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The Absent Lady and the Renaissance Lyric as Letter[1]

In a widely copied poem from the early seventeenth century, a woman's encounter with poetic mail is imagined in terms of foreplay. "Fly paper kiss those Hands," the male sender urges his verse, "Whence I am barrd of late / She quickly will vnloose thy bands / O wish mee then thy state" (1-4).[2] Rejecting the metaphorical bands of love in favor of the paper or silk bands sometimes employed by correspondents to secure mail in early modern England, the poet likens his reader's unfolding of her mail to a pair of lovers' heated fumbling with one another's clothing. Denuded, the posted poem is subsequently kissed, fondled, and granted access to private zones such as "her Brest" (28) (the traditional location for storing love letters).

"Fly paper" stands out for its erotic frankness. Yet, the conceit that routine habits of receiving, holding, and storing correspondence might facilitate intimate contact between a poem's sender and its female reader is ubiquitous in English Renaissance lyric. Most familiar, perhaps, is its manifestation in the amorous sonnets of the 1590s, poems whose presentation as "invitations to love issued within a manuscript system of exchange" is bound up with their capacity for bodily surrogacy.[3] It is no accident that William Percy refers to the poetic "writs" he sends his mistress as "liuelie patterns" (copies or models) of his "liuelesse" form (1-2), nor that, in a poem "To his absent Diana," Henry Constable describes the inky letters of his posted sonnets as "black teares" (12).[4] The famous opening sonnet of Edmund Spenser's *Amoretti*, which deliberately blurs the boundary between "happy leaues" (1) and abject sender, epitomizes these deeply embodied fantasies of textual reception.[5] As the lady "handle[s]" (3) or meets with papers that both emerge from and stand in for the poet's anxiously desiring body, her touch is portrayed as enacting the erotic contact he seeks.[6]

This essay, however, is not about these imagined scenes of reception. Instead, it explores real encounters between historical Renaissance women and the lyrics they were sent in the form of mail. Despite increased attention to early modern women's participation in the socio-textual cultures of both manuscript verse exchange and correspondence, there have been surprisingly few efforts to analyze the rhyming "leaues" and "papers" that were actually delivered to female readers.[7] What did these poetic letters look like? How did they work? And did these remarkable postal documents, almost entirely neglected in modern accounts of Renaissance lyric, share *Amoretti*'s or "Fly paper"'s ambitious commitment to bodily intimacy across distance?

I begin to answer these questions by drawing on a rich material landscape of textual objects I call "letter-poems." Not to be confused with the literary genre of the verse letter or verse epistle, in which a pretense of private correspondence typically disguises a more public mode of address, letter-poems are lyrics that bear traces of transmission from a sender to a recipient via an intermediary. Letter-poems can be found tucked among family papers or pinioned in composite volumes of manuscript separates, where they are identifiable by features we normally associate with prose correspondence: superscriptions (addresses), wax seals, signatures, letter folds, and the like. Letter-poems, in other words, were first and foremost pieces of mail.

Stored in private spaces, possessed of "bands," and often featuring the "hands" of their creators, early modern letter-poems might seem to possess the very features that serve as metonymic sources of proximity between loving sonneteer and receiving lady. Yet, when we look closely at the poetry delivered to historical Renaissance women, we find that, ironically, this familiar lyric structure of embodied contact falls away. Instead, it is replaced by a structure that takes for granted the fundamental inaccessibility of the recipient's body: the structure of correspondence itself. Letter-poems made meaning, I will argue, not by purporting to represent bodies but rather by embracing

the conditions of distance that inform their production. By appropriating the guise and symbolic resonances of prose mail, these verses reveal the surprising intimacies afforded by absence.

II

When William Ringler asserted in his landmark 1962 edition of Sir Philip Sidney's poems that "The reader and not the lady is the audience" of the sonnet sequence *Astrophil and Stella*, he voiced a prevailing critical view that effectively exiled the female recipient of verse to a realm of naive fantasy.[8] It is an exile from which, sixty-five years later, she has barely begun to emerge. For this "reader," implicitly gendered male in Ringler's account, has dominated both historical and literary critical accounts of how Renaissance lyrics work. Only recently have insights into England's thriving manuscript culture broadly challenged the pernicious commonplace that poems "written *to* and *about* women" were primarily designed for the enjoyment of other men.[9]

Letter-poems have much to contribute to these resistance efforts, exposing the frequency with which early moderns of both sexes sought out women (particularly gentle- and noblewomen) to be the postal recipients of lyrics of all kinds. Ambassador Sir Henry Wotton sent "You meaner beauties of the night," his gorgeous verse honoring Elizabeth of Bohemia, to "Lady Wotton," probably his sister-in-law Margaret.[10] John Donne exchanged poems with Lady Magdalen Herbert and Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford, sometimes using his close friend Sir Henry Goodere as an intermediary.[11] Dudley, Third Baron North posted his beautiful "Corona" – an alphabetical verse dilation of Psalm 119 inspired by George Herbert's religious poetry – to his friend and kinswoman Lady Anne Rich (he also sent a copy to the poet Sir John Suckling).[12] When Constance Aston asked her brother in Spain to "Send me some verses, for I want some good ones to put in my book," Herbert Aston obliged, and she returned the favor.[13]

A political poem entitled "The poor mans petition to ye King" survives with the endorsement "Rymes for my mother and her three Daughters from my brother James."[14] The "Ladies Skrymshers" received as mail a collaboratively written poem on their fine dancing.[15] The Irishwoman Alice Draycott, possibly the same lady whom *Leicester's Commonwealth* (1584) falsely accused Robert Dudley of poisoning (the supposed target was her friend Walter Devereux, Earl of Essex), received a lyric dream vision accompanying a gift of two religious tomes.[16] More notoriously, Edward, Lord Denny sent Lady Mary Wroth a misogynistic poetic libel on her authorship of the romance *Urania*, to which she replied in a letter-poem that matched his verse rhyme for rhyme.[17]

Bathsua Makin, an eloquent advocate for women's education, sent a poem on the death of her former pupil, Lady Elizabeth Langham, to the young woman's mother, Lucy Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon.[18] A female member of the Kaye family received a rather more prosaic postal offering upon the death of her husband, urging her to "let your long-enjoyed Blessing go / With blessing, into blisse: the saints did so."[19] John Chalkhill posted his teenaged sister-in-law Katherine Packer a pious get-well letter incorporating a self-deprecating, comically salacious verse designed "to cheare thee up (the scope of my intent)."[20] Bess of Hardwick's son Charles Cavendish made a similar gesture when he sent his sick sister, Mary Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury, an untitled copy of Francis Beaumont's widely circulated poem "To the Countess of Rutland."[21] A generation later, Cavendish's son William Cavendish wrote poems to Margaret Lucas during their courtship (the future Duchess of Newcastle responded in prose).[22] By contrast, Christabella Rogers sent her "much honoured cusen Alce ffennell" a stormy poetic rejection of romantic love defying Cupid's power.[23]

The above examples, many of them drawn from an extensive survey of approximately thirty-five special collections institutions, record offices, and archives across Britain and the US, represent just a few of the documented postal encounters between women and manuscript poems created (whether composed or merely copied) specifically for their perusal. These exchanges tell a

story about English lyric which differs from those emerging from studies of manuscript verse miscellanies or the rise of the printed book. For early moderns' interpretations of lyric, letter-poems reveal, were often deeply informed by expectations about how a rather more mundane textual form – correspondence – was supposed to work. To recover women's reception of letter-poems is thus to recover a forgotten material connection between letter and lyric.

