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The Life and Letters of the Lady Arbella Stuart

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by

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Abstract

Lady Arbella Stuart, a woman nearly forgotten in history and literature and yet a woman who lived a full and exciting life which is well documented in her letters to her family, friends and royalty (both Queen Elizabeth I and James VI and I). Arbella Stuart was born in 1575 to Elizabeth Cavendish and Charles Darnley and was brought up by her maternal grandmother, Bess of Hardwick. She was educated from birth about her proximity to the throne (there was a chance she could have been queen when Elizabeth died) and the important role she had in life. There have been several biographies written about Stuart over the years and most recently an excellent text of her existing letters by Sara Jayne Steen which is the primary source of information for this thesis.

This thesis examines Stuart's tone, rhetoric and style in a selection of letters written over the course of her life, where possible using manuscripts viewed in the British Library and Hardwick Hall, as well as the published text. Part of what makes Stuart such an interesting subject is her ability to manipulate her reader and assume different personae, depending on whom she was writing to. The young Stuart writes passionately and often without thinking first, putting her thoughts on paper and then quickly sending them off to the Queen and her advisers. An older and wiser Stuart writes from James VI and I's court and is very formal in her letters to the King. She is more relaxed when writing to her Aunt and Uncle and depicts court life in a lively informal fashion giving us a valuable insight

into what life as a courtier would have been like at this time. Finally the thesis examines Stuart's last letters written from imprisonment, the work of a desperate woman, fighting for her freedom.

Stuart, like most of us, had a multi-faceted personality. She was at times an apparently submissive and subservient subject of the King; a well read and educated woman who adopted the guise of humility and deference to those in authority, the patriarchal order in place. This thesis will depict the many different sides to Stuart and give a brief overview of her exciting and turbulent life, told through her letters.

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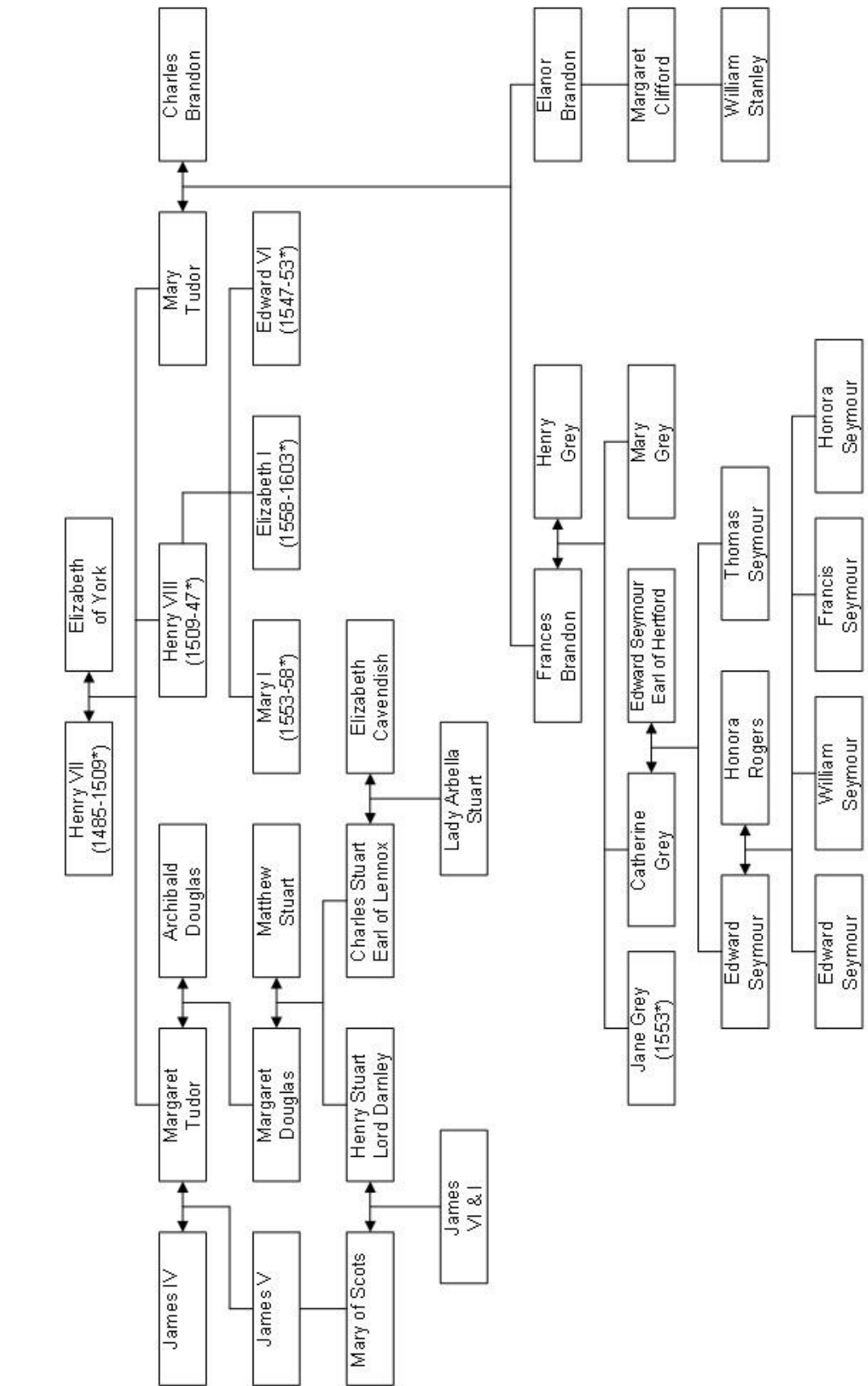
Chapter 1: Background history and letter writing

'Thus with my humble duty unto your Ladyship and humble thanckes for the token, you sent me laste, and craveinge your dayly blessing, I humbly

Cease. Frome Fims, the .viii. of February. 1587

Your Ladyships humble, and obbediente childe

Arbella Steward' (Letter 1, p. 119)



House of Tudor and Stuart

... as I should have adjudged my selfe unworthy of life if I had degenerated from the most renowned stocke whearof it is my greatest honour to be a branch ... (Mid-January 1602/03 to Queen Elizabeth, (6))¹

These lines were written by Arbella Stuart to Queen Elizabeth in January 1602/03 and forewarned of the dire future left in store for Stuart. They were written from her bedroom at Hardwick Hall where she had been imprisoned by her Grandmother, Bess of Hardwick. She writes passionately and poignantly in her defense of her actions, with the knowledge that others have been beheaded for causing less trouble than she has (including her aunt, Mary Queen of Scots). Arbella Stuart was a potential heir to the throne when Elizabeth died and due to her close connection with royalty she had to behave accordingly. She was a prolific letter writer at various stages of her life and it is these letters and her fascinating, turbulent story I will examine in detail in the following chapters.

In this thesis I wish to first examine some of the early letters Stuart wrote to Sir Henry Brounker (the Queen's servant) and Queen Elizabeth in 1602-03 and pursue why she wrote such politically inflammatory texts when she held such a tenuous position at court. I will also look at her involvement in the many plots that surrounded her throughout this period. My aim of the project is to compare and contrast Stuart's early rhetoric and writing style with her later letters written from court when she was emotionally stable and happy with her role as a courtier in King James' and Queen Anna's

¹ *The Letters of the Lady Arbella Stuart*, ed. by Sara Jayne Steen (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 126.

[NB: all references to Stuart's letters are taken from this text and will be cited parenthetically, giving letter and page numbers].

court. In the fourth chapter I address the final sad years of Stuart's life, her manner of dying and her battle with porphyria. I will briefly compare her struggle with her illness with that of other seventeenth century women writers, such as Dorothy Osbourne and Lady Anne Clifford.

Stuart's letters are different from those of other writers of the same era in that she writes as she feels, and often without thinking of the consequences. Her letters are as appealing to her audience today as they were 400 years ago, and I think this is partly due to her honesty – she says exactly what she is thinking at the time of writing, often to her detriment.

In order to understand a complex and compelling woman like Arbella Stuart it is important to first have some insight into the pressures she was under, from the moment she was born and which never abated throughout her life. The reader needs to be given her background history before casting judgement on some of the extreme behavior exhibited by Stuart during her turbulent life which I will proceed to do in this first chapter. Her story in brief sounds like a modern day soap-opera or one of Shakespeare's plays; her life involved relationships with imaginary lovers, plots to overthrow the monarchy, secret marriage in the dead of night, feigned illness, escape from house arrest and even cross dressing in disguise.

Some of history's writers were inspired by her, for example in June 1602, John Manningham wrote an anagram about Stuart which seems an appropriate introduction to this fascinating and largely overlooked woman in history. 'Arbella Stuarda: tu rara es et bella'(you are beautiful and rare).²

In 1752 George Ballard was inspired by work that Elizabeth Elstob had begun on forty learned women who had been forgotten by their nation. '[he] became indignant about the many 'ingenious women of this nation' who had been famous in their own time but who were 'not only unknown to the public in general, but have been passed by in silence by our greatest biographers'.³ Over 100 years after her death, Ballard wrote about Stuart and her life in a positive light. He disputed the author of her life in that years *Biographia Britannica* who declared, 'she was far from being either beautiful in her person or from being distinguished by any extraordinary qualities of mind'.⁴ Ballard suggests that this mistake by *Britannica* was made 'from too great haste in consulting his author. It is indeed observed in the letter he has referred to that her person was not very graceful, but then it is there remarked to her advantage and honour that she answered her lords at her examination with good judgement and discretion'.⁵

² *The Diary of John Manningham of the Middle Temple, 1602-1603*, ed. by Robert Parker Sorlien (Hanover, R.I: University Press of New England, 1976), Folio 26b.

³ Norma Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London: Pimlico, 2004), p. 73.

⁴ George Ballard, *Memoirs of Several Ladies of Great Britain* (Oxford: W.Jackson, 1752), reprinted and ed. by Ruth Perry (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1985), p. 241.

⁵ Perry, p. 241.

Letters and Writing

Before I give a brief history of Stuart's early life I will first describe the form of letters she wrote. 'While letters have always been recognized as important sources of cultural, political and social history, recent studies influenced by literary criticism have encouraged a new appreciation of letters as carefully constructed literary texts ... and has attributed equal authority to more informal modes of writing which give voice to women's lives'.⁶ Through Stuart's letters we gain a unique insight into what life was like for an educated woman in Renaissance England and the frustration she felt with her restrictions in society due to her sex and status as an unmarried woman. Barbara Lewalski states that Stuart's letters are 'noteworthy for their witty and ironic comments on Elizabethan and Jacobean court society; for their unconscious self-representation combined with highly conscious self-fashioning; and for their rhetorical strategies of self-defense, ranging from obfuscation to self-abasement to insistent self-justification'.⁷

But despite high praise for her letter writing style, her spirit and her humorous take on court life, Stuart was not acknowledged as a writer until many years after her death. However, her letters were quoted by biographers and historians throughout the years and 'had come to be seen

⁶ Rayne Allinson, 'These latter days of the world': the correspondence of Elizabeth I and James VI, 1590-1603' *Early Modern Literary Studies Special Issue* 16 2.1-27
<<http://purl.oclc.org/emls/si-16/allilatt.htm>> (para. 1 of 27)

⁷ Barbara Kiefer Lewalski *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 67.

⁷ Sara Jayne Steen, 'Manuscript Matters: Reading the Letters of Lady Arbella Stuart' *South Central Review* 11 (1994), p. 26.

as historical documents to be read for information about well-known political figures and events.⁸ Today Stuart's letters do rank highly in the female literary tradition and we can better understand the pressures that were placed on aristocratic women living in the later part of the sixteenth century through them.

One of the first techniques Stuart would have been taught was how to write correctly, as befitting her status as a member of the extended royal family. As Jonathan Goldberg states, 'the noble youth must write the noble script that sets his hand off from the ordinary hand'⁹. From a young age Stuart had been educated for command in the classical tradition of Greek and Roman learning, 'an education that had been extended to women by the early Renaissance humanists.'¹⁰ As expected, Stuart's formal writing style was exceptionally good. When she was living at court under James' rule the older royal children practiced their letter writing skills in affectionate notes to Stuart. 'She replied to each in letters whose handwriting was so exquisite that it might have been taken from one of the engraved manuals of calligraphy of the time.'¹¹ The importance of handwriting was emphasised by James himself in a letter to Prince Henry in 1603, where he commends his son on his learning. "I am glad that by your letter I may perceive that ye make some progress in learning ...

⁹ Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter: from the hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 119.

¹⁰ Steen, *Letters* p. 5. For more information on the classical tradition of learning please see Steen's introduction and Goldberg's '*Writing Matter*'

¹¹ G.P.V. Akrigg, "*Jacobean Pageant": or the court of King James I* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1962), p. 116.

although I suspect ye have rather written than indited it.” “Not that I commend not a fair handwriting,” he proceeds to explain, but he would have a letter “as well formed by your mind as drawn by your fingers.”¹²

James’s reference to letters formed by the mind is important to note. While Stuart’s italic style did stereotype her, placing her neatly into the female gendered style, often the tone and content of the letters were of a more masculine inclination. As discussed above, Stuart’s education was extensive and this was quite unusual for a woman at this time. ‘Her curriculum is unknown, but her letters reveal a strong background in classical literature: she read Virgil, whose Aeneid she could quote in Latin while writing a letter in haste (Letter 16 p. 158). Lucan, whose *Pharsalia* she cites in the closing of another letter (Letter 13, p. 155); and Plutarch, whom she describes as her ‘disgraced friend’ (Letter 12, p. 149). Her writing contains literary allusions and quotations as well as references to poetical conceits, allegories, the theater, and themes heroic and romantic.’¹³

In a culture where great importance and emphasis was placed on copying of manuscripts and the neatness of style and script, Stuart was highly regarded. In *Writing Matter* Goldberg states that ‘to produce a perfect copy is to reinscribe the social, to be socially inscribed; it shows one’s education into one’s place within an idealized and ideologically naturalized social

¹² James Ist, as quoted in Goldberg, p. 126.

¹³ Steen, *Letters*, p. 25.

order'.¹⁴ So Stuart did fit into her culture's prescribed role for women and followed the 'rules' in handwriting style in this regard - she wrote with a traditional female hand and style. As Caroline Sale states, '... secretary hand was subsequently gendered, however, "as specifically masculine" and professional, while the "Romane or Italian" hand was gendered as feminine – that is, as the hand that women had to of necessity use because they were not capable, in the words of John Davies, of "bruis[ing] a letter as men could do."'”¹⁵ Stuart stepped out of her prescribed role not in the style she scripted, but in the text she wrote and the actions she took.

The sense of self-justification that is noted by Lewalski is a theme that runs throughout Stuart's life. In her early letters she leaves no doubt of her anger and sense of injustice at being kept a virtual prisoner at Hardwick Hall by Bess and Elizabeth. She lamented her hard life in a series of long passionate letters to Brounker which worried the court and Queen about how far Stuart was willing to defy authority. One rambling exchange prompted Cecil to scrawl on the back of the letter 'by this Time you see I think that she hath some strange vapours to her braine'.¹⁶ Clearly Stuart was in great distress while writing these letters, but I tend to agree with Lewalski when she suggests that Stuart was quite sane and her 'madness offers a cover for otherwise unspeakable defiance of authority'.¹⁷

¹⁴ Goldberg, p. 157.

¹⁵ Carolyn Sale, 'The Roman Hand'. Women, Writing and the Law in the Att-Gen v. Chatterton and the Letters of the Lady Arbella Stuart', *ELH*, 70.4 (2003), 929-961 (p. 960). (Sale is quoting from Eve Sanders 'Gender and Literary on Stage in Early Modern England')

¹⁶ Steen, *Letters* p. 36.

¹⁷ Lewalski, p.75.

This defiance of authority was to come to the fore again later in Stuart's life when she married in secret in 1610, without the King's permission. She had had seven quiet years as an apparently submissive courtier at King James's court and it is easy to see how frustrated she had become in this role. With no funds to move forward and buy land or property, and little way out for an unmarried (and unlikely to ever be married) cousin of the King, Stuart felt resentful of her situation.

Even in her early letters to her uncle and aunt we gain a sense that the rebellious streak has not completely been left behind. As discussed previously, it was as early as October 1603 that she wrote to her aunt of the 'ever lasting hunting'¹⁸ at court which kept her from her books. 'Her playful banter, acerbic wit, ironic observation, and self-reflexive irony are irrepressible – a mask and escape valve for a highly intelligent woman who sees the absurdities around her with penetrating clarity but cannot alter or escape from them.'¹⁹

A good example of the sense of self-justification and resentment that Stuart felt towards James is most clearly seen in the petition she wrote to him defending her marriage.

I doe most hartelie lament my hard fortune that I should offend your Majestie the least ... and thoughe your Majesties neglect of me, my good likeinge of this gentleman that is my Husband, and my fortune, drove me to A Contracte before I acquainted your Majestie I humblie beseech your Majestie to consider howe impossible itt was for me to ymagine itt could be offensive unto your Majestie having fewe Dayes before geven me your Royall consent to bestowe my selfe on anie Subject of your Majesties ...

¹⁸ Steen, *Letters*, p. 186.

¹⁹ Lewalski, p. 78.

Besides never havinge ben either prohibited any or spoken to for anie in this land by your Majestie these 7 yeares that I have lived in your Majesties house I could not conceive that your Majestie regarded my Mariage att all' (Letter 91B, p. 254)

This quotation is taken from the final copy of the letter sent to James by Stuart. Like other contemporaries, she would spend a long time deliberating over what to say in a letter, especially if the recipient was a high ranking Royal. 'Just like other kinds of royal gifts, letters were intrinsically political, since their ultimate purpose was the consolidation and furtherance of diplomatic relations.'²⁰ In the draft of this letter Stuart has included additional text and taken out lines where she has reconsidered writing such inflammatory words. For example she tones down her feelings for Seymour in the final draft to be her 'good likeinge of' rather than 'love' and adjusts the line 'And I protest if your Majesty had vouchsafed to tell me your minde, and accept the free will offering of my obedience I would not have offended your Majesty' to become 'Whereas yf your Majestie had vouchsafed to tell me your mynde and accepte that free will offering of my obedience I would not have offended your Majesty Of whose gracious goodnes I presume so much ...', which makes this sentence far less likely to cause offence. This is a trend that Stuart developed throughout her life - she was inclined to be more careful with her words in her later years when in trouble, than when she was younger and overwrought with her impossible situation at Hardwick Hall.

²⁰ Allinson, p. 3.

