

'I haue written to the Queene': the countess of Bedford's performance of power

Historians, literary critics and biographers of Lucy Harington Russell, countess of Bedford (1581-1627), have traditionally focused on her artistic patronage at the expense of her correspondence.¹ While she is best known for her patronage of literary figures such as John Donne and Michael Drayton,² some feminist scholars have re-examined her role in the Jacobean court: Linda Levy Peck investigates female 'power-brokers' in relationships of political patronage³ and Barbara Lewalski portrays the countess as a powerful courtier with a 'self-designed' role that was created and sustained through 'literary images'.⁴ Even Peck and Lewalski, however, give only limited attention to the countess' extant correspondence, and when they do attend to her correspondence, it is primarily to mine her letters for biographical details. Bedford's extant correspondence is worth significantly more critical attention. Her fourteen manuscript letters to Sir Dudley Carleton, English ambassador to The Hague—written between 1618 and 1623—are entangled with the political scene of late Jacobean England, and with the much-thwarted protestant cause of King James's daughter, and Bedford's friend, Elizabeth of Bohemia. In this paper, I will investigate the rhetorical and material context of Bedford's letters to Carleton, and her frequent references to letters she has 'written to the Queen'. It is through these invocations of Elizabeth that Bedford most

¹ A version of this paper was presented at the 'Footprints in the butter: looking for the elephant in the archives' postgraduate conference at the Centre for Editing Lives and Letters in September 2009. I am grateful to the conference audience, panellists and panel chairs for their insightful comments, and to Professor Lisa Jardine and Dr. Robyn Adams for advice at earlier stages of this project.

² Bedford's patronage relationships are discussed in Barbara K. Lewalski, 'Lucy, Countess of Bedford: Images of a Jacobean Courtier and Patroness' in Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker (eds), Politics of Discourse: The Literature and History of Seventeenth-Century England (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987) and Writing Women in Jacobean England (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993); Margaret Mauer, 'The Real Presence of Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, and the Terms of John Donne's "Honour is So Sublime Perfection"', ELH 47:2 (1980); B.H. Newdigate, Michael Drayton and His Circle (Oxford: Blackwell, 1941); Edmund Gosse (ed.), The Life and Letters of John Donne (London: William Heinemann, 2 vols, 1899); Cedric C. Brown, 'Presence, Obligation and Memory in John Donne's Texts for the Countess of Bedford', Renaissance Studies 22:1 (2008); Patricia Thomson, 'John Donne and the Countess of Bedford', MLR 44 (1949); William J. Hebel, 'Drayton's Sirena', PMLA 39:4 (1924); and Dick Taylor, Jr., 'Drayton on the Countess of Bedford', Studies in Philology 49 (1952).

³ Linda Levy Peck, Court Patronage and Corruption in Early Stuart England (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 47–74.

⁴ Lewalski, 'Lucy, Countess of Bedford', 77.

actively utilizes the tools and protocols of early modern epistolary culture to perform political power.

I

The bulk of the countess' extant correspondence, thirty-four letters to her friend Lady Jane Cornwallis Bacon, are in manuscript at the Essex Record Office, and were edited by Richard Griffin Neville, third Baron Braybrooke, in *The Private Correspondence of Jane Lady Cornwallis, 1613–1644* in 1842, and re-edited by Joanna Moody in 2003.⁵ Fourteen letters from the countess of Bedford to Dudley Carleton survive in the State Papers at the National Archives at Kew. Single letters survive elsewhere: one to Robert Cecil, earl of Salisbury, in the Cecil Manuscripts at Hatfield House, one to viscount Lisle in the Sidney Correspondence at the British Library, and one requesting a monetary loan from an unnamed 'Good Cosein'.⁶ In the papers of the third earl of Bedford at the Bedfordshire and Luton Record Office are three letters 'written and signed' by the countess.⁷ An 'extract' of a letter 'from the Countesse of Bedford to the Queene of Bohemia' dated 24 April 1624, is in a manuscript letter collection, 'Letters to and from Sir Francis Bacon, afterward Viscount St Albans and Lord Chancellor, and some few from and to other notable Personages', in British Library Additional Manuscript 5503, and printed in *A Collection of Letters made by Sr Tobie Mathews, Kt.* in 1660.⁸ With this single exception, all the letters are in the countess' own hand and signed with her definitive signature: 'Bedford'.

Lucy Harington Russell, countess of Bedford, was a renowned patron and courtier, regularly mentioned in the letters of her contemporaries.⁹ Baptized on 25 January 1581, she was the

⁵ Joanna Moody, ed. *The Private Correspondence of Jane Lady Cornwallis Bacon, 1613–1644* (London: Associated University Press, 2003).