That there should be a profound relationship between the institution of the mail and the production of literature is not, of course, a new claim. Several scholars have demonstrated a symbiosis between England's development of an increasingly sophisticated postal system and the rise of various literary genres during the long eighteenth century.[24] The letter-poems I explore in this essay show beyond doubt, however, that post and poetry enjoyed a dynamic relationship during the decades preceding the 1660 foundation of England's General Post Office. Despite the primitive, slow, and often highly informal nature of the pre-Restoration post – an ad hoc "system" which was more likely to involve servants, friends, carriers, and passers-by than official post-boys – the practices of Renaissance mail shaped the development of a remarkable kind of poetic object.[25]

A simple point, but one worth bearing in mind, is that when an early modern woman received a poem at the hands of a postal bearer, she may not initially have known it. This is because most letter-poems looked and felt like typical letters from the outside. Inside, they often subscribed to epistolary conventions of layout, handwriting, and formal structure. Indeed, so much did Renaissance readers expect poetic mail to resemble the prose letters they sent that variations from normal epistolary practices generated comment. Describing how the lovesick knight Sir George Rodney sent the newly-married Countess of Hertford a long poetic complaint contrasting his virtues with those of her older and richer husband, one early modern historian reported that the poem had been inscribed in the sender's own blood: a "strange" choice of ink for mail, and one he attributes to "too much affection."[26] Less extreme departures from letter-writing conventions also merited notice.

In Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost*, a play deeply interested in the mechanics of epistolary-poetic transactions, the Princess of France receives from her royal admirer, King Ferdinand,

> as much love in rhyme
> As would be cramm'd up in a sheet of paper,
> Writ o' both sides the leaf, margent and all,
> That he was fain to seal on Cupid's name (5.2.6-9).[27]

For the Princess, the most noteworthy feature of this letter-poem is its excessive text, which prevents her admirer from providing the typical epistolary margin and forces him to place the letter's wax seal right on top of the poetic message itself. Whether or not Shakespeare himself created or received letter-poems, this moment in the play can be taken to reflect his awareness of a widespread contemporary poetic practice that sought to work within established postal regulations.

The sole surviving autograph poem by John Donne is a case in point. In the winter of 1612, Donne sent the English gentlewoman Lady Lettice Rich Carew a poetic compliment from Amiens, inscribing the poem, like King Ferdinand, on both sides of a small, delicate gilded "leaf."[28] In stark contrast to that character, however, Donne took care to create a fairly conventional 3 cm margin on the left-hand side of his paper by making a guiding vertical crease along the page. More importantly for the sake of both privacy and legibility, he managed to avoid King Ferdinand's egregious breach of sealing etiquette. For instead of "cramming" his poetic text into all available space, Donne took care to leave the lower half of the leaf's verso (back side) blank [Figure 1]. This meant that when the poet folded or "locked" the leaf closed into a narrow packet by creating a series of horizontal accordion folds or pleats ("plights") and then folding the resulting strip in half down the middle, an empty section of paper was available for use as the poem's visible outside layer and address panel.[29]
<insert image 1 here>

In the poem itself, this epistolary requirement becomes a private joke with Donne's recipient, Lady Carew. Like a lord who hangs a mirror at one end of a short gallery in order to double its size, so, too, Donne suggests, should he double his poem by offering the same lines of praise to Lady

Carew's equally virtuous sister, Lady Essex Rich (55-7). That he does not do this has everything to do with the poem's function as correspondence. For not only is Donne's chosen paper much too small (a half-sheet rather than the usual full sheet), the demands of letter writing dictate that he retain enough empty space on the back of the page to superscribe the poem "To the Honorable lady the lady Carew" – that is, to the single "Madame" hailed in the poem's salutation. In order to be a proper correspondent, in other words, Donne literally cannot "give this letter length" (58).[30]

While Donne disguised his verse as a tiny "plighted" letter, most poetic senders employed the standard, work-a-day format for prose correspondence: a bifolium, or a sheet folded once to make two leaves or four pages. Typically, an early modern correspondent would inscribe his or her message on the front and, when length necessitated, the inner pages of the bifolium. The last page was left blank to serve as the letter's outside and bear its superscription when the letter was folded and sealed into a tight packet for delivery. It is precisely in this form that we find a letter-poem to Elizabeth Stanley Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, a noted patron of the arts who danced in Jonson's Masque of Queens.[31] Huntingdon's correspondent, Thomas Faye, selected for the medium of his grateful letter-poem a piece of paper of the most conventional size for early seventeenth-century mail (approximately 29.5 cm high by 77 cm wide).[32] After folding the paper in half to make four pages, he copied his verse onto the front page in a clear italic hand, likely for the readerly ease of his female addressee, whose had been trained to write her own correspondence in such a script.[33]

On the fourth page, Faye superscribed his document with the respectful formula "To the Honer of Ladyes / the right hon: Countess / of Huntingdon Ashbye. / Thes." This superscription was the first part of the "poem" Lady Huntingdon would have encountered. Only when Huntingdon unfolded the packet would she have found a series of iambic pentameter couplets portraying her as a model for future goodness and a "blessed springe" whose "breathe" (material influence) has restored the poet from a winter of deprivation (14-15). Even these poetic lines,

however, conform to epistolary niceties by concluding with a postal subscription and signature: "Of whose full Honer / I am the most humble / Admyrer / Thom: Faye." Lady Huntingdon would have noted right away Faye's decision to space out this subscription and signature onto four separate lines which move gradually toward the right edge of the page [Figure 2]. This epistolary gesture of humility, recommended by letter-writing experts and reminiscent of a series of bows executed upon leaving a room, show that poem and letter were conceived as a single, deferential unit. <insert image 2 here>

As documents that moved between distant individuals through the auspices of a messenger, Donne's and Faye's lyrics are, in the most literal sense of the word, letters. And in spite of Erasmus's much-cited representation of the letter as a "conversation between friends," early modern letters bore little resemblance to bodies speaking or touching.[34] As Gary Schneider has observed, the familiar trope of the letter as an object that could talk, kneel, or even kiss its reader is more reflective of a cultural preference for in-person communication than it is of the day-to-day operation of Renaissance correspondence.[35] Moreover, if "nodding, touching, smiling, laughing, embracing, bowing," and performing other interpersonal cues were all impossible in the space of a letter, letters' epistemological differences from embodiment and speech nonetheless gave them a value all their own.[36] In the next part of this essay, I will suggest that a failure to make meaning in the same ways as bodies was often to the letter's – and the letter-poem's – advantage.

