

The Writings of an English Sappho

ELIZABETH COOKE HOBY RUSSELL



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Introduction

THE OTHER VOICE

Dedicating his *Margarite of America* (1596) “to the noble, learned, and virtuous lady, the Lady Russell,” Thomas Lodge calls his dedicatee, “our English *Sappho*.” Perhaps by way of explanation, he writes that “your deep and considerate judgment, your admired honor, and happy readings have drawn me to present this labor of mine to your gracious hands.”¹ Lodge may have remembered, as his dedicatee certainly would have, that Russell’s first husband, Sir Thomas Hoby, had included Castiglione’s praise of Sappho as a woman “most excellent in poetry” in his 1561 translation of *The Courtier*. Lodge may also have hoped to please Russell by comparing her skill at poetry to that of her sovereign and girlhood friend, Queen Elizabeth I, whom Jan van der Noot had called “the second Sappho” in his 1569 *Theatre of Worldlings*.² Lodge is clearly confident that his readers will be familiar with Russell’s literary works and talents, but when he dedicated his work to the fifty-six-year-old Russell, nothing of her authorship had appeared in print. Russell’s entertainment for Queen Elizabeth’s visit to her home in Bisham in 1592 was printed shortly after the event, but no author was identified.³ The only work that she brought to

1. Thomas Lodge, *A Margarite of America* (London: John Busbie, 1596), A4. See below, 262.

2. See Thomas Hoby, trans., *The Courtier of Baldasser Castilio* (London: William Seres, 1561), E4v; and Jan van der Noot, *A Theatre Wherein Be Represented as Well the Miseries and Calamities That Follow the Voluptuous Worldlings* (London: Henry Bynneman, 1569), A4v. I am grateful to Elizabeth Hageman for pointing out this reference to me. Lodge’s comparison of Russell to Sappho was by no means unique. As Jane Stevenson, in *Women Latin Poets: Language, Gender, and Authority, from Antiquity to the 18th Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 9, states it: “Any Latinate woman, however minuscule her oeuvre, tended to be hailed ... as a sister or rival to Sappho.” Less erudite women writers, particularly those writing Petrarchan poetry, were often compared to Sappho as well. See Lawrence Lipking, *Abandoned Women and Poetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 57–126.

3. Elizabeth I, Queen of England, 1553–1603, *Speeches Delivered to Her Majesty This Last Progress* (Oxford: Joseph Barnes, 1592). See below, 147–57. Russell may have had a hand in

2 Introduction

press in her name, a translation of John Ponet's *Way of Reconciliation of a Good and Learned Man*, would not appear until nine years after Lodge's dedication.⁴ We may be tempted to read Lodge's praise of Russell's "happy readings" as presenting her more as a felicitous reader than a prodigious writer—a learned woman capable of understanding *his* text. However, to appreciate fully Lodge's comparison of Russell to the Greek poet Sappho, we must rethink our notion of "publication."

Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell's literary standing rested on three related forms of publication, which Lodge clearly recognized as establishing her credentials as a writer but which modern readers sometimes overlook. First, Russell's fame spread through the circulation of manuscript works. Among these were poems in Greek and Latin,⁵ a manuscript version of her translation (which she completed in her youth but printed in her old age), and possibly accounts of ceremonial performances, including the Bisham entertainment.⁶ Second, Russell was widely acclaimed in her lifetime as an author of funerary epitaphs in three languages, engraved upon tombs that she designed and commissioned for members of her family. Finally, Russell's reputation was established through the joint endeavors of the Cooke sisters and the works that praised them. Lodge's comparison of Russell to Sappho may respond to the perception that she was a member of a distinguished group of women, or perhaps more specifically a group of women writers.⁷ Her membership in such a group, as one of the

bringing this work to press.

4. John Ponet, *A Way of Reconciliation of a Good and Learned Man*, trans. Elizabeth Russell (London: Robert Barker, 1605). See below, 318–416.

5. See below, 49–50, 52–53, and 257–58.

6. Russell states of her translation that she loaned "the copy of mine own hand [i.e., her own manuscript] to a friend." The Bisham entertainment was printed from "loose papers," and more than one manuscript account of her daughter's christening survive, a fact that suggests (as do the ceremony's political and social agendas) that they may have circulated. See below, 125–34, 151, and 328.