This theory is supported by comments the Venetian Ambassador makes in his reports. He appears to be sympathetic to her situation from her early days at court. After Queen Elizabeth's funeral he somewhat scandalously states she is 'a perfect virago of a woman ... most lovingly received by his Majesty ... it is beginning to be said that should the Queen happen to die, this Arabella would forthwith be married to the King and crowned in her place.'²¹

However, by January of 1609 Stuart was fighting for her freedom after her first arrest. The ambassador sees her as being in a state of 'great melancholy by reason of the little esteem with which she finds herself treated, and further because she cannot obtain her proper income, namely such as would befit her condition.'²² This is reiterated later on in the document in which the ambassador's impression of Stuart is as being somewhat stubborn and unwilling to compromise with the King. '... The Lady Arabella answered at length, at first haughtily refusing, and representing the unhappiness of her condition once again bewailed how she could obtain none of the inheritance left by her father'.²³

These verbal tactics and clever rhetoric are part of the reason I find Stuart's letters such fascinating reading. Letters as a literary tool are interesting as several questions develop in the mind of the reader immediately. Who is the letter written to? Why? What effect would this

²¹ "Art X 'Lady Arabella Stuart and the Venetian Archives", *Edinburgh Review* (October 1896), (pp. 483-513), p. 492.

²² *Edinburgh Review*, p. 497.

²³ *Edinburgh Review*, p. 500.

letter have on a situation? What was not said in the letter? As we only have Stuart's letters as evidence as her as an author it is important to read them in the light in which they were written, bearing in mind the questions I have raised above. Annabel Patterson sums this up succinctly when she states; '... historical circumstances, timing, the nature of the audience, not only inevitably affect the interpretation of a work but demand of the writer (a demand not always met sufficiently) a special kind of cleverness.'²⁴ It is this 'cleverness' I hope to draw out from Stuart's epistolary style in the later chapters of this thesis.

Background History

When reading Stuart's letters it is important to understand the upbringing that Stuart had in order to understand her actions in later life. The following paragraphs will first outline Stuart's early life and letters and those who had most influence over her, then briefly examine her time as a courtier during James' reign and will finally look at her last years after her marriage and prison escapes

Arbella Stuart was born in 1575 to Elizabeth Cavendish and Charles Darnley.²⁵ Little is known of Stuart's parents, other than that her father

²⁴ Annabel Patterson, *Censorship and Interpretation* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1984), p. 10.

²⁵ Mary Lovell states in her biography *Bess of Hardwick: First Lady of Chatsworth* (London: Abacus, 2005), p. 250, that Stuart's two grandmothers were summoned to court to explain the marriage to Queen Elizabeth. The marriage had enraged Elizabeth who had not been asked for her permission for the union. While earlier biographers have claimed both Margaret Lennox and Bess were imprisoned over the marriage, Lovell cannot find any surviving record that Bess spent any time in the Tower. Chapter 4 deals in more detail with Arbella and the Tower.

died of consumption when she was six months old and her mother died when Stuart was six. Stuart was then brought up by her maternal grandmother, the formidable Bess of Hardwick, and was educated from birth about her proximity to the throne and the important role she had in life.

Stuart was a special child and was destined for an important role in the court and could potentially have been Queen of England. Charles Darnley was the younger brother of Henry Darnley, the ill-fated husband of Mary Queen of Scots and father to King James VI of Scotland. Elizabeth Cavendish was Bess's second youngest daughter, a placid teenager who was easily manipulated by her strong minded mother. The result of their union was Arbella, disappointingly for all concerned, being born a girl, but still a potential contender for the crown: '...she was the grand-daughter of two ambitious, designing women who had plotted the marriage. Bess herself, now the rich and grand Countess of Shrewsbury, with her eye towards the throne – not bad going for a small Derbyshire squire's daughter'.²⁶

The first view we have of the young Stuart is a portrait which was commissioned when she was just twenty-three months old, which still hangs in Hardwick Hall today. Like most of the paintings at Hardwick, the portrait hangs over the impressive tapestry on the wall.²⁷ At the bottom of

²⁶ A.L. Rowse, *The Tower of London – In the History of The Nation* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1972), p.143.

²⁷ Nigel Wright, House and Collections Manager in 2005, told me that this tradition of hanging the tapestries on the walls started at Hardwick in the 17th century. The tapestries

the painting is inscribed 'Arabella, Cometissa Levenox' which translated is 'Arabella Countess of Lennox'. A grave, chubby faced toddler stares seriously back at her viewers. She is dressed in formal court robes and wears the Lennox gold chains, with a doll (also dressed in elaborate attire) held in one of her podgy hands.²⁸ Even from this young age Stuart was already being trained for a life of royalty as a potential heir to the throne (see a copy of the portrait on page 18).

Not long after this portrait was painted, bad luck struck the toddler. Having lost her father at just six months, her paternal grandmother (whom she and her mother were living with), Margaret Stuart, Countess of Lennox died unexpectedly. With nowhere else to go, Elizabeth Stuart was forced to return to her mother's home in Derbyshire. Four years later Arbella was orphaned, by her mother's death, on 21 January 1582, after a short illness. With no other close family there was no alternative but for Bess to bring up her unlucky granddaughter in the best way she could, with little financial support from Queen Elizabeth: '... the queen provided the guardian no additional money for the child's support. Bess had protested that the expenses associated with a royal heir were high; after all, 'her better education, her servauntes that are to loke to her, her masters that

at Hardwick are considered to be the best in Europe, with over 100,000 visitors coming to view them each year. Bess and her descendents saw carpets and tapestries as far too expensive to use as floor covers, and instead arranged to have rush matting woven for the floors instead. Ironically, today the rush matting that is still used at Hardwick and scents the rooms authentically, is a huge expense to the running of the house and wears out very quickly, needing to be replaced every few years.

²⁸ Sarah Gristwood in her biography, *Arbella England's Lost Queen* (London: Bantam Books, 2003), p. 46, claims this doll may have been given to Stuart by Mary Queen of Scots, as a further indication of their close relationship. The doll has red-gold hair and the look of Elizabeth about her, a token of the family's support of the Queen.

are to trayne her upp in all good Learninge and virtue will require no small charges'.²⁹

Some critics have taken a very harsh view of Bess's strict upbringing of her young charge over the years, with Ian McInnes calling her a 'short tempered termagant'³⁰ and BC Hardy an '... incorrigible intriguer, and a trial to her husband politically as well as socially'³¹. It is interesting to note that Stuart herself was labeled 'a regular termagant'³² by the Venetian Ambassador, so perhaps the two women were more similar than Stuart would have liked to admit. A contemporary account of Bess describes her as a 'woman of masculine understanding, proud, furious, selfish and unfeeling'³³ and it is this type of comment which has branded Bess as a cold, hard woman through the ages. It is possible that the relationship between Stuart and Bess was not as black and white as popular opinion would lead us to believe. While in her old age (and she did live an extraordinary long time, dying on 13 February 1608 around the age of 80) she and Stuart were at loggerheads, this was not always the case.

As discussed earlier, Bess took her responsibilities as Stuart's guardian very seriously and ensured she was educated in the humanist tradition which would serve her well in later years at court. The humanistic programme of education enabled Stuart to be taught the latest

²⁹ Steen, *Letters*, p.17

³⁰ Ian McInnes, *Arabella: the life and times of Lady Arabella Seymour* (London: W.H. Allen, 1968), p. 101.

³¹ B.C. Hardy *Arabella Stuart: A Biography* (London: Constable, 1913), p. 35.

³² Karen Newman, *Fashioning Femininity and English Renaissance Drama* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), p.142.

³³ This is how Edmund Lodge, Antiquarian, described Bess; quoted by Gristwood in her biography, p. 58.

grammatical techniques and essential languages but also prepared her for her role in the hierarchical, patriarchal society into which she had been born. This high level of education was also a cause of frustration to Stuart in later years, when she was restricted by her gender in day to day court life: ‘...humanist women were again and again frustrated; although they might have the same scholarly achievements as men, they were virtually never allowed to leave the domestic sphere. As Vives insists, women should not ‘speak abroad’; they should not run schools; in company, a woman should hold her tongue’.³⁴

³⁴ Goldberg, p. 141.



Portrait of Stuart as a toddler. Photograph taken by David McCoy at Hardwick Hall.

There can be no denying that Bess did an admirable job with Stuart's education even though she was never known as a woman to hold her tongue. 'Arbella's intimate knowledge with their calligraphy and their history suggests that Bess had a number of letters from the Grey and Seymour family still in her possession, and had told her grandchild a considerable amount of history'.³⁵ Bess realized Stuart's potential early on and ensured she was given the best education possible. 'Stuart had been educated for command and the women of rank around her in her youth – Mary Queen of Scots, Queen Elizabeth and Bess of Hardwick – were active and aggressive role models. The paradox of the aristocratic woman whose sex signified subordination, but whose class signified authority, was more extreme in Stuart's case because of her birth and upbringing. Her letters reflect the tensions among these social forces'.³⁶

However, Bess was also very fond of Stuart and I believe (like her most recent biographer, Mary Lovell) that this affectionate side of Bess's personality has been neglected by past biographers. Her nick-name for Stuart (and other favoured grandchildren) was her "juwyl"³⁷ (jewel) and she doted on her granddaughter in these early days at least. 'Bess's ability to enjoy herself and provide enjoyment and entertainment for her children, retainers and tenants has been previously overlooked, as has her obvious

³⁵ Peter Handover, *Arbella Stuart* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1957) p. 139.

³⁶ Steen, *Letters*, p. 5.

³⁷ Mary Lovell, *Bess of Hardwick: First Lady of Chatsworth* (London: Abacus, 2001), p. 406.

warm affections for her husbands, children and grandchildren, and her passionate grieving at the loss of loved ones.³⁸

The first example of Stuart's writing is a note when she was just seven years of age. 'Arbella's own little note is not extant, but it is easy to see her Grandmother's instigation in the tactful message to Elizabeth, whose good graces she was to be at pains to deserve, even while remaining the pet of Mary Stuart'³⁹. By the time Stuart was around twelve years old she was received at court and it seems that the young orphan had grown into a well behaved, accomplished young lady. Charles Cavendish (Bess's third son) wrote to his mother about his niece's debut at court. Lord Burghley had spoken to Sir Walter Raleigh 'greatly in hir commendacion, as that she had the French the Italian [,] play of instruments, danned wrough [wrought, sewed] and writt very fayre, wished she weare 15 years old'. Unlike her Aunt Mary and Cousin James (neither of whom ever met Elizabeth in the flesh), Stuart not only met Elizabeth but was seated next to her at the dining table – a rare and unexpected honour.⁴⁰

Bess must have been delighted with her charge's acceptance into court society and that all her years of hard work had not been in vain. 'She was undoubtedly intelligent above the average, and took full advantage of the excellent education with which her Grandmother provided her; indeed, throughout her life books were an unfailing source of comfort and delight in even her darkest days, such as they could never be to one who did not

³⁸ Lovell, p. 394.

³⁹ Hardy, p. 35.

⁴⁰ Steen, *Letters*, p. 20.

truly love learning for its own sake'⁴¹. Literary and academic excellence were equally high on both sides of the family. 'Arbella's accomplishments were a credit to Bess, for notwithstanding her mere twelve years, she spoke French and Italian, played instruments and wrote with a very fair hand; all necessary attainments for a lady of the court'.⁴² Her paternal Grandmother, Margaret Stuart, had been a poet. Suggestions have been made since the mid-seventeenth century that Stuart may have been a poet herself. 'Bathsua Makin in 1673 commended Stuart's "great faculty in Poetry" and several later writers echoed this point, but no writing beyond Stuart's letters has been clearly identified as hers.'⁴³

Another family member who had literary talent was Stuart's cousin Elizabeth Grey, Countess of Kent, who wrote a medical book that was published in 1653 after her death; Stuart's cousin (and at one stage possible fiancé), King James, was also a writer of poems and pamphlets as well as speeches and letters. His mother, Mary Queen of Scots, was a prolific writer throughout her lifetime and referred to Stuart as 'ma niece' in her letters and may have played with her when she was a young child at Hardwick.⁴⁴ Mary was so fond of Stuart she left her a special book of hers in her will.

⁴¹ Hardy, p. 36.

⁴² David N. Durant, *Arbella Stuart – A Rival to the Queen* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1978), p. 160.

⁴³ Steen, *Letters* p. 57.

⁴⁴ Antonia Fraser refers to their relationship as being 'maternal' in her *Mary Queen of Scots* (p.73). Ruth Norrington states in her biography *'In the shadow of the Throne'* that 'Mary Queen of Scots immediately took a great personal interest in her and lavished much attention on her', p.25. This claim is supported by Susan Watkins in her biography *Mary Queen of Scots*, pp.185-86.

Unfortunately there is no factual evidence existing today which supports the above claim that the two played together. Nigel Wright remarked that 'Arbella and Mary's relationship had become romanticised over the years but the reality was that it was unlikely that they were ever in the same house at the same time'.⁴⁵ Sara Jayne Steen supported this when she replied to my email on this topic. "I concluded that much of the emphasis on closeness resulted from critics and biographers who wanted to read the story romantically, with a deep interconnection between the two Stuarts, the one imprisoned and the other later to be so. The biographers may have been right, but I can't point you to the confirming sources'.⁴⁶

But even if a relationship based on lineage existed, the impressionable Stuart must have felt some apprehension (at the very least) when Mary went to the block in 1587, the same year Stuart attended her first season at court. Ruth Norrington suggests Stuart was deeply affected by Mary's death:

The execution of her aunt was a great blow to Arbella. So much of her early childhood had been spent in Mary's company that her brutal death filled Arbella with fear and horror. Moreover, she was well aware of how precarious her own position was.⁴⁷

Elizabeth and Stuart's relationship deteriorated as they both aged (as it did with Bess) and Stuart became more independent and opinionated and Elizabeth less patient with her young potential heir. On Stuart's second trip to court, a year later, she disgraced herself somehow (it is not clear

⁴⁵ In conversation with Nigel Wright on 21 October 2005, while visiting Hardwick Hall.

⁴⁶ Personal email correspondence from Sara Jayne Steen, 10 October 2005.

⁴⁷ Ruth Norrington, *In the Shadow of the Throne* (London: Peter Owen, 2002), p.40.

what happened) and was sent back to Bess in Derbyshire as punishment. After such a promising beginning, Stuart let the power go to her head and was dismissed by Queen Elizabeth in 1588 for 'presumption'.⁴⁸

Stuart remained in Derbyshire for over a decade, with only adults for company and no-one her own age to talk to. The dismissal created tension between Bess and Stuart, and Stuart quickly got bored in the countryside and sought moral guidance from her studies. In a letter to Henry Brounker in 1602/03 she refers to her books as her 'counsellors and comforters'⁴⁹, a further indication of her dedication to study. She developed a close friendship with the Hall's chaplain, James Starkey, and confided in him 'that she could no longer endure being treated like a child and having her nose tweaked for punishment; he added 'oftentymes being at her booke she would breake forth into teares.'⁵⁰ The letters that Stuart wrote from Derbyshire during this period of imprisonment will be the focus of Chapter two of this thesis. In these informal letters we get a strong sense of the type of life Stuart lived on a day to day basis.

Stuart's life changed entirely when Elizabeth finally died and James took over the role as monarch of England as well as Scotland. Ballard records the Queen's death as 'calm and resigned ... on the 24th of March, Anno 1602 [1603], of her reign the 45th year, of her age the 70th.'⁵¹ Largely

⁴⁸ See Steen's *Letters* text for more information on the dismissal and the rumours of an affair between Stuart and Essex, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁹ Letter 15, p. 157.

⁵⁰ Steen, *Letters*, p. 27. For more information on James Starkey, see p. 41.

⁵¹ Ballard, p. 233.

ignored by Elizabeth during her lifetime, Stuart was ironically invited to be a principal mourner at the funeral – an offer which she refused.

The Lady Arbella Stuart, being of royal blood, was specially required to have honoured the funeral with her presence; which she refused, saying that since her access to the queen in her lifetime might not be permitted, she would not after her death be brought upon the stage for a public spectacle.⁵²

Elizabeth's death meant an enormous change in society as well as for Stuart. James declared magnanimously at a visit at Gilbert and Mary Talbot's home in Worksop on 20 April 1603 that he intended 'to free our cousin the Lady Arbella Stuart from that unpleasant life which she has led in the house of her grandmother with whose severity and age she, being a young lady, could hardly agree'.⁵³ So things appeared to be looking brighter for Stuart with a new monarch at the realm and 'stately and settled establishment of Elizabeth's day'⁵⁴ part of the past.

However, as the years passed Stuart began to realize that life in King James's court was not going to offer her the opportunities she had dreamed of (such as being able to marry) or provide enough mental stimulation for someone of her intelligence. 'As a learned woman who enjoyed and maintained her studies, Stuart was an anomaly at King James's masculine and sportive court. An unmarried woman without significant independent means since Queen Elizabeth and King James between them had absorbed her inheritance, Stuart was economically dependent and found it difficult to pay for the style of life she and others

⁵² Gristwood, quoting John Stow, p. 257.

⁵³ Gristwood, p. 255.

⁵⁴ Gristwood, p. 263.

considered appropriate to her royal rank.⁵⁵ She found herself almost as lonely and unfulfilled in the Stuart courtier's role as she was as a housebound prisoner at Hardwick. 'She found it an empty, futile life. All day was spent climbing in and out of gowns, trying on jewels, dancing, hunting, or exchanging endless chatter with people who cared for nothing but their own advancement.'⁵⁶

Despite being warned by her Aunt Mary to be more circumspect in her letters⁵⁷, Stuart wrote frankly and with refreshing honesty about her experiences in King James's court. She explains to her Uncle Gilbert Talbot the child-like nature of the courtiers and the games she endured, as a participant and spectator:

Whilest I was at Winchester theatre weare certain childeplayes remembred by the fayre laides. Viz. I pray my Lord give me a Course in your park. Rise pig and go. One peny follow me. Etc, and when I camm to Court they weare <as> highly in request as ever cracking of nuts was. So I was by the mistresses of the Revelles not onely compelled to play at I knew not what for till that day I never heard of a play called Fier. But even perswaded by the princely example I saw to play the childe againe. (p.193)

But life at court was not all about playing child-like games and wearing expensive new gowns that she couldn't afford. Queen Anna was a prominent theatrical patron and quickly established the 'performative culture of the Stuart's courts....in which elite women exerted influence and

⁵⁵ Steen, *Letters*, p. 139.

⁵⁶ McInness, p. 149.

⁵⁷ Steen, p. 184. I will address this in more detail in chapter three..

authority; that culture was profoundly inspiring for literary and theatrically minded women.⁵⁸

Unfortunately for Stuart, she had neither the funds nor the invitation to be a part of the performance in Queen Anna's first masque by the poet Samuel Daniel, *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses*. There could be several reasons why Stuart was not part of the cast. She had complained of an 'extreame pain of my head'⁵⁹ a few days earlier to Gilbert and may not have been feeling well enough to dance. She was also under immense pressure around this time with her suspected involvement in two plots (the Bye and Main plots) and it may not have been the appropriate timing for her involvement in court frivolities. It could also have been owing to her lack of funds. James, like Elizabeth, was unwilling to give Stuart many funds and she often refers to herself as a 'poore friend'⁶⁰ in her letters during this period. But most likely it was because it was difficult to place Stuart in an appropriate role in this court. 'A lady of the very highest rank by birth, but one who was yet unmarried (and one, moreover, from whom that politically significant invitation to the dance might seem to be a shade too significant?). All through her life at court – as throughout her life before it – this confusion about Arbella's status was to dog her path'.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Sophie Tomlinson, *Women on Stage in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 8.

