

Material Lies: Parental Anxiety and Epistolary Practice in the Correspondence of Anne, Lady Bacon and Anthony Bacon¹

Abstract: Anne, Lady Bacon (c.1528-1610) is celebrated for her achievements as one of that rare breed of learned women in the early modern period, a reputation gained through the translation from Italian of Bernadino Ochino's Sermons (1548), and the translation from Latin of John Jewel's Apologie of the Church of England (1564). However, her reputation as the mother of Anthony and Francis Bacon is more problematic, and she has long been seen as an overbearing figure seeking to control every aspect of her sons' lives. This article argues that the power struggle of the mother-son relationship is reflected in both the rhetorical features and the material processes of her letter writing practices, as the intrinsic insecurity of epistolary communication engenders a personalised set of strategies designed to control the circulation of her words and enhance her maternal authority.

Keywords: Anne, Lady Bacon, motherhood, mother-son relations, Cooke sisters, postal conditions, bearers

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The exchange of letters between Anne and Anthony Bacon makes up the largest surviving body of correspondence between a mother and son from the sixteenth century, numbering around 180 in total.² This corpus offers an unparalleled insight into the complex workings of a mother and son relationship in the early modern period, and as they were written within a relatively short time frame, between 1592 and 1598, the letters provide a continuity of narrative that allows the thread of everyday life to be followed. The topics discussed in the letters are many and varied, Anne dispensed advice on the salvation of the soul as well as suggesting cures for gout; she communicated news of local gossip alongside discussing matters of national importance; and sent her sons gifts of strawberries, trout and small beer. Her gifts were even tailored to the preferences of her sons, as, for example, when she sent the 'Fyrst Flight of my Dovehouse' she specified that twelve were for Anthony and sixteen for Francis, 'because he was wont to love them better then yow. From A boy'.³ Anne and her sons co-operated on matters concerning the family interest, with Anthony, for example, interceding on several occasions with his patron the earl of Essex on the behalf of one of Anne's favoured radical preachers, William Dyke,⁴ and Anne reciprocates by defending the position of the incumbent of one of Anthony's manors.⁵ Despite this unified defence of family interests and the demonstrations of traditional familial care, there is an undercurrent of suspicion and disagreement threaded through their correspondence that is the result of a perceived failure on the side of both parties to fulfil correctly their parental or filial obligations. This article, therefore, explores how the stresses and strains of this unhappy relationship are reflected in Anne's epistolary practice.⁶ The production, transmission and reception of her letters all become sites through which the power struggle between mother and son is enacted, as Anne's obsessive tracking of the bearers carrying her correspondence, her modulation of the tone and content in a letter depending on the identity of the bearer, and her attempts to control the afterlife of her letters once they reached Anthony's household, all

² James Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 179. The Anthony Bacon Papers held at Lambeth Palace Library contain letters from Anne to other recipients, and includes six letters between Anne and her youngest son Francis Bacon. For a more detailed analysis of Lady Bacon's correspondence see K.A. Mair, 'Anne, Lady Bacon: A Life in Letters' (Ph.D thesis, University of London, 2009).

³ Lambeth Palace Library (hereafter LPL), MS 651, fol. 89r-v (art. 54): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 8 April 1595. In quoting from manuscripts I have silently expanded all abbreviations and contractions, and lowered all superscriptions. All letters holograph unless specified.

⁴ LPL, MS 656, fol. 49r-v (art. 30): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 1 March 1597; LPL MS 650, fols 287r-288v (art.192): Robert Devereux, earl of Essex to William Wickham (copy).

⁵ LPL, MS 655, fols 95r-96v (art. 68): Anne Bacon to Edward Stanhope, 14 February 1597.

⁶ This approach differs from other studies of Anne Bacon's letters: Alan Stewart, 'The Voices of Anne Cooke, Lady Anne and Lady Bacon' in Danielle Clarke and Elizabeth Clarke (eds), *This Double Voice: Gendered Writing in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2000), 88-102; Lynne Magnusson, 'Widowhood and Linguistic Capital: The Rhetoric and Reception of Anne Bacon's Epistolary Advice', *English Literary Renaissance* 31:1 (2001), 3-33; Gemma Allen, 'Education, Piety and Politics: The Cooke Sisters and Women's Agency, c.1526-1610' (D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 2009).

demonstrate how the intrinsic insecurity of epistolary communication fuelled her fears that her sons were not giving her letters, and concomitantly her opinions, the respect they were due.

The letters coincide with Anthony's return to England after thirteen years spent as a spy in France, a period during which his infrequent communication with his family and friends cast significant suspicions upon his activities. Anthony had left for the continent shortly after the death of his father Sir Nicholas Bacon in 1579, at the suggestion of his uncle William Cecil, Lord Burghley, the husband of Anne Bacon's sister Mildred.⁷ Tasked with gathering intelligence for Sir Francis Walsingham, the freedom with which Anthony interpreted his duties, and the contacts he made use of during his stay, fostered his mother's growing suspicions about his religious constancy. Anthony also raced through his income at a speed that forced him to borrow from all and sundry, and his neglect of his affairs at home infuriated his mother.⁸ Upon his return he sought the patronage of the earl of Essex, and coordinated his European intelligence network.⁹

Anthony's failure to produce heirs, to preserve his patrimony, to contribute to civic society in any transparent way, and to subscribe to a godly way of life, made him seem in his mother's eyes a failed son, and her frustration is evident throughout the letters. From Anthony's perspective the level of control his mother wished to exert over him was excessive, as she attempted to regulate the servants whom he employed in his household, what he ate, and even how he went to sleep. In one letter, Lady Bacon urged her son not to listen to music while falling asleep, explaining 'use not yourself to be twanged A slepe. but naturally it wyll grow into a Teadious custome and Hynder yow much'.¹⁰

