



## To the Queen's Most Excellent Majesty: Women's Criminal Petitions to Queen Anne of England

The British State Papers contain dozens of previously unstudied early eighteenth-century letters written by lower and middling class Englishwomen to their sovereign, Queen Anne (1665-1714). These women were petitioning to secure pardons on behalf of their convict husbands, sons, and brothers and they all used the same rhetorical techniques. But how did these women know how to capture the attention of the Queen? In this paper, Emily Rhodes '19 argues that these petitions are evidence of a set of cultural practices and beliefs shared between people from a wide variety of classes and social standings. She shows that these petitions are proof of the vital role of royal pardoning in the judicial system and wider society in late Stuart England. Ultimately, her research reveals both the agency and experiences of lower-class women largely overlooked by previous scholars and the political authority wielded by a Queen frequently considered powerless.



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In 1702, Anne Bonner, of Flitton, Bedfordshire, a servant, wrote a petition to the mighty Anne, Queen of England (1665-1714). Mrs. Bonner expressed “Intollerable Concern for her poor unfortunate Husband,” Henry Bonner, who “at the last assizes before these last at Bedford, was Condemned upon bare Circumstances without any other Kind of Evidence, for Killing a man.” She enumerated her husband’s virtues, for example that “he was allways honestly painful and Industrious to maintain his poor wife & thre Children.” She also included the testimony of twenty-eight citizens of Flitton, including the church warden, which stated that they “certifie that we never knew Henry Bonner Guilty of any Crime or doing of any Mischief to any but that he was a man willing to work and to take care of his family.” Anne concludes by asking for “your Sacred Majesties mercifull Pardon for her poor husband,” lamenting her “Excessive sorrow...almost even to distraction” and reminding the Queen that “his poor wife & thre children, who under this his misfortune are inevitably ruin’d, unless your Majesty pleaseth to be mercifull.”

Mrs. Bonner’s petitioning did not stop there. A later petition sent to Secretary of State William Legge, Lord Dartmouth (1672-1750) “a fortnight Since” she had “delivered a Petition to Her Majesty on Datchett Bridge” used a more desperate tone. Here, she declared that “Your Petitioner is fully assured of his Innocency” and states that “her Majesty was pleased to give Your Lordship with Directions of

Her Majesty’s Pleasure what should be done” but that “to Your Petitioner’s great surprise there is no reprieve come.” Interestingly, Anne Bonner discloses that she works for a Lady Frecheville before reminding Lord Dartmouth that her husband is to be executed on the upcoming Tuesday. This document is followed by a note from Sir Charles Hedges, Attorney General (1649/50-1714) to Lord Godolphin, Lord Treasurer (1645-1712), asking the latter to consider her petition “and report his opinion in what manner it may be best done.” After that, there are no further documents related to the Bonner case found in the State Papers.<sup>1</sup>

The Bonners were probably not a wealthy family accustomed to communicating with the nobility and monarchy. Anne Bonner worked—likely as a servant—for a Lady Frecheville. Furthermore, Bonner’s petitions are written in two different hands, suggesting they were written by scribes rather than Anne herself. On the surface, these documents appear to be mere footnotes in the State Papers archive. However, Queen Anne’s State Papers, include dozens of petitions written by women—wives, mothers and sisters—on behalf of themselves or their convicted relatives that have been untouched by scholarship. These petitions flow with emotion. Declarations such as “Yo[r]: Pet[r]: and her several Infant Children will be Reduced to the Extremest necessity by the Untimely End of her husband” are common throughout.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, many documents composed by the Queen’s advisors and secretaries asking for

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<sup>1</sup> All documents relating to the Bonner case can be found in Testimony signed several hands..., undated, The National Archives (TNA), Her Majesty’s Public Records Office [London] (PRO), State Papers (SP) 34/32 f.127; Petition to the queen from Anne Bonner..., undated, TNA, PRO, SP 34/32/ f.128; Letter from Sir Charles Hedges..., 4 Jan. 1702/3, TNA, PRO, SP 34/32 f.129; and Petition to Lord Dartmouth, Secretary of State, from Anne Bonner, undated, TNA, PRO, SP 34/32 f.131.

<sup>2</sup> Petition of Mary Brenan to queen, 7 Feb. 1713/14, TNA, PRO SP 34/23 f.30.

presiding judges' opinions on the cases also exist.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, Anne Bonner's case was not an isolated occurrence, but rather an example of an active system of monarchical petitioning and pardoning.