⁶ Hatfield House, Cecil Manuscript 111/96, on microfilm in the British Library, M485/23; British Library (hereafter BL), Additional Manuscript 15914, fol. 76; BL, Add MS 15552, fol. 7.

⁷ Bedfordshire and Luton Record Office, Russell Collection, R3/2–6.

⁸ BL, Add MS 5503, fol. 126v–127v and *A Collection of Letters made by Sr Tobie Mathews, Kt. With a character of the most excellent Lady, Lucy, Countesse of Carleile* (London: Printed for H. Herringman, 1660). This 'extract' praises the qualities of Elizabeth's brother, Prince Charles, and its context and circulation deserve a more thorough investigation.

⁹ Biographical sources include: Lewalski, 'Lucy, Countess of Bedford' and *Writing Women in Jacobean England*; Karen Hearn, 'A Question of Judgement: Lucy Harington, Countess of Bedford,

eldest living child of Sir John Harington of Exton and his wife Anne Keilwey. She was notably well-educated, and her family was renowned for its learning and protestantism.¹⁰ On 12 December 1594 she married Edward Russell, third earl of Bedford; the marriage was a considerable social coup for the Haringtons, but the earl's estates were already encumbered, and the expenses of court life put the Bedfords even further in debt. In 1601, the earl was implicated in the Essex Rebellion, fined £20,000, and banished from court to his estate of Chenies in Buckinghamshire.

While it would be folly to suggest that the countess of Bedford spent the next two years hatching plots to regain court favour, she may have anticipated the chaos of monarchical change. James' ascension to the English throne in 1603 radically changed the distribution of court power and favour. Leeds Barroll argues that James' ascension 'paradoxically ... activate[d], for the first time in decades, the political aspirations ... [of] a number of ambitious and talented women'.¹¹ The new queen, Anna of Denmark, required the formation of her own court, and James asked the privy council to send a delegation of English ladies to escort the queen from Scotland to England. The privy councillors logically selected their own relatives, women who represented the power structure they hoped to maintain; in what many historians have described as a lucky coup, a second, unofficial delegation of ladies reached the queen first. This latter delegation included Lady Bedford and her mother, Lady Harington. Anna initially refused to favour the official delegation, but swore Bedford to her privy chamber almost immediately. Lord and Lady Harington were elevated to the peerage,

as Art Patron and Collector', in Evolution of English Collecting ed. Edward Chaney (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004); Helen Payne, 'Russell, Lucy, countess of Bedford (bap. 1581, d. 1627)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Jan 2008 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.ulrls.lon.ac.uk/view/article/24330>, accessed 3 May 2011], hereafter ODNB.

¹⁰ Bedford was associated with her Sidney relatives—her paternal grandmother was Lucy Sidney, aunt of Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney Herbert—and she was a cousin of the poet Sir John Harington, who translated Ludovico Ariosto's Orlando Furioso into English and was the first promoter of the flush toilet. For more on Sir John Harington see Jason Scott-Warren, Sir John Harington and the Book as Gift (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), and 'The Privy Politics of Sir John Harington's "New Discourse of a Stale Subject, Called the Metamorphosis of Ajax"', Studies in Philology 93:4 (Autumn 1996).

¹¹ Leeds Barroll, 'The Court of the First Stuart Queen' in Linda Levy Peck (ed.), The Mental World of the Jacobean Court (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 191.

and the new Baron Harington was appointed guardian of Princess Elizabeth. James pardoned the earl of Bedford and commuted his fines, but the earl chose to remain in the country, leaving his political role in his wife's capable hands.

The countess remained one of the most powerful members of the queen's court until Anna's death in 1619. She continued to participate in court politics and patronage even after the queen's death; with the majority of her extant letters dating from the last decade of her life, we are left with the image of a middle-aged countess, unwaveringly political and accustomed to her power. She cultivated her connections with a network of male friends, especially William Herbert, earl of Pembroke and Lord Chamberlain, and James, marquis of Hamilton, Lord Steward, and gentleman of the king's bedchamber. She was a member of the 'Puritan' political interest, led by Pembroke and Archbishop Abbot, and particularly concerned—especially in the 1620s—with supporting the protestant cause of the former Princess Elizabeth, Electress Palatine and Queen of Bohemia, and her husband, Frederick V.¹² In 1621, Bedford visited Elizabeth in The Hague. From 1618 to 1623, she corresponded with Sir Dudley Carleton.

Carleton, born in 1574, was the second son of Antony Carleton of Brightwell Baldwin in Oxfordshire.¹³ He attended Christ Church, Oxford, and took his MA—after working as a secretary on the continent—in 1600. He was elected to parliament in 1604, but continued to seek a diplomatic post. In 1610, he was knighted and made the ambassador to Venice; in 1615, he was promoted to ambassador to The Hague, a position that became vital with the beginning of the Thirty Years' War in 1618. Ostensibly, Carleton was the countess of Bedford's social inferior, but they were both children of lesser gentry, both 'self-made' by

¹² Simon Adams, 'Foreign Policy and the Parliaments of 1621 and 1624' in Kevin Sharpe (ed.), *Faction and Parliament: Essays on Early Stuart History* (London: Methuen, 2nd edn, 1985), 143–4. Adams notes that Pembroke held the earl of Bedford's proxy in the Lords of 1621, 1624 and 1625.