III

Unlike either a kiss or a conversation, a letter could withstand the passage of time, accruing meaning across days, weeks, and years. Crucially, this semantic stockpiling began even before delivery took place. The very delays that inevitably beset transmission in an age of bad roads, no standing post,

and an unregulated system of private delivery meant that mail tended to be gratefully interpreted by its distant recipients as "material testimony" of its sender's feelings of "love, duty, alliance, and affection."[37] Writing to a friend about his simultaneous receipt of letters dating from January and March (a not uncommon phenomenon), John Donne observed optimistically that this disparity only enhanced the letters' meaning. "[I]f they come as Atomes, and so meet at last, by any crooked, and casuall application," he remarks, "they make up, and they nourish bodies of friendship."[38]

Letters' status as handmade objects represented another crucial component of their testimonial quality. Like the presents of painted miniatures, home-cooked sweets, embroidered textiles, or calligraphic manuscript books offered to elite women in both heterosocial and homosocial contexts, letters were the products of careful, even tedious labor.[39] As such, they reminded the individuals involved in their exchange of their commitments to one another. Mail's symbolic associations emerge most clearly in references to received letters as emotionally resonant artifacts, or what one correspondent termed "a token of your love."[40] "I know not whither an intire diamond of the bignesse on't would have pleased mee half so well," the prolific correspondent Dorothy Osborne once wrote of a letter she received from her lover William Temple.[41] These and other similar expressions showcase Renaissance correspondents' willingness to interpret even the most commonplace or formulaic letter as visible, tactile evidence of the sender's feelings. Since this "evidence" was often preserved in trunks and cabinets, it could be revisited again and again.

As letters in their own right, early modern letter-poems possessed mail's testimonial property. What many poems sent to women readers enacted, then, was less the eroticized presence of their absent sender than a set of social and emotional commitments, both real and desired. Such commitments could often be read in particular material features of the posted objects. When Donne decided, for instance, to fold his letter-poem to Lady Carey into a tiny, narrow band, he adopted a letterlocking format used among an elite subset of Renaissance letter writers (more commonly with

the addition of silk floss) to suggest social intimacy between sender and recipient.[42] This was especially important for Donne, because the implication of closeness which would have inhered in Lady Carey's delicate packet playfully counters Donne's blunt admission that he has never met the woman he praises in rhyme. Even as the poet, performing the role of a good Protestant traveling in Catholic France, professes his ability to recognize the virtues of his female addressee "by fayth alone" (11-12), the material form of Donne's mail hails her as a friend.

Francis Beaumont's famous, much-circulated poem to Elizabeth Manners, Countess of Rutland (later recycled, I noted above, as a gift to the Countess of Shrewsbury from her brother Charles Cavendish) makes a similar claim by drawing attention to its length, a feature traditionally associated with effort and thus with a letter-writer's strength of feeling ("I wonder with what confidence you can complaine of my short Letters that are soe guilty your self in the same kinde. I have not seen a Letter this month, that has been above halfe a sheet," Osborne reproached Temple).[43] When Beaumont writes near the end of his verse, "To what a length is this strang letter growne / In seeking of a subiect, yet findes none" (61-2), he is ostensibly referring to the poem's feigned rejection of conventional lyric subject matter, made explicit in its opening refusal to offer the Countess either "loue or prayse" (6).[44] But Beaumont's allusion to "length" also tells Rutland that his preferred alternative to "ten" clichéd "sonnets" (13) – an artifact he calls a "letter" (61) – possesses a visual symbolism that can more effectively express the depth of his regard for Rutland. The materiality of Beaumont's letter-poem performs, across distance, an expression of familiarity that sonnets or verses written in a "hopeles, witles rage" (11) cannot hope to convey.

A curious test case for letter-poems' circumvention of bodily presence as a primary source of meaning is John Fletcher's witty letter-poem to the Countess of Huntingdon.[45] Fletcher's epistolary strategy may be usefully contrasted with that of Thomas Faye, whose letter-poem for the same reader we have already seen. For if Fletcher is arguably the more skilled poet, the most obvious

difference between the two men's letter-poems, both inscribed on the front of bifolia of comparable size, is nonetheless these senders' choice of *hand*. As we saw, Faye selected for his poetic mail an italic script with few secretary features. But not only is Fletcher's poem inscribed in a spiky secretary hand, a "worldly, businesslike" script employed primarily by male correspondents, it is quite literally written in the hand of a secretary.[46] The only occurrences of Fletcher's own hand are his signature (nearly always an "autograph" feature), the letter-poem's superscription, and a single interjection, after the brief prose postscript which follows the poem, of the word "Maddame" [Figure 3]. <insert image 3 here>

In prose correspondence, the presence of the sender's own hand was traditionally associated with access to the sender's writing body and thus with an intimacy not typically afforded by scribal (that is, professionally transcribed) mail.[47] Early modern letter-writers frequently noted their pleasure in receiving holograph letters (letters both written and signed by the same person), particularly when the senders were socially exalted figures who could afford a secretary. A distinctive hand might even become a source of private meaning between regular correspondents.[48] Indeed, sonneteers' attention to the presence of their own hands is likely an appropriation of this meaningful *epistolary* convention. Yet, the frequent survival of letter-poems *not* written in their senders' hands suggests that other concerns, including legibility or the desire to impress, were likely to take priority. And in the case of Fletcher's letter-poem, I want to suggest that the poet's decision *not* to use his own hand for this letter actually functions, bizarrely, as a playful signal of his familiarity with Lady Huntingdon.[49]

Fletcher's sense of his close relationship with his addressee is already implicit in the apologetic self-mockery with which the poem opens (abbreviations have been silently expanded):

> There ys not any Sculler of our Tyme
> inventing nowe; more misbegott with ryme
> Then I am at this Instant: But tys so
> that I must write, yett hange mee If I knowe
> of what; or to what End; for that maine sinne
> of my forgettfullnes (best of your kinne)

I knowe yow haue forgeuen, for I am sure
yow are too good to Lett your anger dure (1-8).