These petitions reveal more than the fact that women of all classes felt comfortable petitioning and that the Queen was responding to their pleas. They give historians insight into gender, class, criminal, social, legal, monarchical, political, and cultural history at the turn of the eighteenth century. Upon examination, these petitions suggest that in late Stuart England, inklings of shared cultural practices and beliefs existed amongst people of a wide variety of classes and social standings. The women's petitions all employ similar rhetorical practices as those seen in early seventeenth century upper class women's petitions. Furthermore, both the letters and the monarchy's response to them testify to a unified understanding of the figure of the "worthy criminal," and the traits of pardonable men. Finally, these petitions echoed the same maternal rhetoric image used in publications such as poems and proclamations to glorify Queen Anne and portray her as relatable, demonstrating that the propaganda developed by the Crown and its supporters worked as intended. The petitions written by women to Queen Anne provide a case study proving that a shared culture existed at this time. However, this is not to say that these unified cultural understandings *developed* during Anne's reign. To make a judgement on this point is outside of the confines of this paper. However, this rich set of sources, which is accompanied by the royal reactions to them, display that a shared culture was emerging or had emerged.

Simultaneously, these petitions can help historians understand the continued importance of the monarch in a time when the role was becoming

increasingly institutionalized. Instead of exemplifying a post-Glorious Revolution constitutionalized crown, the petitions display the vital role of royal pardoning in the judicial system and wider society in late Stuart England. Queen Anne personally and fiercely protected her royal prerogative, exercising her remaining powers as frequently as possible.<sup>4</sup> She understood popular politics and used them to keep her place in government essential.<sup>5</sup> Even as the power of Parliament grew, Queen Anne ensured that the monarch's role remained vital to the continuing function of the country. Further, these petitions demonstrate that it is time to take a deeper look at the royal prerogative of the early eighteenth century, and at the reign of a queen historians have consistently forgotten and underestimated.

### Shared Understandings of the Duty of Women to Petition

While work has been done on the history of upper-class women's petitioning, the petitions of lower class women have been overlooked. An exploration of the previous scholarship can show the commonalities between the two groups of women. Historians including James Daybell and Alison Thorne have written extensively on the style, form and history of noble women's petitionary letters in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> Their scholarship has proven that in the late Tudor and early Stuart period, society expected noble or rich women to use epistolary skills to protect and promote their families.<sup>7</sup> This role was considered "an extension of female roles within the household," and one of the few instances where women could work outside the domestic sphere.<sup>8</sup> As shown, wealthy women were not only expected to petition on behalf of their family members in prison, it was expected of their gender. Although Daybell and Thorne only consider upper

<sup>3</sup> Petition to the queen from Robert Husher, 8 Aug. 1712, TNA, PRO, SP 34/32 f.40. Signatures found on these documents include Lord Dartmouth, Bolingbroks and H. Boyle.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Gregg, *Queen Anne* (London: Routledge, 1980), 134-36.

<sup>5</sup> Gregg, 150.

<sup>6</sup> See James Daybell, "Scripting a Female Voice: Women's Epistolary Rhetoric in Sixteenth-Century Letters of Petitions," in *Women's Writing*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2006): 3-22; James Daybell, *The Material Letter in Early Modern England: Manuscript Letters and the Culture and Practices of Letter Writing, 1512-1635* (London: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012); James Daybell and Andrew Gordon, eds., *Women and Epistolary Agency in Early Modern Culture, 1450-1690* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016); and Alison Thorne, "Women's Petitionary Letters and Early Seventeenth-Century Treason Trials," in *Women's Writing*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2006): 23-43.

<sup>7</sup> Thorne, "Women's Petitionary Letters," 23.

<sup>8</sup> Thorne, 24.

class women in their work, lower class women would also be expected to perform the same practice.

These petitions followed a strict physical and rhetorical script. Angel Day and Desiderius Erasmus (1466-1536) authored guidebooks on how to write all genres of letters, including petitionary ones.<sup>9</sup> Day—whose parameters closely mirrored Erasmus’—instructed that letters should begin by exalting the addressee; stress the reasons for granting the request; make sure the request is fair and grantable by the addressee; explain how the request might be carried out; and finally express gratitude and humiliation.<sup>10</sup> Letters also utilized appropriate spacing, with sufficient room left between the name of the addressee, the petition and the signature in the bottommost corner in order to display due deference.<sup>11</sup>

These rhetorical strategies are evident in early seventeenth century noblewomen’s petitions. In a petition on behalf of her son accused of treason, Mary Wriothesley, the Countess Dowager of Southampton (1552-1607) declares that she could not “hold stedly in my hart how to wryt” and could only “pray mercy to my miserable sonne...let the bytter passion of a perplexed mother move you to plead for her only sonne.”<sup>12</sup> This statement is emotional and highlights her weaknesses as a woman. In her petition on behalf of her husband, Lady Elizabeth Raleigh (1565-c.1647) refers to herself as “a unfortunat woman” and asks her addressee to “let my sorros cum before you—which if you trwly knew, I asur my selfe you wold pittie me.”<sup>13</sup> As shown, these women understood that emphasizing their helplessness would help their petition succeed.

