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*Your Humble Handmaid: Elizabethan Gifts of Needlework**

by LISA M. KLEIN

THE STOWE INVENTORY OF THE contents of the Wardrobe of Robes gives us a privileged glimpse into the closets of Queen Elizabeth in 1600. There could be found over one thousand clothing items: gowns, robes, kirtles, foreparts, petticoats, cloaks, safeguards, and doublets, plus two hundred additional pieces of material, as well as pantofles, fans, and jewelry.¹ Many of these were gifts presented to the queen at the New Year, on progresses, at Accession Day tilts or other events. Items of embroidered clothing come to dominate the existing gift rolls. The 1588-89 New Year's gifts include, in addition to £795 in gold, almost six dozen gifts of clothing, most of them richly embroidered, plus sixteen items of jewelry, several pieces of gold- or silverplate, and a dozen gifts of embroidered furnishings.² Especially generous were the queen's principal secretary, Lord Walsingham, and his lady, who gave her items of clothing made of the most expensive and exclusive cloth available. Lord Walsingham presented "a cloke and a savegard of faire cullored velvet, laide round aboute and striped downe and eight lowpes in the fore quarters of a broade passamayn lace of Venis gold and silver plate; the cloke lyned with printed cloth of silver, and the savegard lyned with white sarsonett; and a dooblett of white satten cutt, ymbrodered all over with esses of Venis gold." His Lady presented "one skimskyn of cloth of silver, ymbrodered all over very faire with beasts, fowles, and trees, of Venis gold, silver, silke, and small seed pearles . . . lyned with carnation plushe; a peire of perfumed

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¹ Arnold, 247. Arnold includes the entire Stowe inventory in an appendix.

² Nichols, 3:2-10. By contrast, the 1561-62 list reveals that most presenters gave gold in purses, and of the thirty-odd gifts of embroidered clothing, nearly half are handkerchiefs (1:108-19).

gloves, the coaffe ymbrodered with seed pearls, and lyned with carnation velvett." More modest gifts of needleworked clothing included the "smock of fyne Holland about wroughte with black silke" given by Lady Carew and Lady Townsend's "large ruff of lawne cutwork unmade."³

The giving of costly gifts to the queen was seldom motivated by pure devotion, duty, or generosity. The Senecan ideal held that "it is a manly and franke harte, desirous too bestowe even when it hath bestowed alreadie . . . not regarding how gainfull they may bee too the bestower. For els, too doo good because it is a mannes owne profite, is a bace thing, praiselesse."⁴ In fact, this Renaissance ideal of disinterested gift-giving may have been more honored in the breach. Elizabeth's subjects offered her gifts with an eye toward what they could expect in return. As Sir John Harington, the queen's godson and something of a rake, wrote to a friend concerning his attempts to further his suit to regain some lands: "I will adventure to give her Majestie five hundred pounds, in money, and some pretty jewell or garment as you shall advyse, onlie praying her Majestie to further my suite with some of her lernede counsel . . . five and twentie manors do well warrant my trying it."⁵ However fond he was of his queen, Harington's gifts were clearly an attempt to purchase her favorable intervention on his behalf. Apparently he succeeded in laying claim to the lands in question.⁶

In another case also involving a land dispute, a complex network of familial and courtly obligations was invoked by Elizabeth Cooke, now Dowager Lady Russell. She asked her nephew, Sir Robert Cecil, to intercede regarding her suit on behalf of her daughter, Elizabeth, a

³ Ibid., 3:8, 9.

⁴ Seneca, bk. 4, chap. 14, sig. D1r. Wallace, 349-63, provides a good summary of Seneca's *De beneficiis* in his essay arguing that Shakespeare's *Timon* reveals the Senecan ideal of a just society of mutual benefits accruing from generosity as unworkable; still, Hobbes's *Leviathan* reveals a cultural nostalgia for Senecan illusions.

⁵ Harington, 1:118-19; cited also by Arnold, 97.

⁶ It is not known exactly what transpired of his suit. Sometime between 1594 and 1598, Harington writes of his intent to deal plainly with the queen regarding his suit for lands in the North (1:169). By 1600 he has taken possession of the lands, while Robert Sidney evaluates his claim, and alludes to the queen's good will and delight in his presents of poems and dainties (1:312-13). Gifts from Harington to the queen are recorded for 1572, 1574, 1576, and 1579 (1:119-20), and he was generally in his queen's good graces; she refers to him as "that witty fellow, my godson" (1:317).

maid of honor to the queen. She enumerated and priced each grudging gift of clothing, jewelry, curtains, and hats she had bestowed on the queen, including "a gown and petticoat of such tissue as should have been for the Queen of Scot's wedding garment." Her frustration and her calculation were evident as she appealed to Cecil: "Sir, I will be sworn that, in the space of 18 weeks, gifts to her Majesty cost me above 500 l, in hope to have the Dunnington lease; which if now you will get [the lease] performed for Bess's almost six years' service, she, I am sure, will be most ready to acquit any service to yourself."⁷ Alongside her several material gifts to the queen was the prior gift of her own daughter, whose service added to the queen's debt. Promising to scratch Cecil's back if he scratched hers, she reminded him of her daughter's useful proximity to the queen.

The above examples, revealing the ulterior, self-interested motives of gift-giving, invite us to examine the politics of gift occasions involving the queen. Most studies of power relations in Elizabeth's court focus on the formal mechanisms for reward and patronage of male nobles, the manipulation of courtly rhetoric, or the alternately supportive and subversive potential of works of art, poetry, and drama presented to or performed for the queen.⁸ The ritual exchange of gifts, however, was also an important means by which Elizabeth and her subjects fostered allegiances and affirmed hierarchical relationships. Attention to gift exchange, particularly the leverage wielded by a giver who was subordinate, illuminates the mutual constitution of social relations between the giver and the recipient of the gift.⁹ The gifts bestowed by handmaids (and male subjects) ingratiate in order to empower; but while the gift pressures hierarchy, it ultimately reaffirms and reinforces it. Inherent contradictions thus mark the gift exchange:

⁷ Arnold, 97.

⁸ For example, see MacCaffrey, 95-126; Crane, 1-15; Heisch, 31-55; Orgel; various articles by Montrose, 1980¹ and 1983.

⁹ Much good critical work of late acknowledges the complex construction of power relations at court; see in particular Whigham. Little has been done, however, in the area of gift exchange, three notable exceptions being Fumerton, 1991; Montrose, 1980²; and Davis. Gift theory also informs some recent studies of Shakespeare. See Newman; Sharp; and Flesch, who argues that the personal authority of these writers is "created and displayed through (often ritualized) acts of generosity" (ix). A most promising context for my own work are studies of material culture that consider the social function of artifacts; see for example Appadurai and Romano for analyses of how luxury items and gifts create and sustain social relationships.

a gift is free, yet coercive; it engenders a reciprocal relationship, but the exchanges are seldom equal. Elizabeth was aware of and able to manipulate these tensions as she participated in gift occasions, both as a humble handmaid presenting needleworks to her superiors and as the powerful queen receiving them from her subjects.

Because gifts of embroideries figured prominently in the inventories, we ought to consider how these material artifacts helped to solidify social relations involving the women who made and presented them. Wendy Wall has recently shown that the circulation of Elizabethan sonnets was “a means of cementing vital social relationships” among male poets; in this exchange, the female mistress/reader, often a mere fiction, was a “median space marking the forging of alliances” between men.¹⁰ My attention to needleworked gifts, by contrast, shows women as active participants in cultural exchange, using their material objects to forge alliances. The examples in this essay demonstrate that subordinated subjects as well as the queen were able to manipulate the occasions of gift-giving to promote self-interested social relations.¹¹ Women were adept at using their status as handmaids, together with the signifying potential of their hand-made embroideries, in ways that were empowering as well as expressive. 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 maintain threatened familial bonds. The many instances of hand-wrought gifts remind us that women did enter the arena of cultural production, where they promoted their interests and praised the monarch, although less through writing than through their work with the needle. In this essay, I explore, using anthropological theories, the role of the gift in cementing social relations between Elizabeth and her subjects, and I establish the particular intimacy, efficacy, and authority of the hand-wrought gift. 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.

¹⁰ Wall, 38, 40. See chap. 1, esp. 31-50.

¹¹ As Foucault, 92-93, realized, power is primarily a function of social relations and only secondarily embodied in institutions or representatives of state. It can be understood as “the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses” social relations. Greenblatt’s concept of social energy is indebted to this formulation.