⁵⁹ Steen, Letter 32, p. 189.

⁶⁰ Steen, Letter 21, p. 179.

⁶¹ Gristwood, p. 285.

Despite the confusion about what Stuart's role was in this newly established court, the reality was that she had an important position and she was offered roles that befitted her high status. For example she was asked to be the Queen's chief carver in February of 1604, and while she playfully suggests she did not excel at this task, it is important to note that these roles were offered to her above other courtiers and ladies in waiting.

After I had once carved the Queene neve[r] diner out of hir bed chamber nor was attended by any but hir chamberers, till my Lady of Bedfords returne. I doubted my unhandsomm carving had binne the cause thearof, but hir Majesty tooke my indeavour in good part and with better words then that beginning deserved put me out of that error. (Letter 43 p. 205 to Gilbert Talbot)

However, the extra attention that Stuart received from Queen Anna and other members of the royal family actually created additional tensions for her. Stuart seems to have clashed with several of the other women courtiers during these years of James's reign. The close living confinements of the court meant that gossip was rife amongst the individuals of this privileged society. We gain a sense of the seedier side of court life through some of the letters Stuart wrote to her Aunt Mary Talbot, before she was warned to be more cautious. She remarks how grateful she is not to be part of the Ladies idle gossip in August of 1603 (the subject of court talk at this time was Queen Elizabeth).

Our great and gracious Ladies leave no gesture nor tault of the late Queene unremembered as they say who are partakers of theyr talke as I thanck God I am not. (Letter 24 p. 181 to Mary Talbot)

Later the same year, she refers to the Ladies as 'monsters of our sex' and describes their behavior as:

...that wickednesses prevaieth with somm of our sex because I dayly see somm even of the fairest amonst us misled and willingly

and wittingly ensnared by the Prince of darknesse. (Letter 34 p. 191 to Gilbert Talbot)

As the years passed Stuart became more accustomed to her role in the court and quickly learned to play by the rules that were imposed upon her. While she occasionally let her guise slip and we gain a glimpse of the head-strong girl we knew at Hardwick, these occurrences were few and far between. The best example is in March 1607/08 when Stuart was asked to give her lutenist, Thomas Cutting, to King Christian of Denmark. She was unhappy about having lost her servant and points out to Queen Anna her frustration that the King could not find his own lutenist.

I shall beseech your Majestie to conceive, that although I know well, how farre more easy it is, for so great a Prince, to command the best musiciens of the world, then for me to recover one not inferior to this, yet I do most willingly ...(Letter 66 p.226 to Queen Anna)

In chapter three I will discuss in more detail Stuart's frustration with her role at court and the limitations placed upon her due to her poor financial status and her sex. We gain the best sense of Stuart's feelings through the informal letters she wrote to her relatives from the court, in comparison to her formal letters written to members of the court. It is through Stuart's formal court letters that we see her understanding of the conventions of the society she lived in and how she had to behave in order to attempt to achieve her goals. She became an expert manipulator. 'In the court letters, Stuart demonstrates both her awareness of the stereotypes of womanhood as conventions and her ability to manipulate them to her

advantage, which suggests that they did not altogether govern her sense of self'.⁶²

By 1610 Stuart had reached a point in her life where she no longer wanted to live by King James's rules and she unexpectedly married Sir William Seymour (without the King's permission or knowledge) on 21 June 1610 in the middle of the night with the bare minimum of witnesses to make the marriage legal. William Seymour was only twenty-two, the younger brother of the Edward Seymour whom Stuart had hoped to marry in 1603. Despite the age difference and haste of the marriage, there does appear to have been genuine affection between the couple that continued during their time spent in prison over the years that followed. Stuart wrote to Seymour when he was imprisoned in the Tower of London she under house arrest at Lambeth.

No separation but that deprives me of the comfort of you. For whearsover you be or in what state so ever you are it suffiseth me you are mine... I assure you nothing the State can do with me can trouble me so much as this newes of your being ill doth. (Letter 82, p. 241)

After the marriage, a furious James imprisoned both parties immediately, but this was not to stop the headstrong couple. In 1611 they escaped from their separate prisons in disguise ('with Stuart disguised in men's clothes like one of Shakespeare's cross-dressed heroines'⁶³) to meet in Calais. Stuart was caught by the King's men and marched back to London, where she was imprisoned in the Tower until her death by

⁶² Steen, *Letters* p.5.

⁶³ Sara Jayne Steen, 'The Crime of Marriage: Arbella Stuart and *The Duchess of Malfi*', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, XXII (1991) pp.61-76 (p.64).

starvation four years later, purportedly insane (I will discuss this point in chapter four).

In chapter four I will also discuss Stuart and Seymour's romance and examine the letters that Stuart wrote to King James and Queen Anna, in which she defended her actions, and - when this failed - tried to manoeuvre herself back into the royal families' affections. In this chapter I will also discuss Stuart's struggle with her illness, porphyria, and her last few years spent as a prisoner in the Tower.

Interestingly, despite her illness, Stuart received very little sympathy from James or her male court contemporaries. By marrying without the King's permission she had broken the social and moral code which was so important to adhere to in Jacobean society. While the women of the court were more inclined to be understanding (Queen Anna even sent Stuart a gift as a token of her support), the male quarter were not. Despite James being urged by Cecil and his own son, Prince Henry, to show leniency towards Stuart, the King was unrepentant. Stuart had, in his eyes, challenged more than social niceties, she had challenged his patriarchal authority – a far greater crime. A contemporary, writing to an English ambassador in Paris, summed up the general opinion:

I should tell you some newes of a secret marriage betwixt my Lord Beauchamps young sonne and the Lady Arbella, for which the poore gentleman doth pennacnce in the tower, and the Ladies hott bloud that could not lie without a husband must be cooled in some remote place in ye countrie.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Steen, 'The Crime of Marriage', p.68.

By the mid seventeenth century, however, public opinion had changed, and Stuart was seen by many as a 'saint and Protestant martyr'⁶⁵, not a woman who had violated social mores. In the next three chapters I hope to provide an overview of Stuart's fascinating and turbulent life as told through her letters. First I will look at her early years at Hardwick Hall and then compare her writing then with letters written when she became an accomplished and successful courtier during James' reign. I will finally examine her last unhappy years spent in the Tower with little hope of a better life (yet still defiant in the face of extreme opposition). 'Raised to rule and always aware of her rank, Lady Arbella Stuart was not silent or obedient, nor was she passive in response to the forces arrayed against her'.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Steen, 'The Crime of Marriage', p.75.

⁶⁶ Steen, *Letters*, p. 105.

Chapter Two: Arbella at Hardwick Hall

'... most unhappy of all living by continuing my exile out of your Majesties presence...' (Letter 6, p. 124)

In this Chapter I will look at the years that Stuart spent under house arrest at Hardwick Hall with her Grandmother Bess acting as her guard. The letters written during this extremely stressful period of Stuart's life are the ones that she is most remembered for, and in which she appears to speak her mind without thinking of the consequences or proof-reading her letters for grammar, spelling or tact.

By the time Stuart reached the age of 27 she was desperate to escape from her life of boredom and restriction at the stern hand of Bess at Hardwick Hall. The earlier letters we have from Stuart are exactly the kind of text one might expect from a well brought up woman in the later part of the sixteenth century. It is somewhat ironic that the very first letter which exists from Stuart was written on 8 February 1587/8, when she was twelve years old, and was addressed to her grandmother. The tone of the letter is exceptionally polite and deferential. She enquires after her grandmother's health and fills her in on her own well being and that of other members of the family. She even encloses the 'endes of my heare which were cut the sixt day of the moon, on saturday laste' (a country custom was to send hair trimmings to a loved one) and a 'pott of Gelly, which my Servante made' (Letter 1, p.119). This letter is fascinating as we get a good idea of the kind of early life Stuart led (for example she had servants from as early an age as 12 or 13); she clearly had a great deal of respect for Bess, closing the letter with 'Your Ladyships humble, and obediente childe, Arbella Steward' (Letter 1, p.119).

Obviously her situation had altered drastically by the time Stuart reached her mid-twenties, and it is these letters and the plots she was involved in during this period of her life which will be the main focus of this chapter. By the time Stuart was 27 she had spent some time at court (with both positive and negative results); lived through the tumultuous years after the execution of her Aunt, Mary Queen of Scots; and dealt with the deaths of the Earl of Essex in 1603 (to whom she was supposedly close) and her tutor, James Starkey – all very stressful events which took their toll on her mental health. As mentioned in Chapter One, James Starkey had an important influence on her life and was a friend as well as her Chaplain. He was one of the few people who were sympathetic towards Stuart and her hard life at the hands of Bess and who could understand her love of reading and writing in a way other, less educated friends, could not.

Ash Wednesday letter – ‘They are dead whom I loved, they have forsaken me in whom I trusted’ (Letter 16, p. 158)

The letter which will be the focus of the first part of this chapter is the letter written to Sir Henry Brounker on 9 March 1603, Ash Wednesday, the anniversary of the Earl of Essex’s death. I think this letter best reflects Stuart’s emotional response to her impossible situation and her feelings about the deaths of close family and friends over the years. But before we jump directly to Stuart in 1603, it is important to have some idea of the kind of life she led at this time and the different kinds of letters she wrote and why she felt compelled to write them. She would have had servants

to attend to her from a very early age and would have also had a scribe or secretary to assist her with her letter writing. Despite this she wrote many of her letters herself, perhaps due to the emotional release that writing gave her and pleasure she gained from writing in her own script.

'Like most aristocratic women, Stuart also had attendants who might write at her dictation or prepare fair copies of her drafts'⁶⁷ Other noble women also employed scribes or amanuenses whom they dictated to – which makes these letters less personal in the sense you cannot hear the tone and emotion that comes through so clearly in the informal writing hand of Stuart. Stuart continually underlines and scribbles out words in the way a scribe would not. As she remembers words (and even sentences) she wants to add in, they are included above and below the original text. At times Stuart even uses the margins of the paper she is writing on and writes at an angle to fit in all she has to say. An example of this is copied overleaf from a letter Stuart wrote in her informal italic hand to Gilbert Talbot in June 1609. 'Additions and deletions to the text are signs that should be indicated, because they are the woman's voice pausing and then revising, saying the phrase over again'.⁶⁸

As Stuart was forced by circumstances to write letters rather than meet people in person, it is interesting to hear her voice in her letters. Lady Arbella Stuart also contrasts the written text with face-to-face speech

⁶⁷ Steen, *Letters*, p. 107.

⁶⁸ Sara Jayne Steen, 'Behind the Arras: Editing Renaissance Women's Letters', in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts*, ed. by W. Speed Hill ((Binghamton, New York: Medieval and Renaissance/English Texts and Studies in conjunction with Renaissance English Text Society, 1993), pp. 229-238 (p. 236).

when writing Sir Henry Brounker about her fictional lover “I know and assure you I would rather write then speak my minde in a love matter especially of my owne” (Letter 16, p. 164), she asserts. “I would have delivered it you in writing and by my good will have seene you no more after till I had binne out of fear of blushing’(Letter 16, p.164). The importance of handwritten letters is even mentioned by Stuart herself in this letter to Brounker, when she comments that the Queen has commanded her by writing a letter to her Grandmother in her Secretaries hand rather than writing it herself.

Doth it please hir Majesty to commaund me by hir letter <in mr. Secretaryes hand> to my Grandmother, to be soudainely examined for avoiding excuses and will it not please hir, by a letter of hir owne hand to commaund that which hir Majesty cannot commaund as my Souveraine [e] but as my most honoured, loved and trusted kinswoman? (Letter 16, p. 160).

Unlike the Queen, Stuart had plenty of time to write her own letters, locked in her room at Hardwick Hall, denied permission to see her friends or attend the court. Stuart’s writing changes as dramatically as her rhetoric, depending on whom she is writing to. Her court letters are beautifully written in her formal presentation hand, compared to the informal letters to her family which are written in her informal italic hand. This informal italic handwriting deteriorates to being almost illegible in the letters written during late 1602-03 when she was at Hardwick Hall. ‘Even her handwriting may change from a formal presentation hand to a scrawl more consistent with speed and frustration’.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Sara Jayne Steen, ‘Fashioning an Acceptable Self: Arbella Stuart’, in *English Literary Renaissance*, 18 (1988), 78-95 (p. 81).

It is these letters of Stuart's which I find most fascinating, the letters which break out of the 'normal' pattern and have not been carefully proofread and revised. Through the angry and slightly hysterical voice of the 27 year old Stuart we gain a privileged insight in her feelings and thoughts (and perhaps how other women felt) during this period of her life. The fact that Stuart apparently speaks her mind truthfully and without being censored is of exceptional interest to readers today. 'As one historian has remarked, a rare opportunity granted to modern historians to eavesdrop on actual conversations of ordinary men and women of the past "is when someone at the time tried to silence them"'.⁷⁰ The frustrations that she goes through are communicated in a remarkably undated way and the reader responds to her plight with sympathy.

This point is further emphasized by Philip Kennicott;

Part of this may be the impression left by the letters that survive – the ones people thought were worth preserving – which were saved for historical, political or practical reasons. So when a deeply personal voice breaks through, it is all the more powerful.⁷¹

In Stuart's letters from 1602-03 we hear her personal voice lamenting her situation as prisoner of Bess, victim of the crown and her sex. Her letters were her only form of power and self-expression during her imprisonment. To begin with, her words are in her usual formal style; but suddenly the tone changes and 'the anger and defensiveness overcome discretion until

⁷⁰ Sara Mendelson (quoting Adam Fox), 'Popular Perceptions of Elizabeth' in *Elizabeth I: Always Her Own Free Woman* ed. by Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney and Debra Barrett-Graves (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 192-214 (p. 195).

⁷¹ Phillip Kennicott, 'The Lost Art of Elizabethan Letter Writing, Step 1: Make Inke', (2004) <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/article>> [accessed 29 November 2004] (para. 10 of 15).

even the pretence of politeness is gone'.⁷² For example, in the letter to Sir Henry Brounker (who was sent by Elizabeth to investigate Stuart's claims) on Ash Wednesday, her tone changes markedly from the formality at the beginning of the letter;

Sir as you weare a private person I found all humanity and courtesy from you and whilist I live will thanckfully acknowledge it, and with all humility and duty yeild hir Majesty more due thancks for choosing and after upon my humble suite reemploying you then ...
73

In this sentence she flatters Brounker, appealing to his vanity, as she recalls his kindness towards her when they met (which she will thankfully acknowledge while she lives). She goes on to say how thankful she is that the Queen chose Brounker initially, and then again, to perform the task of her interrogation. Stuart chooses her words carefully in this opening sentence - she wants to come across as 'humble' and 'dutiful' towards Brounker and the Queen and she does an admirable job of portraying exactly these qualities. The pattern which is clearly seen here of using two words to convey a point within a sentence was a technique commonly used in Elizabethan Theatre as well as letter writing. 'The periodic sentence is in effect a mini-drama, where the hearers' expectations are roused, held in suspense and finally satisfied'.⁷⁴ We see Stuart use this style when she doubly emphasises her 'humility and duty' to the Queen and the 'humanity and courtesy' she found Brounker had towards her.

⁷² Steen, 'Fashioning an Acceptable Self: Arbella Stuart', p. 82.

⁷³ Stuart, Copy of Letter from Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 135, ff. 130-38

⁷⁴ Sylvia Adamson, 'The Grand Style', in *Reading Shakespeare's Dramatic Language, A Guide*, ed. by Sylvia Adamson, Lynette Hunter, Lynne Magnusson, Ann Thompson and Katie Wales (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2001), p. 39.

Shakespeare would often use the same technique in his plays, especially when princes and courtiers are dealing with each other.⁷⁵

But these techniques lose their impact as Stuart warms to her topic - her unfair treatment by Elizabeth and unhappy state as virtual prisoner at Hardwick – and her writing becomes more passionate, angry and informal. The quotation below illustrates just how informal her writing has become, as her point is lost in the sentences which run on together (often without punctuation) to come to no conclusion at all.

First as I voluntarily confine my selfe to teares silence, and solitarinesse and submitt and desirously expect somme yet more apparent token of hir Majesties causlesly conceived displeasure towards me, so I determined to spend this day in sending you the ill favoured picture of my grieffe who went away so desirous to see the Picture of that most Noble gentleman the King of Scots whom because you know not the power of Divine and Christian love at Court so generally well as for hir Majesties honour and of the place, I would you did cannot beleieve one can comm so neere Gods precept who commandeth us to love our neighbour like our selfe...⁷⁶

The letter continues on in this vein for several pages. The reader cannot help noting the angry tone behind her words as Stuart defends herself. She repeats the 'I' in this letter, making herself and her opinions the central focus of her argument. Stuart laments her grief and spends her day verbally portraying her unhappiness to Brouncker (and it would surely have taken most of her day to write the lengthy seven thousand word letter). Stuart even makes mention of the time taken to write this letter on the second to last page when she says 'Now I have spent this day in

⁷⁵ For more details see Lynne Magnusson, 'Style, Rhetoric and Decorum', in *Shakespeare's Dramatic Language, A Guide*, ed. by Sylvia Adamson, Lynette Hunter, Lynne Magnusson, Ann Thompson and Katie Wales (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2001).

⁷⁶ Stuart, Copy of Letter from Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 135, ff. 130-38

pourtraying my malincoly innocence in the undeceiving black and white
...⁷⁷

As noted above, the main emotion Stuart conveys in this letter is anger, and interestingly she not alone in this. “Historian of emotions Carol Z. Stearn notes that before the end of the seventeenth century, “anger was the prerogative of those on the top hierarchies, (while) anger on the part of those at the bottom of hierarchies was so unacceptable, even shocking, that it was viewed not as anger but as madness”.⁷⁸ Stuart seems to have been a fairly highly strung person – despite several warnings from her Grandmother and Henry Brounker himself, she just simply could not stop herself from pouring out her unhappiness in the form of letters. ‘Letter-writing under any circumstances involves modelling a self in prose, but these letters are unusually self-focussed, and in them Stuart often casts herself in two related literary roles, the beloved woman and the heroic victim’.⁷⁹ In the formal letters, and even the informal letters written in later years, Stuart wrote with the diplomacy and rhetorical flair for which she became famous. There is little evidence of her diplomacy in this letter, however. Stuart would have been well aware that while she was writing to Henry Brounker (Queen Elizabeth’s servant), her wider audience would have included Elizabeth and high ranking members of the court. This letter was not written in a style or tone that was acceptable for a court letter:

⁷⁷ Stuart, Copy of Letter from Hatfield House, Cecil Papers 135, ff. 130-38

⁷⁸ Gary Schneider. *The Culture of Epistolarity: Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), p. 139.

⁷⁹ Steen, *Letters*, p. 40.