Anne's prerogative to dispense such advice was a given, she was after all his mother and her control over the spiritual and physical well-being of her son was culturally accepted, but several factors seemed to have increased Anne's belief in her authority over her son beyond the age at which such control was expected to have waned. First, the classical education she received from her father, the humanist Sir Anthony Cooke, and her subsequent

⁷ Joyce Treskunoff Freedman, 'Anthony Bacon and his World, 1558-1601' (PhD, Temple University, 1979), 34-5. On the career of Anthony Bacon see, Paul E.J. Hammer, *The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Daphne Du Maurier, *Golden Lads: A Study of Anthony Bacon, Francis and Their Friends* (London: Virago, new edition 2007); Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune: The Troubled Life of Francis Bacon* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1998).

⁸ LPL, MS 647 fols 125^r-6^v (art. 59): Nicholas Faunt to Anthony Bacon, 15 April 1581.

⁹ Alan Stewart 'Bacon, Anthony (1558-1601)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); online edn, Jan 2008.

¹⁰ LPL, MS 651, fol. 206^{f-v} (art. 131): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 18 June 1595.

publication of translations of religious works gave her an intellectual stature that enhanced her maternal authority, her 'care for them' she opined was 'no lesse then they both deserue, beinge so qualified in learninge and vertue'.¹¹ Secondly, she was no stranger to political affairs as the wife of the Lord Keeper, Nicholas Bacon and with powerful family connections to the Cecils. This social standing meant that she felt perfectly qualified to offer advice in this area: 'I think For my long attending in coorte and A cheeff counsellors wyffe Few *preclare Femine mea sortis* [women of my position] are able or be Alyve to speak and Judge of such Proceadings and worldely doings of men'.¹² Thirdly, she had been left a generous inheritance by her husband, on the condition that she saw to the 'well brynginge upp' of their sons, and this may have further justified her authority over them.¹³ Finally, both Anthony and Francis wildly overspent their inheritance from their father, and relied heavily on Anne for financial relief. Barbara J. Harris notes that the death of the patriarch was extremely difficult to negotiate for families, a fact evidenced by the 'frequency of feuds between widowed mothers and their eldest sons', and while relations between Anne and Anthony did not deteriorate to such an extreme extent, their correspondence shows how strained and difficult their relationship became after the death of Nicholas.¹⁴ Anthony and Francis's positions were further destabilised by the fact that they were the sons of Sir Nicholas's second marriage, and therefore had less social standing within the wider Bacon family relative to other members. While Anne fulfilled the role of a dutiful mother and perpetual wife to her dead husband, the change in status she experienced, her increased authority over her income and land, and her retention of lands that would ultimately be inherited by her sons invested the relationship between mother and son with complex and potentially conflicting agendas.

Maternal Letters

This article draws on the correspondence of Anne and Anthony Bacon found in the Anthony Bacon Papers at Lambeth Palace Library, as well as a handful of other letters scattered among various archives. Anne's letters are all holograph with the exception of a few contemporary copies, and they all feature her distinctive, messy italic hand. They show evidence of sealing, folding and transportation, which confirms that they were *real* letters, in

¹¹ LPL, MS 649, fol. 276^{r-v} (art. 180): William Cecil to Anne Bacon (copy), 29 August 1593. On Anne's education see Lamb, Mary Ellen, 'The Cooke Sisters: Attitudes Towards Learned Women in the Renaissance' in Margaret P. Hannay (ed.), *Silent But For the Word: Tudor Women as Patrons, Translators and Writers of Religious Works* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1985), 107-25; Stephen J. Barnes, 'The Cookes of Gidea Hall', *The Essex Review* 21 (1912), 1-9.

¹² LPL, MS 651, fol. 156^{r-v} (art. 95): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 12 May 1595.

¹³ Will of Sir Nicholas Bacon: Nathaniel Bacon, *The Papers of Nathaniel Bacon of Stiffkey* ed. A. Hassel Smith, Gillian M. Baker & R.W. Kenny, 4 volumes (Norwich: Norfolk Record Society, 1979-90), vol. 2, 25-9.

¹⁴ Barbara J. Harris, 'Property, Power and Personal Relations: Elite Mothers and Sons in Yorkist and Early Tudor England', *Signs* 15 (1990), 606-32 (630).

the sense of having been sent. By contrast Anthony's letters are drafts or copies in various scribal hands, with additions and deletions possibly in Anthony's hand, preserved in his own archive, as distinct from the actual letters sent to and presumably later discarded by his mother. The interpretation of Anthony's side of the correspondence is necessarily weakened by the lack of these original letters, which casts doubts over the representation of his perspective within this sequence of letters, in that the letters may not reflect the text as sent. However, the fact of their retention within Anthony Bacon's meticulously kept personal archive indicates that they were considered to be an adequate record of his outgoing letters, as draft letters which in all probability served as models for fair copies.

As befitted Anne's status and education, her letter-writing demonstrates her awareness of humanist epistolography – of the necessity for the style and tone of the letter to be appropriate to the subject matter and the status of the person to whom it is addressed.¹⁵ Several of Anne's letters of petition survive, and are evidence for her assimilation and reproduction of some of the most formal modes of epistolary cultural conventions.¹⁶ A letter from Anne congratulating her step-son Nathaniel Bacon on the birth of his daughter is structured around the same points that Sir Thomas Gresham, the father of Nathaniel Bacon's wife, uses in similar circumstances four years later, demonstrating her adherence to conventional formulas.¹⁷ The letter begins by Lady Bacon congratulating Nathaniel on the birth of his daughter, excuses herself for not being able to make the christening and appoints 'my daughter Wyndham' to go in her place, describes the present she has sent and ends with a final line of congratulation to the recently delivered mother. Such a formalized expression of congratulation signals her fulfilment of her step-motherly duties.