GIFT-GIVING AND THE SOCIAL CONTRACT

The exchange of gifts, favors, and compliments was vital to establishing and maintaining Elizabethan social relations. But this gift exchange could be more agonistic than pacific, especially when the queen was involved. Gifts given to Elizabeth could be seen in this sense as examples of what anthropologists term “prestations,” offerings that are “in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous, but are in fact obligatory and interested.”¹² In its calculated, self-promoting extravagance, gift-giving on New Year’s and other occasions resembles the ceremonial potlatch, an aggressive type of prestation in which individuals, through the display of wealth and generous gift-giving, struggle to determine their position in the hierarchy and obtain rights and benefits for their clans.¹³ What Mauss observes of the North American Indians might also be said of Queen Elizabeth’s nobles, particularly the prominent statesmen who offered extravagant gifts: “Nowhere else is the prestige of an individual as closely bound up with expenditure In some potlatch systems one is constrained to expend everything one possesses and to keep nothing. The rich man who shows his wealth by spending recklessly is the man who wins prestige. The principles of rivalry and antagonism are basic.”¹⁴ Lawrence Stone identifies a similar dynamic in the conspicuous expenditures on building, hospitality, and clothing that characterized — and undermined — the English aristocracy in this period.¹⁵ Sir Francis Walsingham, whose extravagant gifts to the queen in 1588-89 befitted his position as secretary of state, died in debt in 1590, and his lands had to be sold to pay his creditors.¹⁶ Thus while the destruction that characterized potlatch events is absent from the Elizabethan rituals, a kind of ruination could attend such excessive spending on gifts.

¹² Mauss, 1.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 4-5. On potlatch, see Haviland, 202-04. Fumerton finds that potlatch and the Kula gift ring, on which she draws for her discussion of child exchange, are two sides of the same coin: “the one extends the tale of community; the other projects the face of self-interest” (251-52, n. 128).

¹⁴ Mauss, 35.

¹⁵ Lawrence Stone, esp. chap. 10. Stone links the general extravagance and ostentation (also manifested, I suggest, in gift-giving) to a fierce competition for social status among aristocrats.

¹⁶ *Dictionary of National Biography*, 20:695.

Even if a magnanimous gift was a reckless expenditure beyond one's means, it must be given with grace, for acts of prestations reflected and reinforced the Elizabethan social hierarchy. Peers and wealthy nobles gave purses containing gold, or they gave gowns commissioned from French tailors, woven with gold and silver threads and ornamented with precious gems. Such garments, whether worn or given as gifts, bespoke the seemingly careless wealth of nobles like Walsingham. They also gave jewelry, like the earl of Warwick's gift to the queen of a carcenet, or collar, of gold, "conteyning 15 peeces, seven set with four rubyes, and one small diamond in the middest, the other seven sett with nyne pearles in a peece sett in gold, having a rowe of small pearles on thupside, and pendants of sparks of rubyes, oppalls, and ragged pearles."¹⁷ Ladies of the chamber presented hand-wrought scarves, handkerchiefs, and bodices, evidence that their spare hours were also devoted to the queen's service. Professionals or members of craft guilds gave tokens of their occupations, with an apothecary bestowing a pot of ginger and orange flowers; a stationer, books; an Italian glover, perfumed gloves; and the sergeant of the pastry and the master cooks, pies and marchpanes.¹⁸

Despite its self-aggrandizing element, the giving of gifts, whether grand or humble, is essentially conservative in that it affirms hierarchy and maintains the positions of parties within it. Annette Weiner's theory acknowledges this resistance to change, as it identifies a feature of gift-giving even more fundamental than reciprocity: namely, the paradox of giving-while-keeping. According to Weiner, people exchange certain alienable possessions in order to safeguard their inalienable possessions. The latter are transmitted from generation to generation within the family, maintaining its identity. She therefore offers a view of gift exchange more subtle and politically charged than Mauss's idealized reciprocity: "In each exchange, participants remain aware of what is not being exchanged and their actions are directed not only to the immediate events but to these events in relation to the ownership of inalienable possessions and the power they differentiate." Present in exchanges is the "thought of an inalienable possession's radiating presence, its political energy, and the danger of its irreversible

¹⁷ Nichols, 3:2.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3:457. These examples are from the 1599-1600 New Year's Gift rolls.

loss.¹⁹ The application to Elizabethan strategies of gift-giving is evident; as gifts of money, clothes, and jewels pass hands, the inalienable possession at stake is often a family's land or office and, by extension, its status.²⁰

The custom of New Year's gift-giving, however, represents more than a self-serving display of wealth or an attempt to propitiate a vain goddess, as more jewels and gowns are stuffed into the queen's bulging coffers and closets. Acts of prestation and counter-prestation form the warp and woof of the social system, involving members in the multiple obligations identified by Mauss: to give gifts, to receive them, and to repay them.²¹ (That Elizabethan culture also shared these ideals is suggested by the iconography of the Three Graces.²²) Unlike commodity exchange, gift-exchange forms social, even spiritual bonds between people who thereby establish community, assert hierarchy, and incur mutual obligations.²³ The fundamental social nature of such exchanges was recognized by Thomas Hobbes, who wrote in *Leviathan*:

As Justice dependeth on Antecedent Covenant; so does GRATITUDE depend on Antecedent Grace; that is to say, Antecedent Free-gift. . . . For no man giveth, but with intention of Good to himselfe;

¹⁹ Weiner, 42. She criticizes traditional anthropology's emphasis on the norm of reciprocity, a theory of economic behavior based on observations of western market economies. While it may falsify the experience of non-western peoples, as Weiner persuasively argues, emphasis on reciprocity of exchange is appropriate to the emergent capitalist economy of early modern Britain.

²⁰ Weiner, 33-35, allows that one example of inalienable wealth is the acquisitions of the nouveau riche that possess authority and earn esteem in greater measure than their exchange value. Had we more gift rolls from Elizabeth's reign, it might be possible, via Weiner's theory, to observe in changing gift-giving habits evidence to test Stone's view of an aristocracy in crisis, seeking by conspicuous expenditure to safeguard its position and status.

²¹ See Mauss, 10-11. For the latest of Mauss's critics, Derrida, chap. 1-2, these obligations in fact annul the gift; as soon as a gift is recognized as such, it is destroyed. Derrida concludes that the gift is impossible and criticizes Mauss's assumption that it exists and is cross-cultural. What gift theorists call gift, Derrida considers simply a form of exchange.

²² See Wallace, 353; the *locus classicus* is Seneca's *De beneficiis*, bk. 1. On Spenser's complex and ambiguous treatment of this tradition, see E. K.'s gloss on *Shepherd's Calendar*, April, 109 ff. and *The Faerie Queene*, VI.x.24.

²³ See Hyde, 56. Mauss likewise favored a spiritual explanation of reciprocity, while Firth, one of his critics, advocated a secular explanation; reciprocity occurs under pressure of "social sanctions — the desire to continue useful economic relations, the maintenance of prestige and power" (421).

because Gift is Voluntary; and of all Voluntary Acts, the Object is to every man his own Good: of which if men see they shall be frustrated, there will be no beginning of benevolence, or trust; nor consequently of mutuall help; nor of reconciliation of one man to another; and therefore they are to remain still in the condition of *War*.²⁴

For Hobbes (and for Mauss, who emulates Hobbes's political philosophy) the gift is the primitive analog of the social contract, the self-interested organization of individuals into a community. The threat of war is overcome by the social bonds forged through voluntary gift exchange, a redirection or sublimation of aggressive impulses.²⁵ In Marshall Sahlins's neat chiasmic formulation: "The force of attraction in things thus dominates the attraction of force among men."²⁶

While it may be going too far to claim that gift-giving is a barely concealed form of warfare, the coercive tactics of presenters such as Lady Russell and Sir John Harington confirm the presence of a competitive, Hobbesian self-interest. As anthropologists and laymen alike recognize, the one who initiates a gift exchange places the recipient under an obligation to reciprocate. Until the recipient returns the favor, the giver possesses an edge. The more generous the gift, the greater the obligation to reciprocate and the more difficult it becomes to discharge the debt. This is evidently what the Dowager Lady Russell was aiming for as she accumulated symbolic capital by her repeated presentations of clothing, jewels, and her own daughter to the queen. Thus gift-giving became a way for subjects to wield power by attempting to make the queen obliged to them.