It was customary for petitions to the monarch to be written by a scribe, as writing oneself was deemed impertinent.<sup>14</sup> Identifying these scribes or determining what percentage of petitions were penned by scribes is probably impossible. Nothing is

known about the presumed men who would have acted as scribes. However, the fact that the letters were scribal does not mean that the women had no say in their content. The letters do not follow a strict script. Many use a variety of rhetorical strategies, emphasize different factors, and can be quite creative. Furthermore, in many instances, two or more petitions come from the same woman in a different hand, which proves they were scribed by different people. While the handwriting is different, the wording can be almost identical, showing that the women have likely dictated the content. Although the women may not have been able to pen the letters, they certainly had a say in their matter. Therefore, the stylistic variations and similarities between the petitions demonstrate that women petitioners must have had some direct input in what was written.

The content of women’s petitionary letters was also highly scripted. As Daybell points out, women’s letters of “humility and entreaty” followed a strict “social script,” and were “marked by tropes of deference and self-deprecation.”<sup>15</sup> As a result, in these letters, women stressed their gender differences and concentrated on their gender identity or familial status.<sup>16</sup> Women emphasized their defenseless image, wrote emotionally charged pleas, and were “clearly exploiting received assumptions about the physiological and intellectual inferiority of their sex as the readiest means of inducing sympathy for their plight.”<sup>17</sup> Therefore, women highlighted gendered perceptions of themselves in order to exert their agency when writing letters in times of crisis. As a result, poor women, somewhat ironically, exerted some real political power by reinforcing their overall helplessness and weakness.

While it remains unclear how these gender expectations disseminated through the classes, it is evident that they did, as lower class women petitioning Queen Anne at the beginning of the

<sup>9</sup> Susan Whyman, *The Pen and the People: English Letter Writers 1660-1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 11.

<sup>10</sup> Daybell, *The Material Letter*, 70.

<sup>11</sup> Daybell and Gordon, *Women and Epistolary Agency*, 69.

<sup>12</sup> Cecil MS 84, f. 11, undated (c. 19 Feb. 1601) in Thorne, “Women’s Petitionary Letters,” 28.

<sup>13</sup> Cecil MS 102, f. 20. Reprinted in Edward Edwards, ed., *The Life of Sir Walter Raleigh*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan, 1868) 406-7 in Thorne, “Women’s Petitionary Letters,” 29.

<sup>14</sup> Daybell, *The Material Letter*, 87.

<sup>15</sup> Daybell, 70.

<sup>16</sup> Thorne, “Women’s Petitionary Letters,” 26.

<sup>17</sup> Thorne, 27-29.

eighteenth century utilized the same rhetorical techniques. In some instances, the petitions read as if written by the same authoresses. Many petitioners stress their own suffering when writing to the monarch. Jane Dyer, a woman “under the terrible sentence of Death for a bare felony” brands herself “yo[r]: Majesty[s] poor unfortunate and perishing petecioner.”<sup>18</sup> Another, Anne Avery, whose bricklayer husband is under sentence of death for robbery, states that she is “your poor afflicted almost disharted petitioner.”<sup>19</sup> These women stress their sorrow and weakness in these times of trouble, much like the women of the early seventeenth century.

Other women focus on the harm they will suffer if their male relative dies. One woman proclaims that the she, “having two young Children to suport by the absence of her husband, is exposed to great Dificulties” while another declares that “your Petitioner and her several Infant Children will be Reduced to the Extremest necessity by the Untimely End of her husband.”<sup>20</sup> Another states that the transportation of her husband to the colonies will make her family “destitute of all Subsistence and left to the utmost misery.”<sup>21</sup> The husband of Anne Prichet, condemned to die as a rapist, pronounced that “if [her husband] die [sic] both she and her Children will be brought to Ruin in this World.”<sup>22</sup> Children were frequently mentioned, with Ann Worrall stating that only the Queen could “prevent the utter ruine of Your poor Pet[r]; and her three small Children.”<sup>23</sup> Some women even declare that the execution of their husband will lead to the death of innocent people. In her petition on behalf of her horse-thieving husband, Joane Evance states that she has “a small Infant att her breast who most Inevitably perish [sic] if her said husband be executed.”<sup>24</sup> The mother of felon John Jubbs even declares that if her son is executed, “it

would also bring your Petitioner with Sorrow to the Grave.”<sup>25</sup> These examples display that when petitioning, women emphasized that without a man in their lives, they would suffer and perhaps even perish. They also highlight their physical distress, stressing the harm they and their children would suffer on the loss of their husband or son. The petitionary letters of the eighteenth century women match those of women in the seventeenth century in emphasizing their emotional distress and womanly weakness, and also their need for male support.