Fletcher knows Huntingdon will overlook his forgetfulness at neglecting to write. His claim that he has little to say is an obvious joke: his poem takes up almost the entire front of the bifolium. But what stands out about this letter-poem, as in the poem by his friend Beaumont (a likely model), is Fletcher's insistence that he does not need to communicate with Huntingdon in the usual manner of men addressing high-ranking women. "Saye then I striue / extreamely to commend yow, some doe thriue / by those vaine gloryes" (9-11), Fletcher notes, "Butt they knowe whoe neede / such commendations" (11-12). In other words, Huntingdon's worth is self-evident. And Fletcher's choice of hand reinforces this sense of her distinctiveness. Not only does Huntingdon have no need to read what other women supposedly enjoy reading about themselves, she has to need to read Fletcher's poem in the "sweet Roman hand" stereotypically associated with the feminine.[50] More significantly, Huntingdon does not require the reassuring signals of intimacy that Fletcher's own handwriting might have afforded. Instead, Fletcher's delegation of scribal labor to a male secretary gestures to his recipient's "masculine" learning and sophistication – the very qualities that have enabled friendship (as opposed to worshipful adoration) to emerge between poet and lady in the first place.

By relocating the symbolism of friendship from his own hand to that of his scribe, Fletcher rejects the notion of the lyric as a "patterne" of his body. Instead, Fletcher draws on distinctly epistolary structures of meaning to communicate with his patron and friend. Thus, when he alludes in his prose postscript (a regular features of letter-poems) to "yor Closett," an interior chamber widely associated with the storage and perusal of letters, we should think twice before we conflate this imagined scene of reading with the sensual "Roome" (30) between a lady's breasts routinely imagined in lyrics such as "Fly, paper."[51] For it is as a correspondent, not as a conventional poetic "mistress," Fletcher suggests, that he desires the Countess of Huntingdon to read his verse. Fletcher recognizes the epistolary closet of his addressee as a space to which he may not be granted access.

Male poets like Fletcher, Beaumont, or Donne were not the only ones to exploit the affective material rhetoric of mail in their poetic communications with well-to-do female readers. Dorothy Constable's extant 1633 letter to Lady Anne Ferrers shows that mail's potent symbolism emerged, too, in homosocial poetic contexts, even when the poems in question were merely enclosed inside a posted letter rather than sent as pieces of mail in their own right. Early modern epistolary enclosures were typically letter-sized bifolia, gatherings, or single sheets tucked into the letter itself. Constable records the presence of such a text when she informs her "most deer and much honored sister" Ferrers (really her half sister) that she has sent her a group of poems written by her own daughter.[52] Sadly, the poems themselves have been lost: an all-too common fate of enclosures. Nonetheless, we can learn much about how these poems were intended to make meaning by observing how amity between sender and recipient, the chief subject of the letter, informs Constable's depiction of the youthful letter-poems she sends.

"[Y]our sweet sosiety though shart," Constable writes to her friend,

> hath made a great impreshon of loue wher the carrackters of consanguinity wear so deeply sett befoer and I should euer be glad to giue testimony of my affections one any occation that lieth with in my power and your commands: now deer sister I think you may perseue how preuelant your desiers ar with me for I haue choes rather to vndergoe the sensuer of a parshall and foolish mother then an vnkind sister wherfoer sweet sister beplesed to keepe thes verses from anys vew for I ashuer you the cheef thing wch I and I think her frinds esteems them for is that thay wer the frutes of her infansy . . . I confes in my folly the les she loues it the moer I delight she should content her self to make moer: thus crauing a fauerable construcktion of what erors you discouer ether in her or me . . .

Constable explicitly frames the enclosed poems as "testimony of my affections," a symbol of the "great impreshon of love" Ferrers's "sweet sosiety" has made on her. In fact, the phrase "carrackters of consanguinity" may be a punning reference not only to the mutual affection which has long been established between the two adult women, but to the actual words and letters inscribed on the enclosed papers themselves. The literal "consanguinity" existing between mother and daughter

extends here to include Ferrers, the recipient whose "desiers" for these youthful poems Constable professes to satisfy.

In this context, the quality of the poems themselves is presented as being less important than their letter-like ability to shore up a feminine alliance across distance. Like a correspondent apologizing for her "rude lines" "scribled in hast" – a conventional *mea culpa* of early modern prose mail – Constable suggests that Ferrers may, as she does, value the poems for other reasons than for the skill or fluency of their contents.[53] Rather, the poet's mother and "frinds," she claims, "esteem" them precisely because "thay wer the frutes of her infansy." Ferrers, meanwhile, is implicitly asked to recognize the poems' significance within a network of female kinship, both "real" and chosen. In the process, Constable grants Ferrers the ability to make a "fauerable construcktion" of the enclosures and, consequently, to perceive their true "meaning."

The Constable-Ferrers exchange offers a rare glimpse of a female-female poetic exchange, one which draws on the language and symbolism of many extant prose letters between women friends.[54] Perhaps even more remarkable, however, is the way in which this epistolary occasion subverts the conventional lyric relationship between desire and textual transmission. In the love poems discussed at the start of this essay, it is typically the sender's unfulfilled desire that instigates the production and transmission of manuscript verse.[55] Yet, in nearly every case, this desire is doomed to remain unfulfilled. For in spite of its potency as a lyric conceit, the prospect of physical intimacy between reader and sender via the fragile posted paper must remain, as the poets themselves know well, a conceit only. In the case of the Constable-Ferrers exchange, by contrast, we might notice that it is the "desiers" of the recipient herself that have prompted Constable to transcribe and send verse. Furthermore, the opening of Constable's letter makes it clear that Ferrers's "desiers" are the *product*, not the instigator, of physical intimacy between the two women:

> I much desier to heer of your safe ariuall at your owne home for I understand
> by M*r* Edward Litlton (whoo hath promised to convay thes lines safely to your

> hands) that you wer not com home in easter week. which makes me fear som disaster might hapen and therfoer we long for Mr Boltons returne that might in forme vs bettor . . . Sweet Sister I joy much that I haue seen you and esteem it as a great fauor both from my noble brother and your sellfe in that you wear plesed to comply with my desiers and giue me meeting.

"Desier," a word which occurs twice more in this passage, governs Constable's exchange with Ferrers no less than it does the poetic offerings described by Spenser and his colleagues. Yet, this term has become detached here from an anticipation of intimacy via the posted text. On the contrary, Constable's allusions to her recent parting from Ferrers reveal that her "desiers" for "meeting" or the physical presence of her friend have already been fulfilled. Constable's most urgent "desier" is instead for news of Ferrers's safe return home, despite the fact that this return once more establishes geographic distance between the two women. What emerges from this exchange is thus an uncoupling of desire from an impossible condition of embodied presence. Reinscribed as something more protean – a marker, perhaps, of mutual concern, longing, and obligation – desire generates poetic production and transmission in unexpected ways.