The bulk of her letters, however, display a familiarity with a more informal epistolary relationship, that between mother and son. The relations inscribed in these letters reflected societal expectations of the roles of mothers and sons, and consequently we find a correspondence structured by maternal authority and filial obedience. Motherhood offered women in this period a legitimate opportunity to wield authority in moral, religious and

¹⁵ Charles Fantazzi introduction to 'De Conscribendis epistolis', in Desiderius Erasmus, The Collected Works of Erasmus, vols 25 and 26: Literary and Educational Writings, vols 3 and 4, ed. J.K. Sowards (Toronto-Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1985), vol. 3, 8.

¹⁶ See British Library (hereafter BL), Lansdowne MS, 43, fols 119^r-20^v (art. 48): Anne Bacon to Lord Burghley, 26 February 1584; LPL, MS 660, fol. 129^{r-v} (art. 91): Anne Bacon to Robert Cecil (copy), 13 December 1596. On the rhetorical conventions of women's letters of petition see, James Daybell, 'Scripting a Female Voice: Women's Epistolary Rhetoric in Sixteenth-Century Letters of Petition', Women's Writing 13/1 (2006), 3-20.

¹⁷ Peter Mack, Elizabethan Rhetoric: Theory and Practice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 115; Anne Bacon to Nathaniel Bacon, 6 August 1573, Papers of Nathaniel Bacon, vol.1, 81-2; Thomas Gresham to Nathaniel Bacon, 3 April 1577, Papers of Nathaniel Bacon, vol. 1, 254.

practical matters, and as a result letters from mothers are filled with advice on all manner of topics.¹⁸ Anne's advice often morphs into instruction, and then usually into censure, as she demands her counsel be put into practice. However her correspondence shows that maternal letters could also demonstrate care and affection, expressed either verbally within the letter or materially through gifts accompanying the letter. The responses of Anthony and Francis show that a son was expected to reciprocate with letters that demonstrated their respect, obedience and gratitude, as well as expressing concern and interest in their mother's health and well-being. This demonstrable show of care combined with frequent apologies about their conduct employed a vocabulary of deference that worked to defuse the more censorious elements of their mother's letters, and aided the maintenance of an epistolary relationship that in turn stabilized the bond between mother and son.

This relationship was reaffirmed within the letter by salutations and subscriptions that continually reiterated and reinforced the social hierarchies in the relationship of writer to the recipient. In *A Panoplie of Epistles* (1576) Abraham Fleming suggests that mothers should be addressed as 'most loving', 'carefull', 'naturall', 'tender', and fathers as 'wellbeloved', 'reverend', 'right good', an epistolary reflection of the differentiation between parenting roles in the period.¹⁹ Although the letter-writing manuals contain a common crop of standard letters of advice and admonition from fathers to sons, and the appropriate apologetic response, and widow's complaints to their sons are also regularly featured, there are fewer examples of letters written to mothers. This may be indicative of a lack of anxiety surrounding this particular epistolary relationship, possibly as a result of the small social or commercial risk involved in such a communication, and the easy translation of conventional filial platitudes into a written form.²⁰ Anthony's terms of address reflect this standard, and his salutations emphasise his mother's status and relationship to him. He often opens his letters with the overtly honorific mode 'To the honourable his very good Ladie and mother the Lady Anne Bacon widdowe', or a similar combination, although this term of address might also be placed at the end, indicating a flexibility about the structure of the letter.²¹ He also uses the

¹⁸ Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, 179-82; Raymond Anselment, 'Katherine Paston and Brilliana Harley: Maternal Letters and the Genre of Mother's Advice', *Studies in Philology* 101 (2004), 431-53; Kirsten Poole "'The Fittest Closet for all Goodness": Authorial Strategies of Jacobean Mothers', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 35 (1995), 69-88.

¹⁹ Abraham Fleming, *A Panoplie of Epistles* (London, 1576), sig. B3^v.

²⁰ Linda C. Mitchell suggests that a letter in which a widow asks her son to study rather than drink and gamble can be found in 'virtually every manual': 'Entertainment and Instruction: Women's Roles in the English Epistolary Tradition', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66 (2003), 331-47 (332).

²¹ Examples of the first usage can be seen in LPL, MS 649, fol. 49^{r-v} (art. 31): Anthony Bacon to Anne Bacon, 5 February 1593; the second can be found in LPL, MS 649, fol. 22^{r-v} (art. 13): Anthony Bacon to Anne Bacon, 20 January 1593.

more concise salutatory line 'my most humble dutie remembred'.²² His subscriptions are similarly respectful, and he often concluded with a phrase along the lines of 'your moste humble and obedient sonne anthony bacon', or 'Your Ladieships most humble and obedient sonne'.²³ If he did not mention his filial identity he still highlighted his subservience to her, concluding 'and so with remembrance of my humble dewty I take my leaue'.²⁴ Francis followed a similar pattern, opening his letter with the same phrase 'my humble dewtie remembred', and signing-off 'your Ladieships most obedient sonne'.²⁵ Both sons were thus keenly aware of the protocols of filial obedience in writing to their mother.