The indirect force exerted by the generous gift makes it an example of what Pierre Bourdieu terms symbolic violence, "the gentle, invisible form of violence, which is never recognized as such . . . the violence of credit, confidence, obligation, personal loyalty, hospitality, gifts, gratitude, piety — in short, all the virtues honoured by the code of honour."²⁷ Put another way, a salient feature of prestation is deniability. The giver must appear not to be coercive, but complimentary; the element of compulsion is "disguised under the veil of

²⁴ Hobbes, bk. 1, chap. 15, 103.

²⁵ On Mauss's debt to Hobbes, see Sahlins, 168-80.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 174.

²⁷ Bourdieu, 192.

enchanted relationships."²⁸ This describes the tactic of the poet who designs his magnum opus as a compliment to the queen, dedicates it to her, and praises her as the pattern of courtesy:

Then pardon me, most dreaded Soveraine,
That from your selfe I doe this vertue bring,
And to your selfe do it returne againe:
So from the Ocean all rivers spring,
And tribute backe repay as to their King,
Right so from you all goodly vertues well
Into the rest, which round about you ring,
Faire Lords and Ladies, which about you dwell,
And doe adorne your Court, where courtesies excell.²⁹

Spenser's tribute to Elizabeth's courtesy is compulsory: he is obligated to give it, and his tribute in turn compels the queen to be courteous to him. The gift of *The Faerie Queene* to Elizabeth thus both fulfills and creates obligation. Spenser's gently coercive gift succeeded, for the queen rewarded him with an annuity of £50, surely making him the envy of many a patronage-seeker.

In emphasizing the expected reciprocity of gift exchange, Spenser's verses also raise the important question of priority: Does the poet or the queen give the first gift? Iconically, the queen was the fountain of grace, the ocean from which all rivers sprang and to which they owed unending tribute. Her subjects acknowledged this: "To your Majestie . . . we doe all homage, accounting nothing ours but what comes from you."³⁰ The queen was God's representative and substitute who initiated the gifts of grace and peace that sustained her subjects. In an illustration from John Case's *Sphaera Civitatis* (1588), Elizabeth occupies the position of prime mover looming over the Ptolemaic state of England. During her coronation procession, she demonstrated her awareness of her position in the divine scheme and her acceptance of mutual responsibilities by kissing and embracing a Bible presented by an allegorical figure of truth.³¹ On other occasions, she insisted on her position as unmoved mover, such as the time when Parliament pressed her to marry and settle the succession out of her duty to the kingdom and she refused to be compelled: "For a guerdon constrained and a gift

²⁸ Ibid., 191.

²⁹ Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, VI.Pr.7. See the discussion by Bates, 157-58.

³⁰ From a speech to the queen at Bisham in 1592, in Nichols, 3:136.

³¹ Montrose, 1980², 449; Neale, 62.

freely given can never agree together," she scolded.³² Astute politician that she was, it is no surprise to find her resisting the "symbolic violence" of their request and insisting on her priority to initiate such a gift to her people.

Indeed, the queen's priority in the hierarchical exchange of gifts calls for a qualification of the norm of reciprocity so valued by Mauss. While Mauss emphasized the equivalence effected by reciprocity, his critics point instead to the importance of rank and hierarchy and argue that exchange functions to authenticate — not erase — difference.³³ In truth, gift exchange between monarch and subject was always unequal. Spenser's annuity, rich reward that it was, would never render his status equal to the queen's. Nor were the formal gift exchanges at all equivalent. One New Year, Sir John Harington gave the queen a jeweled heart of gold, worth far more than the forty ounces of gilt plate he received in return; this was entirely typical.³⁴ These imbalances make sense if we accept that the queen, who was the font of all good, had the advantage of being the initial giver to subjects who would be forever debtors. Sahlins describes hierarchical exchange thus: "Goods are in truth *yielded* to powers-that-be, perhaps on call and demand, and likewise goods may have to be *humbly solicited* from them. Still the rationale is often assistance and need, and the supposition of return correspondingly indefinite. Reciprocation . . . bears no necessary equivalence to the original gift, and the material flow can be unbalanced in favor of one side or the other for a long time."³⁵ Gift-giving is therefore a social exchange which, unlike economic exchange, entails *unspecified* obligations. In the words of Peter Blau, "social exchange, whether it is in this ceremonial form or not, involves favors that create diffuse future obligations, not precisely specified ones, and the nature of the return cannot be bargained about but must be left to the discretion of the one who makes it."³⁶ The delay of the return gift benefitted both the queen and the giver. As long as the gift remained

³² Rice, 115.

³³ Weiner argues that not the balance of equivalence, but the hierarchical "authentication of difference" (40) is the fundamental feature of gift exchange, and Sahlins, 205, discusses how the difference of rank bears upon reciprocity such that paternalism becomes an economic ethic.

³⁴ 1:119-20.

³⁵ Sahlins, 206.

³⁶ Blau, 93.

unreciprocated, the original giver retained a symbolic edge.³⁷ (Lady Russell felt that the queen “owed” her.) Deferring the return gift was also good politics for a monarch, who thereby avoided the perception that honors, places, or rewards could simply be purchased. Her position also granted her the right to refuse reciprocation or even acceptance of a gift.³⁸ The subject, however, had to continue his acts of prestation, even when apparently unreciprocated by the queen, because he always owed allegiance and tribute. Should he cease, the fountain of grace might in turn dry up altogether. As Seneca wrote, to give, even in vain, is proof of a fine spirit.

Partly because a gift generated “diffuse future obligations,” its success — the ability to compel return — is difficult for us to determine. An additional problem is that records pertaining to gifts are rare. One extraordinarily documented case, however, reveals the importance of the New Year’s gift ritual to maintaining and strengthening the monarch-subject relationship. Elizabeth Talbot, countess of Shrewsbury (Bess), put herself in a position to incur Elizabeth’s wrath and mistrust. In October of 1574, while she and her husband were keepers of Mary Stuart, the captive Scottish queen, she hosted Mary’s mother-in-law Margaret, countess of Lennox, though contact between Mary and Margaret had been forbidden. Bess’s aim was to further a

³⁷ According to Bourdieu, this is an essential feature of gift-exchange; he cites La Rochefoucauld’s maxim that “Overmuch eagerness to discharge one’s obligations is a form of ingratitude” (6). Bourdieu also cites the example of a father’s options in responding to a suitor who asks to marry his daughter: “He has to reply as soon as possible if the answer is no, lest he seem to be taking advantage of the situation, and offend the suitor, whereas if he intends to say yes, he may put off the reply for as long as he likes, so as to make the most of the temporary advantage of his position, which he will lose as soon as he gives his consent” (7). One thinks of Elizabeth’s tactic of prolonging her courtship with the duke of Alençon, enjoying the diplomatic advantage it provided in relations with France. Derrida, expatiating on Mauss and the necessary interval of delay, offers this suggestion: “the difference between a gift and every other operation of pure and simple exchange is that the gift gives time” (41).

³⁸ Unlike Mauss, Hyde acknowledges occasions when a gift must be refused, when the connection that it offers is tainted, threatening, or evil (70-73). Indeed, Elizabeth did not always accept or reciprocate gifts. She threatened to return a jewel to Dowager Lady Russell, but never did. She refused Mary Stuart’s request for some of the queen’s gowns, perhaps deeming it inappropriate, but sent her some black material, suggesting that her cousin who remarried so hastily after Lord Darnley’s death should go into suitable mourning instead (Arnold, 98). Elizabeth was not entirely ungenerous, however; she often gave gifts of her own or new clothing to her ladies, a dimension of the subject outside the purview of this paper. For examples, see Arnold, 99-108.

match between her daughter and Margaret's son, Charles Stuart. (Margaret's eldest son had been Lord Darnley, Mary's murdered husband.) The marriage, which made Bess's daughter kin to the queen and her grandchildren heirs to the thrones of Scotland and England, had taken place by November, without the queen's knowledge and approval. In 1575 an heir, Arbella Stuart, was born. Shortly thereafter, some of the Earl's servants were arrested on suspicion of carrying messages for Mary, and Elizabeth began to suspect Shrewsbury's loyalty.³⁹

Having pursued her own dynastic ambitions and possibly jeopardized her standing with the queen, Bess took great pains with her New Year's gift in 1575. Stuck in the hinterlands of Derbyshire with Mary, she invoked the assistance of Anthony Wingfield, the husband of her half-sister and one of the queen's gentleman ushers. He consulted with the ladies of Elizabeth's privy chamber about a suitable gift. Lady Cobham suggested money or a gold cup, but Lady Sussex had very precise suggestions for an embroidered cloak, sure to please the queen. As Wingfield wrote to his wife:

I Dylte with hur for her Jugmente for the neueresgefte. and thys ys hur mynde that she would have the coullere to be off a lyete wacheyte sattene and gardyd with small garges off carnasyon vellvete. and apone the garde imbroyderyd with pansys off all fasyenes . . . and to be trymed with gleysterynge Gould and sylver to the byste shoue . . . for in a naroue garde the panse floware wyll shoue best . . . ye quene lekes byst off that floware.⁴⁰

In January, Wingfield's wife wrote to Bess, reporting an enthusiastic response to the gift:

[W]e have reped such recompence as could not dissire better, furst her majestie never liked any thinge you gave her so well, the color and strange triminge of the garments with the redie and grat cost bestowed upon yt hath caused her to geve out such good speches of

³⁹ Elizabeth was angered, but no one seems to know if Bess was, like the countess of Lennox, imprisoned in the Tower. For the main outline of these events, I have relied on Durant, chap. 5-6.