IV

Renaissance letter-poems, I have proposed, exploit rather than evade the conditions of physical inaccessibility that govern mail. Reproducing the forms and conventions of prose letters, letter-poems reproduce letters' perceived ability to materialize existing and potential affective currents between correspondents. Crucially, such work can only happen in opposition to bodily presence. Indeed, as the Constable-Ferrers exchange shows, it is letter-poems' very refusals to act like bodies that enable them to resist the painful logic of unfulfilled desire that governs so many Renaissance lyrics. The absence of the reading lady is transformed from an obstacle into an opportunity.

By loosening the posted text's affiliation with its sender's body, the letter-poem exchanges initiated by Constable, Fletcher, Beaumont, and Donne offer alternatives to more familiar models of contact between poetic recipient and sender. But one epistolary-poetic exchange in particular, undertaken at the close of the decade that saw the flourishing of sonnets pretending to be both manuscripts and bodies, pushes the possibility of such un-embodied intimacy further still. Though known to scholars, this exchange has chiefly been considered in the contexts of bookish gift-giving and literary networks of political affiliation. Less attention has been paid to the remarkable way in which the sender of these letter-poems invites a third party into the seemingly exclusive space of the postal transaction – a figure whose presence has the potential to supersede his own.

The poet and translator Sir John Harington of Kelston is unusual among his contemporaries for his persistent interpellation of women in exchanges of manuscript verse. Harington's famous translation of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* (1591) was reputed to have been commissioned as a "penance" by Queen Elizabeth herself after she caught him circulating among her ladies-in-waiting an Englished version of one of the romance's lewder episodes.[56] A similar scene of textual transmission is suggested in his epigram entitled "To the great Ladies of the Courte":

> I haue bene told most noble courtly Dames
> that ye commend some of mine Epigrames,
> but yet I heare againe which makes me pensiue
> some are of them to some of you offensiue,
> Those that you like Ile giue and aske no guerdon,
> So that you graunt those that mislike you pardon,
> Both are the fruictles fruits of ydle howres,
> theis for my pleasure reade, and those for yours (1-8).[57]

The poet's use of the plural "you" is telling. Harington's references to "giuing" epigrams and to their mixed success at court wittily invoke a feminine, homosocial community forged in no small part by his readers' distaste ("some are of them to some of you offensiue" (4)).

Citing "To the great Ladies of the Court," Gerard Kilroy persuasively argues that Harington sought to "ground his critique of the Elizabethan court, church and nation in the domestic, to

disguise this profound moral critique as 'the fruictles fruits of ydle houres'."[58] I want to draw attention, however, to a related strategy hinted at in this epigram and made even more overt in Harington's extant letter-poems to women: his unusual self-presentation as a vehicle for feminine intercourse. For if, as Jason Scott-Warren and Julie Crawford have claimed, Harington's poetic offerings were designed to achieve a number of domestic, social, and political ends, they are also deeply informed by their sender's express desire to become the means by which "great Ladies" might interact with one another.[59] The result is a transformation of the usual conceit that the handwritten epistolary verse will emulate or stand in for its sender. Instead, as we will see, it is Harington himself who aims to resemble his more humble epistolary medium.

Harington's function as a conduit for women's homosocial encounters can quite literally be read on the cover of one of his most famous textual gifts, a manuscript presentation copy of fifty-two of Harington's epigrams, transcribed by a professional hand onto fifteen leaves and bound with a personalized copy of his printed *Orlando*.[60] Tooled in gold on the brown calf encasing this precious gift are the names of not one but two female readers: IANE ROGERS, Harington's mother-in-law, and MARY HARYNGTON, his wife.[61] By placing Rogers's name on the front cover and that of Mary Harington on the back, Harington implicitly aligns himself with the hybrid book in the middle.

Harington elaborates on this unusual self-positioning in the dedicatory inscription that bridges printed romance and scribally-produced poems.[62] Though Harington dedicates the collection "To the right vertuous and his kynde Mother in law, the Ladie Jane Rogers," he quickly goes on to explain that "I haue sent you my long promisd Orlando, *and that it maie properly belonge to you and your heire femall*, I haue added to it as manie of the toyes I haue formerly written *to you and your daughter*, as I could collect out of my scatterd papers" (emphasis mine).[63] In early modern England, "properly" could mean both "thoroughly" and "intrinsically."[64] Harington thus implies that the *Orlando* "belonge[s]" to both his mother-in-law and wife not only because it has been "sent" as a gift bearing

both of their names, but because it recalls earlier domestic occasions – both "kynde" and "vnkynde" – upon which these "scatterd papers" were "written to you and your daughter" as a pair.

Though a number of the individual epigrams appear to address only Lady Rogers or only his wife Lady Harington, at least one poem explicitly presented as a verse to the latter implicitly seeks a "reconciliation" with the former.[65] The suggestion is that a poem nominally directed to one woman is intended to be read by the other – a possibility reiterated when Harington observes (with studied carelessness) that he has filled some "spare room" with political epigrams "that I durst neuer show any Ladie, but you two." Even as Harington's text ostensibly seeks to shape his relationship with Lady Rogers by imploring his mother-in-law to "lock me vp as safe in your loue, as I know you will lay vp this booke safe in your Chest," the poet frames this postal gift as a site of past and future contact between the mother and daughter Lady Rogers and Lady Harington.[66]

It is a more conventional letter-poem (or rather, group of letter-poems), however, that takes Harington's role as a vehicle for female encounters to its greatest extreme. On 19 December 1600, the same day that Harington sent his epigrams and *Orlando* to his mother-in-law Lady Rogers, he posted a smaller but no less exclusive collection of handwritten verses. Since these verses and their accompanying letter survive only as a partial transcript in a volume of state papers, we cannot know for sure what material form this poetic mail took. My best guess, based on other extant letter-"packets" of poems, is that Harington posted a series of bifolia tucked inside one another, with the letter inscribed on the front page of the outer bifolium and the verses copied neatly onto the inner bifolia (the last leaf of the outer bifolium would, of course, have been left free of rhymes, its final page deployed for the document's postal address). Fortunately, the scribe recorded what appears to be Harington's original epistolary superscription. This allows us to identify the recipient as yet another "great Lady": Harington's distant kinswoman Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford.