¹³ L. J. Reeve, 'Carleton, Dudley, Viscount Dorchester (1574–1632)', *ODNB*.

their own active pursuit of power. Their relationship was layered, mutually beneficial, and constructed and maintained by their correspondence.

II

Bedford's extant correspondence to Carleton begins on 18 October 1618,¹⁴ with a letter responding to what must have been a request for favour.¹⁵ It is immediately evident that Bedford was not the instigator of the correspondence: 'I have taken the more tyme to awnser your letter', she begins, 'because I wold faine have given yow by mine a better acounte of the effects of your freinds good wishes then the dead calme yett keepes all owr great businesses hear att a stayed inhables me to do'. While Bedford and her friends 'foerseer a certain change' in court offices, they 'cannot make any iudgement when itt will bee, nor who is destined to the places will be void'. In 1618, Carleton had been ambassador to the Low Countries for three years. It was a good position, but Carleton was, in Linda Levy Peck's apt characterization, an 'inveterate office-seeker' who longed to secure a political appointment at home.¹⁶ When secretary of state Ralph Winwood died in 1617, leaving a major political vacancy, Carleton approached several court patrons for support in securing the secretaryship for himself. In her reply to the letter that must have begged her patronage, Bedford suggests that Carleton would be the best choice: '[the position] more necsesarily requiers yow then any other, so as the affection of your freinds haue strength of arguments enow to aleage in your behalfe, ... & might be shewr to speed if the best reason wold prevaile: but that itt will do so I dare not promise in so irregular tymes'. Unfortunately for

¹⁴ While the accidents of epistolary provenance cannot be taken as definitive facts, no evidence survives to prove a more long-standing epistolary relationship between Bedford and Carleton.

¹⁵ The National Archives State Papers (hereafter TNA SP), 14/103, fol. 50. All letters are transcribed using a semi-diplomatic transcription policy. Contractions and abbreviations are silently expanded and lowered, and all punctuation indicating contractions is removed. All other punctuation is left as close to the original as possible, except for the = sign, which I have replaced with a standard hyphen. Spelling is preserved, including i/j, u/v and w. When quoting from transcriptions in the text, I have silently expanded and lowered all contractions, silently omitted crossed-out omissions, and silently included insertions for ease of reading. I have referenced the first instance of each letter, and again referenced when moving between letters or folios.

¹⁶ Peck, Court Patronage, 62.

Carleton, his friends' arguments did not prevail.¹⁷ Bedford promises only to do what she can, and signs herself 'Your Lordships vnfained freind'.

From her opening, situating her letter in response to Carleton's, to her postscript, conveying her best to Carleton's 'noble Lady', Bedford's letter follows the rhetorical conventions that were so ingrained in the epistolary culture of early modern England. While there is no evidence that Bedford read Erasmus, or received the kind of rhetorical training that was common to men of her class, she would have learned the conventions of letter-writing from the practice of writing letters. As James Daybell has established, 'Senecan language saturated the very social and cultural world in which [women letter-writers] operated':

Read for language and rhetoric, women's letters of intercession display a rich vocabulary of patronage, favour, and 'political friendship'. Female letter-writers employed a Senecan language of mutual benefits: they promised repayment of favours in kind, assured the friendship of themselves and their husbands, and mobilized alliances of family and 'friends' ... Although highly ritualized, women's easy familiarity with and utilization of a language of favour and reciprocity—a language typically seen as predominantly male—is suggestive of the high degree of confidence and authority with which many women wrote and intervened in areas traditionally viewed as male.¹⁸

While not strictly a letter of intercession or recommendation, this letter follows a similar pattern and utilizes similar tropes: after opening with a standard introduction, situating the correspondence and explaining Bedford's delay, the letter segues into a narrative that both invokes Bedford and Carleton's network of 'friends' and defines the circumstances that have prevented that network from furthering Carleton's suit.¹⁹ Nowhere does Bedford apologize—Carleton is the suitor and Bedford the patron, and to apologize would be too familiar in a

¹⁷ The king eventually appointed Sir George Calvert to the position. Carleton did become secretary of state, but not until 1628, under a new king.

¹⁸ James Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 27.