The eighteenth century letters of supplication also are written with humility, similar to those of the seventeenth century. Throughout the petitions, the authoresses show due deference to their monarch. Almost all petitions open with “To the Queen’s Most Excellent Majesty,” and are titled “The Humble Petition.” They are proper spaced, with a large gap between the address and the petition, showing that these women understand the need to physically separate themselves from their monarch. This humility continues in the body of the petitions. Begging to spare her husband’s life, Mary Swift of Southwark wrote that “Your Pet[r]: therefore prostrates her Selfe at Your Royall Foot and begs Mercy for her said husband.”<sup>26</sup> Bowing before the Queen is a popular image, with Isabell Watson declaring that she “therefore most humbly throws herself at Your Ma[jesties] feet for Mercy to her Said husband.”<sup>27</sup> Another petitioner, Mary Brenan, states her humility outright: “Yo[r]: Pet[r]: therefore throwes herself at Yo[r]: most Gracious Maj[ties]: Feet, and in the most Humble manner hopes and prays that Yo[r]: Majesty will be graciously Pleased to take the premises into Yo[r]: Royal Consideracon.”<sup>28</sup> Many petitioners also reference the monarch’s “unlimited Grace and mercy.”<sup>29</sup> In her petition,

<sup>18</sup> Petition of Jane Dyer, about 28 April 1705, TNA, PRO, SP 34/6 f.13.

<sup>19</sup> Petition to the queen from Anne Avery..., undated, TNA, PRO, SP 34/34 f.198.

<sup>20</sup> Petition to the queen from Mary Caillaud..., undated, TNA, PRO, SP 34/31 f.174 and Petition of Mary Brenan to queen..., 7 Feb. 1713/14, SP 34/32 f.30.

<sup>21</sup> Petition to the queen from Elizabeth Leigh..., undated, TNA, PRO, SP 34/29 f.69.

<sup>22</sup> Petition to the queen from Anne Prichet..., undated, TNA, PRO, SP 34/34 f.30.

<sup>23</sup> Petition of Ann Worrall for the pardon of her husband..., 2 June 1709, TNA, PRO, Privy Council (PC) 1/2 f.167.

<sup>24</sup> Petition of Joane Evance, wife of Robert Evance, to queen..., 24 Apr. 1709, TNA, PRO, SP 34/10 f.233.

<sup>25</sup> Petition to the queen from Margaret Jubbs..., 7 Aug. 1710, TNA, PRO, SP 34/29 f.84.

<sup>26</sup> Petition of Mary Smith to queen..., undated, TNA, PRO, SP 34/35 f.92.

<sup>27</sup> Petition of Isabella Watson to queen..., 30 Sept. 1713, TNA, PRO, SP 34/22 f.26.

<sup>28</sup> Petition of Mary Brenan to queen, 7 Feb. 1713/14, SP 34/23 f.30.

<sup>29</sup> Petition to the queen from Mary Caillaud..., 29 Feb. 1711/12, TNA, PRO, SP 34/33 f.31.

Elizabeth Leigh asserts that the Queen's "Goodness disdains not the Addresses of the meanest of your Subjects," highlighting her low status but also flattering the monarch by suggesting that she could never leave a subject in need. Anne Avery praises Queen Anne's intelligence, stating that "your great wisdom goodnesse" will help her husband receive a reprieve.<sup>30</sup> Thus, the women position themselves as physically below the monarch, both metaphorically on the paper and with their imagery of being at the Queen's feet. They also praise her virtues such as wisdom, grace and mercy. These petitioners understand the need to show humility and self-deprecation in order to obtain a reprieve, and therefore belittle and weaken themselves while placing the Queen on her literal throne. These women use precisely the same rhetorical strategies used by wealthy women a century earlier and found in the letter writing guidebooks written during the Renaissance.

When writing petitions in the late Tudor and early Stuart eras, wealthy women followed strict rhetorical guidelines in manuals in order to achieve their goals. They focused on feminine weakness and underlined their emotional distress and supplicant position. More than a hundred years later, women of a much lower social standing used the same techniques to beg for mercy for their husbands, fathers and brothers. This role was not only something women did to save their families, it was an intellectual role as vital and expected as keeping the house and raising children. Examples ranging from the wife of a bricklayer to a wife of a captain in the Navy display that women from a variety of social classes of the early eighteenth century understood the steps necessary to fulfil their expected female role of helping their close male relation in a time of need.

How these rhetorical techniques spread throughout the classes is unknown. Certainly, some of the strategies, such as image of prostrating oneself before the monarch is common knowledge

throughout classes and does not need to be learned from a guidebook. Potentially, women could have learned the skills needed for petitioning not from wealthy women, but from wide-reaching and accessible sources such as the Book of Common Prayer or proclamations, which dictated proper behavior. Despite not knowing how these practices became common knowledge, the fact that these letters all utilize the same rhetorical techniques shows that women of all classes in early modern England understood the same social performances necessary to produce a successful or sympathetic petition. Even greater than that perhaps, however, these petitions show that women of all classes in early modern England did have some small form of political agency, which they shrewdly understood how to exert through stressing their own stereotypical weakness and inferiority.