7. As the poet of Lesbos, Sappho was associated with a circle of literary women. For a parallel history of Sappho as a homoerotic writer, see Joan DeJean, *Fictions of Sappho, 1546–1937* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); Harriette Andreadis, *Sappho in Early Modern England: Female Same-Sex Literary Erotics, 1550–1714* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001); and Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). In 1568, Russell's sister Mildred was com-

erudite daughters of Sir Anthony Cooke, was commonly observed by her contemporaries. As early as 1559, William Barker's manuscript work, *The Nobility of Women*, praised Russell and her sisters, "which for Greek and Latin be not inferior to any we have named."⁸ All of Russell's writings display her commitment to "honoring [her] Cooke's blood,"⁹ and she and her sisters worked throughout their lives to promote their individual and collective reputations in a variety of texts and public performances.

Russell's other voice, rooted in her lifelong celebration of her identity as a Cooke sister, foregrounds the importance of feminine community and woman-to-woman alliances—relationships that until recently have been overlooked in critical and historical approaches to early modern England. The Cooke sisters' literacy in Greek and Latin forces even reluctant critics to include them in the ranks of humanists,¹⁰ and this shared erudition lays the groundwork

pared to Sappho by Hadrianus Junius in a Latin manuscript poem: see TNA SP 12/47, 18; and on Junius (1511–1575), see *ODNB*. Jane Stevenson, "Mildred Cecil, Lady Burleigh, Poetry, Politics, and Protestantism," in *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing: Selected Papers from the Trinity/Trent Colloquium*, ed. Victoria Burke and Jonathan Gibson (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2004), 56, identifies the author as Franciscus Junius and dates the poem from 1565. The manuscript is endorsed July 1568, and dated July 9, 1568 in *CSPD*, 1:311. Junius' publication of Eunapius, *De vitis philosophorum et sophistorum* (Antwerp: Christophe Plantin, 1568), which occasioned an accompanying petition to Queen Elizabeth (TNA SP 12/47, 14) and his poems to Cecil, confirms the later date. See also below, 324n14.

8. William Barker, *The Nobility of Women* (1559), ed. Warwick Bond, Roxburghe Collection, 142 (London: Chiswick Press, 1904), 155. The others named are Elizabeth and Mary Tudor; Jane Lumley and her sister, Lady Mary Fitzalan, daughters of Henry Fitzalan, 12th Earl of Arundel (1512–1580); and Jane, Anne, and Margaret Seymour, daughters of Edward Seymour, 1st Duke of Somerset (1502–1552), lord protector under Edward VI and a mentor to Anthony Cooke and William Cecil. See *ODNB* on Jane Lumley, Lady Jane Seymour, and Edward Seymour; below, 128, 319n4; and Letter 34nn5 and 8. On the works of the Arundel sisters, the Seymour sisters, and the Cooke sisters, see Brenda M. Hosington "Minerva and the Muses': Women Writers of Latin in Renaissance England," *Humanistica Lovaniensia* 58 (2009): 1–43; and Brenda M. Hosington, "'The well-wrought verses of an unknown bard': Renaissance Englishwomen's Latin Poetry of Praise and Lament," unpublished paper, 1–32. I am grateful to Dr. Hosington for sharing this work with me.

9. See Letter 56.

10. For many other early modern women who qualify for this title, see Stevenson, *Women Latin Poets*.

for Russell's self-representation and self-defense as a woman of learning, culture, and literary achievement. Throughout her writings, her self-awareness as one of a group of highly educated women enables Russell to argue that her own and her sister's intellectual abilities, far from being the aberrations that some of her contemporaries would claim, suggest similar abilities—often lying dormant—in all women. By foregrounding her role as co-heir, with her sisters, of their father's intellectual legacy, Russell's writings challenge her period's common dismissal of the educated woman as an anomaly, the exception proving the misogynist rule.

Russell's advancement of women's rights and roles in her writings takes many forms. Her letters indefatigably defend her own interests and those of her daughters. A self-taught expert in English law, she rarely hesitated to insert herself into or comment upon legal or political affairs ordinarily considered to fall within the purview of early modern men. She was an activist in promoting the reformed religion and felt herself to be a spiritual counselor for women in particular. She was an advocate for women who had been misused by husbands or guardians; an advisor to women who, through their lack of discretion, had fallen into error; and a worthy adversary to those who threatened and maligned her. She understood how the many ceremonies that marked the stages of early modern men's and women's lives could strengthen political bonds by affirming the social alliances between women. In the series of funeral monuments she designed for the Cooke, Hoby, and Russell dead, the otherwise unremarked deaths of three young women are mourned. Her monument for her parents celebrates the Cooke sisters' accomplishments as much as it does their father's, and her own tomb preserves her self-perceived social worth and personal value for posterity.