⁴⁰ Cited by Arnold, 95, from a letter in the Folger Shakespeare Library.

my lord and your ladyship as I never hard of better. . . . [She] sayd that good nobell copell the[y] show in all things what love the[y] bere me and surely my lord I wyll not be found unthankfull[.] if my lord and yow ladyship had geven v hundrd pound. in my opennon yt would not have bene so well taken.⁴¹

The queen was not only pleased with the design, but impressed by the cost of the gift, which called forth her praise of the Shrewsburys. Most importantly, in the wake of the recent tumult, the queen was reassured of their love and fidelity. She seemed to hint that future thanks were forthcoming, though no particular return was specified. The occasion of giving the embroidered cloak, a gift carefully chosen and designed for Elizabeth, thus exhibited the tension in the gift exchange: it reaffirmed the mutual but hierarchical relationship of the queen and her loyal subjects, the Shrewsburys, while it gently coerced the queen into continued reciprocity.

THE SPIRIT OF THE HAND-MADE GIFT

Why was the Shrewsburys' embroidered cloak such an effective gift? Surely Elizabeth had others equally opulent and even warmer. The popularity of richly embroidered personal gifts has been attributed to her female vanity and her extravagant taste. While not denying these traits, I submit that a personal gift such as an embroidered dress or book is particularly appropriate for fostering the mutual obligation that was the aim of the gift exchange. A hand-wrought gift has a particular intimacy, authority, and efficacy that other gifts, like money or plate, lack. Mauss speaks of the spirit ("*hau*") residing in the Maori *taonga*, or present: "the thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified, and strives to bring to its original clan and homeland some equivalent to take its place."⁴² Moreover, objects given in ceremonial exchange such as potlatch are spiritual, animate and efficacious; they are "confounded with the spirits who made them."⁴³ For Mauss the bond between a thing given and its original owner or maker is cross-cultural, found in Roman, Chinese, and Brahminic law and in Germanic custom. Experience confirms this bond in our own culture; there are those who treasure heirlooms, a hand-made quilt or the family Bible. While we may not ascribe spiritual power to them, as the Maori do

⁴¹ Ibid., 95.

⁴² Mauss, 10.

⁴³ Ibid., 43. Fumerton, 1991, 34, interprets the "*hau*" somewhat differently, as the life force, generosity, that begets further giving.

their *taonga*, we may believe that they connect us to those who created, presented, or previously possessed them. Karl Marx also acknowledged the inexplicable “mystical character” of commodities, or objects of exchange, and proposed that the relations between men become expressed in things that are the products of human labor. In short, the value of objects arises from social, not simply material, relations.⁴⁴

In the Renaissance, there is ample evidence that symbolic associations between a gift and its giver rendered the gift memorable and hence, it was hoped, effective in signifying or promoting a desired relationship. The color, trimming, and expense of the Shrewsbury's cloak called forth Elizabeth's praise of the lord and lady and promises of continued favor. Another, more famous example involves a gift given to the queen by the poet and courtier, Sir Philip Sidney. In 1579 he authored a letter boldly criticizing the queen for her proposed marriage to a Catholic Frenchman, the duke of Alençon. Though there is no evidence that the queen punished Sidney, he did retire from court until the affair blew over. Upon his return in 1581, he presented Elizabeth with a conciliatory New Year's gift of a jewel-encrusted whip, as if acknowledging his transgression and submitting to her reproof. The gift conveys the spirit of the persona Sidney displayed in his literary works, most notably in *Astrophil and Stella*, the aggressive lover who menaces Stella's virtue then meekly submits to her supremacy. In the aftermath of this event, Sidney's uncle, the earl of Leicester, also presented a valuable and symbolic gift: two jewel-encrusted bodkins, perhaps signifying that Elizabeth could stab him if she wished. They were embellished with thirty-six “true-love knots and ragged staffs,” promising Leicester's continued devotion to her and reminding her of their lengthy friendship.⁴⁵

The ingenuity with which courtiers personalized their gifts to the queen is also evident in an embroidered book presented to her by the archbishop of Canterbury, Matthew Parker. Now in the British Library, the green velvet-bound and embroidered copy of *De antiquitate Ecclesiae Britannicae*, published by John Day in 1572, punningly alludes to its maker and simultaneously compliments the queen (see fig.1). The design bordering the edges of the book represents a fenced park, the palings hundreds of small strips of gilt metal secured with satin thread. Though the gilt is now worn, originally it would

⁴⁴ Marx, *Das Kapital* I.1.4. I thank Luke Wilson for this reference.

⁴⁵ Duncan-Jones, 169.

have shone splendidly. Aside from two small windows, the fence is as tight as a stockade, and the gate in the lower center is also closed. In the corners within the border are four deer worked in metal thread and silk. A rose bush flourishes in the center, bearing both red and white blooms. Other flowers are scattered about: a carnation, daisy, and two purple and gold pansies. The punning allusion to Parker is obvious, and the reference to Elizabeth, a Tudor rose flourishing in an enclosed garden, compliments her ancestry, her virginity, and her flourishing state. The back of the book is similarly embroidered with a fence, deer, and flowers, but with a few notable differences. First, the gate to the park is open, and the fenced border is breached in another area where a deer grazes beyond the boundary. Two snakes are among the scattered motifs, and a hare is at the center. This garden, no longer enclosed, represents the "underside" of Eden; the roses of Elizabeth's chastity are displaced by the hare, a victim of the chase and a notably fecund animal,⁴⁶ while the deer, too, are left vulnerable. Thus the allegorical compliment of the upper cover is accompanied by a corresponding admonition from the spiritual head of the English Church. Unfortunately, there is no record of the gift occasion, but it seems unlikely that Parker meant to rebuke the queen or that she could take offense at the splendid gift. Their public relationship was good, and it had a personal dimension as well; Parker had been Anne Boleyn's chaplain, charged with her daughter's spiritual welfare.⁴⁷ His book, its embroidery conveying praise of his inviolate queen and

⁴⁶ Rowland, 88-93, finds that the symbolism of the hare was usually negative. She reports that the hare was, according to medieval encyclopedists, able to give birth without losing virginity and was thus sometimes a symbol for chastity. She notes, that Elizabeth was referred to as a hare by her enemies though I have been unable to locate any such references.

⁴⁷ Guy, 257. Brook, 314, reports that in late 1572-early 1573 Parker appealed to Burghley for the queen's permission to improve his palace and estates and seemed to feel that he was out of her favor. May of 1573 also saw a rare instance of Parker standing up to Elizabeth over a clerical appointment and getting his way (Brook, 315-16). In September, 1573, he hosted the queen at Canterbury, but accounts of the gifts presented to her do not include his *De antiquitate*, though he gave elegantly bound books to her ladies. There is an account of Parker presenting Burghley with a copy of his book in early 1573 in Collinson, 146-48. Brook's account of variations in printed versions, 322-23, may help to pinpoint more exactly the date of the volume presented to Elizabeth. Strype yields no definite answers either.

concern with the continued integrity of their church, must have made a profound impression on Elizabeth; even worn and faded, it is still unforgettable.⁴⁸

Many such gifts were clearly ciphers that depended for their effect on reminding the recipient of the giver's identity and interest. The fenced park on Parker's book is an obvious example. Another mnemonic gift is described in a letter from Sir Thomas Heneage to his wife in July, 1583: "I weas yesternyght with Mistress Skydmore to knowe howe her Majestie dyd, who delyveryd me a token from her Majestie to my master. Ytt was a butterflye of mother of perle as I take ytt, with this message . . . that he myght allowayes remember her that sent ytt, and she herselfe dyd and wolde weare the bodkyn and pendant that he sent her on that eare that shoulde heare nothing that sholde hurte him."⁴⁹ Here tokens are exchanged precisely to remind Heneage and the queen of each other during his absence. Parker's embroidered book, Sidney's jeweled whip, and Elizabeth's butterfly are all gifts that rely upon the symbolic link between the gift and its giver in order to create a bond between the giver and the recipient.