¹⁹ Daybell outlines the style and structure of letters of intercession in 'Women's Letters of Recommendation and the Rhetoric of Friendship in Sixteenth-Century England' in Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne (ed.), *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2007), 176–177. Contemporary textbooks like Angel Daye's *The English Secretorie* (London: Printed by Robert Walde-graue for Richard Iones, 1586), accessed at Early English Books Online, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:99854215, are also excellent sources for rubrics of early modern epistolary conventions.

letter that is notably formal—but she does praise Carleton as she might in a letter of recommendation, illustrating her own skill in preferment and intercession.

In her closing, Bedford suddenly invokes a surprising rhetoric of weakness: 'ther shall be nothing wanting towards your advancement may be contributed by so weake a power as mine'. According to Daybell, this rhetorical weakness was a common trope among female letter-writers: 'what is distinct to women's suitors' letters ... is the calculated use of negative female gender assumptions in letters of deference: female 'weakness' or 'frailty' was a standard deferential trope'.²⁰ Bedford's letter is not deferential, but her use of the rhetoric of weakness may indicate that the social relationship between Bedford and Carleton was more equal than the formal letter might immediately suggest.²¹ Taken in context with the powerful rhetoric of friendship prevalent in the rest of the letter, the rhetoric of weakness seems even more out of place.²² But if Bedford was using the rhetoric of friendship to construct a relationship of mutually indebted equality, and the rhetoric of weakness to lessen any social divide she and Carleton had as patron and petitioner, then two things become clear: first, that Bedford was a talented letter-writer, and second, that she was laying the foundations—even within the carefully executed parameters of a deliberative epistle—for a familiar correspondence.²³ This letter is not a familiar letter: it does nothing to make the absent friend present, and directly states and carries out its purpose. It does, however, hint at the possibility of a further relationship of mutual indebtedness, a friendship that could be

²⁰ Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers*, 27.

²¹ They were both in a position to do each other favours, and while Bedford does not directly mention any return indebtedness in this letter, the subtext would have been apparent to them both.

²² Daybell argues persuasively that 'women's selection of a language of political friendship [a language of equality traditionally seen as exclusively male], and the dexterity with which they deployed this rhetoric, is itself instrumental in constructing an image of their authority and equality with the addressee'. Daybell, 'Women's Letters of Recommendation', 179.

²³ Erasmus' category of the 'familiar letter' included letters 'which narrated events, provided news, both "public" and "private", contained congratulations and complaints, proffered advice and help, gave praise, or were written to amuse'. Familiar letters were intended to 'make the absent friend present', and, thereby, to have an emotional impact on the reader. Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers*, 18. See Lisa Jardine, *Erasmus, Man of Letters: The Construction of Charisma in Print* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993) for Erasmus' remarkable pedagogical program and personal construction of his own power and reputation through letter-writing and publication.

accompanied by familiar letters. It establishes that Bedford was no stranger to the rhetoric of political correspondence.

After Bedford's visit to The Hague in 1621, Bedford and Carleton's correspondence increased in frequency and familiarity. When Bedford was 'wind bound' on her journey home, Carleton invited her to return to The Hague until travel conditions improved. Bedford declined, thanking him for his hospitality. Her second extant letter to Carleton is essentially a thank-you note, but the epistolary dynamic has changed: now Bedford owes Carleton favours, and her rhetoric reflects the difference. 'Every days experience' has shown Carleton and his wife to be 'carefull, & worthy freinds', and she is 'so much more bound to yow as to imbrace a firme confidence that yow never conferred courtesie upon any will retaine a thankefuller remembrance of them'.²⁴ Now that Bedford has reaped the benefits of the Carletons' hospitality, they are worthy friends, equals to whom she owes a significant debt.

Immediately upon her return to England, Bedford wrote to Carleton again. Unlike both previous letters, this letter is long, moving between topics without following a definite form; it is undeniably a familiar letter, cementing both friendship and indebtedness, and it is an immediate follow-up to Bedford's visit to The Hague. She begins where her last letter left off: 'the thanks I owe yow are to many to be sett doune in this paper, & indeed I had rather render yow a litle servis then many words; though I shall never thinke the greatest I might do yow, enoffe to make even for those favours have preseded any desert of mine'.²⁵ She states that her debt to Carleton is so great that it can never be repaid; while this is more rhetorical than factual, it grants Carleton power: he is ahead in the exchange of favours. She immediately complicates this, however, by reasserting her own power: '& of such newse as I found hear the Queen will I am shewr give yow your part, which is not worth a double wrighting'. Instead of sending her news to Carleton, she sends it to the queen, excluding

²⁴ TNA SP, 84/102, fol. 138.

²⁵ TNA SP, 14/122, fol. 156r.

Carleton both from the transmission of information and from her relationship with Elizabeth. Bedford's assertion of power makes her concession of indebtedness suspect; she owes Carleton and counts him a 'worthy friend', but the power balance of their relationship is uneasy.

