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# MEDIATRIX

*Women, Politics, & Literary Production  
in Early Modern England*



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# *Contents*

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	ix
Introduction	1
1. Female Constancy and <i>The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia</i>	30
2. How Margaret Hoby Read her De Mornay	86
3. "His Factor for our loves": The Countess of Bedford and John Donne	121
4. Wroth's Cabinets	160
Epilogue	206
<i>Bibliography</i>	217
<i>Index</i>	251



## *List of Illustrations*

- 1.1 Portrait miniature of Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, with the motto “Constant in the Midst of Inconstancy,” by Laurence Hilliard. Reproduced by permission of the Victoria and Albert Museum.
- 1.2 Portrait of Dorothy and Penelope Devereux. © Reproduced by permission of the Marquess of Bath, Longleat House, Warminster, Wiltshire, Great Britain.
- 1.3 Title page of *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* (1593). © Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.
- 1.4 Center panel from the “Great Picture,” attributed to Jan van Belcamp. Reproduced by courtesy of Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal, Cumbria. © Lakeland Arts Trust.
- 1.5 Detail from the “Great Picture,” “All Senakes Workes translated out of Latine into English.” Reproduced by courtesy of Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal, Cumbria. © Lakeland Arts Trust.
- 2.1 Title page of Philippe de Mornay seigneur du Plessis-Marly, *Fowre bookes, of the institution, use and doctrine of the holy sacrament of the eucharist in the old church*. ([Transl. by] R.S.). 2nd edn. (London by John Windet, for I.B[inge], T.M[an] & W. [Ponsonby], 1600), STC 18142. Hackness 47. Reproduced by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of York.
- 2.2 Close up of Margaret Hoby’s signature on the title-page of Philippe de Mornay seigneur du Plessis-Marly, *Fowre bookes*. Reproduced by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of York.
- 2.3 Detail of de Mornay, *Fowre Bookes*, 235, showing Margaret Hoby’s marginal note and correction. York Minster Library, Hackness 47. Reproduced by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of York.
- 2.4 Detail of de Mornay, *Fowre Bookes*, 305, showing Margaret Hoby’s marginal note and correction. York Minster Library, Hackness 47. Reproduced by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of York.
- 2.5 Detail of de Mornay, *Fowre Bookes*, 93, showing Margaret Hoby’s marginal note. York Minster Library, Hackness 47. Reproduced by kind permission of the Dean and Chapter of York.
- 2.6 Margaret Hoby’s diary entry on Essex’s trial for treason, from Egerton MS 2614, 69<sup>v</sup>. Reproduced by permission of the British Library.

- 2.7 Space in Margaret Hoby's diary for "Sir Arthure Dakins message" to Mrs Cartwright, from Egerton MS 2614, 109v. Reproduced by permission of the British Library.
- 4.1 Map of London in Sir James Howell's *Londinopolis* (1657). Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.
- 4.2 Detail of Baynard's Castle in map of London in Sir James Howell's *Londinopolis* (1657). Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.
- 4.3 Acrostic poem on Susan Herbert, Countess of Montgomery, from Nathaniel Baxter's. *Sir Philip Sydneys ouránia* (1606), A3<sup>v</sup>. Reproduced by permission of the British Library.
- 4.4 The title-page of the *Urania*, identifying it as "The Countesse of Montgomeries / URANIA. / Written by the right honorable the Lady / MARY WROATH. / Daughter to the right Noble Robert / Earle of Leicester / And Neece to the ever famous, and re- / nowned Sr. Philip Sidney Knight. And to / The most excellent Lady Mary Countesse / of Pembroke late deceased." Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.
- 4.5 Detail of windmill from title page of *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*. Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.
- 4.6 Map of the European battleground of the Thirty Years' War from C. V. Wedgwood's *Thirty Years' War*. Reproduced by permission of Yale University Press.
- 4.7 Mary Wroth's coat of arms: the Sidney phaeon (or dart) inside a lozenge, from Henry Peacham, *The Compleat Gentleman* (1622), Y1. Reproduced by permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library.

# Introduction

In a letter John Donne wrote to Sir Henry Goodere in the early years of his courtship of Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford, as his patron, he pondered whether she was the “proper Mediatrix” to present his case to the necessary people.<sup>1</sup> His term evoked Bedford’s status as an influential go-between in early Jacobean political and literary circles, and thus her ability to serve as an intermediary on his behalf (“mediatrix,” *OED*).<sup>2</sup> But “Mediatrix” was also the term the catechism of the Catholic Church used for the Virgin Mary, the preeminent mediator between God and humankind.<sup>3</sup> To some extent such language of intercession was normative at the time; James I’s investment in the divine right of kings helped to produce a corollary set of courtier “saints” or intermediaries who promised would-be acolytes that they would intervene on their behalf with their God-like king.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Donne, *Letters to Several Persons of Honor*, 193.

<sup>2</sup> Other terms used for the women who served in such semi-official political capacities in early modern England included “go-betweens” (Peck) and “almoners of ways” (Stone). Donne’s term, however, captures the textual aspect of the work of such mediators. For other uses of the term “mediatrix,” see the English translation of the letter by Jean-Louis Guez, seigneur de Balzac, “To Madam DESLOGES” (*A Collection of Some Modern Epistles of Monsieur de Balzac: Carefully Translated Out of French* (1639), 152); and the first volume of Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, which refers to multiple women as “Mediatrix” (*The firste [laste] volume of the chronicles of England* (1577), 875, 912, 1701). In Bartholomew Yong’s translation of Montemayor’s *Diana*, Felicia, the “seruant and minister in the Temple of chaste Diana,” also refers to herself as a “mediatrix,” telling the “noble Disteus” that the Gods “haue deyned to humble themselves without any merit of mine, to make a mediatrix for thee.” *Diana of George of Montemayor: Translated Out of Spanish into English by Bartholomew Yong of the Middle Temple* (London, 1598), 312. The term also appears frequently in romances. In Charles Sorel’s *The extravagant shepherd, the anti-romance, or, The history of the shepherd Lysis translated out of French* (1653), “Amaryllis” serves as a “mediatrix” in defense of romances (“The Oration of AMARYLLIS, mediating for Romances,” 77–8).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. A.G., *The viuidoves mite cast into the treasure-house of the prerogatiues, and prayes of our B. Lady, the immaculate, and most glorious Virgin Mary, the Mother of God* (Saint-Omer: English College Press, 1619): “By him we beg of thee, that thou wilt intercede for vs to him, that we may liue in his feare, and dye in his fauour: and that as heere we haue the comfort to enioy thee, as our chiefe Mediatrix of Intercession towards him; so with thee & at thy feet, we may prayse, and glorify him in al eternity, as our only Mediatour of Redemption” (165).

<sup>4</sup> See Linda Levy Peck, “Benefits, Brokers and Beneficiaries.” I discuss this argument further in Ch. 3.

Yet Donne's use of a term as charged with Mariolatry as "Mediatrix" also alluded, with characteristic irony, to his own well-known Catholic origins, and, in a slightly more confrontational way, to Bedford's reputation as a particularly godly, even puritan, Protestant. Donne's use of "Mediatrix" was thus both honorific—an acknowledgement of Bedford's cultural and political influence—and provocative, configuring a bond between them that was at once material (he wanted her financial support) and dialogic. It was also necessarily and acutely conscious of the other activities in which Bedford was involved, and the other media in which she worked. Each of the women discussed in this book can be characterized as a "Mediatrix" in much the same way as Donne characterized Bedford: politically and culturally powerful, but with an edge of oppositionism; at once a patron to be honored and a force to be reckoned with; a maker of texts and a maker of careers.