How many vaine wordes are spoken and who dare speake for me? How many wanton favours are earnestly and importunately begged, and who dare <humbly> and even once and no more, remember hir Majesty to cast hir gracious eye upon me at least with no lesse favour then I deserve? How many inquisitive questions are asked of me and how little inquisitive are my frends and acquaintance [to] what becomes of me? What faire words have I had of Courtyers and Counsellors and lo they are vanished into smoke[.] who is he amongst you all dare be sworne in his conscience I have wrong? and dare tell the Earle of Hartford he hath donne it? and the .2. counsellors they wrong theyr estate to shew such respect to kinred, greatnesse, and wisdomm, and richesse to lett innocence [and] be thus oppressed, and truth suppressed? (Letter 16, p. 173).

The quote above shows the highly emotional state she was in, which is indicated by sentences which run on into paragraphs without appropriate punctuation, completely unlike Stuart's usually carefully structured prose – and the content would certainly have made the court finally pay some attention to her. 'Her anger is open and straightforward and continues at length'.⁸⁰ In addition to this, Brounker was a very important member of Queen Elizabeth's staff and the tone and subject of this letter was not appropriate for someone of his status. Unlike Stuart's other letters, it does not appear that she has written several drafts of this letter or taken time and care to write carefully and tactfully – further indications of her distraught frame of mind during this period.

If Stuart's intention in this letter (and other letters during this period of time) was to obtain help from any friends she had at court, it failed miserably. 'Had such pieces remained at Hardwick, they might well have provided the catharsis of free-writing and done no more; had Stuart remodelled them, as she did her later letters, she might have made a

⁸⁰ Steen, *Letters*, p. 39.

reasonable case ... however, the writings went to court and damaged her in the eyes of those who could have helped her'.⁸¹ It is evident when reading Stuart's letters that from an early age she created a different persona for herself, depending on whom she was writing to. In the letters of 1602-03 she temporarily forgets to put on her persona as potential royal heir and writes an emotional, politically inflammatory text, which she is well aware will be read by most of the court. The alternative theory is that she deliberately decided to not play the political game which was expected of her and made a conscious decision to write these letters in order to gain the attention she was seeking. We will never be sure exactly why Stuart wrote these letters and can only assume she was overcome by her illness (acute intermittent porphyria)⁸² or had decided she could no longer put up with her situation and the only option left was to write to the court.

Stuart's Rhetoric

Stuart's most recent biographer, Sarah Gristwood, takes a slightly different view to Stuart's earlier biographers and sees Stuart as being obsessed with rhetoric. 'Arbella seems to have loved words for their own sake; an Elizabethan tendency that makes her letters all the harder to assess across a distance of four centuries. They could well be taken as more baffling, more eccentric than they should be – unless you compare them

⁸¹ Steen, 'Fashioning', p. 83.

⁸² For more information on porphyria see Sara Jayne Steen's article 'How Subject to Interpretation: Lady Arbella Stuart and the Reading of Illness', in *Early Modern Women's Letter Writing, 1450-1700* ed. by James Daybell (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), pp. 109-126. Steen argues that Stuart suffered from this illness during periods of her life. Porphyria is characterized by attacks of abdominal pain, stomach and liver bloating, muscle pain and weakness and mental shifts from depression and excitement to delusion. I will address Stuart's porphyria in more detail in chapter four of the thesis.

with one of the queen's own elaborate letters, or an allusion-packed speech in a Shakespeare play'.⁸³ Her style in this letter (letter 16 in Steen's text) can be compared with parts of Sir Philip Sidney's *The Arcadia* (published by Sidney's sister in 1590) which Stuart would almost certainly have read. The language she chooses to portray her impossible situation (which she fears is driving her mad, or so she claims to Brounker) is remarkably similar to Sidney's words. For example Stuart writes:

Secondly being allowed no company to my likeing and finding this the best excuse to avoid the tedious conversation I am bound to, I thinck the time best spent in tiring you with the idle conceits of my travelling minde till it makes you ashamed to see into what a scribbling melancholy (which is a kinde of madness and there are severall kindes of it) you have brought me and leave me, if you leave me till I be my owne woman and then your trouble and mine too will cease... (Letter 16, p. 168)

When comparing this with Sidney's style and word choice in *The Arcadia* there are distinct word repetitions and similar style of rhetoric, though Sidney's style is more balanced and controlled;

Therefore, to trouble you no longer with my tedious but loving words, if either you remember what you are, what you have been, or what you must be; if you consider what it is that moves you, or for what kind of creature you are moved, you shall find the cause so small, the effects so dangerous, yourself so unworthy to run into the one or to be driven by the other, that I doubt not I shall quickly have occasion rather to praise you for having conquered it than to give you any further counsel how to do it.⁸⁴

Both writers (or speakers) emphasize their presence in the text with the use of the words 'I' and 'my' making them the central focus. In Sidney's text Pyrocles uses many qualifying clauses and long balanced sentences to bring home his point, in the same way that Stuart's ardent rambling

⁸³ Gristwood, p. 202.

⁸⁴ Philip Sidney, *The Arcadia*, in *The Longman Anthology British Literature Volume 1B*, ed. by David Damrosch (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc, 1999), p. 965.

sentences linger on before finally reaching a conclusion several paragraphs later. But the strongly focused repetition leads the reader back to the direction of the text by continually and deliberately focussing on 'you', being Brounker in Stuart's letter, and Pyrocles' audience in his speech. The fact that this is the end of a speech in Sidney's text is an interesting point - Stuart's language in this letter sounds more like an impassioned speech such as Elizabeth's Tilbury speech rather than a letter pleading her cause to one of the Queen's chief advisers. Like Elizabeth's oral style, Stuart's rhetoric is simple and direct.

The arrogant tone of Stuart's letter to Brounker is also reflected in one of Elizabeth's early responses to her advisers. In 1566 Elizabeth boldly told her House of Commons, 'My Lords, do whatever you wish. As for me, I shall do no otherwise than pleases me. Your bills can have no force without my assent and authority'.⁸⁵ In a similar tone Stuart declares to Brounker in a letter sent the day after the Ash Wednesday letter, 'Sir, I see both the cause, and the end of your coming thearfore I pray you spare your owne trouble, and mine in seekeing that which by these meanes will not be gott' (Letter 17 to Sir Henry Brounker, 17 March 1602/03). The marked difference, of course, is that Elizabeth holds the greatest rank of power in the land and can follow through on her statement, whereas Stuart is under house arrest and is unlikely to carry any authority over a high ranking official like Brounker.

⁸⁵ J.E Neale, *Elizabeth I and her Parliaments* (London: Cape, 1953-57), p. 49.

What I find most interesting though, is that while Stuart appears to be half mad with frustration when writing this letter (as discussed in chapter one, Cecil has noted that she appeared mad, to which Brounker agreed), she is actually aware that she is breaking social and moral codes but she doesn't appear to care: 'What harme can all the world do me now' (letter 16 p. 165) she boldly observes. Stuart is also fully aware that her letters are causing frustration and tension at court, which she notes in an ironic aside to Brounker, acknowledging his patience in reading the letter; '... and then I have made you partly amends for the labour you have bestowed in reading so long and peevisly tedious <a> letter' (Letter 16, p. 168).

Society and Women's role

But Stuart's spirit (and frustration) was more common in her day than one might initially think. In 'Elizabeth I: Always Her Own Free Woman', a recent series of essays about Queen Elizabeth, 'Ilona Bell argues that Elizabeth's headstrong refusal to capitulate to Parliament's attempts to control her marriage negotiations elicited a strong drive for female autonomy in relationship dealings in the wider Elizabethan society'.⁸⁶ This point is important to note in regard to Stuart; she too possibly would have been influenced by the Queen's strength of will and control of her own situation with Parliament, and Stuart's empathy with the Queen's desire for freedom is clear when she states 'if you leave me till I be my owne woman,

⁸⁶ Internet review by Regina Buccola, Roosevelt University, June 2004 <www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.cgi> [accessed 3 May 2005].

and then your trouble and mine too will cease' (Letter 16, p. 168), implying that if she is granted a sense of freedom and independence her behaviour will improve,

Like Queen Elizabeth, Stuart often relied on bringing about an emotional response from her reader, whether they knew they were being manipulated into this position or not. For example, Stuart and Elizabeth both play on their subordinate female status so that it works in their favour. In Elizabeth's famous speech to her army at camp at Tilbury she declared 'I know I have the body but of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king and a King of England too'⁸⁷, and Stuart writes in a similar way to Brounker, stating '... so it is my duty to God to procure by all the lawfull means with speed because my weake body and travelling mind must be disburnded soon or I shall offend my God.' (Letter 16, p. 172). In both cases the women use deliberate irony to get across their points.

Traditions, Friends and Foes

Iona Bell describes many Elizabethan female voices of the day as posing 'a serious challenge to traditional male sovereignty and female subordination. In defining their sex as a beleaguered but emboldened group, in urging all women, regardless of social or martial status, to join together to fight for their common liberty, these Elizabethan female voices

⁸⁷ *Elizabeth I: Collected Works*, ed. by Leah Marcus, Janel Mueller and Mary Beth Rose (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), p. 326.

follow the rhetorical path emblazoned by their queen'.⁸⁸ Bell quotes Camden's *Historie of the Princess Elizabeth* who notes the Queen as being 'alwayes her owne free woman',⁸⁹ a remarkably similar phrase to Stuart's frustrated comment to Brounker about wishing him to leave her to be her own free woman. Like Bess, the Queen and Stuart were perhaps more similar than the Queen or Brounker would like to admit.

Stuart's open defiance of authority is never more apparent than in the letters of 1602-1603. In the same letter to Brounker (March 9th 1602/3), after several pages of complaining about her situation, she changes tack and flaunts her friendship with, and sympathy for, the Earl of Essex (executed two years previously on this same day, Ash Wednesday):

The more you think to make the more you marre when all is donne I must take it hand, and shape my owne cote according to my cloth fitt for me, and every way becoming of that vertue in me whither it be a native property of that bloud I come of, or an infective vertu of the Earle of Essex ... Shall not I, I say now I have lost all I can loose or almost care to loose ... who may well say I never had nor shall have the like frend, nor the like time to this to need a frend in Court .. Had the Earle of Essex the favour to dy unbound because he was a Prince, and shall my hands be bound from helping myself in this distress? ... My words have binne already too offensively taken and too unjustly wrested by them that had least cause so to do. I am deafe to commaundments and dumbe to Authority'. (Letter 16, p.166-174)

This is an excellent example of a final sentence, which also balanced but varied in pace being shorter than those before it, bringing the issue to a clear point. Stuart completely abandons all sense of political caution in

⁸⁸ Ballard, p. 187.

⁸⁹ Ilona Bell, 'Elizabeth I – Always her own free woman', in *Political Rhetoric, Power, and Renaissance Women*, ed. by Carole Levin and Patricia A. Sullivan (Albany: University of New York Press, 1995), pp. 57-82 (p. 58).

expressing her friendship with Essex so clearly and drawing parallels between her own case and his. But as she suggests in her letters, she sees her situation as impossible and now that her good friend Essex is gone, she has no friends left at court and has nothing left to lose. In reality, Stuart had plenty to lose by even mentioning Essex (still a very painful topic for Elizabeth who never really recovered from his betrayal⁹⁰); this kind of talk could have led to Stuart's imprisonment in the Tower, or worse. Stuart is not subtle about her defiance of authority in this letter and states directly that she is 'deaf and dumb' to those who are trying to control her.

Stuart's choice of words at this point in the letter makes the reader sit up and take notice (if they were not already engrossed in what she had to say). Like Shakespeare and his contemporaries she uses alliteration to bring home her more expansive thoughts and feelings. By stating she is both deaf *and* dumb she is really emphasizing how defiant she is in this situation. Theatrical productions at the time also used repetition to make a point in a play or emphasise a particular part of a scene; Stuart writes in a similar way by repeating the sentences she wants to emphasise and asking rhetorical questions of the reader to make her appear as innocent as she needs to be.

⁹⁰ Ann Foster and Stephen Foster state that in the last month of her life Elizabeth 'fell into a deep and ultimately fatal melancholy, attributed by Essex's remaining partisans to her remorse at his execution ... Although it was not generally known, when Elizabeth rid herself to the city of London's ring, she did not remove a second ring, presented to her by Essex, but retained it to her dying day'. As quoted by Nancy Guitierrez in *'Shall She Famish Then?' Female Food Refusal in Early Modern England* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2003), p. 115.

Who can graunt out the Commission which can even in good nature, good manners, or equity require such a confession?... do you thinck I say that I will reveal that to my servants or frends now which shall be prejudiciall for them to be suspected to ghesse at, much more to know, much more to conceale?...though hir fame and intreaty be every wheare glorious and powerfull and for my selfe I will rather spit my tongue in my Examiner or Torturers face, then it shall be said to the dishonour of hir Majesties abused authority and bloud an extorted truth came out of my lippes. (Letter 16, p. 160-161)

Like Shakespeare's use of repetition, Stuart also uses similar language techniques, such as metaphors to bring home a point or embellish a thought to make it appear more interesting. 'Shakespeare's invention of a fully dramatic language, then, strikes a fine and imaginative balance between the love and embellishment of words for their own sake and the functional matching of words to situations'.⁹¹ We see Stuart striking this balance also when she bitterly complains about her representation to the Queen by Broucker as '...have made you present hir Majesty with a misshapen discoloured peece of stufte fitting none nor fitt for his Majesty to look upon' (Letter 16, p. 166) and continues the theme of this interesting image a few paragraphs later when she states '...that many wrong stitches of unkindnesse must be picked out which nedd not have binne so bestowed ... I must take it hand, and shape my owne cote according to my cloth, but it shall not be after the fashion of this world god willing but fitt for me' (Letter 16, p. 166). The many words used undermine her own argument in this part of the letter but the imagery the words portray does give the reader a more sympathetic ear to Stuart's plight.

⁹¹ Lynne Magnusson 'Style, Rhetoric and Decorum', in *Reading Shakespeare's Dramatic Language – A Guide*, ed. by Sylvia Adamson, Lynette Hunter, Lynne Magnusson, Ann Thompson and Katie Wales (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2001)pp. 17-29 (p. 28).

These words also portray an image of Stuart in a very feminine role, hard at work at a piece of embroidery or carefully stitching a delicate garment for her wardrobe. I think she is possibly using this imagery to show the Queen that while she is being rebellious in writing such unusual and highly emotional letters, she is prepared to fulfill her role in society once her requests are met. Needlework itself could be a way of women showing their apparent humility but also working on their own subversive ideas. Even as late as 1652 in the *Homily of Marriage*, women were considered naturally inferior to men:

[t]he woman is a weak creature not endued with the like strength and constancy of mind; therefore, they be the sooner disquieted, and they be prone to all weak affectations and dispositions of mind, more than men be; and lighter they be, and more vain in their fantasies and opinions⁹²

However many women saw needlework as a way of expressing their ideas and interests in a way that writing could not. 'Even Elizabeth, while still a princess, hand-wrote and embroidered prayer books for her father and Katherine Parr, works that were designed to demonstrate her piety and skill and to maintained threatened familial bonds'.⁹³ Mary Queen of Scots used embroidery to heighten tension rather than diffuse a situation by developing her style to articulate calculated, though silent threats, which continually reminded Elizabeth of her potential threat to the crown⁹⁴. The pieces depicted with imagery Mary's claim to the throne –using lilies (representing France), roses (England) and thistles (Scotland) in her work.

⁹² As quoted in *Lay by your needles ladies, take the pen*. ed. by Suzanne Trill, Kate Chedgzoy and Melanie Osbourne, (London and New York: Arnold, 1997), p. 3-4.

⁹³ Lisa Klein, 'Your Humble Handmaid: Elizabethan Gifts of Needlework', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 50 (1997), 459-493 (p. 462).

⁹⁴ Morna R. Fleming 'An Unequal Correspondence: Epistolary and Poetic Exchanges between Mary Queen of Scots and Elizabeth of England', in *Woman and the Feminine in Medieval and Early Scottish Writing*, ed. by Sarah Dunnigan, C. Marie Harker and Evelyn S. Newlyn (Hampshire: Palgrave and MacMillan, 2004), p. 112.

'Analysis of needleworks done by or for Elizabeth shows how women fashioned themselves as subjects, promoted their interests, and fostered social relationships by exchanging hand-wrought works'.⁹⁵

While we are not aware of any embroidery pieces that Stuart worked on, we do know that she was aware of the privilege of gift giving and made good use of this manipulative technique when she was at Court (to be discussed in Chapter three). Letter writing was the main technique that Stuart used to articulate her desires and obtain power, either subtly or more openly as in this letter. Once again in this piece of text we see Stuart refer to herself in an almost regal way. 'I' is repeated continually (as in previous parts of the letter) and she again refers to her blood line – to reinforce to her audience that this is not appropriate treatment for a woman of her rank. Repeating words such as 'I', 'my' and 'me' so frequently in the letter has the same effect as if they were underlined or in bold – it is impossible to not be aware of the writer and her feelings. As in other parts of the letter, she asks rhetorical questions of her reader, as if she is justifying her actions not only to her reader, but also to herself. 'Letter-writing offered Stuart an opportunity to deny that negative vision of herself and replace it with another, to rework her actions on paper until she was as innocent as she needed to see herself. Writing was a mechanism to maintain self-respect'.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Klein, p. 462.

⁹⁶ Steen, *Letters*, p.42.

The other questions which are asked in this letter tend to be of Brounker himself, with whom I believe Stuart felt she had a friendship, and whom she perhaps saw as almost an ally in her predicament. Of course the reality was that Brounker was Queen Elizabeth's staff member and would ultimately always take her side, in the same way that the servants that Stuart had working for her were really on Bess's payroll and not as helpful as Stuart perhaps had hoped: 'My servants shall be taken from me, then shall I be no more troubled with theyr troublesome importunity, and inquisitiveness' (Letter 16, p. 165). Hardy notes in his biography that Stuart's servants however were extremely loyal to her right up until her death, looking after her while she was so ill in her last days.

Stuart's biographers have different opinions on the relationship between Brounker and Stuart and I think their relationship is worth examining due to the many letters Stuart wrote to him from Hardwick Hall. P.M. Handover sees him as 'an efficient time-server, a man without sentiment or pity, keenly aware of the side on which the butter lay thickest'⁹⁷;... and most damningly 'a man of devious ways'.⁹⁸ Steen takes a more sympathetic view of Brounker and his impossible situation and sees him as an 'emissary who would sympathize, as Brounker had pretended to'⁹⁹ and sees Stuart as 'disappointed and irritated that Brounker considered her concerns only tangential to her conspiracy and refused to set a date for her removal from Hardwick Hall'.¹⁰⁰ Stuart certainly was furious with

⁹⁷ Handover, p. 141.

⁹⁸ Handover, p. 141.

⁹⁹ Steen, *Letters*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁰ Steen, *Letters*, p. 35-36.