Scholars seeking to shed light on early modern women's function as patrons, "devisers," and authors have long been interested in Bedford.[67] A poet in her own right and a key player at the Jacobean Court, her verse correspondents included an all-star lineup of Ben Jonson, John Donne, and Samuel Daniel. The copy of Harington's letter, however, makes it clear that his own verse communication with Bedford diverged from these famous exchanges in one key respect. "Right Honorable, and my most honored good Ladie," he begins,

> I haue sent yow heere the deuine, and trulie deuine translation of three of Dauids psalmes donne by that Excellent Countesse, and in Poesie the mirror of our Age; whom, as yow are neere unto in blood, of lyke degree in Honor, not unlike in fauore; so I suppose, none coms more neere hir then your self in those now rare, and admirable guifts of the mynde, that clothe Nobilitie with vertue.[68]

Harington's primary offering to Bedford, he informs her, is a group of poems by a woman. Nor are these just any poems. Harington sends Bedford copies of the stunning metrical verse paraphrases of Psalms 51, 104, and 137 by her famous relation Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke.[69]

Because the Sidney Psalter was confined to manuscript during Pembroke's lifetime, Harington can be seen here displaying to Bedford his enviable access to tightly controlled Sidney family texts. Yet, Harington does not obviously elide the exclusivity of these verses with a desire for exclusive contact with his recipient – a trope, as Wendy Wall has shown, common to the lyrics explored at the essay's start.[70] Instead, he foregrounds a rather different resemblance: that between his recipient, the nineteen-year-old Bedford, and her formidable kinswoman, Pembroke herself. This similarity, Harington claims, is partly the result of "blood." Bedford is "neere" Pembroke in the sense of being related to the poet. In 1600, the term "neere" possessed its current primary meaning of being close at hand, but Harington avoids the obvious embodied potential of this word.[71] Instead, he repeats it ("none coms more neere hir then your self") in order to depict poet and recipient as identical in their shared qualities of learning and virtue. If Pembroke is "the mirror of our Age," she

also mirrors Bedford. Furthermore, Harington implies, it is Bedford's status as the "reflection" of her older kinswoman that makes her most suitable to be the recipient of these poetic psalms.

What is suppressed by this twinning of female poet and female recipient is, of course, Harington's own claim to "neereness" in blood, friendship, and political affiliation with both the Herberts and the Bedfords.[72] Instead, Harington appears to relinquish these claims in favor of a position *between women*. In doing so, Harington effectively reverses the early modern masculine impulse, famously explored by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men*, to "consolidate partnership with authoritative males in and through the bodies of females."[73] Harington's letter-poem instead consolidates partnership among women by means of a male correspondent. And in contrast to the sexualized female bodies by which, Sedgwick argues, men like the socially ambitious poet of Shakespeare's *Sonnets* shored up relationships with other elite men such as the fair friend, the site of contact between these "authoritative [fe]males" is not Harington's body. Nor is it even a text that stands in for his body. Rather, in yet another reversal, Harington posits *himself* as a letter-poem.

This willful erasure of physical presence in favor of a more ephemeral paper form is most clearly set out in the portion of the letter in which Harington describes his own contribution to the poetic offering. "I haue presumed to fill up the emptie paper," he continues,

> with som shallowe meditations of myne owne; not to conioyne theis with them; for that were to piece sattin with sack-cloth, or patch leade vpon golde; much lesse to compare them; that are but as foyle to a dyamond; but as it were to attend them. So as being bothe of meaner matter, and lighter manner, yett maie serue to waite, as a wanton page is admitted to beare a torche to a chaste matrone.

The "shallow meditations" to which Harington refers are a group of more than ten of his own epigrams (including eight of his "theological" poems).[74] These verses, he suggests, are intended to showcase the higher quality of Pembroke's psalms just as a thin leaf of metal ("foyle") sets off the brightness of a gem.[75] By comparing these poems to a "wanton page" who waits on a "chaste

matrone," Harington playfully juxtaposes his own juvenile, masculine crudeness and triviality as an epigrammist with Pembroke's feminine maturity as a virtuosic translator of the psalms.

Yet, even as expressions like "wanton page," "meaner matter," and "fill up the emptie paper" (a version of the poet's "spare roome") modestly conceal Harington's poetic skill and the deliberate thematic design of the textual object as a whole, they gesture to the way in which the materiality of the text brings Pembroke in touch with that other "chaste matrone," Bedford herself.[76] For when we attune ourselves to the poems' function as mail, we realize that this "meaner matter," "emptie paper," and even "wanton page[s]" also represent the final leaves of Harington's postal enclosure. These leaves, crucially, are the textual link between the enclosed copies of Pembroke's psalms and the packet's outermost layer, respectfully superscribed "To the trulie Noble and right vertuous Ladie Lucie Countess of Bedford." If Harington's epigrams are said to occupy the space left over after the transcription of Pembroke's psalms, this "meaner matter" becomes the literal means by which the recipient Pembroke makes contact with her mirror-image, Bedford.

By adopting the material guise of a fragile posted "page," Sir John Harington declares his "meaner" role as mediator between two learned, influential, and well-born Protestant kinswomen and poets. In Harington's lyric correspondence with Bedford (an interesting variation on the hybrid book sent to Mary Harington and Jane Rogers on the same day in 1600), the sender thus proves to be the least important figure in the transaction. Privileged instead is the letter-poem's ability to unite two "great Ladies" – a model of poetic contact that merits further attention as we continue to find evidence of women's activities as creators, supporters, and circulators of lyric.

V

There is a kind of safety in imaginary bodies. Fantastical though they may be, poets' accounts of erotic unions via the medium of a posted manuscript verse conform to the commonplace that, for early moderns, human intimacy was chiefly an effect of proximity: of being able to converse, to kiss hands, to press skin against skin. Risqué poems addressed to surrogate papers or amorous sonnets that conflate ink with bodily fluids make wonderfully literal the idea that lyrics are the vehicles for such intimacy. Poems such as *Amoretti* 1 or the anonymous "Fly paper" reinforce what we already think we know: that poetry should bring people closer together.

This essay has sought to expose some of the problems with this model of lyric contact. First, I've argued, this model disguises the reading bodies of real Renaissance women. Reduced to paper-white hands or bosoms like cabinets, the female addressees of many early modern lyrics have threatened to displace the historical women actually designated as poetic recipients. Yet, archives and special collections bear witness to the importance of early modern women as poetic correspondents. To recall Ringler's formulation, they demonstrate that the "lady" was, in fact, the "reader" more often than we have recognized. Nor do the currents of affinity and obligation running through surviving letter-poems to women move precisely in the ways we might expect. In particular, Sir John Harington's poetic packet to the Countess of Bedford throws into question the manuscript lyric's frequent depiction as a site of male homosocial engagement. It shows that poetic transmission ostensibly occurring across gender lines could, paradoxically, facilitate contact between women.

Women's historic roles as recipients of verse complicate, even thwart the seemingly logical relationship between handling a page and enjoying bodily closeness. They expose, in other words, the second problem with this model of lyric contact: its failure to account for the affective power of absence. Letter-poems – a term I hope will be useful to others – made meaning by taking on the material properties and symbolic qualities of letters: texts expressly designed to be interpreted across distance. And as James Daybell and others have shown, the early modern period witnessed the

development of increasingly sophisticated epistolary strategies for coping with the mundane reality of separation. These strategies bled into the circulation of lyrics, with important consequences.