*Mediatrix* is predicated on a now decades-long history of scholarship on early modern women writers. This history is characterized by books whose titles blazon their authors' and editors' politics and intentions, including *The Paradise of Women* (1981), *Reason's Disciples* (1982), *First Feminists* (1985), *Redeeming Eve* (1987), *Oppositional Voices* (1992), and *Writing Women* (1993).<sup>5</sup> Many feminist scholars of the 1980s and 1990s put the work of women writers in dialogue with what they saw as the pervasive patriarchal and misogynist discourse of the time; as Elaine V. Beilin put it, "The nature of woman, her duties, and her limitations, were topics constantly in the air" (*Redeeming Eve*, p. xviii). Yet in arguing that women's writing served as an (often) effective form of political resistance to what were undoubtedly powerful discourses, these critics often gave those discourses too much credit. As Phyllis Rackin has argued, to claim that misogyny was "everywhere" in the period serves, in unintended ways, to encourage us to find it everywhere.<sup>6</sup> Such arguments also placed women's writing, seemingly incontrovertibly, in dialogue with debates and discourses about "women's nature" and "women's authorship," assumptions that paradoxically delimited its scope.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *The Paradise of Women* was edited by Betty Travitsky; *First Feminists* by Moira Ferguson; and *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print* by Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky. Elaine V. Beilin wrote *Redeeming Eve*; Tina Krontiris *Oppositional Voices*; and Barbara Lewalski *Writing Women in Jacobean England*. Louise Schleiner wrote *Tudor and Stuart Women Writers* in 1994. Many of these scholars rightly give due to earlier projects of feminist reclamation, notably the work of Ruth Hughey, "Cultural Interests of Women in England from 1524–1640: Indicated in the Writings of the Women" (1932); and Charlotte Kohler, "The Elizabethan Woman of Letters" (1936). While I am indebted to all of these authors, *Mediatrix* could not have been written without the work of Margaret P. Hannay, whose work on Mary Sidney Herbert and Mary Sidney Wroth informs the arguments in Chs 1 and 4.

<sup>6</sup> See Phyllis Rackin, "Misogyny is Everywhere." "Reminders that women were expected to be chaste, silent, and obedient," Rackin argues, "probably occur more frequently in recent scholarship than they did in the literature of Shakespeare's time" (44).

<sup>7</sup> Wendy Wall has also questioned the naturalness of creating a category of "women writers." "Do a 1630s petitioner to Parliament, a 1590s queen, and an urban Tudor

Yet the women who produced literary texts in the early modern period did not do so primarily in order to “find a voice” in print, nor to make cultural space for such a phenomenon as “the woman writer.” Their motivations for writing and publishing literary texts were as varied as those of men: they wrote for literary experimentation and pleasure; for fame, or its mitigation; for economic survival and socioeconomic ambition; for friends, supporters, and communities; for purposes of criticism and advice. The same can be said, moreover, of the women who supported writers, and those who were their readers. Margaret J. M. Ezell pointed out years ago that printed texts represent only a fraction of the ways in which women participated in literary culture, and subsequent work on coterie and communal manuscript literary production has revealed the startling range of women’s literary practices.<sup>8</sup> I want to suggest here that we can see this work in acts of patronage and literary dedications as well.

In the preface to her translation of Diego Ortúñez de Calahorra’s Spanish romance, *The Mirrour of Princely deedes and Knighthood* (1578), Margaret Tyler defends her act of translating a secular romance with the claim “that it is all one for a woman to pen a story, as for a man to addresse his story to a woman.”<sup>9</sup> Feminist scholars have focused on Tyler’s preface, particularly this line, as the earliest feminist defense of women’s writing.<sup>10</sup> Yet in the excitement of finding an early modern woman defending women’s use of the pen, scholars ignored the hinge clause of Tyler’s claim. The parallel that

serving woman have enough in common to allow us to generalize about them?” she asks (“Circulating Texts in Early Modern England,” 49). As Wall points out, if we question this category, and the idea that all women writers were proto-feminists (in our own model), “Women writers may no longer fit the pattern of heroic liberal subjects valiantly fighting patriarchy.” But, she adds, the “trade-off is that their work allows for a more historically accurate picture of the circumstances in which gender functions as a social force” (50).

<sup>8</sup> Ezell, “‘To Be Your Daughter in Your Pen’: The Social Functions of Literature in the Writings of Lady Elizabeth Brackley and Lady Jane Cavendish.” For recent work on women’s activities as authors and co-authors, manuscript compilers, verse collectors, and keepers of commonplace books, see *The Verse Miscellany of Constance Aston Fowler*, *The Southwell-Sibthorpe Commonplace Book*; and *English Manuscript Studies 1100–1700*, ix. *Writings by Early Modern Women*. Many of these activities took place in family circles and homes: Sir John Harington’s daughters, Frances and Ellina, transcribed poems in one manuscript, and William Cavendish’s daughters co-authored a manuscript collection of verses and plays. On the Harington family, see Arthur F. Marotti, *Manuscript, Print and the English Renaissance Lyric*, 26; and on the Cavendish family, Ezell, “‘To Be Your Daughter in Your Pen.’”

<sup>9</sup> *The Mirrour of Princely deedes and Knighthood*, A4<sup>v</sup>.

<sup>10</sup> Moira Ferguson calls the preface “the first explicitly feminist argument published by a woman . . . in English,” and Tina Kroutiris discusses it as a radical empowerment of the woman writer (*First Feminists*, 52; *Oppositional Voices*, 44–9). Mary Ellen Lamb argues that Tyler’s claim foregrounds “the significance of women’s reading as a condition of their writing,” acknowledging the importance of women’s reading even as she subordinates it to writing, but goes on to argue that most early modern constructions of women readers “were designed to deny women the independent subjectivity that lies at the core of authorship” (“Constructions of Women Readers,” 24).

Tyler draws between a man addressing a story to a woman and a woman penning a story is predicated on the idea that texts and textual meanings are produced by both writers and their addressees, and in moments of consumption as well as creation. Her subsequent observation that women have a particular relationship to “such workes, as appeare in their name” indicates how seriously such dedications were taken in the period, and hints at the collaborative nature of literary production more generally.<sup>11</sup> Many early modern authors characterized their patrons and dedicatees as co-authors of their work. In one of his many dedications to Mary Sidney Herbert, for example, Samuel Daniel claimed that his “Rhymes” were a joint project, “Begotten by [her] hand, and [his] desire.”<sup>12</sup> Rather than mere hyperbole, claims like Daniel’s tell us something crucial about a mode of literary production in which the productive (and contentious) collusion of supporting, creating, transcribing, and reading literary texts lay at the core of authorship. The women identified in the titles of and epistolary dedications to texts such as *The Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia* were thus neither merely titular nor ornamental. Nor, for that matter, were they necessarily subordinate to other more important concerns, such as the author’s seeking of recognition or preference from sources far more powerful (and presumptively male) than the dedicatee herself.<sup>13</sup> More than mere flattery, authors’ solicitation and interpellation of women patrons and readers was often part of an ongoing engagement with the causes in which those women were actively and vitally involved. Indeed in many cases, the production of literature was itself a form of activism.