Thanks to the research of recent scholars attending to manuscript writing and other "public" works (those published or circulated

in forms other than print) in early modern England,¹¹ we are able now to hear Russell's voice, conveyed as it is through unpublished correspondence, manuscript poems, monumental inscriptions and elegies, sculptural images, legal transcripts, ceremonial performances, and a single printed translation. By considering these works not as scattered, disparate productions but as elements within a unified authorial program, the gendered difference in Russell's writings becomes apparent. She speaks in a myriad of registers in multiple media, always confident and competent, censorious and humorous by turns, often haughty and self-promoting, sometimes mournful and desolate. Reading her varied corpus of writings offers a rich experience of the genres, conventions, and formalities of early modern English culture, revealing the astounding degree of self-expression these tools could afford when employed by an innovative author. Russell's indebtedness to the strictures and codes of her tradition is clear, but the difference in her motives—her defense and celebration of women's rightful inheritance of the intellectual legacy of this tradition—is also undeniable. In her hands, the educated woman's "troublesome" erudition is tempered and naturalized, and what may have seemed strange and incongruous to many of her male contemporaries appears, in her formidable works, as an inalienable birthright and a defining feature of femininity.

ELIZABETH RUSSELL AND ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

In 1558, Princess Elizabeth Tudor came to the throne as Queen Elizabeth I. She reigned for four and a half decades, a period that coincides with nearly all of Russell's adult life and writings. Born in 1540, Russell was the daughter of Sir Anthony Cooke, sister-in-law to William Cecil and Nicholas Bacon, and aunt to Robert Cecil and Francis Ba-

11. These might include texts in needlework, epitaphs and monumental inscriptions, and epistles. See, most notably, Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Burke and Gibson, eds., *Early Modern Women's Manuscript Writing*; and George L. Justice and Nathan Tinker, eds., *Women's Writing and the Circulation of Ideas: Manuscript Publication in England, 1550–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). On letters, see James Daybell, ed., *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450–1700* (London: Palgrave, 2001); and James Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

con. Her family connections put her in close proximity to the center of power in her day, while her intelligence and tenacity ensured her ability to negotiate the political, social, and religious complexities of Elizabethan culture.

The Court of Elizabeth I

During Queen Elizabeth's long reign, the court surrounding her became the center of the country's political and cultural life. It was a place of tremendous theatricality and intrigue, where rivalries were frequent and often bitter. As a female monarch, Elizabeth was reluctant to marry, because doing so would require her to subordinate herself to a husband and thus to surrender some of her political power to him. Her subjects' anxieties about being under a woman's rule—and, as the years went on, about the lack of an heir to succeed her—led the queen to seek a delicate balance between advances toward marriage and motherhood, on the one hand, and her vigorous self-styling as the Virgin Queen, on the other.¹² Elizabeth conducted marriage negotiations with foreign princes and monarchs into her fifties, well beyond the age at which she might have been expected to conceive a child. Meanwhile, at court she cultivated relationships with a number of "favorites" (most prominently Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex), while her courtiers jockeyed for her favor and that of her most influential advisors—first among them William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and, following his death, his son Robert.

Because Russell's father had been tutor to Princess Elizabeth's half-brother, Edward VI, Russell probably had some contact in her youth—perhaps even a friendship, given that she was only seven years younger than the princess—with the future queen. Certainly she asserted this intimacy from the earliest years of Elizabeth's reign and throughout her adult life, and she relied upon it (to her peril, as it turned out)

12. See Susan Doran, *Monarchy and Matrimony: The Courtships of Elizabeth I* (London: Routledge, 1996); Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Leah S. Marcus, Janel Mueller, and Mary Beth Rose, eds., *Elizabeth I: Collected Works* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

to win the queen's support in her legal undertakings.¹³ Russell's writings give us a window onto the social and political machinations of the Elizabethan court, and they underscore the central place of women in a court ruled by a woman.¹⁴ They display the various ways in which a mastery of the conventions of polite society could work to advance one's career and interests, as well as the degree to which what we would consider personal details of the lives of the nobility were subject to the scrutiny and approval of the queen. As heirs to considerable inheritances, Russell's children became wards of the crown following their fathers' deaths—a precarious state, since the queen routinely sold wardships (and with them, the property these wards had inherited) to the highest bidder.¹⁵ Because Russell's brother-in-law William Cecil was master of wards and liveries, Russell was able to serve as her children's guardian, but she was beholden to the queen for accepting her impoverished daughters, Bess and Nan Russell, as maids of honor, because the position offered their best chance to arrange acceptable marriages. When a match was made for Nan, the queen's approval was needed to finalize the contract, and Russell even sought her permission to collect her daughter from court. The queen's attendance at the wedding was Russell's most outstanding social coup.¹⁶