If objects of exchange relied upon their ability to signify the giver in order to promote a relationship, then a gift hand-wrought by the giver might be deemed to have a special efficacy. In fact, presenters of hand-made items often drew attention to this feature. Esther Inglis, who was noted for her exquisite handwriting, presented the queen with a calligraphed book of Psalms in 1599. It was bound in crimson velvet, embroidered with a Tudor rose and crown, and studded with pearls. In her dedication to the queen, Inglis often refers to her own hand, offering Elizabeth the "fruits de ma plume," and referring to characters "tires d'une main feminine." She hopes that her "petit present, escrit de ma main, au pais estranger, pourra obtenir place en quelque coing retire de vostre cabinet," desiring that her work will effect an intimacy with the queen.⁵⁰ The book was delivered to the queen by Inglis's husband, Bartholomew Kello, who was evidently impatient for a

⁴⁸ British Library C.24.b.8. For my discussion of this work, I have relied on my own observations and on the description by Davenport, 60-63. Davenport marks the visual pun on Parker and the allusion to the queen in the roses, and he notes the probability that Parker, who had his own press, painters, and binders, oversaw the design and preparation of this volume.

⁴⁹ Quoted by Ashelford, 100.

⁵⁰ Laing, 292.

reward, since he wrote with some urgency to Anthony Bacon on 14 July and to the queen on 18 July 1599: "I did understand by report of certain of your Majesty's servants, the work was very acceptable to your Majesty, whereof indeed I could not but rejoyce, and so will the writer thereof when she shall hear your Majesty to have taken any small pleasure or delight in her handiwork."⁵¹ As a means of recommending the gift, Kello also pointed out that it was wrought by his wife's hand and invited the queen to appreciate that fact and to acknowledge it to him directly. He may have counted on the book's unique and personal nature to recommend it. Unluckily for Kello, he returned to Scotland unsatisfied, where he wrote again to Bacon in August. As for the gift itself, Elizabeth gave it to Christ Church, Oxford. Perhaps she did not like being compelled to repay a gift immediately, or perhaps she saw no benefit in patronizing the provincial Kello and his wife. Another possibility is that Elizabeth was aware that the modest gift had increased in value and significance by virtue of being her possession; thus she presented a token of her celebrity self to the officers of Christ Church.⁵²

Many women who presented gifts drew attention to their handiwork as a way of softening the monarch's heart. Mary Stuart sent the queen several personal items she had worked while she was in captivity. One was a skirt of crimson satin embroidered with silver thread, which she asked the French ambassador to present "as evidence of the honour I bear her, and the desire I have to employ myself in anything agreeable to her."⁵³ The ambassador reported that Elizabeth "found it very nice and has prized it much, and it seems to me I found her much softened towards [Mary]."⁵⁴ Elizabeth may have liked the gift but she did not

⁵¹ British Library Add. 4125, folio 355. Letters to Bacon are folios 354, 357. I have modernized the spelling, which is as follows: "I did understand be repoirt of certane your Ma teis serviteurs, the vork ves verre acceptable to you Ma tie vherof indeed I could noght bot reiose, and so vill the vreater therof when shee sall heir your Ma tie to have taiken any small pleasour or delyt in hir handyvork."

⁵² This constitutes an ideal instance of gift exchange, for, according to Hyde, 37, a gift gives increase (material, social, spiritual) not with the first transfer, but only after it has passed through someone (especially, it seems, if that someone is famous). Intuitively, however, we tend to feel that passing on a personal gift is simply ungracious.

⁵³ Swain, 1973, 82.

⁵⁴ Quoted by Digby, 57.

reciprocate, nor did she release Mary, thereby declining the obligation Mary sought to create. Sara Jayne Steen recounts a similar episode in which Arbella Stuart, imprisoned after her marriage to William Seymour, sent a gift of embroidered gloves to Queen Anne, beseeching her to accept them "in remembrance of the poore prisoner hir Ma.ts. most humble servant that wrought them in hope those Royall handes will vouchsafe to weare them which till I have the honour to kisse I shall live in a great deale of sorrow."⁵⁵ In her plea for grace she linked the hands that wrought the gloves with the hands that would wear them, a shrewd attempt at female solidarity that might move the queen to intercede with her husband on Arbella's behalf. Inglis used the same strategy in a gift to the duke of Lenox, presenting "quelque oeuvre de ma main a votre Excellence," a work "escrit et trace par ma plume," and ending her dedication: "Ainsi baisant tres humblement les mains de vostre Excellence."⁵⁶ Not surprisingly, women poets adopted this strategy too. In a poem intended to accompany the presentation of the Sidneys' Psalm translation to Queen Elizabeth, the countess of Pembroke depicted their work as a woven cloth ("hee did warpe, I weav'd this webb to end") which she offers: "I the Cloth in both our names present, / A liverie robe." In conclusion, she referred to her own "handmaids taske," alluding to the works of her hand as well as to her subservient position before God and her queen.⁵⁷ These various hand-made works — Esther Inglis's book, Mary's skirt, Arbella's gloves, and Pembroke's poems — had a unique capacity to evoke the giver, her hands occupied in painstaking and loving labor and outstretched in an attitude of presentation, devotion, or supplication.

PRINCESS ELIZABETH'S GIFTS OF EMBROIDERY

Elizabeth was sure to be sensitive to the nuances of such personalized or hand-made gifts as Sidney's jeweled whip, Parker's embroidered Bible, and Inglis's calligraphed Psalms. On at least four occasions in her girlhood, she herself presented hand-wrought gifts rich in significance. In 1544, when she was eleven years old, she translated and copied in her own hand Margaret of Navarre's poem, "The Miroir or Glasse of The Synnefull Soul," embroidered a book cover, and presented the volume to Queen Katherine Parr as a New Year's gift

⁵⁵ Steen, 89.

⁵⁶ Laing, 296-97.

⁵⁷ Mary Sidney, "Even now that Care," lines 27, 33-34, 90.

(fig.2).⁵⁸ The following year she presented a translation of Queen Katherine's *Prayers and Meditations*, also with an embroidered cover, to her father, Henry VIII (fig.3).⁵⁹ She also gave a manuscript with a nearly identical cover worked in red, blue, and silver thread to Katherine Parr (fig.4).⁶⁰ An examination of these volumes reveals Elizabeth's careful self-presentation, her awareness of her complex status and filial obligations, and her efforts to gain advantage from the important occasion of gift-giving. Considering Elizabeth's youth, dependency, and insecure status, her gifts exhibit not the coercive display by which wealthy nobles sought to enhance their status, but rather rely upon the giver's modest humility to foster desired, reciprocal relations with her father and stepmother. With their distinctive and significant covers, these books also reveal the complex and subtle ways in which a needleworked gift could be confounded with the spirit of its maker and rely for its efficacy on being hand-wrought.⁶¹

Elizabeth's gift to Queen Katherine was in every way designed to please her. Translating a devotional work was an acceptable demonstration of learning as well as an appropriately pious exercise for a young girl,⁶² just as embroidering a cover attested to her facility with the needle, a skill also expected of girls. In the design of her book cover, Elizabeth complemented her learning with a demonstration of individuality and wit. In each corner of the cover a pansy is worked in purple and yellow thread twisted with gold, which I believe Elizabeth intended as a pun on the French word *pensee*, meaning "thought" or

⁵⁸ Bodleian Library shelfmark MS Cherry 36. Two editions with reproductions of the holograph of Elizabeth's manuscript and prefatory material exist: Ames and Shell. Besides excellent contextual material, this latter volume has a transcription of the manuscript.

⁵⁹ British Library shelfmark Royal MS 7 D.x. The condition of this work is very poor. Unlike the "Miroir," no studies or transcriptions of this work exist.

⁶⁰ This work, entitled "How We Ought to Know God," is in the Scottish Record Office. I have not examined the manuscript. It is briefly discussed by Swain, 1990, 16, who also reports that a fourth book, also handmade by Elizabeth, is missing.

⁶¹ There is no proof that Elizabeth embroidered the covers of these books, but neither is there reason to doubt that she did. Strong similarities in the design and execution of the three covers suggest that the same person worked them. See Davenport, 34-36. As my analysis will make clear, I feel certain that the work is Elizabeth's; still, if she did not herself embroider the covers, she surely supervised the designs of such important personal gifts.

