

# Domestic Politics and Family Absence

The Correspondence (1588–1621)  
of Robert Sidney, First Earl of  
Leicester, and Barbara Gamage  
Sidney, Countess of Leicester

*Edited by*

**Margaret P. Hannay,  
Noel J. Kinnamon and  
Michael G. Brennan**



The Early Modern Englishwoman, 1500-1750: Contemporary  
Editions

## DOMESTIC POLITICS AND FAMILY ABSENCE

Though all but three of Robert Sidney's 332 extant letters to his wife Barbara Gamage Sidney have been preserved in the Sidney family archive, they have never previously been fully transcribed or edited. This edition of the surviving letters, which Sidney wrote to his wife when they were separated for long periods by his official duties at various continental locations, provides a wealth of information about the Sidneys' family life. They touch on matters such as family illnesses, the children's education, court gossip, finances, and the construction of additions to Penshurst Place, the seat of the Sidney family. The letters also offer an extraordinary record of an early-modern English household in which the wife was entrusted with the overall responsibility for the well-being of her family, and for managing a large estate in the absence of her husband.

Sidney's letters show that, although his union with the wealthy Welsh heiress Barbara Gamage may have been engineered primarily for political and financial ends, clearly the couple enjoyed a happy and loving marriage. Their correspondence is full of endearments, and Robert frequently tells his wife how much he misses her and their beloved children, including his 'Malkin', later Lady Mary Wroth.

The volume includes an introduction and notes by the editors. It also includes contextual materials such as relevant sections on family matters from letters to Robert from his trusted agent, Rowland Whyte; and from Robert Sidney's own business correspondence. The introduction specifically addresses the issue of Barbara's literacy, within the broader context of late-Elizabethan women's literacy.

Margaret P. Hannay, Noel J. Kinnamon and Michael G. Brennan have together edited *The Collected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke* for the Oxford English Texts Series (Oxford UP, 1998) and a modern-spelling edition for students and general readers, *Selected Works of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke* (MRTS, forthcoming). They are currently editing *The Correspondence of Rowland Whyte and Robert Sidney, first Earl of Leicester*.

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Noel J. Kinnamon, Professor of English at Mars Hill College, has published textual studies of the Sidney Psalms in *English Manuscript Studies, Notes & Queries*, and the *National Library of Wales Journal*, as well as a variety of articles on George Herbert, Henry Vaughan, and manuscript studies in the *George Herbert Journal* and *English Literary Renaissance*. With Michael Brennan he has published *A Sidney Chronology: 1554–1654* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

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# General Editors' Preface

Foregrounding women and gender has created a genuine revolution in the way we construct the early modern period, and the aim of *Contemporary Editions* (like its sister series, *The Early Modern Englishwoman, 1500–1750: A Facsimile Library of Essential Works*) is to encourage and perpetuate this revolution by making available the texts that in so many ways have generated it.

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Our greatest debt in compiling this edition is to the present Viscount De L'Isle MBE, DL, and to his father, the late Viscount De L'Isle VC, KG, for their generosity and support in allowing us access to their unique collection of family papers. We are especially grateful for much expert advice and guidance to all the staff of the Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, where the Sidney papers are now preserved. We are also most grateful to the Marquess of Salisbury for allowing us to reproduce an example of Barbara Gamage Sidney's signature from his family papers. We have incurred numerous obligations to other individuals while working on this edition. All scholars interested in the life and writings of Robert Sidney, first Earl of Leicester, are greatly indebted to the pioneering work of his first biographer, Millicent V. Hay, and to the first editor of his poems, Peter J. Croft. In July 2003 Germaine Warkentin and Susie West co-organized at Penshurst a richly stimulating and convivial colloquium, 'The Textures of Life at Penshurst Place, 1552–1743', hosted by Lord and Lady De L'Isle and their son Philip. We are greatly indebted to them for inviting us to this remarkable gathering of Sidney scholars at such an important stage in the compilation of this volume. It provided an ideal forum in which to share ideas across a range of disciplines about the lives of Robert Sidney and his wife, Barbara Gamage Sidney. Noel Kinnamon is grateful to the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Philosophical Society, the Appalachian College Association, and Mars Hill College for their support of his archival work. We very much appreciate the professional assistance of the staff of the following libraries: The British Library, London; the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds; Edinburgh University Library; the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington; Renfro Library, Mars Hill College; the National Archives, London; and the Standish Library, Siena College. We are particularly grateful to the staff at the Centre for Kentish Studies: Anne Atkinson, Mark Ballard, Jonathan Barker, Stuart Bligh, Sandie Brown, Jeannette Burder-Routledge, Michael Carter, Susan Cooper, Alison Cresswell, Anne Entwistle, Elizabeth Finn, Lynn Finn, Jane Harris, Linda Harvey, Nicola Kemp, Margaret Kitcher, Helen Orme, Tricia Phillips, Libby Richardson, Debbie Saunders, Hilary Streeter, Lucy Stroud, Alan Stubbs, Ben Travers, Kirsty Warboys, Dick Whittington, and Frances Wilson.

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# Abbreviations

BL	British Library
Chamberlain	<i>The Letters of John Chamberlain</i> . 2 vols. Ed. Norman Egbert McClure. Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1939; rpt Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1979.
<i>Chronology</i>	Michael G. Brennan and Noel J. Kinnamon, <i>A Sidney Chronology 1554–1654</i> . Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003.
CKS	Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone
Collins	<i>Letters and Memorials of State</i> . 2 vols. Ed. Arthur Collins. London: 1746.
Croft	P. J. Croft, <i>The Poems of Robert Sidney Edited from the Poet's Autograph Notebook</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.
DD	Historical Manuscripts Commission, <i>Report on the Manuscripts of Lord De L'Isle and Dudley Preserved at Penshurst Place</i> . 6 vols. London: 1925–66.
Hay	Millicent V. Hay, <i>The Life of Robert Sidney, Earl of Leicester (1563–1626)</i> . Washington, DC: Folger Books, 1984.
HMC	Historical Manuscripts Commission
HMC Downshire	Historical Manuscripts Commission, <i>Report on the Manuscripts of the Marquess of Downshire, Preserved at Easthampstead Park, Berks</i> . London: HMSO, 1924–c. 1995.
HMC Salisbury	Historical Manuscripts Commission, <i>Report on the Manuscripts of the Most Honourable the Marquess of Salisbury, Preserved at Hatfield House</i> . London: HMSO, 1883–1923.
Hull	Hull, F. <i>De L'Isle MSS</i> . Maidstone: Centre for Kentish Studies, 1974.
'Inventory'	De L'Isle and Dudley CKS MS U1500 E120
MRTS	Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies

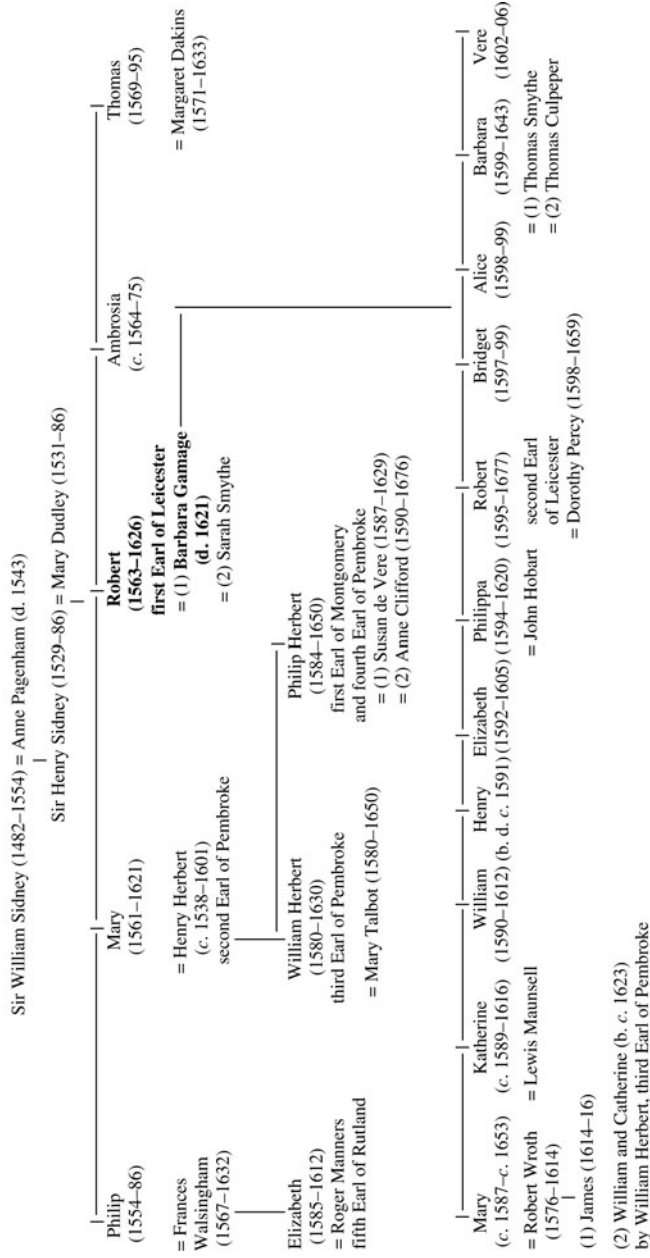
- Nevitt, 'Memorial' Thomas Nevitt, 'Memorial'. Ed. Gavin Alexander and Barbara Ravelhofer, CERES/ Sidneiana, <<http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/ceres/sidneiana/nevitt.htm>>
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary*
- Nichols John Nichols, *The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities, of King James the First, His Royal Consort, Family, and Court*. London: J. B. Nichols, 1828.
- PRO Public Record Office (now The National Archives), Kew.
- RETS Renaissance English Text Society
- SP State Papers
- Stradling Correspondence* *Stradling Correspondence: A Series of Letters Written in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth*. Ed. John Montgomery Traherne. London: 1840.

# Illustrations

Plates 1–8 reproduced between pages 128 and 129.

- Frontispiece    Marcus Gheeraerts II, Lady Barbara Gamage Sidney and Six of Her Children. By kind permission of Viscount De L'Isle from his private collection.
- Plate 1          Paul von Somer, Robert Sidney, first Earl of Leicester (c. 1616–18). By kind permission of Viscount De L'Isle from his private collection.
- Plate 2          Marcus Gheeraerts II, Barbara Gamage Sidney, Countess of Leicester, and Lady Mary Sidney Wroth. By kind permission of Viscount De L'Isle from his private collection.
- Plate 3          Letter from Lady Barbara Gamage Sidney to Sir Robert Cecil with autograph signature, 24 August 1601, Cecil Papers 87/138. Reproduced by courtesy of the Marquess of Salisbury.
- Plate 4          Letter from Sir Robert Sidney to Lady Barbara Gamage Sidney, undated [late July 1595?], La.II.635.f.18. Reproduced by permission of Edinburgh University Library.
- Plate 5          Letter from Sir Robert Sidney to Lady Barbara Gamage Sidney, 5 August 1588, U1475 C81/7. By kind permission of Viscount De L'Isle from his private collection.
- Plate 6          Letter from Robert Sidney, Viscount Lisle, to Barbara Gamage Sidney, Viscountess Lisle, 9 August 1615, U1475 C81/263. By kind permission of Viscount De L'Isle from his private collection.
- Plate 7          Letter from Robert Sidney, first Earl of Leicester, to Barbara Gamage Sidney, Countess of Leicester, 26 September 1620, U1500 C1/20. By kind permission of Viscount De L'Isle from his private collection.
- Plate 8          Penshurst Place in 1747 by George Vertue. From Edward Hasted, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent* (Canterbury, 1778–99). Reproduced by permission of the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds.