In contrast Anne's letters to Anthony are less likely to refer to their kinship in the salutation, and on the rare occasions when she does she simply addresses him as 'sonne'.²⁶ The most frequent allusion to her relationship to him occurs in the superscription, which usually reads 'To my sonne Mr Anthony Bacon'.²⁷ The lack of maternal affection expressed in these two fields is noticeable, especially when compared to the addresses of other mothers, such as Lady Brilliana Harley who addressed her regular letters to her son, 'To my deare sonne Mr Edward Harley, Oxford', and opened the main body of the letter text with 'My good Ned', an affectionate shortened form of his name, and then signed off 'your most affectinat mother'.²⁸

Anne also used the space of the superscription to convey messages that would be usually found in the main body of the letter and in one instance she added 'part not with yowr London house' below her directions for the despatch of the letter.²⁹ Her reason for placing her counsel in the superscription is perhaps because she believed that it might have had more impact resounding from such an unusual location, and demonstrates how she subverted the conventions of letter-writing in order to fulfil her own objectives.

²² LPL, MS 649, fol. 135^{r-v} (art. 87): Anthony Bacon to Anne Bacon, 28 May 1593.

²³ LPL, MS 649, fol. 264^{r-v} (art. 173): Anthony Bacon to Anne Bacon, 20 August 1593; LPL, MS 649, fol. 135^{r-v} (art. 87): Anthony Bacon to Anne Bacon, 28 May 1593.

²⁴ LPL, MS 649, fol. 49^{r-v} (art. 31): Anthony Bacon to Anne Bacon, 5 February 1593.

²⁵ LPL, MS 650, fol. 217^{r-v} (art. 140): Francis Bacon to Anne Bacon, 9 June 1594.

²⁶ This term of address is used in the opening line in ten of her letters. See for example LPL, MS 654, fols 43^r-44^v (art. 29): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 21 January 1596; LPL, MS 656, fol. 49^{r-v} (art. 30): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 2 March 1597.

²⁷ LPL, MS 651, fols 330^r-31^v (art. 212): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 15 August 1595.

²⁸ Brilliana Harley to Edward Harley, March 22 1638, *Letters of Lady Brilliana Harley* ed. Thomas Taylor Lewis (London: Camden Society, 1854), 33-4. See also Daybell's study of Lettice Dudley, Countess of Leicester's addresses to her son the earl of Essex in 'Women's Letters and Letter-writing in England, 1540-1603: An Introduction to the Issues of Authorship and Construction', *Shakespeare Studies* 27 (1999), 161-86 (178-9).

²⁹ LPL, MS 651, fols 207^r-8^v (art. 132): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 6 June 1595. Anne returns Anthony's original letter with her message inserted below.

Among all the conventional elements that make up a letter, it is within her signature that Anne expresses her relationship to her sons most explicitly. In most letters she emphasizes the maternal connection, writing 'yowr mother A Bacon' or 'mater tua A Bacon'.³⁰ The use of Latin within the signature reflects her personal habit of beginning and ending letters in Latin, a practice that was perhaps a way of retaining some of the formal elements of epistolary construction in letters that were unconstrained in other respects. In many instances she keeps the 'yowr mother' formulation, in either language, but abbreviates her name to the initials 'A B'. In both cases she uses a ligature, joining the 'A' and 'B' together. This personal rendition of her name is used consistently throughout her correspondence, lending authority to the rest of her letters through its originality. Again there is a lack of affection as in her subscriptions in comparison to those of other mothers, and also to her own practices, as she signs a postscript note to her sister Mildred 'yowr loving sister'.³¹

The subscription is also the place where she provides the most explicit information on her emotional state, for example in a letter informing Anthony of the death of one of her servants she subscribes it with 'yowr sad mother'.³² In a few cases she uses the area of subscription to express her affection, ending the letter with 'yowr carefull mother' in one instance, and 'yowr louinge and careful mother for yow' in another.³³ She also uses a Latin version of this sentiment, '*mater tua. pia.*' ('your tender mother').³⁴ The signature thus becomes a locus for various types of self-identification – a practice very similar to her sister Elizabeth Russell – as in one letter she signs 'yowr mother A Bacon late lordkepers wydow', stressing the position of authority she held during her husband's lifetime, and her status.³⁵ The figure of the widow was often embraced by the woman letter-writer as a way to enlist a more sympathetic reading audience, as the role carried connotations of helplessness and poverty.³⁶ Anne's usage of the term occurs most frequently in Greek, for example 'yowr mother A Bacon χηρα', signalling an intellectual standing that acts as an adjunct to her maternal role.³⁷ In Lynne Magnusson's analysis of the rhetorical features of Anne's letters to the earl of Essex, she reads Anne's appending of 'widow' (in Greek) to her signature as a symbol of the alternative way in which she conceptualised her widowhood. For Magnusson,

³⁰ LPL, MS 649, fols 15^r-16^v (art. 9): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 23 January 1593; LPL, MS 653, fol. 317^{r-v} (art. 174): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 9 July [n.y.].

³¹ Cecil Papers (hereafter CP), Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, 152/19: Nicholas Bacon to William Cecil (postscript by Anne), 18 Aug 1557.

³² LPL, MS 649, fols 340^r-1^v (art. 232): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 18 October 1593.

³³ LPL, MS 649, fol. 153^{r-v} (art. 100): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 26 June 1593; LPL, MS 650, fols 333^r-4^v (art. 224): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 5 December 1594.

³⁴ LPL, MS 651, fols 330^r-1^v (art. 212): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 15 August 1595.

³⁵ LPL, MS 648, fol. 200^{r-v} (art. 122): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 6 July 1592. For Elizabeth Russell's correspondence see, Elizabeth Farber, 'The Letters of Lady Elizabeth Russell (1540-1609)' (Unpublished Ph.D thesis, Columbia University, 1977).