Manipulating a tightly pleated packet or scrutinizing a secretary's skilled hand, women recipients were asked to interpret markers of emotion that circumvented bodily proximity altogether. For if correspondents frequently described themselves as having been "pleasured" by a letter, what they meant was that they delighted in the good will it represented. A letter-poem's reader would no more "Melt, languish faynt & dye" (34), to borrow the words of "Fly paper," than would her lyric.

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Figure 1. Bodleian Library MS Eng. poet. d. 197. John Donne left the bottom half of the verso of his letter-poem to Lady Carey blank for use as the poem's outside layer and address panel. When folded for transmission, the letter would have been the size of the rectangle containing the superscription to Lady Carew (that is, 1/16 the size of the page), 2.8 cm high by 7.9 cm wide.

Figure 2. Huntington Library HA Literature Box 1, Item 9. Thomas Faye concluded his letter-poem to Elizabeth Hastings, inscribed on the front of a standard bifolium, with a subscription and signature spaced out in such a way as to convey deference.

Figure 3. Huntington Library MS HA 13333. Detail of John Fletcher's poem to Lady Elizabeth Hastings in the hand of Fletcher's secretary or scribe. Fletcher's insertion, in his own hand, of the word "Maddame" is visible at the end of the postscript just above the subscription and signature.

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[2] Westminster Abbey MS 41, f. 52r. This poem is also witnessed in Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 47 and MS Douce f. 5; British Library Add. MS 1792 and MS Sloane 1792; Folger MS V.a.170, MS V.a.262, MS V.a.97, and MS V.a.345; and Rosenbach MS 239/27.

[3] Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca; London, 1993), p. 44.

[4] William Percy, *Sonnets to the fairest Coelia* (London, 1594), sig. C4v; Henry Constable, *Diana* (London, 1592), sig. A3r.

[5] Edmund Spenser, *Amoretti and Epithalamion* (London, 1595), sig. A2r.

[6] See Wall's rich discussion of this poem, pp. 45-46.

[7] Important recent studies of women's participation in exchanges of verse and letters include Diana Barnes, *Epistolary Community in Print, 1580-1664* (Aldershot; Burlington, VT, 2013); Cedric C. Brown, *Friendship and its Discourses in the Seventeenth Century* (Oxford, 2016); Julie Crawford, *Mediatrix: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2014); James Daybell, *Women Letter Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford, 2006); Sarah C.E. Ross, *Women, Poetry, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2015); and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann, *Forms of Engagement: Women, Poetry, and Culture, 1640-1680* (Oxford, 2013). For an essay that discusses the materiality of a posted poem to a female reader (and explores its significance), see Cedric C. Brown, "Presence, obligation and memory in John Donne's texts for the Countess of Bedford," *Renaissance Studies* 22 (2008), 63-85.

[8] *The Poems of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. William A. Ringler, Jr. (Oxford, 1962), p. xliv.

[9] Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, authorship, and sexualities in Renaissance drama* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997), p. 44. An early, influential argument for female-addressed poetry as a means of male homosocial communication occurs in Arthur Marotti, "'Love is Not Love': Elizabethan Sonnet Sequences and the Social Order," *English Literary History* 49 (1982), p. 405. Ilona

Bell disputes this thesis in *Elizabethan Women and the Poetry of Courtship* (Cambridge, Eng., 1998), which makes an important argument for the primacy of the female lyric audience.

[10] J.B. Leishman, "You meaner beauties of the night: a study in transmission and transmogrification," *The Library*, Series 4, 26 (1946), 99-121.

[11] See Crawford, pp. 121-59; Margaret Maurer, "The Real Presence of Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, and the Terms of John Donne's 'Honour is So Sublime Perfection'," *English Literary History* 47 (1980), 205-34; Daniel Starza Smith, *John Donne and the Conway Papers* (Oxford, 2014).

[12] Dudley, Third Baron North, *A Forest of Varieties* (London, 1645), pp. 212, 216.

[13] Deborah Aldrich-Watson, *The Verse Miscellany of Constance Aston Fowler: A Diplomatic Edition* (Tempe, Arizona, 2000), pp. xxi-xxii. Aston's manuscript is Huntingdon Library MS HM 904.

[14] St. John's College, Cambridge MS K. 56, Item 4.

[15] National Library of Wales Pitchford Hall (Ottley) English Literary MSS (uncatalogued), A, unnumbered item.

[16] Emmanuel College Cambridge MS 80. See E. St. John Brooks, "The Death of Alice Draycott," *Journal of the County Louth Archaeological Society* 13 (1954), 179-89.

[17] University of Nottingham Cl LM 85.

[18] Huntington Library MS HA 8799.

[19] Beinecke Library Yale Poetry Box 6, Item 124.

[20] Morgan Library MS MA 3342, Item 2.

[21] Duke of Norfolk, Arundel Castle Autograph Letters 1585-1617, ff. 189-90.

[22] British Library Add. MS 32497. See also Douglas Grant, *Margaret the First; a biography of Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, 1623-1673* (London, 1957), pp. 75-87. I am grateful to Lara Dodds for drawing my attention to these exchanges.

[23] Folger Shakespeare Library Loseley Collection L.b.707.

[24] See, for instance, Margaret Ezell, "Late Seventeenth-Century Women Writers and the Penny Post: Early Social Media Forms and Access to Celebrity," in *Material Cultures of Early Modern Women's Writing,* ed. Patricia Pender and Rosalind Smith (Houndmills, 2014), pp. 140-58; James How, *Epistolary Spaces: English Letter Writing from the Foundation of the Post Office to Richardson's* Clarissa (Aldershot, 2003); Joan de Jean, "(Love) Letters: Madeleine de Scudéry and the Epistolary Impulse," *Eighteenth Century Fiction*, 22 (2010), 399-414; Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford, 2009).

[25] Mark Brayshay, "Conveying Correspondence: Early Modern Letter Bearers, Carriers, and Posts," in *Cultures of Correspondence in Early Modern Britain*, ed. James Daybell and Andrew Gordon (Philadelphia, 2016), pp. 48-65; Alan Stewart and Heather Wolfe, *Letterwriting in Renaissance England* (Washington, DC.; Seattle, 2004), pp. 121-24.

[26] Arthur Wilson, *The History of Great Britain* (London, 1652), p. 258. Quoted in Donald W. Foster, "'Against the perjured falsehood of your tongues': Frances Howard on the Course of Love," *English Literary Renaissance* 24 (1994), 86-7.

[27] William Shakespeare, *Love's Labor's Lost*, ed. Peter Holland (Hardmondsworth, Eng., 2000).

[28] Bodleian Library MS Eng. poet. d. 197. See also Helen Gardner, *John Donne's holograph of 'A Letter to the Lady Carey and Mrs Essex Riche'* (London, 1972).