# Sidney Family Tree



# Sidney Family Alliances Reflected in Correspondence

**Mary Dudley Sidney**, daughter of John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, and Jane Guildford

**Surviving siblings –**

Ambrose, Earl of Warwick, m. (1) Anne Whorwood (2) Elizabeth Talboys  
(3) Anne Russell, daughter of Francis Russell, Earl of Bedford, and Margaret St John

Robert, Earl of Leicester, m. (1) Amy Robsart (2) Douglas Howard, Lady Sheffield [marriage disavowed by Leicester], mother of Sir Robert Dudley (3) Lettice Knollys Devereux, Countess of Essex, mother of Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, and Penelope Devereux, Lady Rich Katherine m. Henry Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon

**Henry Sidney**, son of Sir William Sidney and Anne Pakenham

**Surviving siblings –**

Mary m. Sir William Dormer and was the mother of Jane Dormer Suárez de Figueroa, Duchess of Feria

Lucy m. Sir James Harington and was the grandmother of Sir John Harington and Lucy Harington Russell, Countess of Bedford

Anne m. Sir William Fitzwilliam

Frances m. Thomas Radcliffe, Earl of Sussex

**Barbara Gamage Sidney**, daughter of John Gamage of Coity and Gwenllian, daughter of Sir Thomas ap Jenkin Powell of Glynogwr

**Paternal aunts –**

Margaret m. Lord William Howard, Lord Effingham, and was the mother of Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham, Lord Admiral, and of Douglas Howard, Lady Sheffield, mother of Sir Robert Dudley

Catherine m. Thomas Stradling, and was the mother of Edward Stradling of St Donat's

Mary m. Matthew Herbert of Cardiff

Elizabeth m. Richard Wogan of Wiston



**Susan de Vere Herbert, Countess of Montgomery**, daughter of Edward de Vere, seventeenth Earl of Oxford, and Anne Cecil; granddaughter of William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and Mildred Cooke Cecil; m. Philip Herbert, Earl of Montgomery

**Surviving Siblings –**

Elizabeth m. William Stanley, Earl of Derby

Bridget m. Francis Norris, Baron Norris of Rycote, later Earl of Berkshire

Henry (son of Edward de Vere and his second wife Elizabeth Trentham), eighteenth Earl of Oxford

**Mary Talbot Herbert, Countess of Pembroke**, daughter of Gilbert Talbot, seventh Earl of Shrewsbury, and Mary Cavendish Talbot; granddaughter of Bess of Hardwick, m. William Herbert, Earl of Pembroke

**Surviving Siblings –**

Elizabeth m. Henry Grey, Lord Ruthin, later Earl of Kent

Alathea m. Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel

**Dorothy Percy Sidney, Countess of Leicester**, daughter of Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland, and Dorothy Devereux Percy, m. Robert Sidney, later second Earl of Leicester

**Surviving Siblings –**

Algernon, tenth Earl of Northumberland

Henry, Baron Percy of Alnwick

Lucy m. James Hay, Viscount Doncaster, later first Earl of Carlisle

# Introduction

Robert Sidney, first Earl of Leicester, is known in literary circles primarily for his relationship to three more famous writers: he was the younger brother of Sir Philip Sidney and of Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, and father of Lady Mary Sidney Wroth. His own writing skills are evident in his recently discovered poems and in his extensive correspondence. More than 3400 letters by and to him are extant, most of them business and political letters. His personal correspondence, and particularly these affectionate letters to his wife, reveal a man who strives to live up to the example of his celebrated brother Philip. He is deeply concerned about his wife and children, frustrated in his job, and anxious to fund the extravagant hospitality and display that he believes to be necessary to his position as a Sidney. His letters home are particularly appropriate to this series, for they trace a conflicted relationship with Queen Elizabeth and demonstrate the importance of female kinship networks to male courtiers (sketched out in the chart of Family Alliances). These family letters, and those of his agent Rowland Whyte, also give us vivid details about the childhood of his eldest daughter, Mary (here often ‘Mall’ or ‘Malkin’). We thus have more documentation for the early life of Lady Wroth than for almost any other early modern writer.

This collection of 332 letters from Robert to his wife Barbara Gamage is a remarkable record of an affectionate marriage that endured long absences, the deaths of eight of their eleven children, a frustrating lack of political advancement, crushing financial problems, and the declining health that comes with advancing years.<sup>1</sup> Yet Robert Sidney’s marriage on 23 September 1584 to the Welsh heiress Barbara Gamage nearly did not happen. Her father, John Gamage of Coity Castle in Glamorgan, had died on 8 September, leaving Barbara as his sole heir. (Her cousin Charles Howard, Lord Admiral, later claimed that he had been ‘a very dear friend unto her’ by preventing Gamage from leaving his estate ‘to his bastards’.)<sup>2</sup> Immediately after her father’s death there was a contest for her hand – and for her extensive properties in Wales. Although she had recently come of age, Sir Edward Stradling, her cousin and guardian, took possession of Coity and took her home to St Donat’s in

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<sup>1</sup> Of this total correspondence, 314 letters are printed here; the eighteen letters dealing solely with accounts are summarized below.

<sup>2</sup> *Stradling Correspondence*, 4.

Glamorgan. Another cousin, Sir Walter Raleigh, wrote 'in haste' from the court to say that Stradling had ignored three letters from the Queen commanding 'that you suffer not my kinswoman to be bought and sold in Wales' without Elizabeth's permission and 'the consent or advice' of Howard and Raleigh himself.<sup>3</sup> Finances seem to be the primary focus here, with the emphasis on Barbara's marriage as a matter of being 'bought and sold'.

Her suitors included three cousins, Thomas Jones of Abermarlis, Sir James Whitney of Whitney, and Herbert Croft of Croft Castle, who was favoured by Cecil and by the Queen. Henry Herbert, second Earl of Pembroke, head of the powerful Herbert family in Wales and England, was supporting another suitor, his young brother-in-law Robert Sidney, son of Sir Henry Sidney, then President of the Council of Wales and the Marches. Sir Francis Walsingham wrote on behalf of the Queen ordering Stradling to bring Barbara to the court and forbidding her to contract a marriage, but when he was secretly informed that Stradling intended to favour Robert Sidney he was delighted: 'Mr Raleigh, and the rest of the young gentlewoman's kinsfolk, do greatly desire it.'<sup>4</sup> Walsingham later told Stradling not to worry about the 'blustering words' of Croft's supporters, for 'you shall not lack friends to defend you'. All Stradling could be charged with, Walsingham said, was not bringing Barbara to court before her marriage – but that letter from the Queen had not reached him until two hours after the marriage had been performed at St Donat's in the presence of the Earl of Pembroke, Stradling, and other family members. The timing was so suspiciously convenient for Robert Sidney that it is likely that one of his powerful supporters in Wales arranged for the messenger to be delayed; the ruse saved face for everyone. Walsingham reported that 'there is no fault laid upon you by her Majesty; the marriage being generally well liked of'.<sup>5</sup> The Countess of Warwick, Robert's aunt, expressed the Sidney family's joy, thanking Stradling for 'the great favour . . . showed my nephew Sidney, by whose free consent and furtherance that match was so well made up, which I hope shall be very happy to them both'.<sup>6</sup>

There was some delay in processing Barbara's inheritance, but on 6 February 1585 an indenture was drawn up granting Barbara and Robert Sidney all the lands of her father (T327/8).<sup>7</sup> These Welsh lands were to provide approximately half of the Sidneys' income throughout their lives.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 29. Lady Mary Wroth later dramatized these events in Bersindor's marriage in *The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, ed. Josephine A. Roberts (Tempe, AZ: RETS/MRTS, 1995), 499.