³⁶ Daybell, *Women Letter Writers*, 257-8.

³⁷ LPL, MS 648, fol. 177^{r-v} (art. 109): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 29 June 1592.

widowhood is 'glorified' by its rendering in Greek, and becomes a 'positive sign of her authority' that indicates Anne's assumption of the role of a godly widow within the reformed church, charged with directing the morals of noblemen in the same fashion as male clerics.³⁸ While Anne clearly desired to establish a position of religious authority over her sons, her use of the term within her letters to them also suggests she wished to re-emphasise that the loss of her husband had altered her parental status, and increased her authority in this sphere. The use of her widowed status in this fashion would seem to be at odds with the wider trend (in an epistolary context) of utilising it to symbolise an abject state, but this may be a result of the modulation of her self-representation she enacts according to the recipient of the letter.

Surprisingly, Anne was not meticulous about subscribing her letters to her sons, and at least nine of her letters were apparently sent without either her signature or initial appended, despite internal evidence that they were sent and were not drafts.³⁹ This does not seem to be a practice attached to any particular type of letter, as she omits signing both lengthy letters and short notes.⁴⁰ One pattern that is apparent is her failure to date any of her unsigned letters, indicating nonchalance for letter-writing conventions that affects all elements, not just the subscription; though letters can often be dated by endorsements. One letter even carries no actual signature but includes a concluding line.⁴¹ Alan Stewart suggests that the omission of a signature on a letter was significant and shed suspicion on the authenticity of the letter.⁴² Anne's lack of concern for this protocol implies a belief that her letters to her sons did not necessarily need to be structured in a conventional fashion, and that her hand, the mode of carrying the letter, and the nature of its contents were enough to identify the writer of the letter to the reader. The familial relationship therefore allowed a greater amount of flexibility when choosing how to construct a letter, and the social hierarchy that accorded Anne respect also gave her the power to dispense with conventional epistolary devices when she saw fit.

Anne's handwriting was certainly idiosyncratic enough to allow her letters to be authenticated without a signature, and her distinctive italic hand appears to have proved difficult for her contemporaries to decipher, as copies of her letters feature a preponderance

³⁸ Magnusson, 'Widowhood and Linguistic Capital', 27.

³⁹ For example one unsigned letter is written at Gorhambury and states Anne's intention to 'stepp to London to see & know how it is with yow', LPL, MS 653, fol. 251^r (art. 136): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, undated.

⁴⁰ LPL, MS 653, fols 340^r-1^v (art. 190): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, undated; LPL, MS 653, fol. 250^{r-v} (art. 135): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, undated.

⁴¹ LPL, MS 653, fols 340^r-341^v (art. 190): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, undated.

⁴² Alan Stewart, *Shakespeare's Letters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5.

of gaps and omissions.⁴³ Although James Daybell suggests that women's handwriting could undergo significant change over their lifetime, the hand Anne uses in her letters of the 1590s does not seem to be a remarkable departure from the hand of her youth.⁴⁴ The earliest example of her hand dates from 1557, and shows evidence of the features apparent in her handwriting some forty years later.⁴⁵ Some of her later letters indicate that her script has degenerated to some extent over the intervening years, but problems of legibility cannot be blamed entirely on her age.

Although the letters of her sister Lady Elizabeth Russell, are written in italic and contain inconsistent abbreviations and spellings, her hand is significantly more legible than Anne's, suggesting that it is Anne's heavy use of contractions and curtailments combined with her untidy letter formation that makes her letters so challenging to read. Letter-writers were able to make use of a personal set of salutations, subscriptions and signatures, some of which fitted with the epistolary conventions expounded by the letter-writing manuals while others were more individual concoctions reflecting the status and personality of the writer to a greater extent. Anne grasped this opportunity for self-fashioning, taking advantage of the flexibility of the letter-writing form in order to present a specific model of authority. Margaret L. King observes the importance of the epistolary mode for female expression, suggesting that 'so common was the practice of a mother's ongoing guidance of her older children, notably her sons, that the epistles, handbooks and diaries composed for this purpose constitute a major genre of female authorship'.⁴⁶ Although these letters were to a certain extent codified by the expectations of parent-child relation, in other respects they offered a freedom from the constrictive structure of formal letters, particularly as their position of relative authority within a family context liberated mothers from the need to continually represent themselves in deferential terms. The intimacy of the relationship between mother and son also removed the necessity for excessive politeness (on behalf of the mother at least), opening up a space for a more candid voice to be heard.⁴⁷

'Posting' letters

⁴³ LPL, MS 650, fol. 33^{r-v} (art. 21): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 23 January 1594; scribal copy LPL, MS 650, fol. 37^{r-v} (art. 24).

⁴⁴ Daybell, 'Women's Letters and Letter-Writing in England, 1540-1603', 163.

⁴⁵ CP 152/19: Nicholas Bacon to William Cecil, Lord Burghley (with postscript by Anne), 18 August 1557.

⁴⁶ Margaret L. King, 'The Woman of the Renaissance', in Eugenio Garin (ed.), Lydia G. Cochrane (trans.), *Renaissance Characters* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 207-49 (209).

⁴⁷ In her discussion of Esther Masham's letters Susan Whyman notes that 'the more intimate the writer, the less polite one had to be': 'The Correspondence of Esther Masham and John Locke: A Study in Epistolary Silences', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 66 (2003), 275-305 (301).