### Shared Understandings of "Worthy Criminals"

In the years after the Glorious Revolution, the number of offenses deemed capital increased. The English Parliament during this time authorized a bloody system of criminal law based on terror.<sup>31</sup> According to historian Douglas Hay, post-Glorious Revolution England "established the freedom not of men, but of men of property."<sup>32</sup> As a result of this new emphasis, Parliament approved numerous acts to contemporize capital punishment and protect property from theft or damage.<sup>33</sup> By the dawn of the eighteenth century, crimes such as forgery and counterfeiting currency were added to list of capital offenses already including robbery, burglary, rape, murder and infanticide.

Although the number of capital offenses steadily rose after the Glorious Revolution, J. M. Beattie notes that the number of actual executions performed in England each year did not.<sup>34</sup> This disconnect is explained by the increasing importance of the pardon in early modern England. Pardons could be obtained at two points in the judicial process: first, a judge

<sup>30</sup> Petition to the queen from Anne Avery, undated, SP 34/34 f.198.

<sup>31</sup> Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, John G. Rule, E. P. Thompson and Cal Winslow, *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Pantheon: 1975), 18-19.

<sup>32</sup> Hay et al., 18.

<sup>33</sup> Hay et al., 22.

<sup>34</sup> J. M. Beattie, "The Royal Pardon and Criminal Procedure in Early Modern England," *Historical Papers*, vol. 22, no. 1 (1987): 12.

could reprieve any convicted criminal and send their name to the monarch for a pardon—a request that was never refused. Second, if a judge declined to pardon a criminal, the accused could petition the monarch directly, usually through the Secretary of State, using a carefully worded petition.<sup>35</sup> If the petition caught the monarch's interest, their secretaries would request a recommendation from the presiding judge, and, in most cases, a reason would be given to justify the king's mercy for the criminal.<sup>36</sup> As Beattie explains,

Most reprieves were...to allow the king to show mercy if he chose to. This was seen principally as a means of regulating the level of capital punishment so that an acceptable number of offenders would be sent to the gallows. At the same time, it was hoped that the sentence of death, the solemnity of its pronouncement, and the judge's condemnation would frighten the prisoner into obeying the law in the future. The reprieved prisoner would most often be held in jail and returned to court at a later session to plead to the pardon when it had been issued under the Great Seal.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, pardons played a tremendously important role in England at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and are an example of a crucial royal prerogative that was unaltered by the Glorious Revolution. Anne wanted to exert her prerogative in ways that would ingratiate her with her people, and the royal pardon was a perfect means to do so.<sup>38</sup> The increased number of capital offenses came at the perfect time for Anne, as it created the opportunity to expand one function of the royal prerogative, while some of its other powers were being transferred to Parliament. As a result, during Queen Anne's reign, the parliamentary, judicial and monarchical branches created a criminal system that instilled fear and order in the public, while also keeping them contented with their queen.

How did the monarchs and their secretaries deem which offenders were "worthy" candidates for a reprieve? According to Beattie, remitted criminals shared common traits and their characters—in terms of their reputations and their dispositions—often decided their fates.<sup>39</sup> Pardoned criminals were usually young, from a respectable family, had a place in their community and had been drawn in by another to commit the crime. They were honest and hardworking first-time offenders with families to support and who were willing to serve their country. Additionally, women, especially those who "pleaded the belly," were overwhelmingly pardoned.<sup>40</sup> Judges and the monarch therefore knew which characteristics to seek when deciding which criminals to pardon.

The women's petitions to Queen Anne clearly display that subjects also understood which characteristics would maximize the chance for reprieve. In their petitions, the wives, sisters and mothers stress their convicted relative's "worthy" traits. Take for example to petition of Ann Worrall, whose husband George was "confined in Irons and under Sentence of Death" aboard the HMS Bedford for mutiny after going ashore without permission. Mrs. Worrall's petition stresses that her husband only left the ship as he "was unhappily prevailed with by some of [the other sailors]," and that the men had only wanted to leave the ship "to see their wives and families." She also states:

He had not any intention to promote or Encourage any Mutiny or Disturbance; And that he was always known to be a Man of a Quiet and Peaceable Temper and Carriage: And during his 20 Years constant Service in the Royall Navy, hath behaved himself with the utmost Diligence and fidelity in the discharge of his Duty; and was never so much as accused, of any Crime before.