<sup>11</sup> In their dedications to women, Tyler suggests, male authors “minde not onely to borrow names of worthie personages, but the testimonies also for their further credite, which neither the one may demaund without ambition, nor the other graunt with out ouerlightnesse” (A4<sup>r</sup>). It is, in other words, both a serious, and a reciprocal, business. “If women be excluded from the viewe of such workes, as appeare in their name,” she goes on to ask, “or if glorie onely be sought in our common inscriptions, it mattereth not whether the parties be men or women, whether aliuie or dead.” Like writing, in other words, reading is a vital (“aliue”) part of literary production.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel Daniel, “To the Right Honorable, the Lady Mary, Countesse of Pembroke,” prefatory sonnet to the 1594 edn of *Delia*, cited in Hannay, *Philip’s Phoenix*, 118:

Great Patrones of these my humble Rymes  
Which thou from out thy greatnes doost inspire:  
Sith onely thou hast deigned to rayse them higher,  
Vouchsafe now to accept them as thine owne,  
Begotten by thy hand, and my desire. (sig. A2)

Mary Sidney Herbert presented the psalms she and her brother translated to the Queen in “both our names” (Hannay, *Philip’s Phoenix*, 91).

<sup>13</sup> As Juliet Fleming has argued, texts, even when addressed to women, could be part of a homosocial agenda—men promoting the interests of men—and indifferent to or critical of the women they ostensibly addressed. “The Ladies’ Man and the Age of Elizabeth.” See also Patricia Parker’s discussion of the forms of triangulation in which a woman becomes “the enabling matter of male discourse” (*Literary Fat Ladies*, 132).

The four chapters in *Mediatrix* are devoted to four interrelated communities in which noted mediatrixes played central roles, and to the texts they produced. The first centers on Mary Sidney Herbert, the Sidney alliance, and *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*; the second on Margaret Hoby's community of readers in recusant Yorkshire and the godly texts her reading kept alive; the third on the circle surrounding Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford, and John Donne's verse letters and occasional poems; and the last on Mary Wroth, the Sidney-Herbert alliance, and *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania*. While many of the women who appear in the pages of the book are familiar figures in feminist literary history, I look at their contributions to early modern culture less in terms of their gender or their seemingly discrete roles as writers, patrons, or readers, than in terms of their religious and political affiliations and commitments. The four communities I discuss were related to each other not only by birth and marriage, but by their engagement with the cause loosely identified as militant Protestantism, represented in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries primarily by the Sidney and Herbert families and their allies, and advanced in no small part by the production and circulation of literary texts.<sup>14</sup> By looking at the work these communities produced, as well as the places in and the means by which they did so, I argue not only that women played a central role in the production of some of England's most important literary texts, but that the work they produced was an essential part of the political, as well as the literary, culture of early modern England.

## I. COMMUNITIES, COTERIES, AND ALLIANCES

Society must always consist among two or more.

(T.E., *The Lawes Resolutions of Women's Rights*, 1632)

In proposing the mediatrix as indispensable to the political world of early modern England, I am also proposing a particular view of social and political life, one centered on structures that scholars alternately term "communities,"

<sup>14</sup> These relations are complex. Margaret Hoby had been married to a Devereux and a Sidney before she married Sir Thomas Posthumous Hoby, and was related by marriage to Lucy Harington Russell; Harington Russell, in turn, was related to the Sidneys (her paternal grandmother was Lucy Sidney, the aunt of Sir Philip Sidney and Mary Sidney Herbert), and was allied in court and parliament with William Herbert, Mary Sidney Herbert's son and Mary Wroth's cousin and lover. Harington Russell was also Mary Wroth's godmother, and Dorothy Percy, Dorothy Devereux's daughter, married Wroth's brother Robert Sidney. While the nexus of familial, marital, and dynastic relationships is a tight one, this book is more concerned with the religious, political, and intellectual interests and causes shared by these communities, despite their regional and, to a lesser extent, temporal distance from one another.

"coteries," and "alliances." Larger than the "little commonwealth" of marriage, and smaller than the body politic of the nation, these structures of affiliation were at once heuristics of interpretation, and materially real; indeed it is precisely this duality that makes them such interesting subjects of study.<sup>15</sup> In revisiting the claim that the restricted, patriarchal, nuclear family was the primary basis of social organization in the period, scholars have turned their attention to the extended household and to wider kinship and affinity networks: communities that cohered around shared familial, regional, socioeconomic, religious, and political interests.<sup>16</sup> Frequently, the production of literature was both an expression of a given community's interests and a means of promoting them.<sup>17</sup> Among other things, the production of literature helped to create and sustain exclusive societies: what Earl Miner calls "the little society of the good few."<sup>18</sup> Philip Sidney's dedication of the *Arcadia* to his sister, as well as his frequent appeals to women readers throughout the text itself, suggest that his romance was intended to affirm, entertain, and solicit the interpretive attention of a community of readers. Literary production also helped to shore up or confirm threatened or minority values. Margaret

<sup>15</sup> Many scholars question the usefulness of the concept of "community" altogether. Alan Macfarlane claims that community is a "heuristic concept," and Judith Scherer Herz points out that coteries and communities can be no more than the function of a critic's desire or imagination, "less found objects than artifacts of the discovery process, constructed to serve varied critical, theoretical and historical ends" (*Reconstructing Historical Communities*, 4; "Of Circles, Friendship, and the Imperatives of Literary History," 15).

In "Literary Circles and Communities," I argue that, whether or not a given circle existed (in a particular form), contemporaries nonetheless conceived of it as such, imagining it into a kind of textual, and thus cultural, existence.

<sup>16</sup> For the "restricted patriarchal nuclear family," see Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage*, 409–11. On kinship, see Miranda Chaytor, "Household and Kinship," and David Cressy, "Kinship and Kin Interaction." On communities, see Phil Withington and Alexandra Shepard (eds), *Communities in Early Modern England*. In *Incest and Agency*, Maureen Quilligan has recently argued that endogamy was a way in which families maintained and entrenched power, and that women—particularly women writers—used that power for their own ends.

<sup>17</sup> On literary communities in general, see Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth (eds), *Literary Circles and Cultural Communities in Renaissance England*: "Most often the literary circle is defined as a coterie whose members are linked by shared social, political, philosophical, or aesthetic interests or values, or who vie for the interests and attention of a particular patron, or who are drawn together by bonds of friendship, family, religion or location" ("Introduction," 1–2). On specific literary communities, see Sandra A. Burner, *James Shirley: A Study of Literary Coteries and Patronage in Seventeenth Century England*; Mary Hobbs, *Stoughton Manuscript: A Manuscript Miscellany of Poems by Henry King and his Circle*; B. H. Newdigate, *Michael Drayton and his Circle*; Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet*; and Katherine Duncan-Jones, *Philip Sidney: Courtier Poet*. The Sidney family and circle has benefited from a particularly impressive number of studies, including Michael Brennan, *Literary Patronage in the English Renaissance* (1988); Mary Ellen Lamb, *Gender and Authorship in the Sidney Circle* (1990); Margaret P. Hannay, *Philip's Phoenix* (1990); and Gary Waller, *The Sidney Family Romance* (1993).