<sup>5</sup> *Stradling Correspondence*, 30.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>7</sup> All manuscript references are to the De L'Isle and Dudley U1475 papers at the Centre for Kentish Studies, unless otherwise noted.

Those who had backed Croft may have been more easily reconciled to the marriage by the obvious and continuing affection between Robert and Barbara Sidney. No record exists that the young people were acquainted before their marriage, but since they moved in some of the same circles, it seems likely. Theirs may well have been a love match, for Robert's letters home are best known for their affection. In the first decade of their marriage he calls his wife 'my dear Barbara' or 'my sweet wench'; after 1594 his standard greeting is 'Sweetheart'.<sup>8</sup> He frequently asks her to kiss the children for him; he tells her that he would not want 'the ill husbands at the Court' to know he is sending her the 'first dainties', lest they think he is too fond a husband; and he writes in the midst of a particularly acute financial crisis that if worse comes to worst, 'you have plate yet left in the house, and I do not love my plate so well as I love my wife' (Letter 48; Letter 121).

Barbara kept most of the letters Robert sent during his long absences on the Queen's business – he served under his uncle Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, at Tilbury when the Spanish Armada threatened and then later in the Low Countries; Elizabeth sent him on embassy to the King of Scotland and the King of France, and he was, for many years Governor of Flushing; he later served as Lord Chamberlain to Queen Anne, a position that kept him in England but rarely allowed him to live at Penshurst.<sup>9</sup> Barbara thus served as a family archivist. Robert's business correspondence was also saved, carefully docketed and filed by secretaries, but the extensive correspondence with his brothers, sister, and children that he mentions in his letters, including all his letters from Barbara, has been lost, possibly by his own negligence – or at least by the difficulty in saving personal letters during his travels.<sup>10</sup> His

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. similar affectionate greetings in *The Dering Love Letters: A Collection of 17th Century Love Letters Sent by Sir Edward Dering to His Beloved Wife Unton*, ed. Alison Cresswell (Maidstone, Kent: Heritage Services Group, Kent County Council, Arts & Libraries, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> On his political career, see Millicent V. Hay, *The Life of Robert Sidney, Earl of Leicester (1563–1626)* (Washington, DC: Folger Books, 1984), and Michael G. Brennan, Noel J. Kinnamon, and Margaret P. Hannay, 'Robert Sidney, the Dudleys, and Queen Elizabeth', in *Elizabeth I: Always Her Own Free Woman*, ed. Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney, and Debra Barrett-Graves (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 20–42.

<sup>10</sup> Only a handful of family letters survives. Approximately half of the more than 2300 extant letters to Robert Sidney are from his lieutenant governors in Flushing, Sir William Browne (1594–1611) and then Sir John Throckmorton (1611–16). Other correspondents on the Continent include Prince Maurice of Nassau; Philippe de Mornay, Sieur du Plessis-Marly; Hubert Languet; Louise de Coligny, widow of William of Nassau, at whose home Robert sometimes stayed in Flushing; Marguerite Richardot, Madame Dompres (daughter of Jean Grusset Richardot, president of the Council of Artois and negotiator of the treaty between James VI and I and Spain), who befriended Robert Sidney and his son; and Elizabeth Stuart, Queen of Bohemia, whom he accompanied on her marriage journey. The 'Inventory' includes portraits of Maurice of Nassau, Count Philip of

correspondence with Barbara was preserved at Penshurst by later generations of Sidneys and evidently read by members of the family throughout the centuries. In the mid-eighteenth century, for example, William Perry, husband of Elizabeth Sidney, heir to the sixth Earl of Leicester, showed a letter to George Vertue, who recorded in his notebook written in about 1748 that 'Squire Perry has a letter from Sir. Robert Sidney to his Lady. wherein he desires her to go to Mr Gerrats [Marcus Gheeraerts II] to pay him for her picture and the children's – so long done, and unpaid –, this was Lady Gamage – about 1597'.<sup>11</sup> This letter, referring to the portrait of a pregnant Barbara Sidney and six of her children, was removed from the collection, probably by Perry himself, and has since been lost. The portrait itself now hangs in the Solar at Penshurst along with other family portraits, including a portrait of Robert Sidney, and one of Barbara Sidney with her daughter Lady Mary Wroth (see illustrations). Other physical evidence of their residence remains in the long gallery that they built, which is decorated on the brick exterior wall with the Sidney porcupine and the Gamage griffin. Robert and Barbara Sidney thus remain very much a presence at their home of Penshurst.

Penshurst Place was granted by Edward VI to Sir William Sidney, Robert Sidney's grandfather, in 1552, and has since remained the primary home of the Sidney family. Sir Henry Sidney, Robert's father, added an entrance tower with Edward's coat of arms and a plaque commemorating that gift. This was a reminder to all who entered of the Sidneys' status, but it was also a mark of affection, for Henry Sidney had been raised with Edward. (His mother, Anne Pakenham, was Edward's governess, and his father was the chamberlain who administered his household.) The young King died in Henry Sidney's arms. Had Edward lived, the Sidneys would have no doubt been favoured with wealth and titles. (Their expectations had been so high that John Dudley, Duke of Northumberland, then the most powerful noble in England, allowed the untitled Henry Sidney to marry his daughter Mary on 29 March 1551, though his younger daughter Katherine was married to Henry Hastings, Earl of

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Nassau, and the Princess of Orange, as well as portraits of 'Madam de Dompres, three daughters of hers ... one in her nun's habit and a niece of hers', in 'Inventory', U1500 E120, fol. 7r–v. See Germaine Warkentin, 'Jonson's Penshurst Reveal'd? A Penshurst Inventory of 1623', *Sidney Journal* 20 (2002): 1–25.