Broucker in the letter written on Ash Wednesday and while she had previously written of him as being a 'most worthy Knight' (Letter 14, p. 156) and she his 'pore frend' (Letter 14 p. 156), their relationship had soured as she realises Broucker was always an agent for the Queen alone:

... or make you condemned of idlenesse and discourtesy if you requite my long letters with such short and Courtyerlike peremptory letters as all I have receive from you have binne, whearby I perceive you content your selfe with the highe and by your right well deserved style of hir Majesties faithfull servant, and forgett you professe your selfe both by word and writing to be my frend (Letter 16, p. 168-169)

Emotions and Hysteria

Near the end of the letter Stuart's emotions, which have always been close to the surface, appear to overcome her and her script changes to more of a shorthand-like style, where she does not complete sentences properly or write words in full, which was very common at the time (for example in the beginning of the letter she has written the whole word 'Majesty', near the end this becomes 'Maty', it is also possible that she was running out of paper). When I examined the document I noticed that Stuart writes in more of an uphand slant in the last few pages of the letter and there are several blotches in the ink, which could have been caused by the ravages of time and damp environments, or, as the romantic in me likes to think, by Stuart's tears when she was furiously writing this letter. Steen comments that Stuart's 'usual highly controlled syntax may become more relaxed, her punctuation drop away, and her structure of ideas

become more associational, as through presenting a stream of consciousness. Even her handwriting may suggest shifts in emotion, as an elegant, upright presentation script becomes a plain, slanted informal hand, or a careful informal hand becomes seemingly hurried, heavily blotted scrawl'.¹⁰¹

The raw emotion which is apparent in this letter was unusual to see written in the sixteenth century, particularly a letter which was likely to be read by the Queen. Stuart does not appear to care about appearances at this stage and blatantly accuses the Queen of behaving in an uncaring manner towards her. We can see an example of this below in this balanced sentence taken from the Ash Wednesday letter:

'Shall I many weekes expect what I most earnestly begged and longed for and must I reveale the secretes of my hear importing my soule, my life, all I hold deare in this world in a shorter time then at your <now> first coming I told you I could when it seemes hir Majesty careth no for knowing any thing concerning me, but to breake my just desires?' (Letter 16, p. 160).

In addition to accusing the Queen of behaving in an unacceptable way, Stuart adds text into the script to emphasize her emotion. We see this in the above quotation where she has added in the word 'now' in above the sentence to bring her point home. This arrogance and accusatory tone is typical of Stuart during this period of her life and seems that it could have been a family trait as her Aunt, Mary Queen of Scots, was often thought to let her emotions control her and her arrogance run away with her rather than thinking things through logically.

¹⁰¹ Steen, *Letters*, p. 38.

'Sometimes Stuart's letters begin in a conventionally controlled fashion and shift into an outburst of apprehensions, evasions, or accusations and then shift back again. Her anger may emerge for a phrase or many pages and then re-submerge. Stuart's persona may change from submissive and humble to arrogant and demanding within half a sheet'.¹⁰²

However, while Stuart was close to hysterical in parts of this letter, I do not believe these are the ramblings of a mad woman. Lewalski argues that the letters from Hardwick were not written by a woman who was completely insane. 'This may have been due, as many of her contemporaries and modern biographers have supposed, to a temporary mental breakdown – though if so only, I think, in the final weeks. Rather, she seems to have been practicing the rhetoric of disguise – with some success, that she kept herself out of the Tower and gained one primary objective: release from Hardwick'.¹⁰³

The other argument which supports Lewalski's theory is that Stuart writes politically inflammatory text in this letter which is coherent, if insulting, about the Queen and her counsellors. 'doth hir Majesty favour the Lady Catherines husband more then the Earle of Essex frend? are the Stanhopes and Cecilles able to hinder or diminish the <good> reputation of a Stuart hir Majesty being judge?' (Letter 16, p.159). Her handwriting in this letter is also quite legible, even though it has clearly been written quickly, unlike her handwriting in 1610 when she is pleading for her life from imprisonment and obviously under immense pressure.

¹⁰² Steen, *Letters*, p. 38.

¹⁰³ Lewalski, p. 71.

Like Mary, Queen of Scots, Stuart's abrupt changes in personality within letters written during this period, led her family and Queen Elizabeth's advisers to believe her to be hysterical at best - at worst, insane. It is likely that this unusual behaviour exhibited could have been due to the extreme stress that Stuart was under at Hardwick Hall and is a characteristic inherited by the Stuart family. Antonia Fraser writes of Mary;

This tendency of apparently nervous stress to show itself in physical symptoms almost approaching a breakdown was something she clearly inherited from her father, since the Guises were remarkably free of it: as a characteristic it was to play a marked part in her later career.¹⁰⁴

A similar conclusion can be drawn with regard to Stuart's illnesses which occurred during periods of great stress during her life. In the next chapter I will examine some of Stuart's letters written during her time at King James's court, when she writes in a more publicly acceptable style, even if her subversive rhetoric and manipulation of her reader remain evident, as in these letters written from Hardwick Hall in 1602-03.

¹⁰⁴ Antonia Fraser, *Mary Queen of Scots* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 62.

Chapter Three: A Courtier at James Court

'For here no one's from th' extremity

Of vice, by any other reason free,

But that the next to him, still is worse than he.'¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ "To Sir Henry Wotton", *John Donne's Poetry*, ed. by Donald R. Dickson (New York: Norton, 2007), p. 53. John Donne is referring to the courtiers of Elizabeth's court.

When Queen Elizabeth died in 1603 it did not come as a shock to many that James was her chosen successor. Despite Stuart also having a good claim to the throne (given that she and James were first cousins).¹⁰⁶ it does not appear that she was really seriously considered as a candidate at any stage. With the new monarch came new hope and the vision of a brighter future and Stuart, as one of James's courtiers, was part of this wave of extravagance and euphoria. While Stuart was optimistic at the change of monarch, she quickly discovered that life at James's court was far from the idyllic existence she had hoped for. Despite James initially appearing positive towards her, Stuart ultimately found her position at court to be restricted by her little spending power and lack of freedom to choose a suitor of her choice. James, who had said in 1603 that 'Stuart should be allowed more freedom, that she had been too long "tormented" by grief and treated more "tenderly"'¹⁰⁷ appeared to quickly forget these good intentions, and had less and less time for her as the years went by.

This chapter will examine the letters which Stuart wrote during her years at James's court from 1603 – 1610. These court letters are entirely different in style, tone and rhetoric to the letters which Stuart wrote in 1602-1603, when she was a prisoner to her grandmother at Hardwick Hall. By 1604 Stuart had learnt to play the political game which was expected of her and hoped for a better life by becoming the subservient subject of the king – or at least appearing to take on this role. I will look at how her writing style altered during these years and how her observations of life at court are

¹⁰⁶ See Family Tree on page two.

¹⁰⁷ Steen, *Letters*, pp. 44-45.

important documents in our understanding of this period of history. 'The letters to her family in which Stuart described her early experiences at King James's court suggested that in other circumstances Stuart might well have written fiction: her sometimes critical observations were trenchant and vivid, the narratives well shaped, her tone ironic, consistent, and controlled'.¹⁰⁸

This control which Steen refers to is very apparent in the court letters and was a technique Stuart had discovered and then honed to her advantage. The rambling long letters from Hardwick only a year previously are very different from the new courtier Stuart presented herself as. The new, reformed, Stuart signed herself as 'Your Ladyships most affectionate neece to commaund' (Letter 41, p. 202) when writing to her Aunt Mary Talbot and 'Your Highnesse most humble and dutifull' (Letter 48, p. 209) when writing to Prince Henry. 'Even for an age of flattery, Stuart's court letters sometimes are so deferential that we cringe at what seems to us obsequiousness'.¹⁰⁹ James Daybell addresses the importance of letter writing skills and self-definition for women. 'This process of self-classification is clearly more fully developed in letters than in other media. A single woman might assume several selves, and present herself in different ways dependent upon with whom she was corresponding, and

¹⁰⁸ Sara Jayne Steen, 'Manuscript Matters: Reading the letters of Lady Arbella Stuart' *South Central Review*, 11 (1994), 24-38 (p. 27).

¹⁰⁹ Steen, *Letters*, p. 51.

the circumstances the letter was sent'.¹¹⁰ Stuart's letters from Court are completely different depending on whom she was writing to.

It is important to note briefly here exactly what I mean by the 'court' letters, to prevent confusion later on in the chapter. Unlike Steen, who uses the term 'court letters' to mean only the formal letters to the King and other important members of his inner circle, I use the term to refer to *all* the letters she wrote during the years spent in King James' court, from the informal bantering exchanges with her favourite aunt and uncle (these letters Steen refers to as the informal letters), to the more conventionally humble and formally structured letters she wrote to the King and his advisors.

Role of Women at King James' Court

By examining the different types of letters Stuart wrote at court we gain a better perspective on Stuart's powers of manipulation and her political role within the court. It becomes clear when reading the letters over this period as a whole that, despite stating her dutiful and humble intentions, Stuart was not a perfect model for a subservient woman or subject, and she often chafed at the expectations associated with this role. This put her in opposition to James, who saw himself as 'king by divine right against whose decisions no disagreement or rebellion could be tolerated or justified ... Presumably the great misogynist expected even greater

¹¹⁰ James Daybell, *Women Letter Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 168.

deference from female subjects; he disdained the sex as a whole and, preferring male favourites, rarely enjoyed the company of women'.¹¹¹

James was not alone in these opinions. Intelligent, educated women (of whom Stuart was by no means the only one) were considered an anomaly in society. Her contemporary Thomas Overbury¹¹² wrote a poem called *The Wife* which describes his perfect partner as being virtuous and piteous. 'He cautioned against marriage with a highly educated female. In his view, 'learning and pregnant wit in womankind' was unseemly, for such erudition could only distract from the domestic duties which were a woman's natural province'.¹¹³ After his death Overbury's poem was immensely popular (there are 21 editions up to 1700) and seemed to reflect the opinions of most people in society.

The court that the younger Stuart had entered into briefly in 1587-88 when Elizabeth was Queen did not help to prepare her for the completely different style of court that James presided over in 1604. 'Into this mêlée Arbella entered after the long isolation at Hardwick. Henceforth, these people, Howards, Herberts, Scots Lords and Cecil relatives were her constant companions. They did not welcome her arrival: that she should by virtue of her birth, be given precedence was galling, that she was a possible rival for the royal favour ... was intolerable'.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Steen, 'Fashioning an Acceptable Self: Arbella Stuart', pp. 78-79.

¹¹² Overbury was imprisoned in the Tower of London in 1613 and his murder by poisoning in September of the same year was a sensational scandal. See Anne Somerset's text *Unnatural Murder* (London: Phoenix, 1998) for more details.

¹¹³ Somerset, p. 70.

¹¹⁴ Handover, p. 197.

Her years at Hardwick had not taught Stuart how to hold her own amongst this experienced group of calculating and often malicious courtiers. There was little honesty or reward for loyalty in this court of excess and scandal. Once Stuart had started to find her feet at court she began to let the occasional telling lines about life at court slip into her letters to her Uncle Gilbert and Aunt Mary. On 8 December 1603 she wrote to Gilbert scathingly about the women at court and their appalling behaviour:

I pray you take not that Pro concessio in generall which is onely proper to somm monsters of our sex. I cannot deny so apparent a truth as that wickednesse prevaieth with somm of our sex because I dayly see somm even of the fairest amongst us misled and willingly and wittingly ensnared by the Prince of darknesse (Letter 34, p. 191).

I think Stuart's tone here is telling of her naivety in these early years at court – she is truly shocked by the behaviour of some of the women courtiers and without a close confidant at court her only way to express her opinion was in letters to her uncle. Stuart uses alliteration nicely in the above paragraph and has no hesitation in painting a dire picture of the ladies she was seeing on a day to day basis.

As early as August 1603 Stuart was writing to her aunt and uncle about the type of life she was living. The Ladies she was forced to socialise with were the main targets of her wit. 'Arbella had been more frank when she wrote to Gilbert's wife, for Mary herself was no chuckle-head and could sympathise with Arbella's sense of isolation'.¹¹⁵ Her Aunt Mary is told 'Our great and gracious Ladies leave no gesture nor fault of the late Queene

¹¹⁵ Handover, p. 200.

unremembered as they say who are the partakers of their talke as I thanck God I am not' (Letter 24, p. 181). Her exhaustion at 'this eve[r]lasting hunting' (Letter 27 p. 186) is referred to shortly afterwards when she was ill with a toothache and clearly the continual party of court life was taking its toll on her health. Mary obviously had warned her to be more circumspect in her letters after the discovery around this time of The Main Plot. While Stuart was cleared of being actively involved, the plot was designed to depose James and put Stuart on the throne instead. Stuart retaliates by complaining:

I rather interpret your postscript to be a Caveat to me to write no more then How I do, and my desire to understand of your health, that is no more than necessary ... in pleasing you I offend my uncle I have adventured to write him one superfluous letter more (Letter 26, p. 185).

However, despite toning down her letters initially, her comments about court behaviour again became less and less discreet as her fury raged at the depraved society in which she lived - and few escape her biting comments. Even Queen Anna is referred to as liking 'somm little bunch of Rubies to hang in hire eare, or somm such daffe toy' (Letter 35, p. 194), implying her disapproval at the Queen's superficial nature. The Queen is portrayed by Stuart as having little intelligence or depth of character if a toy or pretty bauble will make her happy. By noting that rubies to hang in her ears would be an appropriate gift also tells of the kind of life Stuart was living at court – a life which hinged on having financial wealth in order to buy the affections of the monarchs. Ten days later she writes to her Uncle Gilbert of the lead up to the Christmas celebrations at court, assuring him that a gift of venison would be well received and telling him how the

Queen intended to 'make a mask this Christmas to which end my Lady of Suffolk and my Lady Walsingham have warrants to take of the late Queenes best apparel out of the Tower at theyr discretion' (Letter 36, p. 197).

While Stuart does not openly criticise Queen Anna in this letter, the thought of Queen Elizabeth's prized gowns being trawled through by the greedy lady courtiers is not a pleasant image for us today, as it must have been disturbing for Stuart in her day. Handover interprets these disapproving letters as Stuart starting to appreciate Bess's morals and her strict upbringing. 'She saw more clearly the virtues of her grandmother against the backdrop of *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* garbed in the robes filched from a dead Queen's wardrobe, and the banquets consumed in greedy haste'.¹¹⁶ Stuart did not partake in this masque though, and there are no clues in her letters as to why she was not invited to be a player. Sarah Gristwood speculates as to why Stuart may have been left out. 'Given the significance of the masque, we have to ask why – this time at least – Arbella was not included as a dancer; ... Absence may be the reason – the toothache, or her still-troublesome eyes? It is even possible that she simply couldn't pay for her costume.'¹¹⁷ Stuart was also new to court life in 1604 and it could have been that the Queen invited only the older and more experienced female courtiers to take part in her entertainments. Certainly Stuart did partake in other future masques, causing her enormous financial pressure - such as her role in

¹¹⁶ Handover, p. 204.

¹¹⁷ Gristwood, p. 285.

Ben Jonson's *Masque of Beauty* in 1608 and her role as the river Trent in Derbyshire in Samuel Daniel's *Masque of Tethys' Festival* on June 5th, 1610.¹¹⁸

The most interesting part of this newsy letter to Gilbert, however is what Stuart has *not* mentioned. At this time she was under immense strain due to her name being mentioned in connection with the Main Plot. Finally, near the end of the letter she makes mention of what was the enormous scandal of the day:

I have reserved the best newes for the last, and that is the King's pardon of <life to> the not-executed traitours. I dare not beginne to tell of the Royall and wise manner of the Kings proceeding thearin, least I should finde no ende of extolling him for it till I had written out a payre of bad eyes. (Letter 36, p. 197)

Stuart's relief at this dangerous situation being resolved is undeniable, as shown in her words above. Finally she could relax at court (if she chose to do so) and start to undertake a more substantial role within the court now that she was above suspicion.

Informal Letters to Family

Stuart's success in her role as a courtier was not just essential for her own future (financial and hierarchical) within the court, but she was also responsible for the continued good favour of the King and Queen towards her extended family. Certainly by most accounts it seems as if she did a good job - at least initially. 'Although her acerbic comments indicate that

¹¹⁸ See Steen's *Letters* text for more details, p. 59 and 64.

she kept her internal distance from the court, she played her part well enough to gain privileges befitting her rank. In 1605 she stood godmother to the newborn Princess Mary. In the same year she was granted a peerage for her uncle William Talbot, and this familial benefit made her peace with Bess'.¹¹⁹

However, despite her success at court for both herself and her extended family, the majority of the court letters to her aunt and uncle depict Stuart in the unhappy state of being constantly stressed. The loneliness and lack of financial stability were a continual cause of concern to Stuart and these issues are recurring themes in her letters home. Letter 35, written on 8 December 1603 to her aunt, is an excellent example of Stuart's emotional response to her situation and her frustration with her lack of power at court. I viewed this letter at the British Library in on April 9th 2008. This letter is written in Stuart's informal hand and the elaborate and beautiful handwriting of a formal letter is not evident anywhere. The corner of the paper has been torn away and the words filled in on the sheet used for repair. It is as if Stuart feels that every scrap of paper must reflect her description of life at the court and the pressure she feels financially.

This is an interesting letter to examine in detail as Stuart's informal writing style and grammatical syntax are most clearly seen in the original letter and get somewhat lost in the transcription in Steen's text. The sentence structure is unusual in that Stuart is writing quickly in sentence fragments

¹¹⁹ Lewalski, p. 80.

that run on together, rather than in the full, structured sentences she composed when writing formal letters.

The letter begins with Stuart thanking her aunt for her support during the recent trials of the conspirators of the Main Plot. As mentioned earlier, Stuart was innocent of the plot, but as she was the subject that the plotters intended to replace James with, it was understandable that she would have been stressed during this period.¹²⁰ Stuart's language and tone in the quote overleaf shows her relief at being found innocent of any involvement and her contempt for the lawyers who were making her life so difficult. By using words such as vain and wicked we are left in no doubt of Stuart's feelings towards these men.

...I cannot forget even small matters concerning that great party, much lesse such great ones as I thanck God, I was not acquainted with all. Thearfore when any great matter comes in question rest secure I beseech you, that I am not interested in it as an Actour, howsoever the vanity of wicked mens vaine designes, have made my name passé through a grosse and a suttile lawyers lippes of late.' (Letter 35, p. 193-194).

Stuart goes on to reinforce to her aunt the feelings of isolation she is experiencing at court:

for if I should not preferred the reading of your kinde and most wellcomm letters before all Court delightes (admit I delighted as much in them as others do) it weare a signe of extreame folly, and likeing Court sportes no better then I do and then I thinck you thinck I do I know you cannot thinck me so transformed as to esteeme any thing lesse then them, as your love and judgement together makes me hope you know I can like nor love nothing better, then the love and kindesse of so honourable frends as you and my uncle. Wheafore I beseech you let me heare often <to> declare your love by the length <and number> of your letters.