<sup>18</sup> Miner, *The Cavalier Modes from Jonson to Cotton*, 275.

Hoby's reading of puritan books in largely recusant Yorkshire, for example, endeavored to keep those ideas an active part of the regional and national conversations. Community is often seen as a positive term (Raymond Williams calls it a "warmly persuasive word"), but communities are, and were, nonetheless always marked by debate and conflict.<sup>19</sup> The production of literary texts could thus also challenge members of a given community to better adhere to a set of values.<sup>20</sup> When Mary Wroth invoked Susan Herbert and Mary Sidney Herbert in her romance, she was certainly imagining a same-sex "concentrate" of loyalty and political prudence particular to women, and useful for the purposes of political critique.<sup>21</sup> But she was also evoking the alliance between their families more generally, and attempting to shore up their commitment to a political cause.<sup>22</sup> Like the communities that produced them, literary texts were often more than merely affirmative; they were dialogic, contentious, even confrontational.<sup>23</sup> The communities discussed in this book produced a great deal of exciting and innovative literature, but they were by no means simply mutually supportive or hermetically sealed cultural enclaves. Regardless of the shared sympathies of their constituencies, they were made up of people who were at once allies and disputants, their very

<sup>19</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords*, 76. Withington and Shepard similarly refer to the term's vagueness and "rhetorical warmth" (*Communities in Early Modern England*, 2). On conflict as a defining feature rather than occasional side-effect of community, see Bob Scribner, "Communities and the Nature of Power." As Scribner writes, "concepts of community embodied universal, virtually hegemonic values, that led everyone to seek to appropriate them in social and political power plays in order to tilt the moral balance in their favour, or at least to disarm or comfort opponents" (317).

<sup>20</sup> On the ways in which coterie literary production serves "to confirm threatened social values and relationships," see Margaret J. M. Ezell, *Social Authorship and the Advent of Print*, 39.

<sup>21</sup> Laurie Shannon argues that chastity, configured as same-sex bonds, "harbors a heroic femininity similar to the 'gender concentrate' of male friendship," and thus that it is similarly useful as a limit case to male tyranny (*Sovereign Amity*, 69).

<sup>22</sup> Both Sidney and Wroth specifically alluded to female communities of readers within their respective romances, but their appeals were as strategic as they were flattering. Each author's understanding of the importance of women to their own literary and social ambitions was matched by their recognition that women's relationships were as politically engaged as those between men. Susan Frye and Karen Robertson use "alliance"—a term which "denotes a formally recognized relationship activated or chosen to the political advantage of its members"—in order to highlight the explicitly political aspects of the cultural networks forged by and between women. See the "Introduction" to Susan Frye and Karen Robertson (eds), *Maids and Mistresses, Cousins and Queens*, 4–5. As an example of such support, in the period following Walter Raleigh's imprisonment for treason, his wife, Elizabeth Throckmorton, relied on the help of other women. One of her petitioning letters to Robert Cecil included a list of eighteen women's names that clearly served to buttress her claims and illustrate her network of support (Robertson, "Tracing Women's Connections from a Letter by Elizabeth Raleigh").

<sup>23</sup> Literary coteries thus did not just "cohere social bonds among like-minded readers" (Ezell, *Social Authorship*, 42). As William H. Sherman puts it, every textual event represents "the voices of [an] argument" (*John Dee*, 58). Harold Love similarly claims that "the impetus

nature marked as much by conflict as by consensus. Rather than private and elite literary “coteries” exempt from wider political meanings, the communities I discuss in this book are best understood in terms of their religious and political commitments, of which the production and circulation of literary texts was an integral part.

Most of the interrelated communities I discuss here have been grouped under various aeges before. Linda Levy Peck describes them as an “affinity network”; Mervyn James as an “oppositionist group”; Margaret P. Hannay as an “alliance”; and S. L. Adams as a “puritan faction.”<sup>24</sup> The compound hyphenation of what is often referred to as the “Sidney alliance”’s reputed leaders—Leicester-Sidney-Essex-Herbert—goes some way towards explaining both its genealogy and its constituents, even as it marginalizes the women who were, as I argue here, often its anchoring forces and symbolic representatives. The alliance is often seen as having its origins under Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester in the 1570s, centering for periods on Philip Sidney (d. 1586), Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex (d. 1601), and Prince Henry (d. 1612), and ending under the leadership of William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, whose turn to Parliament signaled both an irreversible shift in English politics, and the end of the alliance’s particular kind of activism.<sup>25</sup> While it was no means monolithic, nor, for that matter, consistent in either membership or approach, the alliance was committed to several things: a militant and internationalist Protestantism; a limited or mixed monarchy, particularly the political

to initiate an exchange of texts within a community (or to create a new community out of the exchange of texts) would frequently have a motive that was either reformist or reactionary” (*Scribal Publication*, 177, 179).

<sup>24</sup> Peck, “Benefits, Beneficiaries, and Brokers”; James, *Society, Politics and Culture*, 392; in *Philip’s Phoenix*, Hannay refers to the “Dudley/Sidney alliance” (14), the “Protestant alliance” (21), and “the Protestant interventionist party” (81); and S. L. Adams, “Favourites and Factions,” 272. Richard Helgerson refers to “the militant interventionist policy of the Leicester-Essex faction” (*Forms of Nationhood*, 53). Factions, in Peck’s words, were “networks of patrons and clients who, at the least, were viewed by others as connecting and co-coordinating their political behavior. The faction might be animated not only by mutual self interest but by similar views on foreign policy and religion” (*Court Culture*, 53). “Faction” was a term of derogation and never used by group members to define themselves. In *Sonnets and the English Woman Writer*, Rosalind Smith refers to the alliance as “a group of aristocratic Protestant patrons perceived to be independent of courtly corruption and intrigue, often identified in terms of a physical withdrawal from the court to the country” (99). She is one of the few scholars to note, and take seriously, the women in the group, arguing that it “included a distinct sub-group of women courtiers: Susan Herbert Countess of Montgomery; Lucy Harington, Countess of Bedford; and Lady Mary Wroth” (99).

<sup>25</sup> For various accounts of this genealogy, see David Norbrook, *Poetry and Politics*; Vernon F. Snow, “Essex and the Aristocratic Opposition to the Early Stuarts” (“‘Essex connection’ constituted the nucleus of the aristocratic opposition to the early Stuarts,” 224); Warren Boutcher, “Florio’s Montaigne” (“The tradition of aristocratic political Puritanism that descended from . . . John Dudley, Earl of Northumberland, through the various branches

rights of the aristocracy, including the right to counsel; and the value of what has been called “practically active” or “political” humanism.<sup>26</sup> The alliance was at once oppositional and consiliary, and its members made use of literary texts both to oppose the current direction of royal policy, and to offer advice on how to do things better.<sup>27</sup> It expressed, in Patrick Collinson’s words, “what is vulgarly called resistance theory, but is better described as the polemical critique of monarchy.”<sup>28</sup> Its members sought a share in monarchical governance, that is, rather than its overthrow, and they sought to do so, in part, through the use of books.