⁶² See Lamb, 107-25.

"idea." The association of "pansy" with the nearly homonymic French word is conventional and would have been available to Elizabeth. Ophelia, in her madness, offers rosemary for remembrance, saying "And there is pansies; that's for thoughts" (*Hamlet* 4.5.180). The pansy was also known as "love-in-idleness."⁶³ Perhaps in choosing the flower, Elizabeth wanted to invoke the tension between its association with vain or idle love and the poem's focus on sacred love. The flower's connotations of idleness were offset by her own work with the needle, and the pun on pansy/*pensee* drew attention to the thoughtful work of translation and the prayerful act of meditation (both of which were held to prevent dangerous idleness). Thus the gift proclaimed with a subtle wit both aspects of the girl's industry; Elizabeth's hands and her mind were kept occupied by the work. At the same time, she confronted the recipient (her learned stepmother) with a clever intellectual paradox rendered visually.

It is generally assumed that the pansy was simply a favorite flower of Elizabeth, bearing no particular significance. But it was so frequently associated with her that it must have been a signature flower, like the eglantine. Evidently, Elizabeth adopted the pansy as a lighthearted self-reference while still a child, using the motif in her embroidered work. Perhaps she favored the flower for its ability to signify both the serious and the coy aspects of her disposition. Pansies appeared again in the corners of the books presented to her father and step-mother in 1545, linking the three embroideries as expressions of Elizabeth's identity. Pansies were evident in the dress Elizabeth wore in the so-called Rainbow portrait. Lady Sussex, it will be remembered, recommended giving Elizabeth a dress bordered with pansies, for "ye quene lekes byst off that floware." Pansies were prominent as well on the embroidered cover of Archbishop Parker's book. In the description of the queen's garments in the Stowe inventory, the number of references to embroidered pansies is second only to roses, the obvious flower of compliment to Elizabeth's beauty and her family dynasty. Praising Elizabeth in the April eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*, Spenser associated her with the pansy: "The pretie Pawnce, / And the

⁶³ See Moyne where the illustration of the pansy is accompanied by its English name "pawnsie" and its French name "pensee." In Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*, love-in-idleness is the ingredient of Puck's magic potion, and Oberon's account of the flower's origin (2.1.156-68) recalls the entertainment for Queen Elizabeth at Elvetham in 1591.

Chevisaunce, / Shall match with the fayre flowre Delice.⁶⁴ (Possibly this was a veiled criticism of Elizabeth's current courtship with the duke of Alençon [the fleur-de-lis], a dubious enterprise [chevisaunce] to Elizabethan Protestants like Spenser.⁶⁵)

In many ways, Elizabeth's gift to Katherine (the translation as well as the embroidery) reveals an awareness of her place and her obligations within the powerful and troubled family of Henry VIII. Her own position in the family was at this point tenuous. In 1544, Elizabeth apparently offended the king (though details of the incident are unknown), was banished from his household, and restored only by Katherine's intervention. At this time Elizabeth's legal status was being altered as well. Declared a bastard before Anne Boleyn's execution in 1536, Elizabeth was established in the succession by an act of Parliament in 1544, though she was still illegitimate.⁶⁶ Studying Elizabeth's translation, Prescott finds that her errors and omissions reveal "at best a confused anxiety and at worst a deep anger" towards her father.⁶⁷ Moreover, as Prescott points out, the substance of the meditation — God as a great king and judge who is kind to daughters and merciful towards adulterous wives — would make it resonate uncomfortably with the king.

The meditation would, however, be suitable and perhaps reassuring for his current wife, and it is to her that Elizabeth addressed her work. Katherine may even have asked Elizabeth to translate the poem, which expressed her own humanist and reformist sympathies.⁶⁸ In fact, the work has an exclusively female lineage: written by Margaret of Navarre, it was translated by Elizabeth, and presented to Elizabeth's stepmother. The poem's title also echoes a work by Lady Margaret Beaufort, a learned humanist and mother of Henry VII, who translated *The Myrour of Golde for the Synfull Soule* in 1506.⁶⁹ By invoking her exemplary great-grandmother, Elizabeth indirectly asserted her own Tudor credentials while also acknowledging her duty to her current stepmother. In her prefatory letter, she proclaims Katherine's

⁶⁴ Spenser, "April", lines 142-44.

⁶⁵ See Norbrook, 87-88. The only recorded usage of "chevisaunce" as a flower is this one; in the May eclogue, the word is glossed by E. K. as signifying "spoyle, or bootie, or enterprise . . . sometime for chiefdome."

⁶⁶ See Jenkins; and Neale, 6, 9.

⁶⁷ Prescott, 68-69.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁶⁹ Perry, 31.

“affectionate will and fervent zeal . . . toward all godly learning” and her own “duty toward you (most gracious and sovereign princes).”⁷⁰ Elizabeth presented her work as an attempt to sharpen her wit and avoid the dangers of idleness through study. She also evinced an appropriate, feminine modesty that was paradoxically empowering: “I know that as for my part which I have wrought in it (as well spiritual as *manual*) there is nothing done as it should be nor else worthy to come in Your Grace’s *hands*, but rather all unperfect.” To the contrary, she had every reason to be proud of her apt translation, her even script, and her skillful needlework. Nonetheless, she intended the gift to be kept private, asking Katherine that “no other (but your highness only) shall read it or see it, lest my faults be known of many.”⁷¹

Elizabeth knew that a modest reference to one’s handwork could ingratiate in order to empower, that hands could reach into a queen’s private space, her personal cabinet.⁷² Esther Inglis used the same strategy in dedicating a volume of emblems to Prince Charles, asking him to “remember me your Graces humble hand-maid” and gesturing in the next sentence to “the fruits of my pen,” the hand-wrought book. Echoing her earlier dedication to the queen, she asked that the “small pledge of my duetifull and verie humble obeissance may have sum retired place in your Highnesse Cabinet.”⁷³ In a letter to the king asking for an Oxbridge fellowship for her son, Inglis also referred to herself as “your most humble handmaid.”⁷⁴ Similarly, the countess of Pembroke had referred to the “handmaids taske” of translating the Psalms for Elizabeth. Like Pembroke, Inglis — surely aware of her renown as a calligrapher — played on the simultaneous humility and self-promotion signified by the designation, “handmaid.”

As Inglis’s gifts ably demonstrate, the female provenance of a humble handiwork did not preclude the work’s political dimension.⁷⁵ Indeed, given Elizabeth’s strained relationship with her father, she perhaps sought to secure an alliance with her stepmother via the gift.

⁷⁰ Shell, 111.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 111-12 (emphasis added).

⁷² See Fumerton, 1988, 93-99, for her discussion of the politics of self-revelation centered around “private” cabinets, miniatures, and sonnets.

⁷³ Laing, 304.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 308.

⁷⁵ On diplomatic reasons for translating Marguerite’s work, see Prescott, 64-66.

Her demonstration of learning, piety, skill, affection, and filial duty would surely have impressed Katherine, a woman of no small influence with the king. Even if Katherine agreed to keep the work private, she may have praised Elizabeth's achievement to her husband.⁷⁶ She may even have shown the book to Henry, who would have admired the cover even if he did not study the text. Whatever the ambiguities of the translation, the book's cover hid them by affirming Henry's position and his union with Katherine. Visually, the design alludes to his name and titles: gold braid outlines an interlaced cross and a shield, perhaps signifying Henry's self-assumed role as *defensor fidei*.⁷⁷ The six continuous knots that link the cross and shield, moreover, resemble the letter "H" and emulate the final flourish accompanying Henry's signature (fig.5). As princess, Elizabeth also signed her name with such a flourish, perhaps imitating her father and affirming her own Tudor identity (fig.6).⁷⁸ At the heart or center of the work are embroidered the initials "KP," enclosed as if protected by the surrounding design. The initials also emulate Katherine's characteristic signature, "Kateryn the Quene KP," in which the loop of the "P" reaches back to intersect the "K."⁷⁹ The knots also resemble true lovers knots, hinting at the affection of Henry for the queen.⁸⁰ By her design, Elizabeth sought visually to reassure Katherine of her protected place as Henry's beloved wife at the same time that she poignantly alluded to her own marginalized identity by depicting the four pansies outside the design of interlaced knots enclosing Katherine's initials.

The work presented to her father in 1545 also suggests Elizabeth's

⁷⁶ Katherine Parr was also famed for her interest in needlework. In the British Museum is her copy of Petrarch's works, printed in Venice in 1544; on the cover her arms are embroidered, and perhaps she did the work. See Kenrick, 58.