¹²⁰ Lady Jane Grey was innocent of immediate involvement in the plot to put her on the throne and was still executed by Queen Mary.

While we as readers feel sympathy for Stuart and her impossible situation (which is her intention), it is fascinating to read how Stuart uses manipulation techniques so effectively. Here we see her painting a portrait of her life at court being so dull that she lives for correspondence from her aunt and revises her draft to include the last sentence which asks for not only long letters, but also many of them. Stuart was not alone in her desire for lengthy correspondence and like her contemporaries, saw the exchange of letters as proof of a loving relationship. Gary Schneider notes that ‘the materiality of the letter, indeed, commonly represented affect. Correspondents equated the length of the letter or the frequency of writing with love and affection’.¹²¹ Dorothy Osborne (1627 – 1695) used the same kind of emotional blackmail when writing to William Temple. “O if you do not send me long letters then you are the cruellest person that can be. If you love me, you will, and if you do not, I shall never love myself.”¹²²

Stuart continued to use these techniques with great skill over the following years. For example when she requested favours (such as money from her uncle and aunt), the phrasing of these requests needed to be delicate so as not to cause offence. ‘But the desire of a correspondent to write more text, and more frequently, had to be tempered when writing to a patron for favour: if a client wrote too much or too often, the risk of alienating a

¹²¹ Gary Schneider, *Vernacular Letters and Letter Writing in Early Modern England, 1500-1700* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2006), p. 124.

¹²² Dorothy Osborne to William Temple 14 April 1653 in Paul Salzman, ed. *Early Modern Women’s Writing – An Anthology, 1560-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 256.

patron arose'.¹²³ Stuart would usually work and rework her drafts before finally deciding to send a letter. It was more important for Stuart to feel she had written her request, or defended her reputation, in the best possible way. 'A study of successive drafts of Stuart's letters is particularly telling of initial reactions in that it discloses passages lost by subsequent amendments and the toning down of language and phraseology considered inappropriate, perhaps too hastily or rashly applied to paper'.¹²⁴ Stuart uses these techniques to her advantage when writing to James from her imprisonment which I will discuss further in chapter four.

Formal Letters and Financial Situation

The letters in which Stuart's formal epistolary skills came to the fore were those written in June 1603 when she requested a new pension from James, as her small pension of two hundred pounds had ceased on Elizabeth's death.¹²⁵ Stuart writes her request to James' chief adviser, Robert Cecil. Following the rules of court protocol on how to approach the King with such requests, her tone is deferential, yet to the point.

My good Lord. it hath pleased his Majesty to alter his purpose concerning the pension wherof your Lordship writ to me; It may pleased you to move his Majesty that my present want may be supplied by his Highnesse with somme summe of money which needeth not to be annuall if it shall so seeme good to his Majesty But I would rather make hard shifte for the present then be too troublesome to his Highnesse, who I doubt not will allow me maintenance in such liberall sorte as shall be for his Majesties honour, and a testimony to the world, no lesse of his Highnesse

¹²³ Schneider, p. 125.

¹²⁴ 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. by James Daybell (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), p. 8.

¹²⁵ For more details see Steen, *Letters*, p. 176.

Princely bounty, then naturall affection to me. (Letter 19, p. 177-178).

Stuart's letter is written in her formal presentation hand and signed as 'Your Lordships poore friend, Arbellla Stuart'. 'The hand was also associated with authenticity and authorization, and could likewise represent intimacy and demonstrate emotion. Both the handwritten letter and one's signature, therefore, were socially significant'.¹²⁶ Stuart repeats the words Majesty, Lordship and Highnesse in the letter, making her seem completely deferential to James despite the fact she is asking for a favour from him, in this case, more money. By repeating his titles she is reinforcing that he is in command of her and her superior rather than how she would address an equal.

'James often insisted that his correspondents respond in their own handwriting rather than in dictated letters, for this demonstrated duty and fidelity to James. Even in state correspondence, James might require personally handwritten letters'.¹²⁷ Stuart's objective in this letter is to obtain as much money as possible to make her situation less precarious. With this in mind she emphasises the good relationship between herself and James near the end of the letter (the natural affection James has for her). As Stuart was not writing directly to James himself or granted an audience with him, she has to make her words work effectively for her and plays on Cecil's sympathy for her situation. This was a deliberate tactic which many other letter writers used when a meeting in person was not

¹²⁶ Schneider, p. 121.

¹²⁷ Schneider, p. 121.

permitted. '...the rhetoric was most often employed in affect-laden contexts: the language in these letters was designed to evoke emotions such as pity and compassion in their recipients, far more difficult to accomplish, I suggest, in letters than in face-to-face interaction'.¹²⁸

Queen Elizabeth used a similar technique when she was imprisoned in the tower by Queen Mary: '... the two (Stuart and Queen Elizabeth) used their court correspondence as a mask to hide their true selves and intentions under the guise of abject humility and obedience, while concurrently hinting at the responsibility of the monarch for their respective torments'.¹²⁹

On this occasion Stuart's request for funds was successful and King James agreed to pay her a gift of six hundred and sixty-six pounds until her pension had been decided.¹³⁰ Stuart was grateful for Cecil's assistance and dutifully wrote to him when she received the funds.

I aknowledge my selfe greatly bounden to your Lordship of whose patience I presume in reading these needless lines, rather then I would by omitting your due thanckes a short time, leave your Lordship in the least suspence of my thanckfulnesse to you, whose good opinion and favour I highly esteeme. (Letter 22, p. 179)

The negotiation of funding by King James was to become a constant worry and cause of stress for Stuart over the forthcoming years. Her financial situation is even mentioned to her aunt in Letter 35 (discussed in the family letters section) as Stuart lists her Christmas gifts for the royal family.

¹²⁸ Schneider, p. 117.

¹²⁹ Melanie R Anderson "“Mine Owne Woman”":Constructed Selves in the Correspondence of Princess Elizabeth and Lady Arbella Stuart," *Publications of the Mississippi Philological Association* (issue 1-7), 2005, pp. 1-7 (p. 6-7).

¹³⁰ See Steen, *Letters*, p. 179 for more details.

By now Stuart is aware of how to play the game of a courtier and has asked for advice on what would be appropriate gifts for Queen Anna and King James. Her final few sentences in this letter refer once again to her poor financial situation and here Stuart does not pull any punches but says directly:

And for all the world else I am unprovided. This time will manifest my poverty more then all the rest of the yeare, but why should I be ashamed of it when it is others fault and not mine? my quarters allowance will not defray this one charge I beleeve.' (Letter 35, p. 195).

Barbara Lewalski succinctly sums up Stuart's underlying implication in these lines. 'Her tart, witty letters give covert testimony to her mounting discontent. At times her wit is simply a gesture of self-affirmation, the only one available to the impotent; at other times it registers a determination to find some remedy.'¹³¹

Later Court Letters

In 1605 Stuart clearly decided that enough was enough; she swallowed her pride and made a trip to Hardwick Hall to visit her grandmother Bess and at the same time request some funds from her to help with her situation. Although she did not receive a warm welcome, 'the old lady relented sufficiently to present her with a gold cup worth a hundred pounds and £300 in cash, but she was not reinstated in the will'.¹³² Stuart's financial situation at Court was going from bad to worse and like many

¹³¹ Lewalski, p. 82.

¹³² Alison Plowden, *Mistress of Hardwick* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972), p. 110.

other courtiers, she had borrowed heavily,¹³³ which had led to the drastic measure of asking her grandmother for help.

Stuart's anxiety grew worse over the next few years and was at its peak when she corresponds with the Danish King and Queen between 1606 and 1608. In July 1606 King Christian IV of Denmark (Queen Anna's brother) arrived at court and Stuart was a significant player in the festivities at Court which accompanied their trip. Somerset sums up the excursion somewhat bluntly; '...the visit to England of Queen Anne's brother, King Christian IV of Denmark, was the signal for the entire court to embark on a stupendous drinking bout'.¹³⁴ Stuart quickly became one of the Danish King's favourite courtiers and when she defended him over an incident when his drunken behaviour had got him in trouble; it seemed she had won herself a firm friendship. 'King Christian thought highly of her and would willingly advance her fortunes',¹³⁵ Stuart was assured – finally it appeared she had made connections with powerful and wealthy people who were prepared to help her. To begin with, their relationship appeared to go from strength to strength. 'Thus, specifically expressing her pleasure at his "joyful letters", Arbella Stuart writes to King Christian of Denmark that 'nothing is more pleasant than happy reading and writing [of letters]'.¹³⁶

¹³³ See Steen, *Letters*, p. 58 for more details.

¹³⁴ Somerset, p. 37.

¹³⁵ Steen, *Letters*, p. 212.

¹³⁶ Schneider, p. 141.

Clearly Stuart was aware by now of the importance of powerful friends at court, as a close relationship between the academic, straight-laced Stuart and the loud, drunken King of Denmark does not seem well matched. However, Stuart was determined to keep the couple as firm friends and is dutifully submissive in her correspondence with them and their royal staff, such as Andrew Sinclair (the King's chamberlain). We see this most clearly when Stuart asks Andrew Sinclair in 1607 to pass along a small gift of needlework to James's sister-in-law, the Queen of Denmark; her draft emphasizes the degree to which she places herself below him:

Thus am I bold to trouble you even with these womanish toys whose serious minde must have somm relaxation and this may be one to vouchsafe to discend to these petty offices for one that will ever wish your happinesse [and] increase and continuance of honour (Letter 59a p. 53).

Stuart is apologetic in bothering Sinclair with her 'womanish toys' and her tone implies she is far his in-superior, despite saying she has a serious mind. Her tone throughout this letter is deferential and this is further reinforced with she wishes him every happiness and increase of honour.

After an excellent beginning, their relationship soured in 1607 when King Christian requested the services of Stuart's lutenist, Thomas Cutting. Stuart was not at court at the time of the request in early spring of 1607, having retired to the Shrewsbury's house at Sheffield to recover from a winter illness. 'Whilst here, the King of Denmark besought his sister to gain Arbella's consent to parting with her favourite lute-player, a man named Cutting, whose performance he had greatly admired the preceding

summer, and whose services he was anxious to transfer to his own Court'.¹³⁷

This would have been a particularly difficult favour for Stuart to grant – of course she had no option but to hand over her musician as graciously as possible, but she would have most likely been devastated and frustrated at the loss of her favourite staff member, who was a valuable asset to her entourage. On 15 March 1607/08 Stuart wrote to King Christian, explaining that she hoped that Cutting was now in his service and the pleasure it gave her to be able to assist the King in this way. This is an extremely formal letter which follows all the correct protocol when corresponding with royalty. Stuart does imply that Cutting is a loss to her but quickly points out it is her pleasure to serve the King in any way she can:

And indeed although he pleases me because he stands out among the few accomplished in that art, and although I know that, in the royal good fortune to which all the most excellent studies, prayers, talents, and services, in this as in other arts, are directed most readily, its is easier to add to the number of those who excel in any art than to achieve proper measure, yet since I have sought nothing more diligently or eagerly than an occasion that would offer me the opportunity of demonstrating my respect and unfeigned disposition to devote myself to your royal pleasure, I most willingly embraced this opportunity... (Letter 65, p. 224-225)

As Steen suggests in the quote below, I think Stuart takes her gratification in serving the King too far when she notes near the end of the letter,

I accepted with not inconsequential commendations because of the quality of his art and uprightness of his character, this same man I send with no less commendation (now that it pleases your Majesty),

¹³⁷ B.C. Hardy, *Arbella Stuart–A Biography* (London: Constable and Company, 1913), p. 201.

ready to send (had I the power) Orpheus or Apollo (Letter 65 p. 225).

Steen suggests 'her style becomes so fulsome in submission to and glorification of a patron like King Christian that one wonders if Stuart did not, by calling attention to the artifice of the hierarchy, undercut the sense of her submission and thus reduce the letter's effectiveness'.¹³⁸

Stuart's true feelings are thinly veiled in her letter to Queen Anna, written the same day as the letter to King Christian, March 15th. Stuart is deferential to the Queen and begins her letter in her most submissive tone:

May it Please your most Royall Majestie. I have received your Majesties most gracious and favorable toaken which you have beene pleased to send me, as an assurance, both of your Majesties pardon, and of my remaining in your Gracious good opinion, the which, how greate contentment it hath brought unto me, I fynde no wordes to expresse ...' (Letter 66, p.226)

She does however manage to find the words to express her frustration in losing her highly sought after musician later on in the letter:

I shall beseech your Majestie to conceive, that although I know well, how farre more easy it is, for so great a Prince, to command the best musiciens of the world, then for me to recover one not inferior to this, ...' (Letter 66, p. 226)

Steen sums this up clearly when she states: 'The court letters suggest that she sometimes tired of revising her direct statements into the indirect, submissive court rhetoric. Occasionally her annoyance at being forced into the deferential role slips through, as when, for example , she points out that she is sending King Christian her lutenist even though it would be

¹³⁸ Steen, *Letters*, p. 60.

easier for him to obtain another fine musician than it will be for her to do so'.¹³⁹ Ironically, despite verbal assurances of support in financial matters and money making projects, it is unclear if King Christian ever actually gave Stuart any funds - and her precious Cutting was given to Prince Henry in 1609, with no mention of his return to Stuart's service. No-one considered the feelings of Cutting himself of course—he had no option in this whole procedure but to go along with what fate his superiors had decided for him.

The formal letters are very different in tone and style to the informal, almost free-writing style of the letters addressed to Stuart's close relatives. As much as Stuart tried to be a part of court life and adapt to her new surroundings she was ultimately too independent and strong willed to live this existence without seeing an end in sight. 'Stuart perpetuated the roles by adopting them, and it is sad that she felt she had to do so. At the same time it is fascinating to watch a verbally talented woman give rhetorical shape to a self she thought would be more acceptable to a misogynistic King and his court than her unreformed one ever could be'.¹⁴⁰

'Your Lordships Poore Frend'

During 1609 the period of calm life at court was brought to an end as Stuart's financial situation reached climax point. Bess died on 13 February 1608, and while Stuart was on better terms with her before her

¹³⁹ Steen, *Letters*, p. 60.

¹⁴⁰ Steen, 'Fashioning an Acceptable Self', p. 95.

death, she was still left very little in her will. The death of Bess seemed to spur Stuart into applying for monopolies on oats, wine and Irish hides from James and essentially looking for whatever way she could obtain additional funds to live on. There seems to be an almost frantic desperation in Stuart's letters and behaviour during this time, and her constant requests may have led to a cooling in her relationship with James. '...one begins to notice faint and almost imperceptible indications that she was scarcely in so great favour at Court as formerly. It is difficult to account for this save by remembering that the royal smile is proverbially capricious.'¹⁴¹

The clearest way to see Stuart's panic take root is to examine the way she signed her letters. Stuart's letter in August of 1609 to Robert Cecil is signed 'Your Lordships much bounden and assured frend'; by December the same year she signs as 'Your Lordships much bounden poore frend', indicating her poor financial status and also hinting for sympathy. In 1609 Stuart appears to have had what we call today a 'mid-life crisis'. Her grandmother (arguably the most significant influence in her life) died, she got very ill with smallpox immediately afterwards, and once recovered, decided to make some huge life-changing moves, such as being more forthright when asking for monopolies and funds from James. Hardy sums this up by stating her change in personality as '...a loosening of interest in these sordid necessities, and a profound distaste for the foolish and

¹⁴¹ Hardy, p. 215.

extravagant Court life, together with a firm desire to pay all debts, retire from town, and pursue henceforth a quieter and more sober existence'.¹⁴²

Blocked by James in these endeavours to live a quiet life in the country, Stuart appeared to take stock of her options – which appeared to be to live unhappily as she had been for the last seven years at court where she has no power or funds; or to find herself a husband and a new life. Of course in 1610 that is exactly what Stuart did by marrying William Seymour; thus beginning the final chapter of her life; and the topic of the final chapter of this thesis.

¹⁴² Hardy, p. 225.

Chapter Four: Death and The Tower

'The robin redbreast and the nightingale never live long in cages'¹⁴³

¹⁴³ John Webster *The Duchess of Malfi*, ed. by Trevor Millum (London: Longman Literature, 1996), 4.2. 12-13.

The Loves of ‘The Lady Arabella’

Where London’s Towre its turrets show
So stately by the Thames side,
Faire Arabella, child of woe!
For many a day had sat and sighed,

And as shee heard the waves arise,
And as shee heard the bleake windes roare,
As fast did heave her heartfelt sighes,
And still so fast her teares did poure!¹⁴⁴

The above epitaph now seems somewhat trite and dated, but I think it begins this chapter in a fitting way for these final sad years of Stuart’s life. After the long years spent at King James’s court on her best behaviour, Stuart could finally no longer bear to play the role of dutiful courtier and cousin, and married William Seymour (the younger brother of Edward Seymour whom she had hoped to marry in 1603), without royal permission, beginning a series of events which would drastically affect the rest of her life.

The last sentence above might seem somewhat dramatic and overstated, but these last five years of her life really were full of drama and intrigue. Even the marriage ceremony reads like a romantic fiction, taking place in the dead of night with the bare minimum of witnesses. ‘At midnight on 21 June 1610, Seymour, Rodney, and one of William’s servants rowed a boat down the Thames on Greenwich Palace. Stuart and Seymour married clandestinely in Stuart’s chambers there, at four in the morning of 22 June,

¹⁴⁴ “The Loves of ‘The Lady Arabella Stuart’”, cited in Isaac D’Israeli, *Curiosities of Literature* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1867) p. 363.