The world of the Elizabethan court as revealed in Russell's writings is one in which personalities, rather than policies, seem to hold sway. In 1585, Robert Dudley wrote to Lord Burghley, informing him that, "Lady Russell came to my house and spoke with me touching her daughters' causes."¹⁷ With this informal social visit, Russell most likely hoped to capitalize on Dudley's position as the queen's favorite. Russell is sometimes at odds with other members of the court, and is on record as having interfered in matters beyond her immediate interest.¹⁸ Her correspondence bemoans the sometimes cool reception

13. See Letters 9 and 11.

14. See Letter 23.

15. See Neil Hurstfield, *The Queen's Wards: Wardship and Marriage under Elizabeth I* (London: Longmans, Green, 1958).

16. See Letters 44 and 46, and below, 270–76.

17. Strype, 3, appendix, 133. On Dudley, see Glossary of Persons.

18. She admits this in Letter 23. See also Salis MS 31.106 (printed in *Calendar*, 5:181), in which Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, complains that Russell had written to Burghley to

afforded her by the queen, and she suspects even her closest allies of malice and backstabbing. She unabashedly relates a hefty list of gifts amounting to £500, including jewels, hats, and dresses, with which she plied the queen in her (successful) effort to acquire the lease of Donnington Castle.¹⁹

Russell often employs the language of courtship culled from Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*, at once affirming the pervasive influence of this handbook of courtly behavior made available in England through a translation by her first husband, Thomas Hoby, and establishing her proprietary relationship to the work as Hoby's widow. A self-described "courtier and parliament woman,"²⁰ Russell navigated the perilous waters of courtly favor and exerted influence on those around her, sometimes with success, sometimes not. Her writings vividly portray a society dominated by rank and rule, tradition and hierarchy, in which one must master the rules of the game in order to survive.

Reform and Religious Activism

Queen Elizabeth's long monarchy followed the two very brief reigns of her half-brother, Edward VI (1547–1553) and half-sister, Mary (1553–1558), both of which were rocked by religious turmoil. Edward was nine years old when he ascended to the throne, and the regents who ruled for him (with whom Russell's father and brothers-in-law were closely aligned) instituted sweeping reforms of the Church of England, including the eradication of Catholic beliefs in church doctrine and episodes of iconoclasm that targeted images, statues, and icons within churches.²¹ Under Mary, Catholicism was reintroduced into the country and Protestant reformers, including many of Edward's bishops and advisors, were persecuted as heretics. Many others,

dissuade the payment of his daughter's marriage allowance, "but for that she was herself the first that moved this allowance, and hath since altered her mind upon some conceit, I hope my lord will not be carried away upon such unconstant balance."

19. See Letters 15 and 43.

20. See Letter 52. Russell's sense that gender presents no barrier to her assumption of these roles is noteworthy.

21. See Diarmaid MacCulloch, *The Boy King: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 21–25 and 107.

QUEEN ELIZABETH I TO ELIZABETH HOBY
 September 1566
 Oxford¹

Madam,

Although we hear that since the death of your husband, our late ambassador Sir Thomas Hoby, you have received in France great² and comfortable³ courtesies from the French King, the Queen Mother,⁴ the Queen of Navarre,⁵ and sundry others,⁶ yet we make accompt⁷ that⁸ all⁹ these laid to gether can not so satisfy you as some poor testimony of our favor,¹⁰ with the approbation of the late service of your husband and of your¹¹ own demeanor there. Wherefore, though you shall receive¹² it somewhat lately in time, yet we assure you the same

1. TNA SP 70/85, 78. Endorsed in a later hand, "[1566] in July or August." Great Britain, Public Record Office, *Calendar of State Papers, Foreign Series, of the Reign of Elizabeth, 1566–68*, ed. Allan James Crosby (London: Longman and Co, 1871), 112, also gives the date as July, but September is more likely since internal evidence indicates that Russell had already returned to England from France when the draft was written. A later manuscript copy, dated 1709, is found in BL Harley MS 7035, 161. Although the letter is sent under the queen's seal, it is in Burghley's hand and was certainly authored by him on the queen's behalf.

2. "Courtesies," stricken.

3. "Testaments," stricken.

4. "An," stricken.

5. Charles IX (1550–1574), Catherine de Medici (1519–1589), and Jeanne d'Albret (1528–1572), respectively. See *Nouvelle biographie générale depuis les temps les plus reculés jusqu'à 1850–60*, ed. M. le d'Hoefler, et al. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1963–1969).

6. "Whereby we think," stricken. Edward Cooke wrote to Cecil on July 17, 1566, recounting visits to Russell by numerous dignitaries in Paris following Thomas Hoby's death: see TNA SP 70/85, 41.

7. Account.

8. "No," stricken.

9. "They," stricken.

10. "And," stricken.

11. "[S]ending [yours'] who," stricken.