III

Bedford's relationship with Elizabeth of Bohemia was established long before she began corresponding with Carleton. As Queen Anna's closest lady and the daughter of Princess Elizabeth's governor, Bedford might have functioned as a sort of older sister to Elizabeth—limited, of course, by their prescribed social roles. Elizabeth's only extant letter to Bedford, dated March 1620 from Prague, begins, 'Dear Bedford, I see by your lines that you are still the same to me in your affection as I have ever found you, which I will ever requite with my most constant love since I have no better means to shew my thankfulness. I would that others were of your mind'.²⁶ In 1618, the citizens of Bohemia deposed Holy Roman Emperor Ferdinand II and offered the crown of Bohemia to Frederick V, Elector Palatine. In what was seen as a great protestant triumph over the catholic Hapsburgs—at least by Frederick and his wife—he accepted the crown. Many of Elizabeth's friends and allies, including her father, King James of England, strongly disapproved. They were right: Frederick could hold neither Bohemia nor the Palatinate against the Holy Roman Empire. Though they called themselves king and queen of Bohemia for the rest of their lives, Frederick and Elizabeth only ruled Bohemia for a year. By early 1621, Ferdinand had taken back Bohemia, and Frederick and Elizabeth had retreated to The Hague, desperately defending the Palatinate. At home in England, Bedford and her friends fought for Elizabeth and Frederick's cause, urging the king and parliament to enter the holy war in Europe and send military aid to the Palatinate. Mary Anne Everett Green states that Bedford 'was more valuable than any paid agent could have been, in communicating to her royal friend every change in the political gales that passed

²⁶ Jane Harvey McMaster and Marguerite Wood (eds), Supplementary Report on the Manuscripts of His Grace the Duke of Hamilton, HMC Vol. 21 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1932), 9.

through the English atmosphere, and in giving hints of the course it would be advisable to take in certain emergencies'; Bedford was 'in constant correspondence with Carleton'.²⁷

Carleton was the natural gate-keeper for letters to Elizabeth. As ambassador, any political intelligence from England should have gone to him; as Elizabeth's host in The Hague, he was the logical intermediary for the queen's correspondence. While it was certainly not unheard of for subjects, and particularly friends and favourites, to write directly to royalty, it was still a little unusual. In this case, it was also discourteous to Carleton. Bedford's letters to Carleton would almost certainly have gone in the same packets as her letters to Elizabeth, carried by the same bearers; they would presumably have passed through many hands on their way to the queen—likely including Carleton's—but Bedford nevertheless makes a point of regularly informing Carleton that she has 'written to the Queen' without requesting his intercession, permission or approval, and without sharing the same news with him in turn. When Bedford bypasses Carleton's authority and writes 'directly' to Elizabeth, she asserts her power by transgressing against the social conventions of epistolary transmission and political intelligence; this transgression is made apparent by the letters in which she *does* ask Carleton to intercede.

On 25 February 1621/2, Bedford writes, 'This inclosed letter to the Queen doe mee the favor to deliver & intreate her to reed in your presence alone, because I am shewr shee will acquainte yow with the contens'.²⁸ In her postscript, she assures Carleton, 'What I have written to the Queene take my worde is not with out iust cause & acordingly wax itt'. The materiality of Bedford's letter-writing is often conspicuous in her language, but her request that Carleton 'wax' the letter is particularly intriguing. Bedford's letter to Elizabeth must contain sensitive information: she asks Carleton to deliver it himself, to entreat Elizabeth to read it in his presence alone, and to 'desier itt may not be trusted to a pockett, but fier', the

²⁷ Mary Anne Everett Green, Elizabeth, Electress Palatine and Queen of Bohemia (London: Methuen & Co., rev. edn, 1909), 216.

²⁸ TNA SP, 84/105, fol. 179.

equivalent of 'burn this'. While Bedford is 'sure' that Elizabeth will acquaint Carleton with the contents of the letter, her implication is that Carleton should not acquaint *himself* with the contents of the letter, that the conveyance of information to Carleton should be at the queen's discretion alone. While this does not seem entirely unreasonable, given Bedford's established relationship with Elizabeth and a sensitive political letter, Bedford then asks Carleton to approve the letter, sight unseen, with his own seal. For whatever reason—perhaps the letter is unsealed, or perhaps Carleton's political presence would be particularly useful in this case—Bedford wants Carleton's intercession. Her assurance that she has 'just cause' demands his trust: while he could read the letter and see her 'just cause' for himself (and then seal the letter as she requests), Bedford wants him to wax the letter on the strength of her word alone. On some level, this carefully constructed request must be a performance; she has, after all, previously written to the queen without his intercession. Asking Carleton to approve and deliver this letter indicates that she is aware of the protocol she elsewhere chooses to violate; asking him to trust her 'just cause' without reading the letter is an assertion of power and privilege. Bedford places herself on the same informational level as Elizabeth, but Carleton must wait for the queen to acquaint him with Bedford's new intelligence—provided, of course, that he follows her instructions.