⁷⁷ For this suggestion, I thank Martha Oberle, who commented on an earlier version of this essay presented at the South Central Renaissance Conference, New Orleans, Louisiana, 1991.

⁷⁸ These knots are fashionable in the period; several patterns appear in Quentel's book of designs for needleworkers printed in Cologne in 1541. In the portrait of Henry VIII by Hans Holbein in the National Portrait Gallery, London, similar knots decorate the forefront and arms of his costume.

⁷⁹ The suggestion that Elizabeth as a Princess mimicked her father's flourish in her own signature was judged likely by Dr. Bruce Barker-Benfield of the Bodleian Library, which possesses the manuscript; the conscious replication of Katherine's initials supports the intentionality of the design.

⁸⁰ An Elizabethan example of decorative true lovers' knots is the armor of George Clifford, earl of Cumberland. See the illustrations in Strong, 142, plates 65-67.

efforts to authenticate her Tudor identity. Again, four pansies occupy the corners. They are less peripheral than on the *Miroir* binding, for here they flank the initial "H," which is centered at the top and crowded at the bottom in an attempt to maintain symmetry. The center of the design is a monogram, now worn and hence difficult to decipher, but perhaps signifying the interlaced letters of "KATERYN" and "HENRY."⁸¹ (The identical monogram is more easily seen on the less worn volume in the Scottish Record Office [fig.4].) This gift to Henry was a volume of prayers of Katherine Parr which Elizabeth translated into Latin, French, and Italian. Prefacing it is the only letter we have from Elizabeth to her father, a letter which conveys a tone of submission appropriate for a young daughter and subject: "[N]ot only am I bound to you by the law of the land as my lord, by the law of nature as my lord and by divine law as my father, but as the most gracious of lords and my own matchless and most kind father so I would be bound to your Majesty . . . and therefore I have gladly sought, as was my duty, how I might offer your Grace the best gift that my skill and industry might find."⁸² Overcoming the abashed hesitancy of a girl not exactly sure how to address a father who has delegitimized her, Elizabeth recovers her footing and gracefully states her case as "your daughter and one who should be not only the imitator of your virtues but also heir to them." She promises that if the work is well received it will "powerfully incite me to further efforts" of learning, godliness, and service. As she alluded to Henry's might in her gift to Katherine, here she praises "the pious zeal and great industry of a glorious Queen" and hopes that "you will feel that this holy work which is the more highly to be valued as having been compiled by the Queen your wife, may have its value ever so little enhanced by being translated by your daughter."⁸³ Apparently Elizabeth judged that the Katherine connection was crucial to mending or maintaining the relationship with her father, for it was a prominent feature of all three gifts in 1544-45. By her embroidered gifts, Elizabeth carefully affirmed, while gently manipulating, the social hierarchies in which she was embedded.

⁸¹ See Davenport, 34; Perry, 36. The book is in the British Library, Shelfmark Royal MS 7 D.x. The nearly identical volume presented to Katherine contains the same center monogram, but this time pansies flank the initial "K."

⁸² Perry, 37. The translation from Latin is Perry's.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 39.

Practiced by Elizabeth even as a child, gift-giving performed an important social and political function throughout her public life. These varied examples show that both as a giver and a recipient, she was able to master the occasions of gift exchange in order to maintain or manipulate social, political, and familial relationships. Her own experience also taught her the value of a hand-made gift personalized to convey the spirit of the giver. A hand-made gift embodied a unique contradiction that surely enhanced its efficacy: a skillful needlework or a neatly penned manuscript, though presented with a conventional plea to forgive its defects, paradoxically proclaimed its worth and that of the giver. When presented to a superior, it testified to hours spent in devotion and service to the recipient. The value of an item worked on cloth with silk and gold threads was compounded by the time invested, and by the message conveyed in its design — in short, by all the circumstances of its creation and presentation. Moreover, the significance of its design and visual content was dependent upon and revealed by these circumstances, as in the gifts of Archbishop Parker and Princess Elizabeth.⁸⁴ A gift of needlework allowed the giver a moment of elaborate, often complex self-presentation that was at once personal and social, and often political as well.

Jonathan Goldberg, discussing Esther Inglis's handiwork, illuminates a further contradiction also present in Elizabeth's manuscripts and their embroidered covers. While the woman's hand was engaged in appropriate activity, copying religious texts or wielding a needle, it was also becoming empowered and gaining for the writer/needleworker a valued interiority.⁸⁵ Its products were put into social circulation: Esther Inglis sought patronage from monarchs while Elizabeth, with her gifts to Katherine Parr, positioned herself in a female community within Henry's court. Her work with the pen and needle fell within the parameters of behavior appropriate for a Christian girl, a daughter, and a subject. At the same time, this work asserted her sense of identity and awareness of her own self-interest as she used the occasions of gift-giving to establish and strengthen familial relationships.

⁸⁴ This point expands the argument of Marotti, chap. 1, esp. 8-9, that Renaissance lyrics take much of their meaning from the specific historical situations in which they are produced and received.

⁸⁵ See Goldberg, 147-53.

Finally, this analysis of Queen Elizabeth as giver and receiver of needleworked gifts accentuates the particular contributions of women to social exchanges. Central to Annette Weiner's revision of Mauss's gift theory is her contention that women as well as men are powerful agents vitally involved in the production, exchange, and authentication of inalienable possessions.⁸⁶ She shows how in many societies women's power and participation in cultural reproduction are associated with cloth and its production. These roles, however, have been invested with negative values by anthropologists, who have accordingly overlooked the political, aesthetic, and cultural significance of cloth.⁸⁷ Weiner condemns the traditional scholarly practices which have perpetuated this split and obscured the fact that both men and women are involved in human and cultural reproduction.

The study of needlework has suffered a similar neglect from the Renaissance onward. As professional work, done largely by male guild members, the craft of needlework was becoming subordinated to the fine arts. It was also becoming work associated with women, who were progressively isolated from public activity in their domestic spheres.⁸⁸ Yet it is a perfect example of women's agency in the reproduction of culture, particularly, as I have argued, in the exchange of gifts. While women didn't offer their lives to the queen's service, the spoils of piracy to her coffers, or their poetic masterworks to her everlasting memory, they did present gifts, especially of needlework. The study of Renaissance needleworks given as gifts shows how central women were to the ritualized exchanges that sustained a vast network of relationships. Often the gifts were made by women such as Mary Stuart, Esther Inglis, Arbella Stuart, and Princess Elizabeth. They were hand-made by handmaids. They were exchanged between women. Elizabeth's female attendants (like Ladies Cobham and Sussex) were powerful intermediaries in the gift exchange with vital advisory roles. Women planned, executed, and presented gifts of needlework as essays in self-promotion; by their self-interested prestations, they sought to

⁸⁶ Weiner, 11.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, chap. 2.

⁸⁸ See Cahn.

foster familial or patronage relationships, to fulfill and create obligations, and to fashion themselves as subjects, participating fully in the socially and politically significant occasions of gift exchange.

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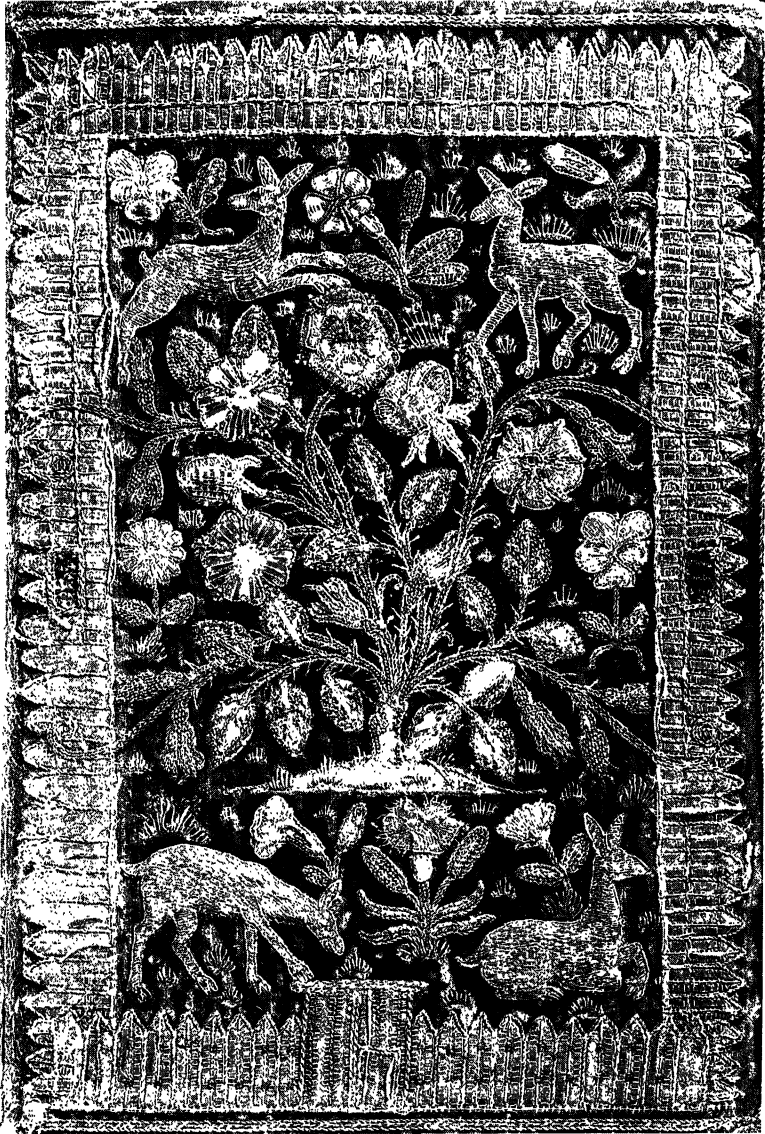