12. "That some," stricken.

proceedeth¹³ only¹⁴ of the late knowledge of your return,¹⁵ and therefore we let you know that the service of your husband was to us so acceptable, as¹⁶ next your self and your children,¹⁷ we have not the meanest loss of so able a servant in that calling. And yet since it hath so pleased almighty God to call him in the entry of¹⁸ this our service, we take it in the better part,¹⁹ seeing it hath appeared to be God's pleasure, so to call him away so favorably²⁰ to the service of²¹ him, specially in that constancy of his duty towards God, wherein we hear say he died very commendably.

And²² for your self, we can not but let you know that we hear²³ out of France,²⁴ such singular good reports, of your duty well accomplished towards your husband, both living and dead, with other²⁵ your sober, wise, and discreet behaviors²⁶ in²⁷ that court and country, that we think it a part of great contentation²⁸ to us and a commendation of our country that such a gentlewoman hath given²⁹ so manifest a testimony of virtue³⁰ in such hard times of adversity as none can be greater left than.³¹ And therefore though we thought very well of you

13. "Oly," stricken.
14. "Par so lately partly," stricken.
15. "Partly from," stricken.
16. "We have," stricken.
17. "That grieves," stricken.
18. "His," stricken.
19. "That it was," stricken.
20. "In his service that," stricken.
21. "A better," stricken.
22. "To you it may of you seem God hath given you his grace," stricken.
23. "Both," stricken.
24. "And here at home," stricken.
25. "Assigned to," stricken.
26. "In those," stricken.
27. "Those foreign parts," stricken.
28. Satisfaction.
29. "Such," stricken.
30. "And praise," stricken.
31. "And therein," stricken.

before ...³² [yet shall we hereafter make a more assured accompt of your virtues and gifts, and wherein soever we may conveniently do you pleasure, you may be thereof assured. And so we would have you to rest your self in quietness, with a firm opinion of our especial favor towards you. Given under our signet at our city of Oxford, the of September, 1566, the 8th year of our reign.

Your loving friend,

Elizabeth R(egina)]³³

32. The draft is incomplete. The remainder of the letter is here interpolated from BL Harley MS 7035, 161.

33. Latin for queen.

Elizabeth Hoby, Wife, to Thomas Hoby, Knight, her Husband

O sweet spouse, the greatest part of our¹⁸ soul,
 Whose life was the marrow of my life.
 Why do the envious fates tear asunder those thus united?
 Why am I alone, left behind on a widow's bed?
 England saw [us] happy, France saw [us] happy,
 Our love went over the sea, over lands,¹⁹
 We were a lucky pair, while we lived together,
 The body was twofold, the spirit was one.
 But nothing lasts on earth, dearest spouse,
 You, you can be my doleful witness.
 While you served the fatherland, while you managed the public good,
 You perished, a sad corpse in an unknown land.
 And our sick²⁰ children burn with feverish flames.
 What should I do for myself, alas, overwhelmed by so many
 evils?
 Unhappy spouse, unhappy mother I wander about,
 I weep for you, husband snatched away, I weep for you, my
 limbs.²¹
 I depart [these] fatal lands; ravaged, I drag hence the body
 Of my spouse, hence the faint limbs of [our] offspring.
 Thus, womb swelling, I return both by land and by sea
 Into the fatherland, desperate with grief, loving death.
 My dear spouse and most excellent Thomas,
 In whom was whatever was right and noble:
 Elizabeth, once your most pleasing bride,
 Conveys these words full of pious tears.
 I was unable to avert death, but [your] dead limbs,
 As much as I can, I will always cause to be tended with honor.

18. [Translator's Note] While *nostrae* can mean "my" in a heightened poetic sense, a translation of "our" anticipates the poem's emphasis on the union between wife and husband.

19. [Translator's Note] Russell refers to the English Channel ("sea") and the "lands" of England and France.

20. [Translator's Note] While *miseri* typically means "miserable," it can also denote illness.

21. [Translator's Note] The figurative sense may be "children."

You God, either return a husband like Thomas to me,
Or may my death²² return me to my husband Thomas.