On 4 April, although grateful that he has ensured the burning of her last letter, Bedford bypasses Carleton's authority again: 'I have now written her such a volume of such things as fill owr eares hear, as I protest my hand will scarce hold a pen any longer att the present; therfore of newse I will refer yow for your part to her'.²⁹ Writing fatigue is a common excuse, but this is more than an assertion of power over Carleton. Bedford's decision to 'refer' Carleton to the queen for his intelligence may also be a transgression against Elizabeth: she has essentially cast the queen as a messenger, putting Carleton in the impossible position of having to ask Elizabeth to be *his* intermediary for Bedford's correspondence. Bedford does not stop there; next, she demands Carleton's help in corralling the queen: 'I haue written to

²⁹ TNA SP, 14/129, fol. 7r.

the Queen to wright thanks to Master Secretary Calvert, I beseech yow putte her in mind of itt, because I know itt will be to good purpos'.³⁰ Secretary of state George Calvert—allied neither with the 'Spanish' party, which urged reconciliation with the Catholics, nor with Bedford and the earl of Pembroke's 'Puritan' party, which argued that England should send military support to the Palatinate—would have been a useful ally for Elizabeth's cause.³¹ In her next letter, Bedford again urges Carleton to persuade Elizabeth to write to Calvert,³² but becomes slightly apologetic: 'Wear I an ower with yow I should give som reasons for divers things I have donne, & may doe, which perhaps yow will not aprehend good grounds for; but att this distance preserve mee in your opinion by an implicit fayth'.³³ This not-quite-apology is manipulative: she begs Carleton's implicit trust, reminding him both that he owes her in return—'be pleased in on to reseae my thanks for all your letters, & what they containe of obligacion to mee'—and that Elizabeth's 'good is as dear to mee as my owne lyfe'.³⁴ The subtext is clear: if Carleton also values Elizabeth's good, then he must trust Bedford implicitly, in spite of her transgressions—transgressions, it seems, of which she is well aware. Given the opportunity, Bedford would explain herself to Carleton in person; in their correspondence, however, she begs his trust: her performance of power, she suggests, is essential to the queen's welfare.

In a letter on 13 March 1622, Bedford again has no time to 'troble [Carleton] with many lines', but 'part of the newse wee have hear I have written to the Queen'.³⁵ She does not, of course, share this news with Carleton in turn. A year later, on 28 March 1623, she writes her most urgent epistle to Carleton:

³⁰ TNA SP, 14/129, fol. 7v.

³¹ John D. Krugler, 'Calvert, George, first Baron Baltimore (1579/80–1632)', *ODNB*.

³² Both Elizabeth's delay in writing to Calvert and Bedford's caution—she only wants Elizabeth to write if 'wrighting will not be harmefull to her'—may be attributed in part to the fact that Elizabeth's sixth child, Louise Marie, was born on 18 April 1622. This second letter is dated 4 May.

³³ TNA SP, 14/139, fol. 20r.

³⁴ TNA SP, 14/130, fol. 20v.

³⁵ TNA SP, 14/130, fol. 85.

My Lord, I beseech yow doe me the favor to deliver or send the Queen this letter as soone as yow can; with the contens whearof itt is like shee will acquaint yow, which if shee doe, beleeve so well of mee as that if I had not found much cause I wold not have donne what I confesse against my selfe, & for Gods sake preach more warines to the Queen whom she wses freedon to, else shee will undo her selfe, & make others afrayd how they interest them-selves in her servis, though for my part I will never omitte making good my proffessions to her as becoms a faithfull & carefull servant;³⁶

Bedford again asks Carleton to serve as intermediary, this time out of necessity: Carleton may have to 'send' the letter to Elizabeth, because Elizabeth may not be in The Hague.

In February of 1623, Prince Charles and the duke of Buckingham went on a secret expedition to Spain. They went in disguise, and intended to return to England with the Infanta Maria, a marriage contract between England and the Habsburgs and an end to the war in Europe. As Green tells the story, Elizabeth, 'who had had so many sad experiences of the treachery of Spain, was shocked and alarmed by the tidings', wrote to the duchess of Richmond and Lennox 'with more warmth than discretion'. The content of Elizabeth's letter to Lennox got out—possibly due to the duchess' indiscretion—and many people got the wrong impression: 'The false interpretation put upon the matter was, that Elizabeth intended to come into England herself, or to send thither her eldest son, in order promptly to advance her claim to the throne, in case of any misfortune happening to her brother'.³⁷ Rumour had it that Elizabeth was coming to England to claim the throne, and to forward her own cause while her brother was in Spain, betraying her with the Catholics.