In the conclusion of her petition, Ann reiterates that this is her husband's first offense, and reminds Queen Anne that the death of her husband will ruin of her

<sup>35</sup> Beattie, "The Royal Pardon," 13-14.

<sup>36</sup> J. M. Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England 1660-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 432.

<sup>37</sup> Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, 431.

<sup>38</sup> Gregg, *Queen Anne*, 155.

<sup>39</sup> Gregg, 440.

<sup>40</sup> Gregg, 440; Beattie, "The Royal Pardon," 15.

life and that of her children.<sup>41</sup> Mrs. Worrall notes many of her husband's "worthy" traits, including his dedication to his family, his hardworking and honest nature, his crimeless history, and that others influenced him to commit the crime. These references show that Ann Worrall clearly knew what to emphasize when petitioning the Queen.

A further example of this common understanding of the worthy qualities of a reprieve is Anne Avery's petition on behalf of her husband Jacob, who was facing execution for robbery. Mrs. Avery states that her husband has always "carryed himself very affectionately towards your Petitioner and his Children, and always acted very industriously and honestly for the maintenance of his family." Anne further explains that her husband "was reduced to extream straits and having the Misfortune to become acquainted with ill company was seduced and prevailed upon much against his inclination and contrary to his former course of living to attempt the Robbery for which he now justly lies under Condemnation." Mrs. Avery also worries that she and her family will fall into poverty and points out that this incident was "the first time he ever was accused of Guilty of such a Crime or anything that deserved Censure." Finally, she emphasizes the low impact of the crime, as "the persons injured [received] noe greater damage than the losse of 7<sup>s</sup> : 6<sup>p</sup>".<sup>42</sup> Anne Avery understands what she needs to say about her husband and family to obtain a pardon. She focuses on his virtuous history, that he has committed no other crimes, stole to protect his family, was taken in by others and the family's reliance on him for support.

Margaret Jubbs, mother of burglar John Jubbs of Norwich, provides a final example of a petitioner emphasizing reprieve-worthy qualities. Margaret first tells the Queen that her son "hath his Wife & three small Children to maintain" before mentioning her own sorrow if her son should die so soon after her husband, who died a fortnight before the petition was written. Furthermore, she says that her son "is a

young man. This being the First Fault & he being very pentinent, there's great Hopes of his Amendment." She finishes her petition by expressing her desire that her son be transported rather than executed, a sentence just emerging during Queen Anne's reign and one that helped to modulate the impact of the increase in capital crimes.<sup>43</sup> Like the other petitioners, Margaret reminds the Queen that this is her son's first offense and that he has a family for which he must care. She also stresses his youth and his penitence—both characteristics deemed worthy of pardon. John Jubbs is one of the only convicts examined in this paper whose fate is absolutely known. In "The Last Dying Speech and Confession of John Jubbs," a printed and circulated copy of his last confession, the convict states that he "obtained her Majesties Reprieve." However, he misunderstood the pardon and believed it to be a "Transport Pardon to the West Indies" rather than an unconditional pardon. As a result of this misunderstanding, John Jubbs broke out of jail only to be caught, tried again and executed on April 16, 1714.<sup>44</sup> John Jubbs' initial pardon displays the effectiveness of his mother's petition stressing his reprieve-worthy qualities.

There was a further means by which women could prove their convicted male relative was a "worthy criminal." Beattie also argues that family members used social capital to support petitions. The petition might reference a person of influence or a higher social standing with whom the family had a connection, or include a petition signed by important and unimportant members of the prisoner's parish community.<sup>45</sup> These supplemental supporting petitions acted as a guarantee of the veracity of the main petitioner, and added weight to the petition and assurance that the felon was indeed worthy of reprieve.

In their petitions, many women referenced important people with whom they had connections. After petitioning to Anne for a pardon for a counterfeiting charge, Martha Elton sent a petition to Secretary Hedges reminding him that "you[r]

<sup>41</sup> Petition of Ann Worrall..., June 2 1709, PC 1/2 f.167.

<sup>42</sup> Petition to the queen from Anne Avery..., undated, SP 34/34 f.198.

<sup>43</sup> Petition to the queen from Margaret Jubbs..., 7 August 1710, SP 34/29 f.84.

<sup>44</sup> John Jubbs, *The Last Dying Speech and CONFESSION, of John Jubbs, who was Executed at Chelmsford on Fryday the 16<sup>th</sup>, of April 1714* (Norwich: Tbo. Goddard, 1714), 1.