Some of the books used by the members of the alliance have received a great deal of attention in this regard. Critics have pointed out, for example, that the Sidnean Psalms were modeled on Genevan and Huguenot translations which had expressed the political opinions of their translators

of the Dudley, Russell, Knollys, Sidney, Devereux and Herbert families, survived to find a figurehead in the Earl of Pembroke in the Jacobean era. The heirs to this tradition coalesced partly around the Virginia Company whose directors included the Earl [of Pembroke], Philip Herbert, Robert Sidney, Lord Harington and his sister”: Boutcher, “Florio’s Montaigne,” 71); S. L. Adams, “The Protestant Cause,” 4, 7 (“By the 1580s Leicester’s clientage, originally inherited from his father, was beginning to adopt something of a party ethos; loyalty to the Earl himself was increasingly overshadowed by his identification with the cause” of the “advanced Protestants”); and Hannay, *Philip’s Phoenix* (“Sir Philip Sidney, the hope of the alliance, died fighting its battles. Then the men of the powerful alliance of Leicester’s own generation, died within ten years: Bedford in 1585, Henry Sidney in 1586, Leicester in 1588, Warwick and Walsingham in 1590; Huntingdon in 1595”: 68). S. L. Adams argues that the “failure of Essex to achieve a similar position [as Leicester] and to extend a similar protection [to the cause] was to doom this form of organization... Only after the failure of Buckingham in 1625 and Pembroke in 1626 to provide adequate leadership did political puritanism turn... to the House of Commons and the ‘country’ and repudiate the court” (“The Protestant Cause,” 35). As we will see in Ch. 4, Pembroke was working with the House of Commons in the early 1620s as well.

<sup>26</sup> On “practically active” humanism, see G. R. Elton, *Studies in Tudor and Stuart Politics and Government*, 220; on “political humanism,” see F. J. Levy, “Francis Bacon and the Style of Politics,” 147–9. See also S. L. Adams’s account of “political Puritanism,” which did its work under the leadership of the court aristocracy, and was concerned with aristocratic constitutionalism and in giving assistance to the Church abroad rather than rapprochement with Catholic powers. He also makes much of the alliance’s investments in an ambitious foreign policy, specifically geared around resistance to the Habsburgs (“The Protestant Cause”). On religion, he argues that “As long as the magistrate was godly, Calvinism could function equally well within the autocracy of the Palatine, the semi-autocracy of Maurice of Nassau, the aristocratic constitutionalism of the English gentry or the French theorists of the 1570s, and the bourgeois republicanism of Geneva” (10).

<sup>27</sup> For the relationship between oppositionism and counsel, see S. L. Adams, “The Protestant Cause,” 234. Adams (193) cites the argument of the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* that nobles are “obligated not only to perform their own duties, but also to hold the prince to his.”

<sup>28</sup> Collinson, “The Monarchical Republic of Queen Elizabeth I,” 44. See also Blair Worden: “In pre-civil war England it was the abuse of monarchy, not the principle, that attracted complaint” (“Republicanism, Regicide and Republic,” 311). Collinson’s focus is the 1584 anti-absolutist Bond of Association, an informal convocation of regional heads, earls, privy councilors, residents of Lincoln’s Inn, and bishops, who, given the absence of a plan for succession, established a republican plan of rule (48–50). Politics, argues Collinson,

and served as cautions for their monarchs. In Mary Sidney Herbert's rendering of Psalm 101, for example, King David promotes the value of his subaltern magistrates, vowing that "Such men with me my Counsailors shall sitt / such euermore my Officers shall be, / Men speaking right, and doing what is fitt."<sup>29</sup> Her contemporaries did not miss her point. In his manuscript copy of the poems, John Davies used gold capitals to emphasize the significance of "Counsailors" and "Officers." The works of Roman history and philosophy and British antiquarianism the members of the alliance read, translated, and published, are also frequently mentioned in political histories of the period.<sup>30</sup>

Yet many of the other texts produced by the alliance, including many of those I discuss in this book, have received almost no attention in these terms. (The *Urania*, most notably, is rarely mentioned in connection with "practically active" humanism.) Moreover, while some of the books associated with the alliance have also been associated with women—most critics, for example, note that Sidney wrote the *Arcadia* for his sister—this association is rarely seen in political terms, and the role of women thus remains, for the most part, both secondary and apolitical. *Mediatrix* argues that the texts discussed in its chapters were intimately related to the political concerns of the alliance that produced them, but it also argues that women played a crucial role both in the production of these texts, and in effecting the political goals they served. Rather than mere support staff, many of the women discussed in this book, including Mary Sidney Herbert and Lucy Harington Russell, served, at various points, as the leaders and spokespeople for the alliance.<sup>31</sup> This leadership, moreover, was both literal and symbolic. While they often had the "voice" or leadership of the alliance

"is now seen to have been one of differences and contentions within a regime, not of 'government' versus 'opposition'" (40).

<sup>29</sup> See Hannay's discussion of the psalms in ch. 4 of *Philip's Phoenix*, "This Moses and this Miriam." The quotation is from p. 105. Hannay provides the information about the Davies manuscript at p. 245 n. 78.

<sup>30</sup> See e.g. Malcolm Smuts, "Court Centered Politics and the Uses of Roman Historians"; and James, *Society Politics and Culture*. Vernon Snow also discusses the alliance's "use of the past" and their hiring of poets, historians, playwrights, and antiquarians: "They subsidized books and historical plays, many of which elevated honour and eulogized their lineal or titular ancestors. The antiquarians formed a society and presented research papers on such subjects as the origin of gentility, the etymology of honor, the antiquity of parliament and the dignity of titles. They attempted to prove that the English constitution was a mixed monarchy; that conquest and counsel were the principal functions of the titled nobility; and that the House of Lords had once possessed untold privileges and greater jurisdiction when it was the *magnum concilium*" ("Essex and the Aristocratic Opposition to the Early Stuarts," 226). For oppositionist drama, see Margot Heinemann, *Puritanism and Theatre*; and Albert H. Tricomi, *Anti-Court Drama*.

<sup>31</sup> In a move characteristic of much history of the period, S. L. Adams simultaneously acknowledges the central role that women played in the alliance, and presumes that it could not possibly have been substantive. "It was from the second generation of the great puritan

in practical and political terms, women also frequently served as its representatives in a more figurative sense. As we will see in the pages that follow, the forms this representativeness took were varied and sometimes intimately related to one another. When Gervase Markham set out to publish his continuation of Philip Sidney's romance in 1607, for example, he entered it in the Stationers' Register as "The Countesse of BEDFORDES Arcadia Begynnyng where the Countesse of PEMBROOKES endes."<sup>32</sup> Like many others, Markham clearly saw Bedford as Pembroke's successor. The women discussed in this book performed in court masques as allegorized virtues; their miniatures were mounted on playing cards and used as symbolic bargaining tools in high stakes diplomatic negotiations; they were configured as "Pastorellas of *Arcadia*," and "starres" in an "Asterisme" that reflected the workings of their network; their celebrated constancy exemplified the neostoic fortitude and political disposition of their cause.<sup>33</sup> The women of the Sidney alliance were, in short, a crucial part of what has been called the "metaphorics" of a "discontented nobility," and like many metaphors, they found a logical home in books.<sup>34</sup> Their work as literary producers is thus registered not only in title-pages and dedications, but