Bedford believes the rumours—or at least cannot afford to doubt them—and expects Carleton to be more sure of Elizabeth's location than Bedford herself. She requires Carleton's aid, both to direct or deliver her letter to Elizabeth, and to reiterate the sentiment her letter to the queen surely contains: 'for Gods sake preach more warines to the Queen whom she wses freedon to', she writes, 'else shee will undo her selfe, & make others afrayd

³⁶ TNA SP, 14/140, fol. 95.

³⁷ Green, *Elizabeth*, 214–215.

how they interest them-selves in her servis'. Neither the duchess of Lennox nor the privacy of correspondence can be trusted, and if Elizabeth is not more careful, Bedford fears she will lose her English support. Her letter to Carleton is brief, and it seems panicked; familiar letters were intended, in part, to convey emotion, and the emotion of this letter is still evident today. Yet while her panic was probably very real, it must also have been performative, intended to impress the urgency of the situation upon Carleton, and to convince Carleton to share that urgency with Elizabeth. Bedford can do nothing to help Elizabeth without Carleton's support; without Carleton, her letter may not even reach the queen.

Bedford was not the only person to write urgently to Carleton in response to the rumours of Elizabeth's journey to England. According to Green, 'the Earl of Pembroke wrote privately and hastily to Carleton, to represent the danger of such a step, and to urge him, if possible, to prevent it; adding, in conclusion, a serious caution to the Queen, not to entrust any matters of a secret nature in her letters to the Duchess of Lennox'.³⁸ Pembroke's letter to Carleton is undated, and misfiled in the State Papers for 1623 as 'Sept ?' with a penciled cataloguer's note reading 'before October 1623'. There seems little doubt, however, that Pembroke's letter was written at approximately the same time as Bedford's. The context is the same:

My Lord, hauing this safe messinger & hearing out of some rumors a noyse as if at this time the Queene of Bohemia might take a iorney heather; out of my zeale to her seruice & loue to her person, I doe beseech your Lordship that if you find there be any such Intention, you will vse all the power you haue with her, which I know is great; to hinder such a resolution, for I know during her brothers absence nothing under heauen can be so dangerous vnto her³⁹

Pembroke is concerned for Elizabeth's safety and begs Carleton to do everything in his power to prevent the queen from coming to London—including, if it will help, invoking

³⁸ Green, *Elizabeth*, 216.

³⁹ TNA SP, 14/152, fol. 124. Accessed at the State Papers Online, Gale Document Number: MC4323700872, <http://go.galegroup.com.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/mss/i.do?id=GALE|MC4323700872&v=2.1&u=colu mbiau&it=r&p=SPOL&sw=w&viewtype=Calendar>.

Pembroke's name. Pembroke argues that Prince Charles alone 'must restore her husbands, & her childrens honors'; he is certain that the prince will take his sister's cause to heart once he returns from Spain, and that 'nothing can giue it such a check as her coming heather at this time'. Like Bedford, Pembroke asks Carleton to trust his judgment: 'the reasons are not fitt for paper but let me Intreat you in this to build uppon my knowledg that can not mistake what I now say'. Also like Bedford, Pembroke wants Carleton to prevent Elizabeth from writing anything more to the duchess of Lennox: 'one thing more I must not omitt; but this I doe not desire to heare of againe, let the Queene write no more to the Duchesse of Lennox, ... not but that I know she loues with her hart; but that tong can keepe nothing secret. this may be thought a breach of frendship in me, if it did not concern a greater obligation'. Pembroke beseeches Carleton to burn his letter—an instruction Carleton obviously did not follow—and signs himself 'Your Lordships most affectionate frend to comand'.

Pembroke and Bedford were relatives, friends, allies and members of the same political party. Bedford invokes Pembroke in other letters to Carleton, and Pembroke wrote to Carleton at other times; it is not surprising that the sentiments of their letters—especially at this particularly fraught time—are similar: that both ask Carleton to advise Elizabeth not to write to Lennox, that both assure Carleton of their continued devotion to Elizabeth and her cause, and that both sign themselves as Carleton's friends. But while the context and sentiments of the two letters are similar, Bedford's epistle is notably shorter, and not nearly as informative—or indeed as polite—as Pembroke's. Bedford seems to rely on the previous standards of her correspondence with Carleton: she gives Carleton very little information, but begs that he 'deliver or send' her enclosed letter to Elizabeth. She suggests that Elizabeth will likely share Bedford's letter with Carleton, but again implies that Carleton should not read the letter himself. If Elizabeth does choose to share the letter, Bedford hopes that Carleton will 'beleeve so well of mee as that if I had not found much cause I wold not have donne what I confesse against my selfe'. She does not tell Carleton what she has 'confessed against herself'. Once again, this is an assertion of power. Even in the middle of

an urgent and time-sensitive letter, requiring Carleton's intercession and support, Bedford demands that Carleton trust her without knowing what she has written to the queen, and with only the small assurance that she has 'much cause' for her unknown transgression.