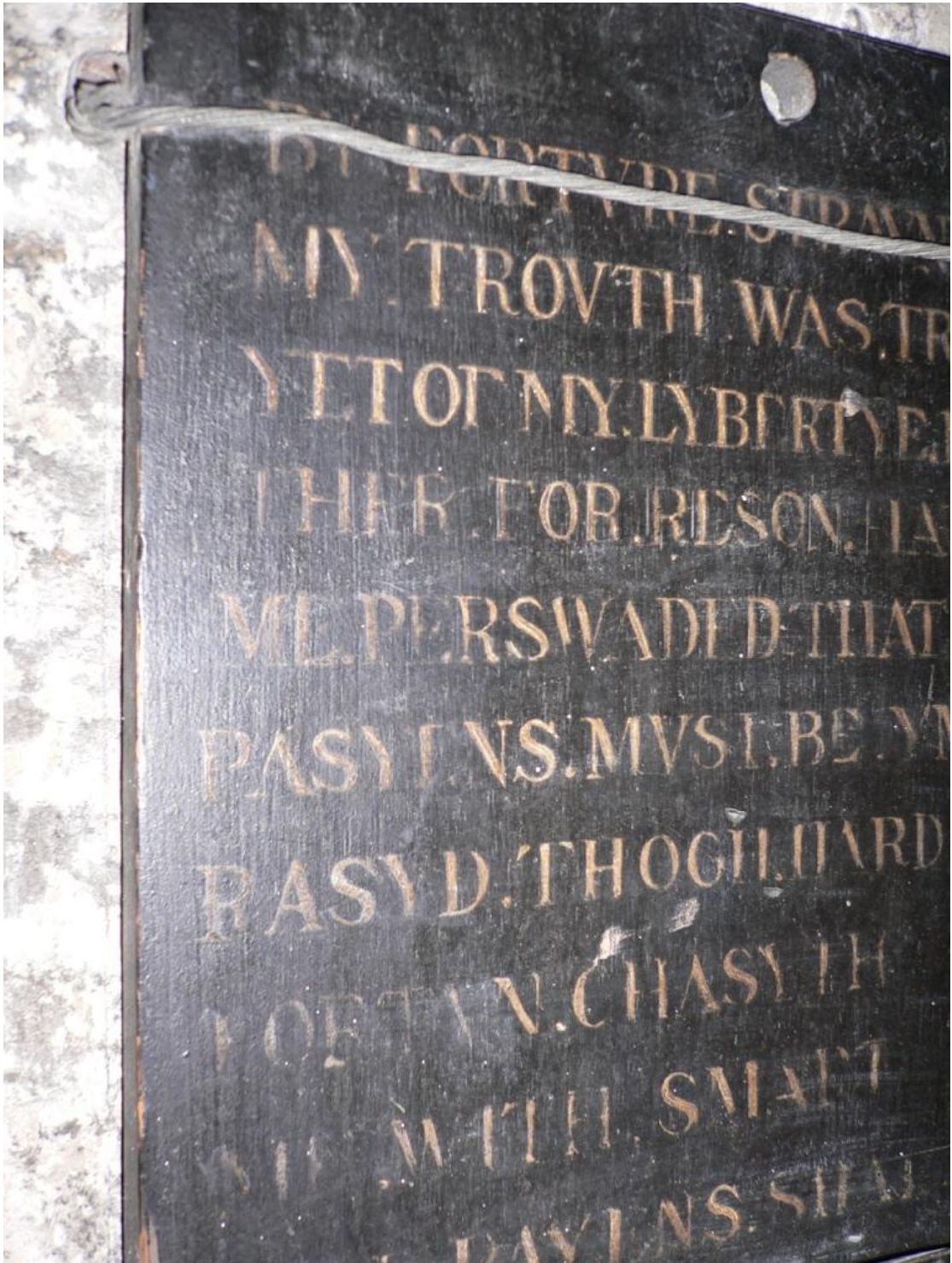
with enough friends and servants in attendance to ensure that the legitimacy of the marriage could not be challenged'.¹⁴⁵

When James found out that the marriage had taken place he was furious, and acted immediately by imprisoning Seymour in the Tower and placing Stuart under house arrest in Lambeth (on the other side of the river). But that was not to stop the couple; after so many years of living life the way James desired her to, Stuart decided to take matters into her own hands. In 1611 the couple escaped from their separate prisons in disguise ('with Stuart disguised in men's clothes like one of Shakespeare's cross-dressed heroines'¹⁴⁶) to meet in Calais. Stuart was caught by James' guards and marched back to London, where she was imprisoned in the Tower until her death four years later.

The Tower was not unfamiliar territory to Stuart's extended family. Her paternal grandmother, Margaret Lennox, was imprisoned in the Lieutenant's Lodgings in 1566 for her part in the marriage of Mary Queen of Scots and her son, Henry Darnley, and left an inscription above the fireplace to mark her time there. The graffiti is hard to read clearly and make out exactly what is written but it is still firmly etched into the walls as a constant reminder of Lennox's betrayal of Queen Elizabeth.

¹⁴⁵ Steen, *Letters*, p. 65.

¹⁴⁶ Steen 'The Crime of Marriage: Arbella Stuart and the Duchess of Malfi', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, XXII (1991), 61-76 (p.64).



Photograph of Margaret Lennox's graffiti in The Tower of London.

Photograph taken by Rowena McCoy.

The room today is decorated in modern décor and has a copy of the portrait of Stuart as a toddler in one corner. As this is the room which is supposedly haunted by Stuart's ghost it is known informally as the 'Arbella Stuart room' to current Tower staff.¹⁴⁷

A.L. Rowse and most of the other earlier writers on Stuart state that Queen Elizabeth sent both Bess and Margaret Lennox to the Tower for their role in the marriage of their children, Elizabeth and Charles (Stuart's parents). It was widely believed until recently that Bess of Hardwick was also imprisoned with Margaret Lennox, possibly even in the same room as Arbella, but this was not the case.¹⁴⁸ This was recently discredited by Bess's most recent biographer, Mary S. Lovell. 'Despite being ordered to London, there is no surviving record that Bess spent any time in the Tower in January 1575, as is claimed by some biographers.'¹⁴⁹

Unlike her paternal grandmother, Stuart did not leave any markings which can be clearly identified as her work on the Tower walls. 'The best source of information about prisoners in the Tower are the acts of the Privy Council which regulated any change in their state – but the acts from 1605 to the end of 1612 are missing, destroyed in a small Whitehall fire soon after they were set down.'¹⁵⁰ Most biographers believe she was likely to have been taken to the Bell Tower which was where high profile prisoners were traditionally kept. When I was taken through the Bell Tower rooms in

¹⁴⁷ Information given to me by Jane Spooner on (April 4th 2008) when I was given a private tour of the Tower and the rooms where Stuart was likely to have been held.

¹⁴⁸ See PM Handover's biography for more details, p.51.

¹⁴⁹ Mary S. Lovell, *Bess of Hardwick* (Abacus: Great Britain, 2006), p. 249 and p. 157. It was actually William St Loe's cousin Elizabeth who was imprisoned, and records got confused over the years.

¹⁵⁰ Gristwood, pp. 392-393.

April 2008 the Tower staff supported this theory. I was told by Jane Spooner that the only place that we can be absolutely assured was connected to Stuart's stay was Cold Harbour Gate where existing documents state that Stuart was passed water from here to her rooms. There are just small walled remains left of Cold Harbour Gate today, but these remains are very close to the Bell Tower, which supports the assumption that Stuart was imprisoned in this building.

Sarah Gristwood disputes this assumption that Stuart was kept in the Bell Tower and believes she was imprisoned where Anne Boleyn and Queen Elizabeth were kept, in the royal lodgings. 'A wealth of new information has emerged in the last few decades suggesting that Arbella too, was held here in the old palace, close to her aunt Mary Talbot.'¹⁵¹ However, when I was shown through the Tower by Jane Spooner she was confident that the most likely place that Stuart would have been kept was in the Bell Tower and while of course we will never be sure, this certainly seems the most likely place to me.

The Bell Tower

The Bell Tower is the two-storied building within the Tower which contained the bell which was rung at sunset. 'Her predecessors in the upper chamber which was hers had been distinguished: Bishop Fisher had been imprisoned there under Henry VIII, Elizabeth as Princess during

¹⁵¹ Gristwood, p. 393.

Mary's reign¹⁵². Today the Tower stands as impressively as it did in 1610. The upper chamber is not a large room, and I am convinced that once Stuart had her belongings and servants installed it would have felt quite cramped and claustrophobic. The day I was shown through the room it was near the end of winter with a pale watery light filtering through the narrow arrow slits and small glassed windows. The room is cold and the feeling of isolation that prisoners would have felt is apparent on entering the room.

In Stuart's day the huge fireplace to the left side of the doorway would have had a fire blazing to warm the room for Stuart and her ladies. The fireplace would have been much larger than it appears today (work on modernizing the room was done some time after Stuart's years of imprisonment) and also its large size reflected her high social status. The Bell Tower was the place to keep the highest ranking prisoners of the Tower; it dates back to the twelfth century and was designed to keep the most important prisoners in comfort and isolation. 'The difficulties of escape from the upper room were almost insuperable for no interior stair connected it with the lower, and her chamber was reached either through the Lieutenant's lodging or along the battlement from the adjoining Beauchamp Tower.'¹⁵³ In addition to the fireplace, Stuart's room also had an adjoining garderobe, which supports the theory that she was held in the most comfortable of circumstances.

¹⁵² Handover, p. 288.

¹⁵³ Handover, p. 289.

However one of the earliest known biographers of Stuart, Elizabeth Cooper, sees her conditions differently. 'The luxuries that had been granted to William Seymour were all denied to Arabella, and to judge from her complaints, she was poorly served as the commonest prisoner. So suspicious was the King, that the strange servants who waited on her probably knew that they were watched and dared not show the least indulgence.'¹⁵⁴

Cooper and Handover conflict with Gristwood who agrees with the Tower staff that I met with, that Stuart was unlikely to have been treated unfairly. 'Arbella's rank meant that she was never going to be treated brutally; the foul and stinking cells also found in the Tower were not for such as she. What she probably lacked most acutely was society.'¹⁵⁵ Unlike the poor prisoner many years earlier whose graffiti remains by the entrance to the Bell Tower room, there is no clear inscription anywhere in the Tower to allow us to be sure where exactly Stuart was kept, but this is not to say it is not lying undiscovered in some remote corner of a crumbling wall. Part of the reason I think that Stuart may have been kept in the Bell Tower was this graffiti that does exist by the entrance way. This prisoner writes 'By torture strange my truth was tried, yet of my liberty denied. Therefore reason hath me persuaded that patience must be embraced. Though hard fortune chaseth me with smart, yet patience shall prevail'.¹⁵⁶ Stuart also refers to her 'harde fortune to offend his Majestie' (Letter 97, p. 261) in a

¹⁵⁴ Elizabeth Cooper, *Life and Letters of Arabella Stuart* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1866), p. 228.

¹⁵⁵ Gristwood, p. 401.

¹⁵⁶ Handover, p.289.

letter which was assumed to be written from the Tower. Stuart would have undoubtedly seen the inscription when taken for exercise along the battlement and as most of us do, if you see or hear something often enough you use the phrase without thinking.

Diet

While Steen is clear that none of the letters in her edition are definitely dated from Stuart's time in prison¹⁵⁷, there are several which may have been written from the Tower, but we are unlikely to be ever able to prove this. In a letter written to Thomas Erskine, Viscount Fenton,¹⁵⁸ Stuart complains of her conditions in prison. In an insertion running up the left hand side of the margin she notes in huge scrawling printed script that 'I can neither get clothes nor posset ale for example nor any thing but ordinary diett and complement fitt for a sicke body in my case when I call for it, not so much as a glister saving your reference' (Letter 94, p. 257).

Cooper gives an account of the general diet of state prisoners in the Tower during this period and we can assume that Stuart would have had a similar menu. For dinner it is likely that she had, 'Mutton stewed with potage; Beef, boiled; Boiled Mutton; Veal, roast; Capon, roast; Conies; For supper, Mutton and potage; Sliced beef; Mutton, roast; Conies; Larks; and for Divers, Bread; Beer and Wine.'¹⁵⁹ This was the menu for the Duchess

¹⁵⁷ See Steen's *Letters*, notes, p. 257

¹⁵⁸ Although over a hundred years earlier Cooper believed this letter was written to Lord Northampton, Cooper, p. 234.

¹⁵⁹ Cooper, p. 295.

of Somerset and she was provided by the Lieutenant with 'all napery, plate, pewter vessels for the roasting of her meat, butter to baste the same, with divers other charges which be incident, as vinegar, mustard, various salads, and others.'¹⁶⁰ So while Stuart may not have enjoyed the 'red deare pies' she so enjoyed in October of 1604 (Letter 46, p. 207), it is unlikely that she was left to starve by the authorities. By modern day standards this kind of meal is very high in carbohydrates and meat and lacking fresh fruit and vegetables.

Letters from Imprisonment

However, despite being fed well and given exercise, Stuart was still in a high security prison and the alienation and loneliness of her life in the Tower severely affected these last years of her life. The letters which Steen considers likely to have been written from the time of imprisonment in the Tower are a fascinating study in the steady decline of Stuart's spirit and eventually, her health. When the initial abusive and angry letters failed to achieve her goals, she tried alternative tactics to gain favour within the court again. 'While she did not enjoy success, her letters demonstrate a mastery of the conventions of courtly petitioning: Arbella possessed great facility with the modes of flattery, self-promotion, strategic misdirection and appeal. However, her letters also reveal a willingness to break convention, to replace the codes of courtiership with a rhetoric of

¹⁶⁰ Cooper, p. 295.

abuse borrowed from parliamentary debates over property rights and from Protestant martyrological literature.¹⁶¹

The letters that survive from the period of Stuart's imprisonment at Lambeth and possibly the Tower are reminiscent of the angry young Stuart of 1603. However the fact that many of these letters survive in draft form show that she has learnt from previous mistakes and thinks carefully before writing to the people who are most likely to be able to help her. The most intriguing feature of Letter 94 (mentioned earlier and viewed at the British Library in April 2008), are the capitals which are all around one centimetre high and reminded me instantly of the style she adopted when under surveillance at Hardwick Hall in 1603. In this autograph draft letter she appears truly desperate - there is no sign of the unbreakable spirit and sense of injustice she worked so beautifully into her earlier letters. This letter is the scrawled note of a desperate woman who is looking for help from any source.

In an after-note the hand changes to Stuart's secretary's hand. The most interesting part of this after-note is Stuart's reference to her pain when she was writing; this is probably why a different hand has written this text. 'I wish your lordship would in a few lines understand my misery for my weaknes is sutch that [writing] <it> is very paynfull to me to write and cannot be pleasant to any to read' (Letter 94, p. 258).

¹⁶¹ Deborah G Burks, *Horrid Spectacle – Violation in the Theater of Early Modern England* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Duquesne University Press, 2003), p. 195.

So while we will never be sure if this letter was written while Stuart was imprisoned in the Tower or not, I think we can come to some conclusions about her state of mind and body when writing this and the few remaining later letters. She mentions that she is sick and she is not being fed adequately for a sick person; she is in pain, even when writing (and this might be why more letters have not been found from these final years) and she sounds desperate in her pleas for help from anyone who she thinks could be convinced to assist her.

When Stuart was imprisoned in Lambeth in June and July of 1610 she again bombards with letters any acquaintance that she feels might be able to help her – but her tone is quite different to the letter above which is written *after* her escape with William. She boldly declares to the world she is “Arbella Seymaure” but the tone of these letters is quite different to the tone of the letters of 1603. Steen notes that by signing herself in her married name she is ‘emphasizing the legitimacy of her marriage and her alliance with a ‘lord’ other than King James, which was said to have enormously annoyed the king’.¹⁶²

However, as time passes and her imprisonment continues she is far less arrogant. In a note (and it is literally written on a ragged scrap of paper) to Lady Jane Drummond written in July of 1610 she sounds rushed and beside herself with fear at her predicament. Words are crossed out and re-written in a more deferential way. For example in the quote below, the

¹⁶² Steen, ‘Manuscript Matters’, p. 30.

words 'of mine in all humility' are written in as an after thought to appear more subservient and the word 'deliver' is altered to 'present' in the first line as if to ensure that this note makes its way to the Queen personally (Jane Drummond was the Queen's first lady of the bedchamber), showing how important Stuart believed her words to be:

Good Cousin. I pray you do me the kindnesse to present this letter of mine in all humility to hir Majesty and with all my most humble and dutifull thankces, for the gracious commiseration it pleaseth hir Majesty to have of me as I heare to my great comfort. I presume to make suite to hir Majesty because if it please hir Majesty to intercede for me I cannot but hope to be restored to hir Majesties service and his Majesties favour, whose just and gracious disposition I verily thinck would have binne moved to compassion er this by the consideration of the cause in it selfe honest and lamentable, and of the honour I have to be so neare his Majesty and his in bloud...

While Stuart was imprisoned in Lambeth, Seymour was imprisoned in the Tower. In the only existing letter written to her husband Stuart is sympathetic to hear that he has a cold and worried about his health, which she had good cause to be since he was kept in close confinement at this stage. This letter was written in the summer of 1610 and we can hear the defiant Stuart ring through again as she writes to give her husband strength during this extremely stressful period.

No separation but that deprives me of the comfort of you. for whearsover you be or in what state so ever you are it suffiseth me you are mine....I assure you nothing the State can do with me can trouble me so much, as this newes of your being ill doth. and you see when I am troubled I trouble you too with tedious kindnesse for so I thinck you will account so long a letter your selfe not having written to me this good while so much as how you do. but sweet Sir I speake not this to trouble you with writing but when you please. be well. and I shall account my self happy in being your faithfull loving wife. Arb. S.

The only letter that Steen publishes in her book from Seymour to Stuart is a message written between February and May in 1610 (thus about one month before they were married) after Seymour had been called before the Privy Council. He appears to have been warned against Stuart and told the Privy Council that while he and Stuart had discussed marriage, he would not have gone ahead without King James's permission. Clearly his feelings had altered while imprisoned in the Tower and he had decided to seek an easier life than one with Stuart.

'he doth therefore humbly desier your ladyship since the proceeding that is paste, doth not tye neyther hym nor your ladyship to any necessytie but that you may Freely Comitt each other to theyr your best fortunes, that you would be pleased to desist from your intended resolution concerning hym, <who likesyse resolves not to truble you any more in this kinde>.¹⁶³

The receipt of this message would likely have sent Stuart into a decline as all her hopes were pinned on her relationship with Seymour - without his love and the hope of a better life with him abroad she would have been overwrought. But as we know Seymour had a change of heart over the next month and the marriage went ahead as planned, but in secret and with severe consequences. No other letters survive between the couple.

Cooper makes a valid point about their relationship when she states that perhaps not all the blame for Stuart's unhappy state while in prison should be ascribed to James: but rather, '...or whether the cruel neglect and fickle affection of the heart she had so dearly loved had not as large a share in causing the sufferings that destroyed her brilliant intellect and turned to

¹⁶³ Steen, *Letters*, p. 291.

torture those feelings that nature had given for joy. Nothing is left but conjecture. Perhaps Seymour, who had won her in days of happiness, wrote fond letters of consolation to her in her misery....But one thing is certain, that Arabella never received his letters. They would have preserved her reason, possibly her life. It was not alone imprisonment, it was despair, that broke her heart.¹⁶⁴ The rumours that Stuart died of a broken heart were rife at the time of her death and in a television series on the Tower of London shown in the UK in 1998, it was even claimed that Stuart died of grief when her husband did not write.¹⁶⁵

The alternative to imprisonment was the madhouse, which in 1615 was not an attractive proposition. Conditions would have been beyond what Stuart could cope with, for at least in the Tower she was fed and looked after and retained some degree of dignity. Mary Lamb (who killed her mother during a spell of derangement) was imprisoned in Bedlam in the late eighteenth century. 'It was a chamber of horrors where the 'mad' were considered beasts and chained, 'treated' with repeated bloodletting, vomiting and blistering – a spectacle for crowds of Sunday sightseers.'¹⁶⁶ At least Stuart was spared this kind of humiliation by being imprisoned, in isolation with only her servants to witness her decline.

Dorothy Osborne's letters have been compared with Stuart's over the years; she uses a similar style of rhetoric, and at times the same

¹⁶⁴ Cooper, p. 245.