families, such as Russells, that the strongest representation came," he writes. Political puritanism lost its leaders Warwick, Walsingham, Leicester, and Huntingdon by the mid-1590s, and "only the widows" like Anne, Countess of Warwick, remained ("Protestant Cause," 108). The Earl of Bedford's heir, he continues, had been killed in 1585 and his grandson was a minor. Even as he acknowledges the role of "a significant group of great ladies," including Margaret Russell, Mary Sidney, and Lucy Harington, Adams is nonetheless unable to see them as key factors in the alliance's activities, skipping over them to get to the next generation of men (182). At "the bare minimum," he continues, "the Virginia Company provided a medium for the association of the survivors of the Leicestershire and Essex parties with the younger men who would become the spokesmen for political Puritanism in the 1620s" (Adams, "Protestant Cause," 182). Yet even in the 1620s, as we will see in Ch. 3, loyalists located the center of oppositionism in the "ill councils of Bedford House"—one of the households over which Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford, reigned supreme.

<sup>32</sup> Cited in Gavin Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 141: "when Gervase Markham stopped reminiscing about the glory days of Essex's ascendancy and Penelope Rich's patronage, it was Lucy Harington to whom he considered dedicating his next-generation continuation of Sidney, *The English Arcadia*."

<sup>33</sup> For women as allegorized virtues, see Chs 1 and 3; for the use of miniatures, see Ch. 1; for neostoic constancy, see Chs 1 and 4. In his *Ourania* (1606), Nathaniel Baxter refers to Wroth and her sister Philippa as "Ladies of worthe, and babes of *Sydneia*," "Pastorellas of *Arcadia*" and "blessed Nymphs/Neeces to Astrophell" (*Ourania*, B3; B4). In his dedicatory poem to Wroth in his *The Whole Works of Homer . . . in his Iliads and Odysseys* (1616), George Chapman refers to her as part of the "Sydneian Asterisme": "TO THE HAPPY STARRE, DISCOVERED in our Sydneian Asterisme; comfort of learning, Sphere of all the vertues, the Lady Wrothe." (Pyrocles refers to Philoclea as his "Load-starre of comfort" in the *Arcadia* (NA 178, ed. 329)). Miniature portraits of both Dorothy Percy and Mary Sidney Herbert were mounted on playing cards (*Correspondence of Dorothy Percy Sidney*, 11 n. 26).

<sup>34</sup> This quotation is from Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition*, 77. I discuss this concept more fully in Ch. 1.

also within the texts themselves, where they and their work can be seen in figures ranging from the learned disputants in puritan treatises to the Roman heroines in neostoic tragedy and the ciphered heroines of chivalric romances.

Mary Sidney Herbert, Margaret Dakins Hoby, Lucy Harington Russell, and Mary Sidney Wroth are the central figures in this book, but other women make significant appearances as well: Penelope Devereux Rich and her sister Dorothy Devereux Perrot Percy; Margaret Russell Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, her sister, Anne Russell Dudley, Countess of Warwick, and her daughter, Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset; Katherine Dudley Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon, sister of Robert Dudley and Mary Dudley Sidney; Margaret Hoby's mother-in-law, Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell; Mary Sidney Herbert's daughter-in-law (and Mary Wroth's ally), Susan de Vere Herbert, Countess of Montgomery; and, in the conclusion, Dorothy Devereux Percy's daughter Dorothy, who married Mary Wroth's brother, Robert Sidney, in 1615.<sup>35</sup> While the familial interrelationships are certainly part of the story I tell in this book, I am interested in these women less as mothers, daughters, and wives than as members of an alliance and heads of powerful households. In particular, I am interested in them as "almoners of ways"—mediatrices who served as go-betweens for the various interests and offices that made up political life in early modern England.<sup>36</sup>

As Margaret Maurer puts it, the position that these women occupied was "theoretically non-existent" in the annals of political history, but "could be and often was, everything" in the political culture in which they actually

<sup>35</sup> In addition to these other women, this book also considers a much wider range of texts than the *Arcadia*, key militant Protestant treatises (including those of William Perkins, Richard Greenham, and Philip de Mornay), Donne's poems, and the *Urania*. Other works which are discussed in some detail include the poetry of Samuel Daniel, Michael Drayton, and Ben Jonson, and letters by Penelope Rich, Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, and Fulke Greville.

<sup>36</sup> Scholars frequently assume that the family was a refuge from political life. See e.g. Hannay's claim that Wroth was "safe in her elite family circle" (*Mary Sidney*, p. xiv); Nandini Das's assumption that a focus on the familial connections between Sidney and Wroth risks keeping their work "cloistered within the aristocratic familial coterie of the Sidneys" (*Renaissance Romance*, 6–7); and Gavin Alexander's assumption about the "parochial nature of Pembroke's literary coterie" (*Writing After Sidney*, 82). Alexander is particularly (and peculiarly) insistent that Sidney Herbert's work should be considered solely in relationship to her brother: "[Philip Sidney] is subject and object enough"; "Sidney's endings are the focus of her grief, and both the beginning and the end of her art" (Alexander, *Writing After Sidney*, 111, 127). Scholars make similar claims about Wroth. See e.g. Elizabeth Mazzola's claim that "Wroth's subject is the confines of the family" (*Favorite Sons*, 79). The term "almoner of ways" was a contemporary term. (See e.g. Jane Nevill to the Earl of Salisbury, 27 January 1605–6 in *The Cecil Papers: Calendar of the Cecil Papers in Hatfield House*, xviii. 1606 (1940), 20–40: <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=112278&strquery=almoner>> accessed September 2012).

lived.<sup>37</sup> Recent work on the female-centered courts of Queen Elizabeth I and Queen Anne has revealed the constitutive role that women played in the political life of early modern England.<sup>38</sup> (While scholars have long pointed out that influential courtiers like Robert Carr slept in the King's bedchamber, that is, they are now starting to look at the influence of women like Lucy Harington Russell who slept in the Queen's.) Yet while some of the women in this book served as attending gentlewomen—a position that was, and should be considered, a political office—others played less clearly defined roles, many of them away from the court altogether. The work these women did ranged from arranging marriages and the promotion of men to particular offices and benefices, to patronizing literary, religious, and political works, writing letters and presenting petitions, and mediating agreements and disputes.<sup>39</sup> (When Ben Jonson was arrested for

<sup>37</sup> Margaret Maurer, "The Real Presence of Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford," 215. Hannay points out that when Robert Sidney and Rowland Whyte discuss "friends" at court, they were often referring to Katherine Dudley Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon; Elizabeth Cooke, Lady Russell; and Anne Russell Dudley, Countess of Warwick (*Philip's Phoenix*, 66). Rowland Whyte regularly advised Robert Sidney to take advantage of the power of his female relatives, telling him at one point that "the way to work it, is by your letter to my Lady your sister [Mary Sidney Herbert]" (*Philip's Phoenix*, 155).