While Bedford and Carleton have a history of familiar correspondence that Carleton and Pembroke do not seem to share, it is notable that Pembroke's letter is so much more informative than Bedford's. There is no evidence that Pembroke also wrote to Elizabeth, and it seems reasonable to suppose that the content of Bedford's enclosed letter to Elizabeth closely resembled the content of Pembroke's letter to Carleton—that Bedford directed her information and warnings first to the queen, while Pembroke directed them first to Carleton. But Pembroke was Lord Chamberlain and a leader of the political party that supported Elizabeth's cause in England. He may not have been able to claim the same kind of long-standing relationship with Elizabeth as Bedford, but he was just as much Elizabeth's faithful friend. He could have written to the queen. Instead, he counted on Carleton to serve as intermediary for the information contained in his correspondence. Pembroke follows protocol: he writes to Carleton and requests that Carleton advise Elizabeth; he does not bypass Carleton's authority as ambassador and Elizabeth's host. Pembroke's letter to Carleton strongly suggests that Bedford made a conscious decision not to follow protocol; that she wrote to Elizabeth without Carleton's intercession—except, perhaps, as a necessary messenger in moments of crisis—as an active performance of power over Carleton.

IV

Bedford may have required this performance of power more than Pembroke. James Daybell, citing Lynne Magnusson, notes that 'there is a correlation between a woman's language and her self-perception of her power; the authority invoked by women in their letters might be interpreted as much as an act of rhetorical self-presentation as a reflection of actual

status'.⁴⁰ In other words—not surprisingly—early modern women were aware that performing power was half the battle to achieving power. Bedford was ostensibly Carleton's social superior, but their backgrounds and ambitions were similar, and he had power she lacked—as ambassador, as Elizabeth's host and even as a man. Their familiar epistolary friendship was built on a carefully constructed relationship of mutual indebtedness; but Bedford was often unable to repay the favours she owed Carleton,⁴¹ and perhaps her performance of power seemed especially necessary when she could not uphold her end of their mutual debt. It does not seem unreasonable to argue that Bedford's greatest tool in her performance of power over Carleton was her friendship with Elizabeth; nor that in a predominately epistolary relationship, writing to Elizabeth without requesting Carleton's intercession—except when it was absolutely necessary, and even then with a calculated reinforcement of her power—was the most actively powerful thing she could have done. In the context of the rhetoric of political friendship prevalent in her other letters to Carleton, and her awareness of the materiality of letter transmission, her apparent disregard for epistolary protocols seems actively transgressive. Her transgressions must themselves be a performance of power: they state that she is so much more powerful than Carleton—at least in her relationship with Elizabeth—that protocol does not apply to their correspondence. This was a risky sociopolitical gambit, but Bedford seemed very conscious, throughout both her correspondence and her life, that her status relied on her continued ability to perform power. In her letters to Carleton, she performed that power by writing to Elizabeth.

The letters to Elizabeth that Bedford regularly invokes in her letters to Carleton do not survive. Carleton's letters to Bedford do not survive either, but their existence is given by

⁴⁰ Daybell, 'Women's Letters of Intercession', 185.

⁴¹ In her last extant letter to Carleton, unable to help him secure the provostship of Eton, she writes, 'so unservisable a freind as I am to yow may easelier be forgotten then I could recover so great an honor againe as itt is to live in your remembrance & good opinion, which all the meanes I have to deserve is the makeing itt appear that I forgoe not the memory of your favours, . . . which I had need somtymes professe, (that can no more;) as now I doe, & this treuth as hartely as I can do any thing, that that ocacion shall inable mee to meritt of yow, I shall ioeye in'. Bedford believes she has lost Carleton's good opinion. She wants to regain it, but she has no means to do so, and it 'afflicts' her that she cannot act on Carleton's behalf. TNA SP, 14/154, fol. 62.

Bedford's letters; we can even guess at their content. Bedford's letters to Elizabeth are another matter entirely. If Bedford had followed the same protocols as Pembroke, and written her news to Carleton with the admonition that he share it with Elizabeth, we might have more information about the political scene in London at the beginning of the Thirty Years' War. We might have that same information, if Bedford's letters to Elizabeth survived; the holes in the archive are endless in their possibility, and nearly all of this is conjecture. Nevertheless, if Bedford had simply written to Elizabeth, without simultaneously using her letters to Elizabeth to perform power over Carleton, we might never know those letters existed. It is only her constant invocations of her letters to Elizabeth in her letters to Carleton—her performance of power in her correspondence—that tells us for certain that Bedford has 'written to the Queene'.

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