On the reredos, right:

**Elizabetha Hobaea, Soror ad Philippum Hobaeum, Equitem
Fratrem**

Tuque tuae stirpis non gloria parva Philippe,
Cujus erat virtus maxima nota foris.
Itala quem tellus norat, Germania norat,
Qui patriae tuleras commoda magna tuae,
Tuque meo Thomae frater dignissime frater,
Mens quibus una fuit, sensus et unus erat.
Tu mihi, tu Thomam voluisti jungere fratrem,
Judicioque tuo sum tibi facta soror.
Sic ego conjugium, sic omnem debeo prolem,
Cuncta mihi dederas, haec tribuendo duo.
Reddere quid possum, suspiria vana recusas,
Praeteritoque malo sera querela venit.
Faelices animae coeli vos regia caepit,
Mortua nunc capiet corpora funus idem
Et soror et conjunx vobis commune sepulchrum,
Et mihi composui, cum mea fata ferent,
Quod licuit feci, vellem mihi plura licere,
Sed tamen officiis quaeso faveto piis.
Iamque vale conjunx, semper mea maxima cura;
Tuque Philippe, mihi cura secunda, vale.
Non ero vobiscum, donec mea fata vocabunt,
Tunc cineres vestros consociabo meis.
Sic, ô sic junctos melius nos busta tenebunt,
Quam mea me solam tristia tecta tenent.

22. [Translator's Note] Literally, "my fate." While *fatum* can be taken as "fate" in its most primary sense, it often also means "death." Because this second meaning best renders into English idiom the word's function within Russell's verse, *fatum* will be translated as "death" throughout the remainder of Russell's poetry.

LETTER 57

To Mary Talbot, Countess of Shrewsbury
After May 4, 1605
Blackfriars¹

To the Right Honorable, my
very good lady, the
Countess of Shrewsbury²
give this.

Good noble lady,

I never made suit to your ladyship in my life to my³ knowledge. Now I do. I have sent your ladyship a little book whereby you, most noble lady, may know what my religion is, and the grounds thereof, which I hold and have ever taught to mine. Sweet lady, read it thorough. This is all my suit.

Be not, good madam, like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ears and refuseth the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely, lest that happen to your self, whom I so long have honored, which the prophet

1. Lambeth MS 3203.410. Endorsed, "Lady Dowager Russell to my lady, about religion." The letter is dated on the assumption that the book sent to Talbot is Russell's translation of Ponet's treatise (see Letter 56, and below, 318–416), and based on evidence of a friendship between Russell and Talbot in the last years of Queen Elizabeth's reign. The countess was included in a small party whom Russell invited to stay with her at Donnington during the queen's planned (but ultimately cancelled) progress in August 1602 (see Letter 53).

2. Mary Cavendish Talbot (1557–1632) was the wife of Gilbert Talbot, 7th Earl of Shrewsbury (1552–1616). She was the aunt of Arbella Stuart (1575–1615) and supported Arbella's claim to the English throne following Elizabeth I's death in 1603. Her public embrace of Catholicism caused her husband's career at court to suffer, and he was suspected with her of plotting to place Arbella on the throne. Although her husband was exonerated, the countess was imprisoned in the Tower in 1611. Shrewsbury secured her release in 1615. For her refusal to swear the oath of allegiance to James I, Shrewsbury was fined £20,000. See *ODNB* for Gilbert Talbot and Arbella Stuart.

3. "Y" stricken.

wisheth in the same place.⁴ Read it, only I crave. God, in whose hands the hearts of princes be,⁵ enlarge your heart and lighten the eyes of your mind to hear, seek, and follow his word and will in all obedience, according to his word, and not after men's traditions and fancies. So, wishing your ladyship as well as to mine own soul, I end with, sweet countess, read this. If you fulfill not my request then shall your ladyship's soul be more beholding to me than to your self. And so I rest.

Your ladyship's affectionate
friend and old acquaintance,
Elizabeth Russell Douager

4. See Church of England, *Psalter*, Psalm 58:3–6, “The ungodly are forward, even from their mother's womb: as soon as they be born, they go astray, and speak lies. They are as venomous as the poison of a serpent: even like the deaf adder that stoppeth her ears; which refuseth to hear the voice of the charmer, charm he never so wisely. Break their teeth, O God, in their mouths: smite the jaw bones of the lions, O Lord.”

5. See Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Book Named the Governor* (London: Thomas Berthelet, 1537), B4–B4v: “The hearts of princes be in God's own hands and disposition.”

LETTER 58
To Robert Cecil
After May 4, 1605
Blackfriars¹

[To the] Fairest flower of my garland,
[the] honorable Earl of
S[alis]bury, Master of the King's Majesty's
most honorable Court of Wards

My very good lord,

If pity be not wrought in your lordship's heart by God's Holy Spirit to overthrow as wicked a cozenage² as ever was offered by an executor to a brother, unto his brother's heir, then this poor couple³ must be renegades, not having a place to hide their head in, which, on my faith, I believe will make the gentlewoman stark mad. To consider what she was, the honor of her two grandfathers, uncle, and so many barons⁴ wives, her aunts, and to see her self made so base as not worthy to have reward of £200 jointure for being a slave in subjection, to live without comfort of a husband every way all her life. Good my lord, extend

1. Salis MS 197.54. Not endorsed. Dated based upon the death in 1604 of Mark Steward (see n3). Printed in part in *Calendar*, 21:78.