<sup>38</sup> On Elizabeth's court, see Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power*; Pam Wright, "A Change in Direction"; and Elizabeth Brown, "'Companion me with my Mistress': Cleopatra, Elizabeth I, and their Waiting Women." On Queen Anne, see Leeds Barroll, *Anna of Denmark*. Recent critics have worked hard to overturn Pam Wright's argument that the Privy Chamber "ceased to be a forum for independent initiatives in counseling the monarch over key political issues" when it came to be the forum of women. Nancy Mears has described Elizabeth's court as characterized by an "ad hoc" secretarial process facilitated in no small part by the intimate and consiliary services of women (*Queenship*, 46). Charlotte Merton and Joan Greenbaum Goldsmith have seen women as "points of contact" in the courtly circulation of news and information, and Mears has factored women's activity "into the wider workings of court politics—policy, debate, diplomacy" (Mears, "Politics," 68). See Charlotte Merton, "The Women Who Served Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth: Ladies, Gentlewomen and Maids of the Privy Chamber, 1553–1603" (Ph.D. diss., Cambridge University, 1992); and J. B. Greenbaum Goldsmith, "All the Queen's Women: The Changing Place and Perception of Aristocratic Women in Elizabethan England, 1558–1620" (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1987). From at least 1566, Leicester's main contacts with Elizabeth were Dorothy Broadbent and Blanche Parry (Mears, "Politics," 73 n. 38). Privy Chamber servants like Broadbent and Parry facilitated access to Elizabeth for secretaries and courtiers; they managed petitions and delivered royal commands; they were also sources of information on the Queen and court, utilized not only by foreign ambassadors but by fellow members of the political elite.

<sup>39</sup> As Alison Wall points out in her *ODNB* entry on Penelope Rich, in 1599 "Rich asked Sir Julius Caesar, a judge of the admiralty court and master of requests, to continue his favour to a Captain Isard, for which she was beholden to Caesar." As we will see in Ch. 4, Mary Wroth supported the careers of—and attempted to mitigate the punishments for—officers in the English garrisons in Flushing (see also Hannay, *Mary Sidney*, 149). When he was in trouble for his part in the Essex conspiracy, Sir Charles Danvers appealed to the Countess of Warwick and Lady Hoby for help.

offending the King with *Eastward Ho* in 1605, for example, the Countess of Bedford was one of the people to whom he turned for help.<sup>40</sup>

The importance of such work was far from invisible to contemporaries. When Robert Sidney was seeking office in 1599, for example, the family secretary, Rowland Whyte, wrote to him at his wife's behest to tell him that she had had "much Speech" with "Lady Buckhurst" about (her husband) the "Lord Treasurer[s]" "love" for Sidney. Whyte concludes the letter by telling him that "Her Ladyship desires [him] to wryte unto these her Goships, for indeed they are worthy to have Thanks."<sup>41</sup> In another letter from the same year, Whyte informs Sidney of the work Penelope Devereux Rich has been doing to secure him the office of the Warden of the Cinque Ports, including keeping a letter of petition "in her bosom" and promising to deliver it to the Queen in the morning.<sup>42</sup> Such attention to the mediatrix's body served less as an inevitable form of sexualization than as an index of her status as a keeper and bearer of secrets—of the power she embodied in her very person and in her access to that of the Queen. The historian Thomas Fuller provides a perfect emblem of such power in his description of the rise of George Villiers's as James I's favorite in 1615: "the Lady Lucy Countess of Bedford led him by the one hand, and William Earl of Pembroke by the other."<sup>43</sup> (Herbert would be made Lord Chamberlain the next year; on 11 September 1619, John Chamberlain wrote about a dispute between the Earl of Pembroke and Villiers which was "accorded mediation" by "the Lady of Bedford.")<sup>44</sup> The work that these women did, moreover, both at court and elsewhere, was carried out alongside their domestic, familial, and communal duties.<sup>45</sup> The great households with which they were associated are thus best understood not as "domestic sites"—particularly if we understand them as sites of separate-sphere

<sup>40</sup> On *Eastward Ho*, see Lewalski, *Writing Women*, 107; and Smith, *Women of Ben Jonson's Poetry*, 59.

<sup>41</sup> Collins, *Letters and Memorials*, ii. 153. In her *Life of Robert Sidney*, Millicent Hay points out that he sealed the letters he wrote to two of the Queen's maids with the Sidney arrowhead, suggesting that they solicited political, rather than romantic, assignations (154).

<sup>42</sup> Rowland Whyte often mentions Penelope Rich in his reports to Sir Robert Sidney. The letter is cited in Rawson, *Penelope Rich and her Circle*, 178. See also a 1599 letter to Robert Sidney in which Rowland Whyte discusses Barbara Gamage Sidney "present[ing] a petition with honest offers" to the Queen on behalf of her husband's rights to a park (cited in Hannay, *Mary Sidney*, 69).

<sup>43</sup> "Sir Tho. Lake may be said to have ushered him to the English Court, whilst the Lady Lucy Countess of Bedford led him by the one hand, and William Earl of Pembroke by the other, supplying him with a support far above his patrimonial income" (Fuller, *History of the worthies*, 130). See also Taylor, "The Masque and the Lance," 33. In April 1615, Villiers was knighted, installed in the privy chamber, and given a pension.

<sup>44</sup> Chamberlain, *Letters*, 61.

<sup>45</sup> In his discussion of John Dee's reading, Sherman points out that "Dee's base of operations was his own household, and his textual activities were carried out alongside

labor and containment—nor as “safe houses,” somehow exempt from the machinations of political life.<sup>46</sup> Rather, the great houses with which these women were associated are best understood as bases of operations.

## II. PLACE (AND PROPERTY)

We cannot be so stupid as to imagine, that God gives ladies great estates, merely that they may eat, drink, sleep and rise up to play.

(Bathsua Makin, *Essay to Revive the Antient Education of Gentlewomen*, 1673)

While the “private castles” of the ancient baronial nobility had become, under increasingly centralizing monarchs, the “private houses” of a somewhat diminished nobility, many of the great households of early modern England nonetheless retained their status as regional bases of power.<sup>47</sup> Through local governmental offices, such as Lord Lieutenant of the County, the household remained the basic unit of local government. It was, in Sir Henry Wotton’s words, “a kind of private *Princedom*,” and its lord “ruled his country almost as the king ruled the kingdom.”<sup>48</sup> Indeed England itself was sometimes imagined as a “federation of noble fiefdoms,” its rule effected as much by regional magnates and local office-holders as by an all-powerful monarch.<sup>49</sup> Understanding political governance as localized requires, once again, recognizing the centrality of women, who were often the owners, proprietors, administrators, and office-holders of

his domestic and communal duties” (*John Dee*, 69). This was certainly true for the women discussed in this book as well, and our difficulty in seeing this is often the result of an anachronistic sense of what “domestic life” comprised.

<sup>46</sup> Marion Wynne-Davies makes such an argument about “safe houses” in two related essays on Mary Wroth: “Penshurst, like all familial houses, functioned as a place where noble women could find pleasure in one another’s company without the darker and more dangerous intrigues of the early seventeenth-century court” (“For Worth, Not Weakness, Makes in Use But One,” 170 n. 11). She also identifies Penshurst as a “safe house” in “So much Worth as lives in you,” 49.