<sup>11</sup> Included in 'Inventory' (fol. 13v): 'A fair large table in which are the pictures of my lady of Leicester at length with child and six of her children' (*Vertue Notebooks Volume V*, Walpole Society, vol. 26 [1938], 75). Later in the same series (*Vertue Notebooks VI*, Walpole Society, vol. 30 [1955], 147), Vertue again refers to that letter: 'a Letter amongst Sydney Letters not yet printed wherein S<sup>r</sup> Rob<sup>t</sup> Sydney writes to his wife to go to M<sup>r</sup> Garrets painter to pay him for *her picture* [Lady Gamage *added in margin*] & children, done by him, 1598'. We are grateful to Karen Hearn for these references. See also Karen Hearn, *Marcus Gheeraerts II: Elizabethan Artist in Focus* (London: Tate Publishing, 2002), 51.

Huntingdon, who had a distant claim to the English throne.) But as it turned out, the Sidneys were implicated in Northumberland's efforts to have Lady Jane Grey succeed Edward; when Mary Tudor successfully asserted her right to the throne, the Dudley family fell abruptly from one of the highest positions in the kingdom. All the Dudleys were stripped of their titles and vast properties; Northumberland, Lady Jane, and her husband Guildford Dudley were executed; and the four surviving sons were imprisoned. The younger John Dudley, Earl of Warwick, died at Penshurst shortly after his release from prison. Of Northumberland's wealth and power nothing remained, and of his thirteen children, only five survived his fall – three sons (Ambrose, Robert, and Henry) and two daughters (Mary and Katherine). Jane Guildford Dudley, Duchess of Northumberland, died shortly thereafter, appointing her son-in-law Henry Sidney as her executor. To him she left magnificent green velvet hangings embroidered in gold with the Guildford and Dudley arms, and a 'foot carpet of Turkey work'.<sup>12</sup> These hangings would have been a constant reminder to the Sidney children of their family's fallen greatness.

During these dark years, Henry Sidney was the sole hope of the Dudley family, though he later said that he was 'neither liking nor liked as I had been'.<sup>13</sup> He adroitly won a position with Queen Mary, was sent to negotiate her marriage with Philip of Spain, and interceded with the king to free the three surviving Dudley sons, though Henry died shortly thereafter, fighting for Queen Mary in the battle of St Quentin. When Queen Mary died on 17 November 1553, Elizabeth came to the throne, and the fortunes of the Sidneys rose with those of the Dudleys. The Dudleys were restored in name and in some of their wealth, Lady Mary Dudley Sidney served Elizabeth at court, Ambrose was allowed to inherit the family title of Earl of Warwick, and Robert, the Queen's favourite, was later made Earl of Leicester. Both Ambrose and Robert Dudley were without legitimate heirs (except during the brief life of little Lord Denbigh, Robert Dudley's son), so the eldest Sidney son, Philip, was for most of his life the heir to two earldoms. Henry Sidney likewise prospered under Elizabeth, who appointed him President of the Council of Wales and the Marches (1560–86); he also served as Lord Deputy of Ireland 1565–71 and 1575–78. In 1572 Elizabeth offered to make Sir Henry Sidney a baron, giving him the lowest of the aristocratic titles. Lady Sidney, the daughter of a duke, had the bitter task of declining on his behalf, 'considering our ill ability ... to maintain a higher title than we now possess'.<sup>14</sup> If the Sidneys had hoped that this would induce Elizabeth to support them financially so that they could

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<sup>12</sup> Will of Jane Guildford Dudley, Duchess of Northumberland, 1554, probate copy PRO PROB 11/37/194–95v, printed in Collins, 1:34.

<sup>13</sup> Sir Henry Sidney to Sir Francis Walsingham, 1 March 1583, PRO SP 12/159/39v.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Dudley Sidney to William Cecil, 2 May 1572, PRO SP 12/86/33.

accept the title, they were severely disappointed. The Sidneys' (comparatively) limited finances and lack of a title were also to haunt Robert's career under Elizabeth.

Born on 19 November 1563, Robert was the fifth of seven children. By the time he was four, two of his elder sisters had died, Mary Margaret and Elizabeth. His elder brother Philip had gone to Shrewsbury School and Oxford, and by the time Robert was nine was travelling on the Continent. Robert was educated by tutors at home along with Mary, Ambrosia, and little Thomas, who was six years younger than Robert. The four younger children were close, and their proud parents even dressed them alike on occasion, as in 1571 when the girls had matching dresses of purple and orange changeable taffeta, and the two boys had cloaks in matching fabric (A36). After Ambrosia's death at Ludlow Castle in February 1575 this tight family group was scattered: Mary went to court at Queen Elizabeth's personal invitation and Robert went to Oxford.

Robert's famous older brother Philip was expected to take over the family estate and to have a brilliant political career; he was thus honoured by Protestant leaders on the Continent. His character and abilities were such that Henry Sidney told young Robert to imitate his 'virtues, exercises, studies, and actions' (Z53/22). Henry Sidney later said that he had three sons – 'one of excellent good proof, the second of great good hope, and the third not to be despaired of, but very well to be liked'.<sup>15</sup> Although he was always in the shadow of his remarkable older brother, no expense was spared in educating Robert, who was indeed of 'great good hope'. Like Philip he attended Oxford and then went on a tour of Europe. By this time his father, serving the Queen in Ireland and Wales, had delegated Robert's education to Philip. Philip made certain that Robert was educated by his own tutors on the Continent, including such prominent figures as Hubert Languet. In preparation for a life on the international stage, Robert became a linguist, learning not only the usual Latin and French, but also Dutch, German, Italian, and later Spanish. Philip, who encouraged Robert's love of music, made certain that he was tutored in singing at Christ Church, still the most musical of the Oxford colleges.<sup>16</sup> He also arranged for Robert to be introduced to important Protestant leaders, including William of Nassau and his son Maurice, who was later to become Robert's friend and ally in Flushing.

Philip, Robert, and young Thomas Sidney all served under their uncle Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, in the English campaign to free the Low Countries from Spanish occupation. After Philip was wounded in a skirmish

<sup>15</sup> Sir Henry Sidney to Sir Francis Walsingham, 1 March 1583, PRO SP 12/159/41.