<sup>45</sup> Beattie, *Crime and the Courts*, 444-45.

petition[rs] was a Manuall Serv[t] to yo[r] Hon[r]" and asks him to "Interceede w[th] her most Sacred Maj[ty] to admit yo[r] Peticon[er] to be Inserted into the next Generall free Pardon."<sup>46</sup> Martha Elton's sentence was commuted to transportation.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, Margaret Jubbs' petition on behalf of her son seems to cram in between widely spaced lines that her late husband "serv'd in y[e] Millitia in y[e] Reigns of King Charles y[e] 2[d] King James & King Will[m] as Lieutenant & under yo[r] Maj[ty] as Captain."<sup>48</sup> It is as if someone has reminded her that this is an important fact to include. Finally, Roger Lowen's wife Frances begins her petition to Queen Anne by stating that her husband was "formerly Gentleman of the Horse of the Duke of Zell."<sup>49</sup> Douglas Hay shows that pardons were often granted to those with connections as "mercy was part of the currency of patronage."<sup>50</sup> These women cited their connections not because they expected any favoritism from their illustrious connection, but because they hoped to activate their paternalism. The fact that women referenced their relationships to these powerful people—no matter how tenuous—displays that they understood how to profit from social capital.

Many of the petitions under study included supplemental petitions. One of the most substantial supported the already-explored Henry Bonner and contained twenty-eight community members, including the church warden and overseers. The supplement stated that the "Inhabitants of Flitton...certifie that we never knew Henry Bonner Guilty of any Crime or doing of any Mischief to any but that he was a man willing to work and to take care of his family therefore we humbly desire to have him Restored to his wife and Children again."<sup>51</sup> Isabella Watson's petition on behalf of her husband George who had been condemned for pickpocketing, obtained a certificate "by the minister churchwarden, and others of St Andrew Holborn, Middlesex" signed by seventeen hands total, stating they had known him for six years and that "George Watson has lived in

good Credit and reputation allways behaving himselfe honestly Religiously & fairly amongst his Neighbours to the best of our knowledge or informacon."<sup>52</sup> These women knew how to gather testimony to support their husbands which proves not only a shared social understanding of how to advocate for their husbands, but also that they could accumulate and expend social capital.

However, supplementary petitions could also be used against a petitioner. In 1713, William Matthews, convicted of highway robbery, had his sister Mary Warner, who had risen in social status, write on his behalf to the Queen. Upon receiving his command from the monarch for more information about the case, the presiding judge, Littleton Powys (1647-1732), was so determined to prevent the release of Matthews—who he considered not only a repeat offender but also a murderer and a bigamist—that he enclosed a petition from the town of Lichfield, where the inhabitants were furious that Matthews had only been found guilty of manslaughter in a recent murder case. This town held that Matthews "ought to have been found Guilty of Murder. The murder having been plainly and fully proved and that the same was Barbarously Committed & without any provocacon."<sup>53</sup> Whether Matthews was pardoned is unknown; there are no later documents related to his case in the State Papers. However, what is apparent from this and other supplementary petitions is that the opinions of others were considered when deciding who should be pardoned, and that citizens of all classes understood this. Thus, the lower classes of England of the early eighteenth century understood the pardonable characteristics and the sort of supporting evidence necessary to secure or prevent a pardon.

All classes in early eighteenth century England shared common beliefs about who should be considered a worthy criminal. Letters written by Queen Anne's secretary James Vernon (1646-1727) to various judges and mayors soliciting opinions on

<sup>46</sup> Petition of Martha Elton to Secretary Hedges..., 1702-1706, TNA, PRO, SP, 34/36 f.197.

<sup>47</sup> Nottingham's Letters: To the Recorder [of London], 17 July 1702, TNA, PRO, SP, 44/104 f.83.

<sup>48</sup> Petition to the queen from Margaret Jubbs..., 7 August 1710, SP 34/29 f.84.

<sup>49</sup> Petition of Frances Lowen to queen..., undated, TNA, PRO, SP, 34/36 f.60.

<sup>50</sup> Hay, *Albion's Fatal Tree*, 45-47.

<sup>51</sup> Testimony signed by several hands..., undated, SP 34/32 f.127.

<sup>52</sup> Certificate by the minister churchwarden and others..., 30 September 1713, TNA, PRO, SP, 34/22 f. 27.

<sup>53</sup> Certificate from Richard Wakefield, Town Clerk of Lichfield..., 8 April 1713, TNA, PRO, SP, 34/34 f.169.

petitions or delaying executions are found in the State Papers. In those letters, Vernon sums up the petitions in a few lines, and often only cites the points which show that the petitioner or the convict for whom the petitioner is writing is a worthy criminal. While providing an account of the petition of John Banfie to Baron Tracy, Vernon jots down that the convict was tried “upon very Slender Evidence” and states that “he is a Young man, have [sic] a Wife and sev[el] small Children who must Unvariably perish” and that “he is anxious to list himself in the service of the Queen by sea or land. This is his first offence.”<sup>54</sup> In another, written by Vernon to Baron Hatsell (1641-1714) on behalf of Philip Devon, he notes that the petitioner “was not yet 17 years old” and that the petition also contained “a Certificate from the Minister, Church Wardens & other Inhabitants of St Martin Vintry London, that the pet[or] had faithfully served his master...and that this was his first crime.”<sup>55</sup> Lastly, Vernon writes a very brief note to Lord Chief Justice Thomas Trevor (1658-1730) in which he sums up William Mapledoram’s mother’s petition to have his sentence of felony and burglary remitted. Of this petition, Vernon simply notes: “Good character. First conviction. *Prays* for pardon. Is young and willing to serve anywhere.”<sup>56</sup>