As a result of her education and social standing Anne was familiar with contemporary practices of letter-writing and could easily navigate both formal and informal modes. The intimacy of the mother-son relationship liberated her from a strict adherence to the conventional components of a letter, allowing the letter's visual and rhetorical construction to vary according to its function. The meaning of her letters is thus disseminated via both its written contents and visual presentation, an assessment that chimes with Daybell's entreaty that 'letters should not just be viewed as texts or documents, but are complex forms that registered meaning both textually and materially'.⁴⁸

The material components of the letter, such as the spacing, the handwriting, the type of paper used, and how the letter was sealed, have been recognized as imparting meaning upon the letter by a number of critics.⁴⁹ Recently, Alan Stewart has extended the attention paid to the material aspects of letter-writing to encompass the practical circumstances of epistolary transmission as well. The conveyance of letters from writer to recipient was entrusted to a servant, a paid carrier, or a friendly contact willing to deliver the letter.⁵⁰ The letter is therefore invested with the texture of the relationship between the writer-bearer-reader, and a letter carried by an intimate associate of both writer and reader may contain news and information of a more personal nature than one carried by a less well-known bearer.⁵¹ The writer had to trust that the bearer would see the letter delivered, and would always be aware of the possibility that the bearer might read the contents. The knowledge of this meant that, in an attempt to maintain their security, writers often used privacy devices within their letters, such as cipher, even if the bearer was considered reliable.

Once delivered, the letter would not necessarily have been read in private, but may well have been read aloud by the bearer or by another servant. The bearer may also have been charged with giving the addressee a verbal message from the writer of the letter, thus infusing the written form with an oral dimension, and would also often report back to the

⁴⁸ Daybell, *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England*, 47; Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter-Writing, 1512-1635* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012).

⁴⁹ For example Steen explores the 'meaningful' aspect of handwriting and how it can be used to display social deference and empathy in 'Reading Beyond the Words: Material Letters and the Process of Interpretation', *Quidditas: The Journal of the Rocky Mountain Medieval and Renaissance Association* 22 (2001) 54-69 (57). Jonathan Gibson shows how the positioning of a signature alters depending on the social status of the recipient, 'Significant Space in Manuscript Letters', *The Seventeenth Century* 12 (1997) 1-9 (4).

⁵⁰ Philip Beale, *England's Mail: Two Millennia of Letter Writing* (Stroud: Tempus, 2005), 187.

⁵¹ Daybell, *The Material Letter*, 137-8.

writer about the manner in which the letter was received.⁵² At this point the letter may then have been communicated to others, either by passing the letter on or by circulating another copy. This dismantles the idea that letters were by definition private, stable documents, delivered anonymously and discreetly to a sole recipient.

As the process of writing was such a time-consuming process with variable outcomes, it is unsurprising that writers in the period often refer to the various stages of the procedure within their letters.⁵³ Gary Schneider suggests that the 'system of the post and the materiality of the letter itself also had much to do with how early modern peoples conceived letters and letter-writing to function', and that as a result of this internal commentary on the process being undertaken 'numerous gestures towards epistolary theory [...] are contained in letters themselves', with Schneider seeing these 'gestures' being more valuable than the theories espoused in epistolary manuals.⁵⁴ For Anne Bacon the composition of her letters did not warrant as much comment as the sending, suggesting that of the two elements, sending was the more problematic.

Most of her letters were carried and delivered to Anthony by one of her servants, although evidence from her letters also shows that friends, neighbours and tradesmen travelling in the right direction were also tasked with letter-carrying. The majority of Anne's letters were sent to her sons in London from her home Gorhambury, which lay about two miles west of St. Albans. Situated twenty-three miles from London, St. Albans was connected to the city by the Chester road linking London to Holyhead, one of the six main postal roads, and would have taken four hours to cover at a speed of about six miles an hour.⁵⁵ By whatever means they travelled it seems it was possible to make the journey there and back within one day, as Anne demanded that a messenger sent to Anthony return that day: 'I look For the boy at night dispatch him I pray yow'.⁵⁶ Control over the return of the messengers becomes a theme of her letters, and continues a wider concern with her sons' treatment of servants. Throughout her letters Lady Bacon expressed an anxiety that the household servants dominate Anthony and Francis, and that their financial problems are the result of a lack of control over their households. These suspicions are exacerbated by the seepage of her servants towards Anthony, as they recognised that his age, status and location offered them

⁵² See Stewart, *Shakespeare's Letters*, 198-9.

⁵³ Alan Stewart and Heather Wolfe, *Letterwriting in Renaissance England* (Washington DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 2004), 121.

⁵⁴ Gary Schneider, *The Culture of Epistolarity* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 18.

⁵⁵ Stewart and Wolfe, *Letterwriting*, 122. On early modern postal conditions see Daybell, *The Material Letter*, ch. 5. J. Crofts, *Packhorse, Waggon and Post: Land Carriage and Communications Under the Tudors and Stuarts* (London: Routledge and Kegan Press, 1967), 123.