2. An act of deception or trickery.

3. The two children (heirs) of the deceased. The parties in this dispute are obscure, but they seem to be descendents of Simeon Steward of Lakeheath (1507–1583), to whose daughter Margaret (d. 1603) the attorney Sir John Brograve (bap. 1538–1613) was married. The widow and her children were denied support and property by a brother (Dr. Steward) serving as executor of her husband's will. Because the children had become wards of the crown (as Russell's daughters had), she here appeals to Robert Cecil as master of the Court of Wards. The widow may be Anne, daughter of royal physician Robert Huicke (see *ODNB*), who married Mark Steward, Brograve's brother-in-law. Mark Steward died in 1604, leaving a daughter and a son. See *ODNB* for Sir Simeon Steward (1580–1629). Mark had five brothers, but it is not clear which one might have had the title of doctor. See Stirnet.com, "Stewart30," <http://www.stirnet.com/HTML/genie/british/ss4tz/stewart30.htm>.

4. "Many barons," stricken, but the meaning of the sentence requires that these words be retained.

out your love to the Burrows house,⁵ as much as law, equity, and conscience may warrant a Christian magistrate in such a case.

For God's sake, let them not be kept from dwelling on their own inheritance.⁶ Whosoever shall be inhabitant there will look to have a bargain sufficient to discharge their servants, rent, and reparations, with some gain toward their toil. Why should not this be fitter for them selves than for a stranger or Doctor Steward's son to dwell on? Their own counselor persuaded the doctor and his brother that it was fit for none so much as for them selves to have all that was left him. They confess that they meant it to their good, and most devilishly yet they have put it from his heirs of his own body. Mr. Brograve,⁷ that on Sunday all inveighing against Doctor Steward, is now turned

¶ quite to take his part. Sir John—even the same hypocrite—Brograve, told me that he had heard of one in John Steward's case had eight or many children, and yet he thinketh it fit the land by a lease upon trust made should be put from the children of his own body.⁸ I beseech your lordship to enquire of Milner Steward's bedfellow⁹ how false this slander is. Good my lord, take order that they may dwell all their life in their own, and provide her a jointure¹⁰ and a yearly portion of £40 to discharge her meat and clothes out of Steward's living, while Steward liveth,¹¹ who in good truth so snobbeth¹² because his house should

5. Unexplained, but see Letter 12, where Russell notes that her daughters receive rental income from a house in the Burrow (or Borough) of Denbury. These alternative spellings could also refer to an individual or family.

6. The family is being prevented from living on the property inherited from the husband and father.

7. See *ODNB*; and n3.

8. Possibly John Steward of Marham (d. 1604), one of Mark Steward's brothers and Brograve's brother-in-law. He had thirteen children, eight of whom lived to adulthood. See John Chambers, ed., *A General History of the County of Norfolk* (London: J. Stacey, 1829), 57.

9. Milner may be "milliner" (*OED*). No record of a Milner Steward survives. The person referred to is presumably Dr. Steward's wife; thus her bedfellow would be Dr. Steward.

10. The remainder of the letter is written on the second page of the bifolium.

11. Referring to the son and heir.

12. Sobs.

be kept from him as none can comfort him, but wisheth he might die this night. My lord, eight score pounds,¹³ in truth, hath been yet and is to be being owing since < ... >¹⁴ I sent the bill to day to peruse. It hath been £80 spent before this term, and £20 promised to the Court of Wards officers,¹⁵ Mr. Attorney, £10, and Mr. Surveyor, £10,¹⁶ if it be ended to them to dwell on their own, and his lease, gotten by such cozenage, overthrown, and their debts to be p[ai]d with their own woods.

Overthrow this cozenage, sweet lord. God will bless you for it, and your lordship shall never be troubled more with my epistles. Doth any man you keep cost your lordship less than £20 a year—that is, 7s a week beside lodging—and £20 his horse and £20 his man, beside apparel for a gentleman or gentlewoman in these years, less than three score pounds¹⁷ for three? O, my lord, what is £66 13s 4d to fund a man and his wife, a man, and a maid?¹⁸ Can any have less than £200 for all charges? What do they speak of £30 for reparations of a place that is put from them?

My lord, the gentlewoman is a very good housewife, hath had the guiding and rule of her mother's house. Have pity upon the gentlewoman thus despised. How many as mean as she hath had thousands, and a wise man, though they brought not a great portion?¹⁹ Help, sweet lord,

13. £160.