<sup>16</sup> James M. Osborn, *Young Philip Sidney (1572–77)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 122; Croft, 48–54; and Gavin Alexander, 'The Musical Sidneys', *John Donne Journal*, forthcoming.

outside of Zutphen, his two brothers remained with him as his life gradually ebbed away. The intense mourning for Philip in England and in the Low Countries produced four books of elegies, as well as ballads, eyewitness accounts of his death, and Thomas Lant's engravings of the 700 mourners in the funeral procession. Robert was the chief mourner, accompanied by his brother Thomas; his sister Mary was represented by her husband, the Earl of Pembroke. Had Philip lived, Robert's life would have been unimaginably different. He would not have inherited Penshurst, of course, nor been appointed as Governor of Flushing in his brother's place. Nor would he have inherited the title of Earl of Leicester, after long years of lawsuits with Leicester's 'base son Robert Dudley', as Leicester termed him in his will.<sup>17</sup> (Young Robert Dudley's mother was Douglas Howard, daughter of Barbara Sidney's aunt Margaret Gamage Howard, so he was a cousin to both Robert and Barbara Sidney.) Robert would not have inherited the career or title that was to have been Philip's, but he would have retained a friend and ally who could have helped to guide both his political and his literary efforts. And he would not have felt so bereft. His emotional state in the years immediately after Philip's death is depicted in a painting owned by Leicester showing young Robert Sidney dressed in black and leaning heavily on a halberd, with helmet and gauntlets on the ground. Behind him a battle is portrayed in front of a fortified city, probably intended to represent Zutphen. Propped against a tree is a tilting lance, perhaps representing the courtly career that he had given up for the war in the Low Countries. The portrait accurately portrays Robert's state of mind at this time, for it is the very image of despair.<sup>18</sup>

Other family losses intensified his grief. His mother and father also died in 1586, shortly before Philip's death, and his only surviving sister was reported close to death in that year. Leicester died in 1588 and his other Dudley uncle, Ambrose Dudley, Earl of Warwick, in 1590. Thus, throughout the early years of his correspondence with Barbara, Robert relied on his mother's sister, Katherine Dudley Hastings, and her husband Henry Hastings, Earl of Huntingdon; and on his mother's widowed sister-in-law, Anne Russell Dudley, Countess of Warwick, who was particularly close to Queen Elizabeth. Other family allies at court in his own and the next generation were his own sister Mary and her husband Henry Herbert, Earl of Pembroke, and, in later years, their sons William Lord Herbert, later third Earl of Pembroke, and Philip, later Earl of Pembroke and Montgomery. He also corresponded with Frances

<sup>17</sup> Will of Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, 1587, probate copy PRO PROB 11/73/2-4 (copy also in PROB 1/1), printed in Collins, 1:71.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Goldring has made the probable identification of this portrait, sometimes identified as Sir Thomas Knollys, as Robert Sidney. See her "'So lively a portraiture of his miseries": Melancholy, Mourning, and the Elizabethan Malady', *The British Art Journal*, forthcoming 2005.



Walsingham Sidney, Philip's widow, who remarried Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex, and then after his execution, the Irish Earl of Clanrickard; Robert was, for a time, a follower of Essex and had extensive correspondence with him. In later years he corresponded with his niece, Philip Sidney's daughter Elizabeth Sidney Manners, Countess of Rutland. Barbara's cousin Charles Howard, Lord Effingham (in 1597 Earl of Nottingham), was another important ally in his positions as Lord Chamberlain of Queen Elizabeth's household (1583–85) and then Lord Admiral (1585–1618). All of these family members are mentioned frequently in Robert's letters to Barbara, although little of that wider family correspondence survives.

Barbara Gamage's childhood and education are undocumented, although tradition would suggest that she was raised under the guidance of her guardian Sir Edward Stradling. Heiress of the Gamage of Coity, she came from a cultured and literate bilingual Welsh family. Younger Gamage sons were sent to university in England. Her father was celebrated for his activity in promoting Welsh poetry. Famous bards such as Tomas ab Ieuan ap Rhys sang at her home, as well as at those of other prominent Glamorgan families in this literary and political circle including the Stradlings, Herberts, and Maunsells.<sup>19</sup> She was apparently bilingual in Welsh and English and may well have been literate in both languages.<sup>20</sup> Barbara, as is evident from this correspondence, was an intelligent woman who held full control of important domestic and estate matters; she was evidently also well versed in the basic medicine that was part of a woman's domestic duties. Robert frequently relied on her advice and depended on her care. For example, after an illness he told Sir John Harington, 'My wife hath been my doctor, my nurse, my friend, and my sovereign cure'.<sup>21</sup> Barbara was certainly trained, as were the Sidney girls, in household administration and hospitality, but she may not have learned some other skills common to English aristocratic women. Her childhood was probably much different from that of Robert's sisters, who both were given a rigorous Humanist education, emphasizing Latin and rhetoric, and were also taught French and Italian, as well as the skills of needlework, lute playing, singing, dancing, and archery. There is no mention of Barbara's knowledge of the classics, for example, or her needlework, and no hint here that she shared her

<sup>19</sup> *Glamorgan County History*, ed. Glanmor Williams (Cardiff: Glamorgan County History Trust Ltd, 1974), 4:564.

<sup>20</sup> Welsh gentrywomen of this period were perhaps more likely to read Welsh than English. There is a Welsh language letter from Peter Mutton of Flintshire to his mother in 1605, for example, and Richard Owen's 1552 translation of Vives' *De Instructione Feminae Christianae* (1523) that circulated in manuscript in gentry households may also be indicative of Welsh women's literacy. We are grateful to William Griffith and Nia Powell for this information.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Sidney to Sir John Harington, *Nugae Antiquae*, ed. Henry Harington (London, 1769), 1:122.

husband's love of music, although the King and Queen of Morea, who shadow Robert and Barbara in Wroth's *Urania*, are shown at a family concert.<sup>22</sup>