⁵⁶ LPL, MS 653, fols 326^r-7^v (art. 181): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 14 July (n.y.).

more opportunities for advancement than those at Gorhambury. Her fears for the further depletion of staff can be seen as a motivating factor behind her insistence that her messengers return promptly, as well as the 'charge of Tareing [tarrying]' that their absence incurred.⁵⁷ As Anthony's intimacy with the earl of Essex grew, so he was allowed to make use of his patron's servants for the conveyance of his letters. In one letter he informed Anne that 'his Lordships owne footman [...] attendethe here dailie to be dispatched where I thinke good', and offered Anne the services of the footman for the conveyance of her response.⁵⁸ However, Anne refused, doubting the security of such a messenger so closely associated with the earl.⁵⁹

Anne distrusted her own bearers as well, and in such cases the contents of the letter were significantly altered depending on the identity of the bearer. In a letter in which she expressed her suspicions about the handling of the sale of Barley, a manor in Hertfordshire belonging to Anthony, she warned 'let not my man this bearer understand eny thing by yowr selff or yowr men. For thowgh honest and pretely spoken For his kinde yet he is satis linguae and non insulsus [has sufficient languages and is not stupid]'.⁶⁰ The sale of Barley is seen as a local issue, and information about the matter would be more likely to be potentially meaningful to the bearer than other controversial matters concerning court or ecclesiastical politics. Letters containing discussion of these matters also utilise cipher on occasion but do not indicate a specific fear that the bearer may use the contents against her. In a similar respect Anne Bacon's only letter to Anthony written in Latin (although the postscript is in English) is concerned with the town politics of St Albans, demonstrating how it is the combination of the bearer's identity with the content of the letter that determines Anne's utilisation of epistolary privacy devices.⁶¹

A similar modulation of content in relation to the identity of the bearer is apparent in another pair of letters written by Anne to Anthony. Having grasped the opportunity to convey a letter via a neighbour travelling to London, she attempted to conceal certain elements in the letter by converting from English to Greek mid-way through a sentence: 'For your state of wanting

⁵⁷ LPL, MS 651, fol. 156^{r-v} (art. 95): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 12 May 1595.

⁵⁸ LPL, MS 660, fol. 123^{r-v} (art. 86): Anthony Bacon to Anne Bacon, 5 December 1596.

⁵⁹ LPL, MS 660, fols 151^{r-2v} (art. 109): Anne Bacon to Robert Devereux, earl of Essex (copy in Anne's hand), with a note to Anthony Bacon added to the foot where she writes 'I wolde not send to yow by his man', 4 December 1596.

⁶⁰ LPL, MS 653, fol. 317^{r-v} (art. 174): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 9 July (n.y.).

⁶¹ LPL, MS 649, fol. 23^{r-v} (art. 14): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 25 January 1593.

health and of mony and some other things towching yow both gives me no quiet'.⁶² This use of a form of cipher where the substitution of Latin or Greek limits readership may easily have gone unnoticed, especially as 'gives me no quiet' does not seem to have added much that was not already apparent in the letter. But in a letter of two days later Anne made her actions plain, as she refered to the sentiments she had expressed 'in Few wordes but yesterday by my neighbowr', and repeated that the 'state of yow Both doth much disqwiett me as in greeke words I signified shortly'.⁶³ The letter then goes on to list in explicit detail why she is angry at her sons, and focuses on the suspicions she has over the position of one of Francis's servants:

yet so long as he pitieth not him selff but keepeth that Bloody peerce [Percy] as I towlde him then, yea as A coch companion and Bed companion A pround prophane costly Fellow, whose being about him I verely Feare the lorde god doth mislyke and doth less bless yowr Brother in credit and other wyse in his health.

These are among the most explicit implications made by Anne concerning Francis's sexuality, and indicate Anne's suspicions about his inappropriate intimacy with his servant. That this sentiment is deliberately omitted from the earlier letter lends weight to the suggestion that Anne is not merely concerned with Francis's overreliance on his men servants, but is haunted by visions of the 'fowle synns' being committed against him by 'his cormorant seducers and instruments of satan'.⁶⁴ The placing of her fears in Greek would also seem to run contrary to the assessment that Anne used Latin to express only her 'personal tenets', and indicates once more the elasticity of her epistolary habits.⁶⁵

That the themes of the first letter (delivered by the neighbour) are developed at length in the second letter (no bearer specified), indicate the extent to which the identity of the bearer restricted her self-expression. Anne's disquiet about the bearer in the letter relating to Barley seems to infect the entire tone of the letter, which relays one suspicion after another in an almost hysterical tirade. Likewise the letter conveyed by her neighbour is notably more reticent about her opinions concerning her sons than other letters. The impact of the

⁶² LPL, MS 649, fols 99^v-100^r (art. 65): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 15 April 1593. Italicised words in Greek, translation from William Hepworth Dixon, Personal History of Lord Bacon (London: John Murray, 1861), 309.

⁶³ LPL, MS 653, fols 318^r-19^v (arts 175 and 176): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 17 April [1593].

⁶⁴ LPL, MS 653, fol. 319^{r-v} (art. 176): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 17 April [1593]. See Alan Bray's discussion of Anne's anxiety in Alan Bray, 'Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England', History Workshop Journal 29 (1990) 1-19 (4).

⁶⁵ Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson (eds), Early Modern Women Poets: an Anthology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 23.

messenger on the letter has been theorized by Alan Stewart, who suggests that the 'messenger is part of the letter', and that 'letters *rely* for their meaning on a specific messenger whose employment as bearer impinges on, or indeed creates, the conditions of the relationship between writer and recipient', an analysis that would seem to be compatible with Anne's utilisation of bearers.⁶⁶

The use of a bearer in this situation creates a negative basis for the epistolary communication, a situation that can be fruitfully compared to Anne's employment of a trusted intimate to convey her first letter to Anthony upon his return from France in February 1592. Anne enlisted Nicholas Faunt, a man respected by both mother and son, to deliver her letter, in an attempt to smooth the path to reconciliation. Anne wrote that 'I have entreated this gentleman mr Faunt to somuch kindness For me as to Jorny to yow', and filled the letter with words of admiration for Faunt's godliness and honesty.⁶⁷ The honesty of the bearer and her trust in him to see the letter rightly delivered, combined with his close association with Anthony, makes Faunt the ideal bearer of this letter, and illustrates Lady Bacon's awareness of the significance of the messenger to the letter and its reception. Anne seems to have chosen Faunt because she believes he could be relied upon to bring Anthony a kind report of his mother's position, something that she could not be assured of from other messengers.