14. Two words are illegible.

15. Two illegible words are stricken.

16. The attorney advised the Court of Wards during judicial proceedings, and the surveyor assessed the value of properties. These positions were held by Sir Henry Hobart, attorney from November 1605 to July 1607, and Sir Cuthbert Pepper, surveyor from October 1600 until he succeeded Hobart as attorney in July 1607. See Institute of Historical Research, "Wards Officers," <http://www.history.ac.uk/publications/office/wards.html>; and *ODNB* on Hobart.

17. £60.

18. To provide a man and wife with a manservant and a maidservant.

19. In other words, women of her rank have had wealth and made good marriages despite having been provided a small marriage portion (either a dowry or a jointure).

help. God will help you and your country with prolonging your days,
*et totus populus dicat*²⁰ Amen.

Your lordship's aunt that prayeth for you,
Elizabeth Russell Douager

20. And let all the people say.

LETTER 59
To Robert Cecil
May 13, 1606
Blackfriars¹

Right Honorable, my very
[lo]rd, the Earl of Salisbury

My Lord of Salisbury,

Tomorrow is appointed to be the day of hearing of my cause against the Earl of Nottingham, Lord Admiral, touching Donnington,² where I humbly crave your honorable presence, hoping that though in the beginning your lordship denied to deal between us, yet in that place as a counselor and judge³ you will censure according to justice and equity. This being all I crave, I humbly take my leave.

Your lordship's old aunt,
Elizabeth Russell Douager

1. Salis MS 119.74. Endorsed, "1606, Lady Russell to my lord." Printed in part in *Calendar*, 18:437.

2. See below, 417–28, for a full transcript of the case, which commenced on May 14, 1606.

3. As a Privy Counselor, Cecil sat on Star Chamber cases, but he absented himself from both hearings involving Donnington.

LETTER 60
To Robert Cecil
November 6, 1606
Blackfriars¹

Right Honorable, my very
lord and nephew
the Earl of Salisbury

Good my Lord of Salisbury,

Vouchsafe me your presence, I beseech you, at the Star Chamber tomorrow.² My matter was let the last day by the Lord Norris³ upon a motion the Lord Chief Justice and Chief Baron⁴ are to deliver their opinion whether the lodge be appertaining to the castle or to the keeper only, so to proceed to censure for end.

1. Wherein I beseech that Dolman,⁵ justice of peace, may be punished for not housing me, nor removing the force of two drawn swords, twenty-four halberds, and as many he[ad]pieces⁶ out of the castle—mine own weapons against my self—and that Dolman may be put out of commission.

2. That Duke, who hath been the author of all this trouble to the spoil of the Lord Admiral and begging of me by so manifest false information, may be punished and put out of his office of the paymaster

1. Salis MS 119.73. Endorsed, “1606, Lady Russell, Dowager, to my lord.” Printed in part in *Calendar*, 18:436–37.

2. See below, 417–28. Russell’s case was concluded on November 7, 1606.

3. Francis Norris, Earl of Berkshire (1579–1622): see *ODNB*. The case had been deferred in May in order to ascertain the status of Russell’s claim to Donnington: see below, 423.

4. Edward Coke (see Letter 10n2) and Sir Thomas Fleming, Chief Baron of the Exchequer (c. 1544–1613). See *ODNB* on both.

5. See Letter 53.

6. Helmets.

of the Alms House, which is in my patent, which was granted by the queen before the new corporation.⁷

3. That James likewise may be punished for his false informations, set on by Duke, to the Lord Admiral.⁸

4. That Bellingham⁹ may be punished for his saucy performance of his master's service,¹⁰ with such saucy taunts to my self, saying, when I disposed my self to silence that I came not thither to answer his questions and eloquence, "Oh," saith he, "Belike¹¹ you think me like some of your kin that delight to hear them selves speak." He saith in his answer that I called him knave, which, on my faith, I did not, scorning to file¹² my mouth with a servant who did but his duty for matter, though not in manner.

Thus committing the rest to your lordship's own wisdom, I humbly crave pardon for my scribbling.

Your lordship's poor aunt, Elizabeth Russell
Dowager

7. Queen Elizabeth's grant to Russell included her role as paymaster of the almshouse at Donnington (see Letter 43n3), but a petition granted to the Earl of Nottingham in 1602 removed it from Russell's governance. William Duke was appointed by Nottingham to oversee the almshouse, a charitable institution and hospital. See *VCH, Berkshire*, 2:84, 2:94, and 4:96.

8. Richard James succeeded Duke as master of Donnington almshouse. See *VCH, Berkshire*, 4:94.

9. James Bellingham (d. 1641). See *VCH, Berkshire*, 2:97 and 4:49; and below, 417.

10. "Servants," stricken.

11. Perhaps.

12. Defile.