Barbara's world was not entirely unfamiliar to the Sidneys; Robert and his siblings had lived in Ludlow, Shrewsbury, and various other of their father's official residences as President of the Council of Wales and the Marches. That they knew and valued the Welsh bardic tradition is evident in Philip Sidney's praise of Welsh poets in his *Defence of Poetry*.<sup>23</sup> Barbara's pride in her Welsh heritage (and presumably Robert's pride in her lineage as well) is evident in the magnificent pedigree that she had drawn up in 1608, when their daughter Katherine was to be married into another prominent Glamorgan family, the Maunsells (U1500 F13). While we may be somewhat sceptical of the claims that Barbara was a direct descendent of Coradoc Vraych, knight of the Round Table, and of Paen Gamage who came to Britain with William the Conqueror on her father's side and of Jestyn ap Gwrgan, Prince of Glamorgan, on her mother's side, we can be quite certain that the names of her parents and grandparents are correct. Her paternal grandparents are listed as Robert Gamage and Joan Champernon of Devonshire (aunt of Sir Walter Raleigh), giving her an English grandmother. Her father is listed as John Gamage, Lord of Rheged and Coity. Her mother Gwenllian is listed as the 'daughter to Thomas paternally descended from Jestyn ap Gwrgan, Prince of Glamorgan and Morgannog'. There must have been some rivalry between the families, with Gwenllian's family emphasizing their more ancient Welsh lineage; even her Welsh name sets her apart from the English names chosen by her husband's family. In her pedigree Barbara is listed as 'daughter and sole heir' and her coat of arms is depicted on the left side in direct descent and parallel to the presentation of her male ancestors. The pedigree concludes with a second rendition of her coat of arms, this one some 12 inches square, surmounted by the Sidney porcupine and the Gamage griffin. The genealogy also explains Barbara's relationship to prominent families through her father's sisters: Margaret was the wife of Lord William Howard, Lord Effingham, and mother of Charles Howard, Earl of Nottingham, Lord Admiral; Catherine was the wife of Thomas Stradling and mother of Edward Stradling of St Donat's; Mary was the wife of Matthew Herbert and mother of William Herbert of Cardiff; Elizabeth was the wife of Richard Wogan of Wiston and mother of John Wogan father to William Wogan of Wiston. All of the eldest sons listed are described as 'now living 1608' and provided a network of influence for the Sidneys, like Robert's powerful Dudley aunts and uncles. The Sidney

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<sup>22</sup> Mary Sidney Wroth, *The Second Part of the Countess of Montgomery's Urania* ed. Josephine A. Roberts, Suzanne Gosset, and Janet Mueller (Tempe, AZ: RETS/MRTS, 1999), 29–31.

<sup>23</sup> *Defence of Poetry*, in *Miscellaneous Prose of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 76.

connection also benefited the Gamages. At least two of their Gamage nephews came to Penshurst as pages, and members of other Glamorgan families (Bird and Rice, for example) came as friends or as upper servants.

The Gamages were also well connected at the English court. Barbara's aunt Margaret Gamage Howard was one of Katherine Howard's ladies at court, and Margaret's husband William Howard, Lord Effingham, served as Lord Chamberlain for Mary and then Elizabeth, so it is not impossible that Barbara was occasionally at court with her aunt. Raleigh was another relative who took great interest in her and her marriage, as we have seen. Thus we know Barbara's social status and family connections, but we do not know where she grew up, how she was educated, how much of her early life was spent in Wales, or even if she spoke English with a Welsh accent. We can be fairly certain that she was not educated like her sister-in-law Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, however, because of her somewhat awkward signature, because no works by her are extant or referred to by contemporaries, and because Mr Bird, the children's tutor, contemptuously reproached Barbara with her 'want of education', as Rowland Whyte reported (C12/208).<sup>24</sup> Bird's angry remark may have meant merely that she was not as educated as he was, not that she was illiterate.

Robert Sidney uses a more affectionate and informal style in writing to his wife than in his business or political correspondence, and his rhetorical strategies suggest what he thinks is appropriate for her. There are none of the literary allusions, classical references, or clever word play that we might imagine that he used in his (now lost) frequent correspondence with his witty and learned sister, to whom he sent his autograph notebook of poems (BL Add MS 58435). Nor does he display the knowledge of classical and modern languages so evident in his political *Commonplace Books* (Z1/1 and Z 1/10).<sup>25</sup> He rarely discusses the details of his work in Flushing; sometimes he even mentions to her that he has sent 'news', or political reports, to his sister, or to his daughter Lady Mary Wroth. Instead he normally writes to Barbara in a simple, plain style, focusing primarily on family and personal matters, including occasional court gossip.

Because her side of the correspondence has been lost, we have no unmediated voice for Barbara, but we can sometimes deduce her words by Robert's reply, as when she has clearly accused him of extravagance when he borrows 1000 pounds from the Earl of Essex to outfit himself for his embassy to the King of France (Letters 22–24). He defends this as a necessary business

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<sup>24</sup> We are in the process of editing the lively letters from Rowland Whyte, which give political and family news and advise Robert on the best course of action to take at court (C12/1–289).

<sup>25</sup> See Robert Shephard, 'The Political *Commonplace Books* of Sir Robert Sidney', *Sidney Journal* 21.1 (2003): 1–30.

expense – and perhaps it was, since he won the friendship of the King – but when we look at Thomas Nevitt's accounts of his expenses we can see why Barbara might well have questioned his spending all that borrowed money on 12 new court suits, a magnificent cloak lined with sable, and the livery for his pages and footmen.<sup>26</sup> To Robert it was a reasonable expense, for his father appreciated the need for display and, as Governor of both Ireland and Wales, lived in a magnificent style. He had taught his son to emulate this display, telling him during his European travels that he would give him 'such a suit of apparel, as shall beseeem your father's son to wear, in any court in Germany'.<sup>27</sup> The lesson on the need to dress the part of the successful courtier was well learned, but as the masculine military honour culture embraced by Henry Sidney's generation was gradually replaced by the masculine ideal of the obedient courtier, such extravagance came to be seen as imprudence.<sup>28</sup> More importantly, Robert Sidney simply did not have the income to support such a display, and his intent to use it to win a position and title at court failed. Elizabeth was not impressed – nor was Barbara.