Once the letter was out of the hands of the bearer and moved into Anthony's household Lady Bacon lost complete control over its dissemination, and it is her apprehension concerning this stage of the communication process that rouses her greatest fears.⁶⁸ As a consequence many of her letters are appended by a postscript instructing him to 'Burn this', which he evidently ignored.⁶⁹ Perhaps more pragmatically, Lady Bacon attempted to control by whom the letter was seen, writing 'let not yowr man see my lettres I write to yow and not to them', and also commanding that Francis alone be shown them 'I pray shew yowr Brother this lettre. But to no creature elce'.⁷⁰ In a similar fashion her use of cipher acted as another protective device if Anthony instructed the bearer to read her letters aloud. Anne's conceptualization of the malicious reception of her letters by Anthony's men, who will 'misconstrue' the contents, represents in epistolary form the harm she believed they wished upon her. Anne's predictions concerning Anthony's attitude towards her letters: 'read not my lettres ether scoffingly or carelesly. Which hath ben used to much For I humbly thank god I

⁶⁶ Stewart, *Shakespeare's Letters*, 196.

⁶⁷ LPL, MS 653, fols 343^r-4^v (art. 192): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 3 February [1592].

⁶⁸ Lynne Magnusson discusses this letter in 'Scoff Power in *Love's Labour's Lost* and the Inns of Court: Language in Context', *Shakespeare Survey* 57 (2004), 196-208 (201).

⁶⁹ LPL, MS 651, fols 108^r-9^v (art. 66): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 1 April 1594.

⁷⁰ LPL, MS 648, fols 172^r-3^v (art. 106): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 27 May 1592; LPL, MS 651, fols 328^r-9^v (art. 211): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 5 August 1595.

know what I write and counsell' also indicates the analogy she drew between the reception of her letters and her maternal advice.⁷¹

Anne's fear over Anthony's composition of letters to her also belies her acute anxiety that their correspondence is unduly at the mercy of the machinations of his men. In a letter filled with advice concerning Anthony's behaviour, Anne made the accusation that 'others write yowr lettres and not yowr selff'.⁷² There was an element of truth here, as the letters written by Anthony to Anne all appear to have been drafted by a scribe and then edited at a later stage, as mentioned above. Insertions of a more substantial nature often seem to have been added to boost the religious tone of the letter: 'I purpose god willinge to doe my dewtie unto your Ladyship after the Tearme ^{^but^} not to remaine at Redbourne aboue 3 daies ~~for~~th by reason of some business which your Ladyship ^{^wyth god his healpe shall^} understand by my selff'.⁷³ Only one of the letters actually sent to Anne by Anthony is extant, and in this example the main body of the letter was written by a scribe and the subscription added in Anthony's own hand.⁷⁴ The excuse that the debilitating effect of gout prevented him from writing may have been acceptable to Anne, and in which case her accusation that 'others write yowr lettres and not yowr selff' would refer to the general composition rather than the actual physical production of the letter. The drafting of his letters show that Anthony was as circumspect about writing letters to his mother as he was to other recipients, and their familial relation did not remove the need for him to exert maximum control over his self-representation within his letters.

Conclusion

Whilst Anne and Anthony co-operated in matters concerning the family interest, and presented a united front to defend the Bacon family position and income, the dynamic of their own relationship became increasingly destructive towards the end of the period of their correspondence. Anthony's opinions about the burdensome nature of his mother's correspondence, referred to in his letters to others, are not vocalised to Anne, and his epistolary terms of address utilised the social conventions necessary in order to maintain a respectful attitude towards his mother.⁷⁵ Even when he accuses her of 'a Soueraigne desire to ouerrulle your Sonnes in all thinges how little soeuer yow understande eyther the groundes or the circumstances of proceedings', the conventional respectful subscriptions

⁷¹ LPL, MS 653, fols 330^r-1^v (art. 183): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, [1593].

⁷² LPL, MS 651, fols 328^r-9^v (art. 211): Anne Bacon to Anthony Bacon, 5 August 1595.

⁷³ LPL, MS 650, fol. 214^{r-v} (art. 137): Anthony Bacon to Anne Bacon, 10 [20?] June 1594. Insertions indicated by the use of caret marks.

⁷⁴ LPL, MS 651, fols 207^r-8^v (art. 132): Anthony Bacon to Anne Bacon, 6 June 1595.

⁷⁵ LPL, MS 660, fol. 147^r (art. 106): Anthony Bacon to Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, 13 December 1596.

are maintained, and even enhanced, and he addresses this letter to 'his very good Lady and mother the Lady Anne Bacon widowe'.⁷⁶ In contrast Anne's assumption of a position of maternal power enabled a flexible epistolary style that engendered an unusually candid voice to be expressed, but her anxiety over the transmission of her letters demonstrates the true weakness of her position. Anthony did not defer to her instructions regarding the composition of his letters, or to the reception of her correspondence or advice. In fact, rather than obeying her instructions to 'burn this' his mother's letters are instead diligently endorsed and filed with the rest of Anthony's papers, where they remain today. The pressures inherent in epistolary communication, in particular the risk of multiple, unauthorised readers, exacerbates the existing distrust and suspicion within the relationship, and the material processes of letter-writing come to embody the very texture of the mother-son relationship.

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⁷⁶ LPL, MS 650, fol. 228^{r-v} (art. 150): Anthony Bacon to Anne Bacon, 12 July 1594.