<sup>47</sup> Between 1580 and 1629, Stone argues, “private castles gave way to private houses” and aristocratic rebellion petered out (Stone, *Crisis of the Aristocracy*, 15). For a brilliant discussion of the estate as a power base—what she calls a “princedom”—see Susan Wiseman, *Conspiracy and Virtue*, 80–94, esp. 88. On the shift from “magnate politics” to court-centered patronage, see Peck, *Court Corruption*.

<sup>48</sup> The first quotation is from Sir Henry Wotton, *The Elements of Architecture* (London, 1622), cited in Wiseman, *Conspiracy and Virtue*, 88; and the second from S. L. Adams, *Leicester and the Court*: “What distinguished the nobility was its superior power, as manifested in its affinities. The lord ruled his country almost as the king ruled the kingdom” (376).

<sup>49</sup> “In effect the country was divided into spheres of influence that could be displayed on maps; in some senses England was a federation of noble fiefdoms” (Bernard, *Power and Politics*, 31). See also Collinson, who argues that early modern England is best understood

these country estates. If, as some scholars have argued, England was a nation of office-holders, some of those office-holders were women.

The alliance discussed in this book held disproportionate sway in England's "federation of fiefdoms." In fact, by the 1570s, the Sidneys and their allies controlled over two-thirds of the property in England.<sup>50</sup> Their status as great magnates is well noted in literary history. Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst," to take the best known example, celebrates the Sidney estate in terms that both highlight and satirize the *noblesse oblige* of its owners. Wilton House, the Herbert seat in Wiltshire, was often praised as an "academy" for poets, and the Bedford estate of Twickenham Park and the Wroth estate of Loughton Hall were the subjects of well-known poems by John Donne and Ben Jonson respectively.

In some ways, women held unstable positions in these households. When Mary Sidney Herbert's husband died in 1601 and her son inherited his title, she (officially) lost her status as the mistress of Wilton.<sup>51</sup> Margaret Hoby fought with her husband about the future of the Yorkshire estate they lived and worked on, and after her death, and against her express

as "a series of overlapping, superimposed communities which are also semi-autonomous, self-governing political cultures or 'republics'" ("Monarchical Republic," 58). For local office-holding, see Mark Goldie, "The Unacknowledged Republic"; and Conal Condren, *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England*. Goldie points out that local officers were "agents of their communities as much as of the crown" (166). People saw themselves as "subjects of an anointed monarch who was armed with awesome prerogative powers yet also saw themselves as citizens of self-governing communities" (175–6).

<sup>50</sup> Hannay, *Philip's Phoenix*, 22. Mary Sidney's father, Henry Sidney, was Lord President of the Council of the Marches of Wales, and Lord Governor of Ireland. He alone "administered about one-quarter of the land under Elizabeth's rule" (20). By the 1560s, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and his brother Ambrose, Earl of Warwick, controlled most of Worcestershire. The power of the alliance was increased by consistent support in the Council from Mary's godfather, Henry Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, whose vast lands lay primarily in Wiltshire and in Glamorganshire. The other great Protestant earl was Francis Russell, Earl of Bedford; his daughter Anne married Ambrose Dudley, and his heir, Edward Russell, married Lucy Harington. When Mary Sidney married Henry Herbert, Earl of Pembroke (who succeeded Sir Henry Sidney as Lord President of the Council of the Marches of Wales), she married "the one great Protestant earl who was not [yet] a member of the Dudley family" (35). Herbert had inherited property in Wiltshire including Wilton (and eighteen other manors), as well as the town, castle, and borough of Cardiff with supporting estates, and more than half the land in Glamorganshire (36). In his history of Pembrokeshire, George Owen wrote that "you must understand that the earls of Pembroke of late time . . . were not earls only in name, as the rest of the earls of England were, but they were earls in deed." He goes on to describe "their royal jurisdiction, power and authority, *which they more like princes than subjects had over their people of this country in times past*" (cited in Helgersson, *Forms of Nationhood*, 136, emphasis added).

<sup>51</sup> While much has been made of her husband's dispossessing will—as John Chamberlain wrote to Dudley Carleton, "The erle of Pembroke died a fortnight since leaving his Lady as bare as he could and bestowing all on the young Lord even to her jewells" (cited in Hannay, *Philip's Phoenix*, 172)—her jointure was substantive. The list of properties in which she

wishes, he left it to his relatives rather than her own.<sup>52</sup> As a result of her husband's involvement in the Essex conspiracy (and general profligacy), Lucy Harington Russell spent her life encumbered by debt.<sup>53</sup> Mary Wroth was also afflicted by debt; when her husband died in 1614, she was famously left with a "£1200 fortune, a son a month old and £23 000" in debt.<sup>54</sup> His property, moreover, was entailed upon male heirs.

Yet none of these details dictates a straightforward story of female victimhood and dispossession. Indebtedness was often the default state of the propertied and ambitious in a credit economy like that of early modern England, and pleading for its amelioration was a standard means of socioeconomic and political negotiation and self-promotion. (Wroth, for example, successfully pleaded with Queen Anne to better the estate she would eventually hold in her own name; and Bedford's debts were but one of the many subjects of her myriad negotiations with various political parties.) Despite the law of *coverture*, moreover, many early modern women maintained substantial property interests of their own and were personally involved in the financial management of combined marital property.<sup>55</sup> Barbara Gamage, the Welsh heiress who married Robert Sidney in 1584 and became the mistress of Penshurst, brought financial stability to the Sidney family; indeed Jonson's allusion to her "linnen [and] plate" at the end of "To Penshurst" seems to hint at the female origins of the estate's functional wealth.<sup>56</sup> Her husband also consistently deferred to and relied on her in matters of estate management; "all things" concerning Penshurst, he wrote to her in 1609, "shall still be commanded by you."<sup>57</sup>

Women's governance of great estates, moreover, was not only a matter of money and ground-level husbandry. There is a remarkable moment in *De Republica Anglorum* (1584), when the political theorist Sir Thomas Smith states that while women should not, as a general rule, "medle with matters

was to retain life interest is given in a document entitled "Lands of the right honorable Henry Earle of Pembroke appointed for the ioynture of Marye nowe comtesse of Pembroke wife of the saide Earle and Daughter of the right honorable Sir Henrye Sidney, Knyght of the Garter and Lorde President of Walles," and consists of ninety sheets (Hannay, *Philip's Phoenix*, 41). She was left holdings in Dorset, Wiltshire, Devon, Glamorgan, Monmouth, Sussex, Kent, and Surrey.

<sup>52</sup> See Sir Erskine Perry (ed.), *The Van den Bempde Papers*, 21; *Diary of Lady Margaret Hoby*, ed. Dorothy M. Meads, 43–4; and Ch. 2.

<sup>53</sup> See Margaret M. Byard, "The Trade of Courtship"; and Ch. 3.

<sup>54</sup> Cited in Josephine A. Roberts, "Introduction," *The Poems of Lady Mary Wroth*, 59–60. See also Hannay, *Mary Sidney*, 172.

<sup>55</sup> See Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England*, 12 and throughout.

<sup>56</sup> Jonson, "To Penshurst," l. 86, p. 96. Hannay notes that Barbara was her father's "sole heir" and the properties she inherited provided half of the Sidneys' income (*Mary Sidney*, 11).

<sup>57</sup> *Report on the Manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley Preserved at Penshurst Place, Kent*, vol. iv. See also *Domestic Politics and Family Absence*, 148.