[29] On practices of securing letters for transmission, see Jana Dambrogio and Daniel Starza Smith (eds.), *Letterlocking.org*, http://letterlocking.org/ (2016–). Dambrogio and Smith also have a monograph, *Letterlocking*, in preparation.

[30] I share Peter Stallybrass's interpretation of this poem as a carefully constructed formal and material artifact. I am grateful to him for our conversations about the Lady Carew holograph. See also Thomas Fulton's analysis of the letter's gilt edges in "Gilded Monuments: Shakespeare's

Sonnets and the Mediated Text," in *Comparative Textual Media: Interplays between Making and Critique*, ed. N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman (Minneapolis; London, 2013), pp. 236-7.

[31] James Knowles, "Hastings, Elizabeth, countess of Huntingdon (*bap.* 1587, *d.* 1633)," *ODNB* Online edn. (Oxford, 2004).

[32] Huntington Library HA Literature Box 1, Item 9.

[33] On the use of italic hand, see Daybell, *Women*, p. 64. The Countess of Huntingdon's italic hand can be found in her surviving letters. See Huntington Library Hastings Correspondence Boxes 5-7.

[34] Erasmus, *De conscribendis epistolis formula*, in *Literary and Educational Writings*, ed. J.K. Sowards (Buffalo; Toronto, 1978), p. 20.

[35] Gary Schneider, *The culture of epistolarity: vernacular letters and letter writing in early modern England, 1500-1700* (Newark, DE, 2005), pp. 29, 110-19.

[36] Ibid., p. 29.

[37] Ibid., p. 54.

[38] John Donne, *Letters to severall persons of honour* (London, 1651), p. 74.

[39] Amanda E. Herbert, *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity, and Friendship in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven; London, 2014), pp. 55-76; Cathy Shrank, "'These fewe scribbled rules': Representing Scribal Intimacy in Early Modern Print," *Huntinton Library Quarterly* 67 (2004), 298-99; Georgianna Ziegler, "Hand-Ma[i]de Books: The Manuscripts of Esther Inglis, Early Modern Precursors of the Artists' Book," *English Manuscript Studies 1100-1700* (9, Writings by Early Modern Women), 73-87. On the laborious process of writing letters, see Stewart and Wolfe, pp. 13-14.

[40] Huntington Library MS HA 1421.

[41] *Dorothy Osborne: Letters to Sir William Temple, 1652-1654,* ed. Kenneth Parker (Aldershot; Burlington, 2002), p. 81.

[42] Heather Wolfe, "'Neatly sealed, with silk, and SPANISH wax or otherwise': the practice of letter-locking with silk floss in early modern England," in *In the Prayse of Writing: Early Modern Manuscript Studies. Essays in Honour of Peter Beal*, ed. S.P. Cerasano and Steven W. May (London, 2012), pp. 169-170.

[43] Schneider, p. 124; Osborne, p. 205.

[44] Quoted from Duke of Norfolk, Arundel Castle Autograph Letters 1585-1617, f. 190v.

[45] Huntington Library MS HA 13333.

[46] James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-writing, 1512-1635* (Houndmills, 2012), p. 88; Jonathan Gibson, "From Palatino to Cresci: Italian Writing Books and the Italic Scripts of Early Modern English Letters," in *Cultures,* ed. Daybell and Gordon, p. 37.

[47] James Daybell, "Female Literacy and the Social Conventions of Women's Letter-Writing in England, 1540-1603," in *Early Modern Women's Letter-Writing, 1450-1700*, ed. Daybell (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 67; Daybell, *Material*, p. 86; Schneider, p. 121.

[48] Graham Williams, "My evil favoured writing": Uglyography, Disease, and the Epistolary Networks of George Talbot, Sixth Earl of Shrewsbury," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 79 (2016), 387-409.

[49] On Fletcher's relationship with the Countess and Earl of Huntingdon, see Gordon McMullan, 'Fletcher, John (1579–1625)', *ODNB* Online edn. (Oxford, 2004); McMullan, *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher* (Amherst, MA, 1994), pp. 17-22.

[50] William Shakespeare, *Twelfth Night*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, *2nd Edition*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt et. al (New York, 2008), 3.4.26. The servant Malvolio has been fooled by an italic hand into thinking that his mistress Olivia has written him a love letter.

[51] On reading letters in closets, see Schneider, pp. 68-70.

[52] Folger Shakespeare Library Ferrers Papers MS L.e. 682.

[53] Schneider, p. 66.

[54] Daybell, *Women*, p. 160.

[55] See Wall, pp. 42-43.

[56] Jason Scott-Warren, "Harington, Sir John (*bap.* 1560, *d.* 1612)," *ODNB* Online edn. (Oxford, 2004).

[57] *The Epigrams of Sir John Harington*, ed. Gerard Kilroy (Farnham; Burlington, VT, 2009), p. 198.

[58] Ibid., p. 64.

[59] Crawford, p. 133-4; Jason Scott-Warren, *Sir John Harington and the Book as Gift* (Oxford, 2001).

[60] Cambridge University Library Adv. b 8.1 (C).

[61] Kilroy, p. 70.

[62] This "bridging" effect is made all the more potent by the letter's inscription on the verso of the stationer's imprint, which appears on the final page of the printed *Orlando*.

[63] Kilroy, p. 71.

[64] *OED*, properly, defs. 2, 6.

[65] Kilroy, p. 50.

[66] Scott-Warren argues that this book served as a way for Harington to mend his vexed relationship with his mother-in-law. In his formulation, it is Mary Harington who effectively becomes the medium through which Sir John and Lady Rogers can develop the proper familial relationship. See pp. 106-22.

[67] The term "devisers" was coined by Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson in "Elizabeth I's Reception at Bisham (1592)," in *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. Jayne Archer et. al (Oxford; New York, 2007), p. 208.

[68] Inner Temple Library Petyt MS 538 Vol. 43, f. 303v. The postal superscription is transcribed at the top of the page.

[69] For a text of the psalms, see *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke* Vol. II*: The Psalms of David*, ed. Margaret Hannay, Noel J. Kinnamon, and Michael G. Brennan (Oxford; New York, 1998). The psalms are transcribed on Inner Temple Library Petyt MS 538 Vol. 43, ff. 284r-286r.

[70] Wall, pp. 34, 46.

[71] *OED*, near, defs. 1, 2.

[72] Scott-Warren, p. 146.

[73] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985), p. 38.

[74] Inner Temple Library Petyt MS 538 Vol. 43, ff. 289r-290v. It is possible that the extant epigrams were supplemented by others whose transcriptions have been misplaced. See Kilroy pp. 80-81, 324.

[75] Kilroy, pp. 80-81.

[76] On the thematic agenda of Harington's gift, see Crawford, p. 133; Scott-Warren, pp. 146-53.