FIGURE 1: Archbishop Parker's "De antiquitate Ecclesiae Britannicae" (1572), presented to Queen Elizabeth. British Library C.24.b.8. By permission of the British Library. (Photo: British Library)

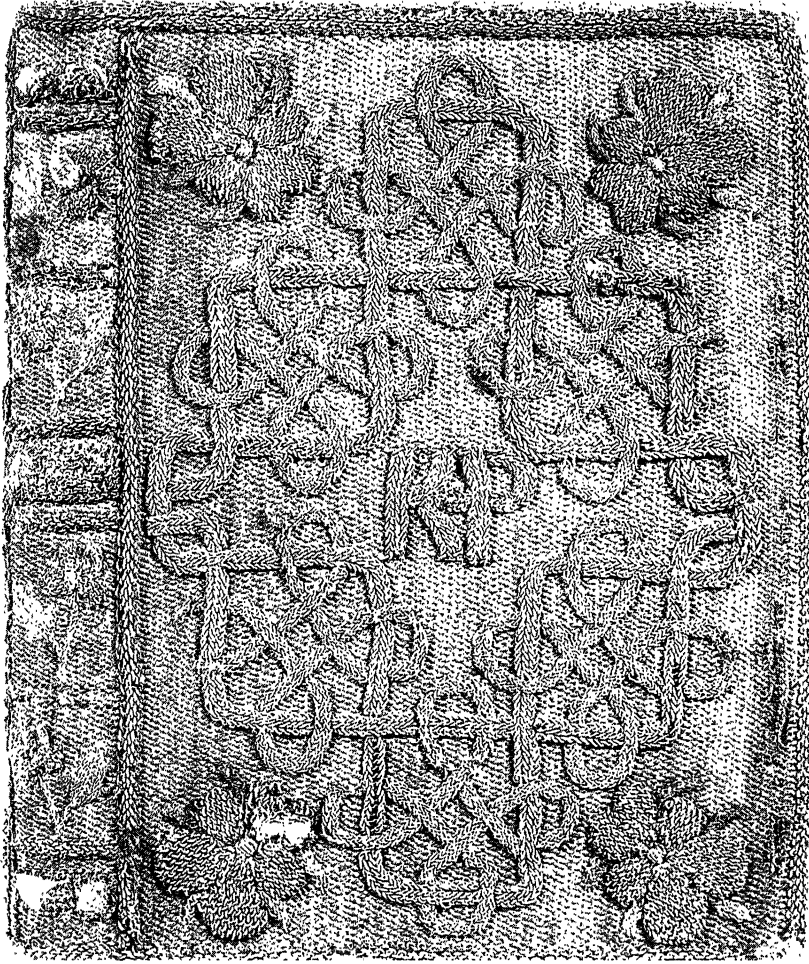


FIGURE 2. "The Miroir or Glasse of the Synneful Soul," presented by Princess Elizabeth to Queen Katharine Parr, 1544. Bodleian MS Cherry 36 (front cover). By permission of the Bodleian Library, Oxford. (Photo: Bodleian Library)

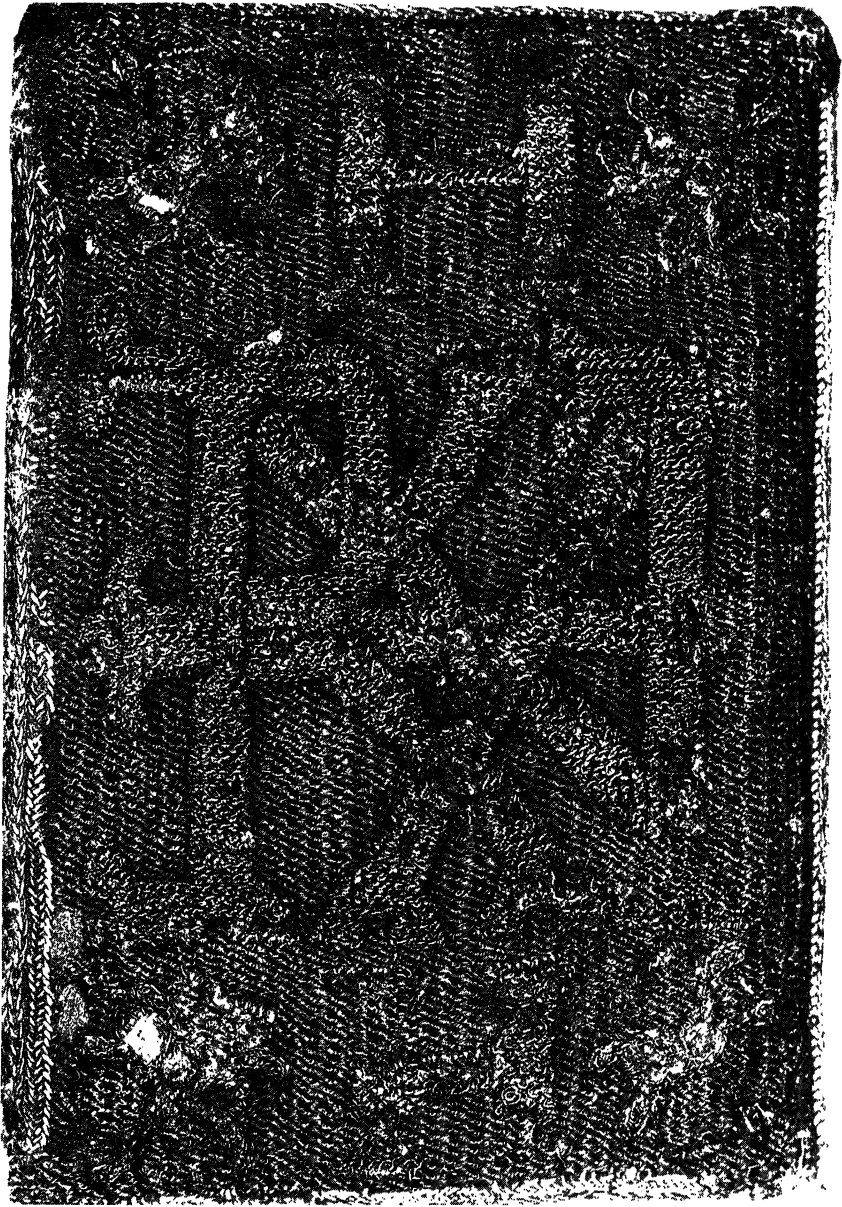


FIGURE 3. *Prayers and Meditations*, presented by Princess Elizabeth to Henry VIII, 1545. British Library Royal 7Dx (back cover). By permission of the British Library. (Photo: British Library)



FIGURE 4. "How we ought to know God," presented by Princess Elizabeth to Queen Katharine Parr, 1545. Scottish Record Office RH 13/78. By permission of the Scottish Record Office. (Photo: Scottish Record Office)

FIGURE 5. Detail of signature of Henry VIII. Folger Shakespeare Library X.d.75 (5). By permission of the Folger Shakespeare Library. (Photo: Folger Shakespeare Library)

FIGURE 6. Signature of Princess Elizabeth. PRO SP 10/2. Crown copyright, reproduced with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. (Photo: Public Record Office)

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