We can also deduce that they had some difference of opinion about childrearing. Robert was most concerned that young William was still with the women at seven, when he should have been breeched (put into trousers) and have begun studying Latin with a tutor. He also was adamant that she should leave the three older children at home when she went to join him at Flushing in 1597 (Letters 122–24). Whyte let Robert know the distress that his commands were causing his family, saying that young Mary 'every time she thinks of it doth fall aweeping, and my Lady when she perceives it doth bear her company. Mrs Mary came to me and prayed me to write to you for leave to come over to see your Lordship and that she was yet too young to part from her mother' (C12/80). Robert finally had little choice but to let them all come to Flushing. (The continued close relationship of Mary, later Lady Wroth, with her mother is evident in a striking mother–daughter portrait still at Penshurst. [See Plate 2.] Even more important for her development as a writer was this early exposure to the Continental culture and politics, later reflected in her *Urania*.) This difference in the Sidneys' philosophy of childrearing echoes throughout the correspondence, even years later when their sons are enrolled at Oxford but prefer to spend their time at Penshurst. Robert can command, cajole, or even plead, but in his absence he cannot force Barbara to make choices that might be good for their children's future but would take them from her. Robert's continual apologies for delays in coming home also imply some reproaches

<sup>26</sup> Nevitt, 'Memorial', fol. 2r.

<sup>27</sup> Henry Sidney to Robert Sidney, 28 (18?) October 1580, Z53/26.

<sup>28</sup> Lisa Celovsky, 'Hospitality as Sidneian Legacy', paper read at 'The Textures of Life at Penshurst Place, 1552–1743', Colloquium 7–8 July 2003, Penshurst Place, Kent.

from Barbara, as does his letter that begins, 'Lest you should chide me for not writing' (Letter 128). But he is equally eager for letters, remarking on occasion that he has not received any letters from her for several weeks and asking for news of home.

Could Barbara write? We know that she did send Robert letters, for he frequently refers to them. What we don't know is whether she dictated them or wrote them with her own hand. She sends her letters 'by Peter Brown' or 'by Foulkes', for example, but then so does he. These phrases just reveal the difficulties of a postal system dependent on sending servants to carry letters, or else finding someone who happens to be going in the right direction. There are more tantalizing clues. For example, Robert asks, 'I pray you put your hand to the presentation of Mr Vane to the parsonage of Coity', which may imply her writing or at least her signature (Letter 3). In another letter (Letter 35) he refers to a private matter (another pregnancy) that she had mentioned in the postscript of her letter, and there are scattered references to other postscripts throughout the correspondence. She may have written the postscripts like some other women, but the only known examples of her writing are a few signatures (C1/12; Cecil Papers 87/138; U1500 A13/3). The earlier signature 'Bar. Sydney' is more fluent than the later 'B. LiSle', which uses the capital 'S' in the middle and is printed in a large, scrawling hand that does indeed look more drawn than written, as Croft observes.<sup>29</sup> Perhaps she could write at least a few words, or copy out something that had been written for her. See, for example, Robert's instruction to write to her cousin the Lord Admiral, saying that he will 'set down what you shall say to him' (Letter 84). One particularly intriguing piece of evidence is a 1597 letter from Barbara Sidney written in a fluent Italian hand with secretary elements.<sup>30</sup> It is very tempting to believe that the hand is hers, but since the signature is so radically different from her other letters, the Huntington letter may be a scribal copy made for the estate files like a few other letters in Robert's correspondence.

If she did not write fluently herself, then who did write? Mr Bird the tutor? Mrs Lucretia the governess? Rowland Whyte? But Whyte's letters, though they occasionally convey messages from Barbara or present the viewpoint of the family at Penshurst or in London, do not constitute her reply, since Whyte also mentions letters from Barbara. Their children were taught to write in early childhood, for Robert thanks 'Malkin' (his affectionate name for little Mary) for a letter when she was about nine (Letter 87), and thereafter mentions letters from her and occasionally from his other children. Could Wroth or the other children have written on their mother's behalf? On at least one occasion in 1614

<sup>29</sup> Croft, *Poems of Robert Sidney*, 74.

<sup>30</sup> Barbara Gamage Sidney to John Stamer, 3 January 1597 (Huntington Library MS STT 1897). We are grateful to Germaine Warkentin for this reference.

Wroth did convey a message, although her statement implies that Barbara wrote as well, for Wroth says that her mother ‘remembers her best love to your Lordship and desires you to excuse her not writing’ on this occasion (C52).<sup>31</sup> Perhaps it is significant that the Queen of Morea, who shadows Barbara in Wroth’s *Urania*, is a loving wife and mother but is never shown in the context of reading or writing, unlike the Queen of Naples who shadows the learned Countess of Pembroke. We suspect that Barbara did have to employ an amanuensis, at least for formal correspondence, as on the frequent occasions when Robert asks her to write to people at court about his leave, about obtaining Otford manor, or about a position that he is seeking. She was also active in marriage negotiations. For example, he asks her to deal directly with Sanford, Pembroke’s secretary, about obtaining money for Mary’s marriage portion (Letters 140–41). These letters could have been dictated, as was appropriate for business correspondence, particularly with a secretary such as Sanford. Another hint that she may not have been able to write fluently is that Robert agreed to send letters of thanks to those who had stood as godparents at the christening of his child. Such a social occasion would require an autograph rather than a dictated letter.<sup>32</sup>

A separate question is Barbara’s ability to read. Reading was often taught separately from writing, particularly for women, and the evidence for Barbara’s ability to read is persuasive. Robert’s letters are sometimes intimate enough that it is difficult to imagine them read aloud by a third party. Another hint of her ability to read is that he sends her an open letter to deliver after she has seen it (Letter 82), and on another occasion asks her to keep the contents of the letter secret, implying that no one else should read it (Letter 167).

The question of Barbara’s literacy in English is also complicated by her Welsh background. None of the evidence seems absolutely conclusive, but we now think that she was fully literate in English but could not write easily, as would have been normal for a Welsh gentlewoman of the time.<sup>33</sup> Whether she read Robert’s letters privately or listened to them read aloud, his letters not only speak of his affection, but also reveal the importance that he put on hospitality as a form of honour. Robert’s instructions to his wife all involve this enactment of nobility. He knew how a noble household should be run

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<sup>31</sup> Margaret Arnold has recently discovered another letter from Wroth to her father, 19 March 1613 (University of Kansas Library, Crawford MS 177), this one about her jointure.

<sup>32</sup> James Daybell, ‘Female Literacy and the Social Conventions of Women’s Letter-Writing in England, 1540–1603’, in *Early Modern Women’s Letter Writing, 1450–1700*, ed. James Daybell (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2001), 64.

<sup>33</sup> Kate Chedgoy notes that the first extant Welsh woman’s writing is a letter written in 1603, half written by a secretary, with more personal things added in her own hand. We are grateful to her for sharing in personal conversation her work in progress on Welsh women writers.