¹⁶⁵ Steen, 'How subject to Interpretation: Lady Arbella Stuart and the Reading of Illness', p. 123.

¹⁶⁶ 'Your Weekend' magazine in *The Sunday Herald Newspaper*, July 11, 2009, p.15.

techniques as Stuart to manipulate her audience, in her case, her husband to be, William Temple. Osborne wrote to Temple from 1652 -1654 and their correspondence became an essential part of their relationship – in fact the couple rarely met in person during the courtship. Carrie Hintz in her excellent *An Audience of One* describes the letters as displaying ‘extreme shifts between formality and intimacy, and a kind of persuasive – even manipulative – power. In these letters, Osborne had to argue that the couple should give up their love entirely, while making it clear that she did not actually want that to happen, and making it even more clear that Temple should increase his efforts to gain the consent of his father.’¹⁶⁷ If letters from Stuart to Seymour were to be found today I think they would be of a similar style to the writing that Osborne adopted to make her partner respond in the way she wanted him to. Unfortunately no such letters have been discovered and we can only assume that the relationship between Stuart and Seymour had similar elements of control exhorted by Stuart (as depicted in Osborne’s letters) as she convinced him to marry her, despite the fact that just one month earlier he had declared to the Privy Council that he would no longer see her; and then to escape with her from his prison in the Tower and start a new life abroad.

The final letters written to King James after Stuart’s marriage are ‘much more controlled in their tone and rhetoric than the angry letters she wrote in 1602-03. For these letters, there survive multiple drafts indicating the care with which Stuart crafted and honed her presentation of her case.’¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁷ Hintz, p. 61.

¹⁶⁸ Burks, p. 219.

This clever use of language is apparent in the last letter printed in Steen's volume (letter 101 A-D). This letter was written to King James during Stuart's imprisonment after her marriage and it is in this letter she asks for a second month's respite to recover from her illness (which was granted). She used this time to plan her escape with Seymour.

But nothing avaylinge me certenlie I had sodaynlie perished if your Majestie had not speedelie had compassion of me in graunting me this time of stay for my recoverie, to which if itt maie please your Majestie of your gracious goones to add 3 weekes more, Mr. Doctor Moundford hopes I maie recover so much strength as may enable me to travel.(Letter 101 C)

This letter, which exists in four drafts, is unusual in the sense that it has been reworked by Stuart so many times and that her secretary has recorded her comments in the margin where she refers to part of the text that have been underlined. For example, in the last draft the words 'resistans or refusal to do such things as are fit for mee to do to make my Journey<s> less painefull, or perillous' have the comment written 'as thoughe I had made resistans etc. and so the Journey more perilous and painefull by my selfe whereupon I must confess I bely my selfe extremely in this'. This comment shows that Stuart was still resistant to authority and despite writing the letter to appease James, she was still furious with him.

Near the end of the letter Stuart underlines the words 'who hath profere of my obedient hart' and she notes 'he hath hadd better profe[r]s [of] then this and as thoughe none but this would serve'. Steen sums up Stuart's persona here succinctly. 'Her creation of a deferential self was an attempt to exploit the patriarchal models and use the language of flattery and

obedience as an indirect means of achieving power when overt power was unavailable'.¹⁶⁹

Why Stuart would have had these comments recorded is a mystery, but the reworking and submissive tone of the letter achieved her goal, for King James allowed her another month to recover. Ironically, he was so impressed with the tone and structure of the letter that he and Prince Henry had it read aloud to the Privy Council.¹⁷⁰ The numerous drafts and comments that Stuart makes on these drafts make these letters unusual and important historical documents. The revision Stuart makes to her letters is a kind of self imposed censorship of her real opinions and feelings. Having learned from past mistakes made in 1603, Stuart now ensures her tone is one that she hopes will achieve her objectives.¹⁷¹ Patterson explains the effect of such censorship and the effect of this on our epistolary history. 'The more successfully a society impressed on its writers that it was dangerous for them to speak their minds without inhibition, the more likely they were to encode their opinions. The more successfully writers encoded their opinions, the less evidence of 'persecution' we have'.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ Steen, *Letters*, p. 81.

¹⁷⁰ Steen, *Letters*, p. 263.

¹⁷¹ Steen notes in her article, 'Manuscript Matters' p. 34 that Cecil's handwriting appears on letters written in 1610, showing that Stuart was being monitored and under surveillance in the same way she was in 1603.

¹⁷² Patterson, p. 29.

Illness and Death

The porphyria which first appeared to plague Stuart during the stressful years of imprisonment in Hardwick Hall in 1602-03 returned again during the later years of her life and I believe (as does Steen) that it was a contributing factor to her death on 25 September 1615. As quoted in the official documents, which declare her to have died due to a 'chronic and long sickness ...[one that after a time resulted in ill-health and malnutrition], which, increasing as well by her negligence as by refusal of remedies (for a year she would not allow doctors to feel her pulse or inspect her urine). By long lying in bed she got bedsores, and a confirmed unhealthiness of liver, and extreme leanness, and so died.'¹⁷³

Stuart's battle with porphyria is best discussed in Steen's excellent article 'How Subject to Interpretation: Lady Arbella Stuart and the reading of illness', and it is this text which will be my primary source for this section of the chapter. First it is important to have a clear definition of what AIP (acute intermittent porphyria) is and how it affects the behavior of the individual. While the next quote is quite lengthy, I think it is essential that a full interpretation of Stuart's affliction is given. 'AIP is characterized by recurrent attacks of abdominal pain, with stomach and liver distention; severe muscle pain and weakness' mental shifts ranging from depression and excitement to delusion; difficulty in swallowing and subsequent emaciation; convulsions; coma; and if severe enough, death. The patient

¹⁷³ Nancy Guiterrez, *Shall She Famish Then? Female Food Refusal in Early Modern England* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2003), p. 116. [From HMC appendices to Eighth Report, MSS of the College of Physicians 229].

may suffer from restlessness, insomnia, a rapid or irregular pulse, or sensitivity to lights. Extant letters by or about Stuart indicate that nearly all of these symptoms were present'.¹⁷⁴

Of course there was no understanding of AIP in the seventeenth century and perhaps Stuart's story would have ended a little more happily if such diagnosis had been available. However, as we know, Stuart's story was never likely to have a happy ending and indeed it does not. It was truly appalling that such a lively and intelligent woman was left in isolation in the Tower until ultimately the loneliness and sheer hopelessness of her situation had its toll on her mental state or her illness overcame her. While I do not see that AIP was the only factor in Stuart's decline, I do believe it was part of the problem, in addition to years of unhappiness and imprisonment. Cooper sees her as purely a romantic, tragic victim. 'The misery of her mind speedily acted on the weak frame of Arabella, and days spent in weeping and nights passed without sleep, added to the dreary monotony of her prison, had their inevitable effect on so excitable and ardent a nature'.¹⁷⁵ Of course, Cooper was writing before the days of AIP diagnosis; perhaps if she had the benefit of all the medical information available to us today she would have had a different opinion.

While Cooper has tended to romanticize Stuart's life in some of her comments, I am inclined agree with her on this point. Stuart, after five years of imprisonment, two escape attempts (plus other plots to gain

¹⁷⁴ Steen, 'How subject to interpretation', p. 110.

¹⁷⁵ Cooper, p. 229.

freedom which did not come so close to success) and many desperate, pleading letters to anyone and everyone who could possibly help her, had finally decided that her situation was hopeless. Despite lack of documentation, it is still apparent that Stuart chose to die in a way she wanted to (which was refusing to eat or accept medical attention), rather than in isolation until old age or illness eventually took their toll. Where words failed Stuart, the last years of her life are documented by court gossip about her physical and mental state, and many described her fasting as deliberate. Northampton and Chamberlain both describe her illness in a nasty, malicious way which is disturbing to read today. 'Her fasting, he says, is pretence: 'god knowes what supplies are brought when the curtines are drawne'. In unpleasant terms, he laughs about what sound like delusions on Stuart's part ... John Chamberlain also is flipant: she is 'distracted' and 'craakt in her braine'.¹⁷⁶

What the court gossips failed to see was the truly desperate situation Stuart was in – and that by fasting she at least had some control over her life. Stuart was far from the first woman to choose this method of dying (to starve yourself was widely considered a form of suicide, the worst of sins because it meant the sinner had despaired of God's mercy). Lady Katherine Grey also was imprisoned in the Tower by Queen Elizabeth, for fornication before her marriage. 'She pined in the tower and refused to eat, sending out piteous letters begging for clemency.'¹⁷⁷ Unfortunately

¹⁷⁶ Steen, 'How subject to interpretation', p. 122.

¹⁷⁷ Lovell, p. 178.

her pleas fell on deaf ears and she died at age twenty-seven after refusing to eat properly for over a year.

Mary Queen of Scots also had more in common with Stuart than their shared suffering with porphyria. Mary also chose to fast for three days a week as a form of protest when imprisoned by Queen Elizabeth (even though at her execution it was noted that she was overweight having been, like many of the Stuarts, tall and handsome in her younger years), a technique which eventually worked in her favour and the Queen backed down; 'Not wanting to be accused of killing Mary by neglect, Elizabeth agreed to several of Mary's demands'.¹⁷⁸ The idea of controlling your own death and it being your last public statement of power was picked up by playwrights at the time and often depicted on the stage. "... a pre-occupation with women's staging of their own deaths, as if controlling the manner of one's dying was a mode of empowerment that early modern women might readily embrace, if only in 'fancy'".¹⁷⁹

The drama that had always followed Stuart made for good theatre. The secret marriage and escape were the kind of plot lines the contemporary audience lapped up. 'The play most directly analogous to Stuart's case is John Webster's popular *Duchess of Malfi*. ... The play was begun in 1612, soon after Stuart's name had been heard by much of adult London; and it was performed at Blackfriars theatre, in the neighbourhood where Stuart had had her private home, in 1614, when rumors were circulating in

¹⁷⁸ Lovell, p. 296.

¹⁷⁹ Sophie Tomlinson, *Stuart Women on Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 153.

London that Stuart was being driven mad by her incarceration.’¹⁸⁰ The quotation which begins this chapter is taken from the *Duchess of Malfi* which ends tragically, with the Duchess being put to death by strangulation at her brothers’ orders. Like Stuart, the Duchess is imprisoned after she attempts to flee following her secret marriage. The Duchess was imprisoned for her apparent crime without trial or jury to pass judgment.

Another woman who has been compared with Stuart is Dorothy Osborne, and her story had a happier ending. One reason why Stuart and Osborne have been compared was that like Stuart, Osborne was an ill woman for certain periods of her life, suffering from melancholia. She was also accused of pretending to be ill by her family and of using her illness at times to form a closer bond with William Temple (her future husband). ‘Osborne rhetorically manipulated illness so that it was no longer threatening to the courtship but a means of drawing the couple together’.¹⁸¹

Osborne’s attacks of melancholy would come on extremely quickly and left her feeling drained and without dignity. Like the porphyria attacks that Stuart suffered, the melancholia would result in a lack of control in Osborne’s letters. A remarkably confident and independent woman when she was well, it was not surprising that she found her family overly controlling during these periods of illness and made bitter remarks about the cures that were imposed upon her. ‘Her family’s care became a

¹⁸⁰ Steen, *Letters*, p. 95.

¹⁸¹ Hintz, p. 132.

constraint, usurping her right to autonomous control, and even the mechanisms of her basic survival were resigned to their judgment. 'I am neither to eate drink nor sleep without their leave,' she sarcastically noted'.¹⁸²

The same kind of animosity towards family is shown by Stuart in these later years of her life, repeating the same pattern of resistance towards Bess during the years of imprisonment at Hardwick Hall in 1602-03. Records survive which show that Stuart spoke using similar rhetoric to her earlier Hardwick Hall letters. 'According to the same statement Stuart had said "all the world ... will condemne me to undoe my Aunt that indured for me", but Stuart could not in conscience allow 'a foolish woman' to 'overthrowe a whole family',... If this account can be trusted, Stuart's words are reminiscent of the rhetoric she had used a decade earlier when she had written of fictional lover and envisioned herself as grandly heroic, avowing power and influence she lacked'.¹⁸³

The combination of illness and a weakened mental state due to years of imprisonment took their toll on Stuart. Her final hopes to attend Princess Elizabeth's Valentine's Day wedding in 1613 were thwarted, and despite having bought a chain of fifty-one pearls to be embroidered on her gown for the occasion¹⁸⁴, Stuart was not given permission to leave her prison. The final years of her life are not recorded by her letters but there is information from what others at court had said about her. 'Some of her

¹⁸² Hintz, p. 136.

¹⁸³ Steen, *Letters*, p. 86.

¹⁸⁴ See Steen, *Letters*, for further details p. 89.

contemporaries viewed the Lady Arbella Stuart with compassion, even thought they saw her as a royal melancholic who needed more self-control; others considered her a political manipulator, an actor, a willful woman, eventually a madwoman in the Tower. Insanity has long been the diagnosis for women who do not conform to their culture's definition of modest womanhood, as the Lady Arbella clearly did not'.¹⁸⁵

Whether Stuart died from starvation or porphyria or literally a broken heart (which was listed as a cause of some deaths in the seventeenth century) is unclear. 'By modern standards the physician's report is vague'.¹⁸⁶ The official statement of her cause of death reads:

a chronic and long sickness; the species of disease was *illam jamdiu producem in cachexiam* [one that after a time resulted in ill-health and malnutrition], which, increasing as well by her negligence as by refusal of remedies (for a year she would not allow doctors to feel her pulse or inspect her urine). By long lying in bed she got bedsores, and a confirmed unhealthiness of liver, and extreme leanness, and so died.¹⁸⁷

When Stuart died on 25 September 1615 she was nearly 40 and had lived a life filled with disappointments and unhappiness. James feared that some of his contemporaries would believe he had had a hand in her death and quickly ensured her body was removed from her rooms at the Tower (in the middle of the night) and taken to Westminster Abbey, where her body lies today. Stuart's coffin was discovered in 1867 on top of Mary

¹⁸⁵ Steen, 'Reading of Illness', p. 123.

¹⁸⁶ Steen, *Letters*, p. 97.

¹⁸⁷ Steen, *Letters*, p. 96.

Queen of Scots' coffin in a vault directly beneath Mary's tomb.¹⁸⁸ Her name is printed into the stone to mark her grave but nothing more.

By the mid-seventeenth century public opinion had changed and Stuart was seen by many as a 'saint and Protestant martyr',¹⁸⁹ not a woman who had violated social mores and disobeyed the King on many occasions. Stuart has become a romanticized figure over the years, and her life now has a myth-like quality to it. There have been rumours that she had a baby in secret – although whatever happened to that possible child remains a mystery. Conjectures of further escape plots and her death by poison are still aired from time to time. The reality is that we are more interested in Stuart today than many were during her time, due to her letters which are as vibrant and interesting to read today as they were in the seventeenth century. While we have pity for Stuart and her impossible situation, it is her letters which allow us to relive this life and see it through her eyes. Through her words we can travel back in time and feel her anger at her situation in life and her resistance towards those who tried to control her. Steen sums up her voice by stating,

...we hear a voice that did not speak as humble woman or subject. Stuart chafed at the role. Her creation of a deferential self was an attempt to exploit the patriarchal models and use the language of flattery and obedience as an indirect means to achieving power when overt power was unavailable.¹⁹⁰

I see Stuart as living life to the best of her ability and never allowing those in authority to undermine her. She lived a fascinating and turbulent life

¹⁸⁸ Lovell, p.493.

¹⁸⁹ Steen, 'The crime of marriage: Arbella Stuart and the Duchess of Malfi', p. 75.

¹⁹⁰ Steen, *Letters*, p. 81.

which was never boring to study and read about over these last four years of researching this thesis. I think this quote from Virginia Woolf sums up Arbella's personality succinctly:

She will write in a rage where she should write calmly. She will write foolishly where she should write wisely ... She is at war with her lot. How could she help but die young, cramped and thwarted.¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ *A Room of One's Own* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1946), p. 104. Woolf is describing Charlotte Brontë

Conclusion

Arbella Stuart lived over 400 years ago and yet her voice rings as vibrantly and clearly today when reading her letters as it did in her lifetime. She lived an exciting and turbulent life filled with drama and intrigue. 'From the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries, her story has been told and retold in ballad, poetry, novel, drama and biography'.¹⁹² Despite her story being retold so many times and in various forms, I discovered there were still relatively limited recent studies completed on her letters.

I have found her a fascinating subject to research and my quest for knowledge about her life has led to hours scrambling through manuscripts at the British Library and two important 'behind- the-scenes' tours of her places of imprisonment – that being Hardwick Hall and The Tower of London. I have had many friends and colleagues ask me why I have been so interested in Arbella and why this thirst for information on her had become almost an obsession. She fascinated me because she speaks truthfully and without thinking and it is her descriptions of her everyday life at Hardwick Hall and later, at King James' court which have kept me enthralled over the years. Her ability to manipulate her reader and assume different personae, depending on whom she was writing to, was part of her appeal to me. Her letters can be both loosely structured and informal when writing to family, or extremely formal and correct when writing to those in authority. Stuart's letters give the reader a private view

¹⁹² Steen, *Letters*, p. 1

of life during this period of time and the frustration she felt as a woman in this patriarchal society, in a way that official court documents cannot.

Throughout this thesis I have explored how Stuart's tone, rhetoric and style of writing altered over her lifetime and how her illness had such an impact on her letter writing. Like most of us Stuart had a multi-faceted personality. She was both resistant to authority at times during her life and also able to adopt the guise of humility and deference to those in authority. Her voice is emotional and distressed in the rapidly written letters of 1602-03 (written from her bedroom at Hardwick Hall; - today this room is used as a storage area); as she demands to be allowed to follow her dreams and live her life the way she felt she was entitled to. The frustrations and real emotion apparent in these letters and those written during the final years of her life, throws light on what life could be like for women in this period of history. 'Raised to rule and always aware of her rank, Lady Arabella Stuart was not silent or obedient, nor was she passive in response to the forces arrayed against her. Articulate in her anger, she struggled to command her destiny through whatever means were available, from ruse to overt defiance'.¹⁹³

Today Stuart's letters rank highly in the female literary tradition and through them we can understand the pressures that were placed on aristocratic women during this time period. From a young age Stuart had been educated for command in the classical tradition of Greek and Roman

¹⁹³ Steen, *Letters*, p. 105.

learning and as expected her writing style was exceptionally good. Her frustrations are all the more apparent because she was so privileged and educated so well and then unable to use her talents at court. While her italic style did stereotype her, placing her neatly into the female gendered style, often her tone and content of the letters were of a more masculine inclination, a further indication of her extensive education.

Through her words Stuart allows us to travel back in time and feel her anger at her situation in life and her resistance towards those who tried to control her. Her spirited letters are as much of a pleasure to read today as they were 400 hundred years ago and I have thoroughly enjoyed researching and studying the letters and the woman herself.

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