Queen Anne also expressed a shared understanding of these cultural values. In a report of a meeting between the Queen and the Lord Chief Justice, Sir John Holt (1642-1710), the latter remarks that the Queen “hath been pleased to extend her mercy” to a Thomas Lyford, “in consideration of his youth.”<sup>57</sup> In another letter to Hedges, Anne expressed her desire to pardon a convict because “having a wife and six children,” it “makes me think it a case of compassion” to grant him a reprieve.<sup>58</sup> These instances suggest that the queen genuinely was affected and moved by these petitions. Women as low as bricklayers wives and as high as the queen shared the same attitudes towards “worthy” criminals.

This sampling of petitions from Queen Anne’s reign proves that the both the nobility and the working class understood the traits and characteristics of pardonable convicts. The women displayed their shared cultural understanding by emphasizing these characteristics in their petitions, and they were considered most important to the monarchy when deciding who to pardon. While Queen Anne exercised her royal prerogative of pardoning throughout her reign, she only pardoned criminals considered worthy, and the women writing to save their male relatives understood this. Anne could have vetoed the capital offense laws, but chose instead to use her royal prerogative in a selective manner that allowed her to cement her relationship and shared culture with those near and far from the throne. Therefore, in the early eighteenth century, there existed a shared cultural understanding of which criminals were pardonable.

### Shared Understandings of Broadcasted Images

When Queen Anne ascended the throne of England on March 8, 1702, she and her royal advisors had to decide how to portray her monarchy to the nation. Anne quickly decided to follow the path of many previous monarchs—including the other childless female monarch, Elizabeth I (1533-1603)—and become the mother of the nation.<sup>59</sup> Scholar Toni Bowers states that “Anne Stuart encouraged her subjects to imagine her as the perfect embodiment of two ideals: virtuous mother and powerful ruler.”<sup>60</sup> Anne wanted to exert her royal authority while simultaneously accentuating the traits she shared with her subjects.<sup>61</sup> She achieved these ends by emphasizing her image as a mother. One of the likely reasons she chose this self-representation was her own motherless state, having lost seventeen children. Anne therefore used maternal images to recast her lack of an heir as a maternal dedication to her country. Anne also wanted to “present herself in terms

<sup>54</sup> Vernon’s Letters: To Baron Tracy, 7 April 1702, TNA, PRO, SP, 44/102 f.351 v.

<sup>55</sup> Vernon’s Letters: To Baron Hatsell, 7 April 1702, TNA, PRO, SP, 44/102 f.351 v.

<sup>56</sup> Vernon’s Letters: To Lord Chief Justice Trevor, 13 April 1702, TNA, PRO, SP 44/102 f.359 v.

<sup>57</sup> HMC *Portland*, IV, 334: Holt to Robert Harley, 30 September 1706, in Gregg, *Queen Anne*, 144.

<sup>58</sup> *Monthly Magazine*, XVI (December 1803), 396: queen to Sir Charles Hedges, Tuesday evening, in Gregg, *Queen Anne*, 144.

<sup>59</sup> Toni Bowers, *The Politics of Motherhood: British Writing and Culture, 1680-1760* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 66.

<sup>60</sup> Bowers, 42.

<sup>61</sup> Bowers, 44.

attractive and accessible to the majority of her people...[investing] herself with the trappings of equality with commoners, effacing her royal difference to a significant extent.”<sup>62</sup> This was also done as Anne “understood the new power of the people and embraced the new politics of elections and the public sphere.”<sup>63</sup> By depicting herself as a mother of her people, Anne was able to remain accessible to her people during these political and societal transformations.

Anne began cultivating this matronly image as early as her coronation. During the ceremony, John Sharp, Archbishop of York (1645-1714) preached on Isaiah 49: 23: “Kings shall be thy nursing fathers and their queens thy nursing mothers.” This sermon immediately established Anne’s maternal self-representation, and an account of the coronation circulated throughout the kingdom, so that all could understand this metaphor.<sup>64</sup> Anne also issued many proclamations that “assisted in representing her as a nursing mother to her people.”<sup>65</sup> In them, she frequently spoke of her affection and “tender care for our people.”<sup>66</sup> Her proclamations against sin, vice and profanity also served to further this nurturing and guiding image.<sup>67</sup> As they were spread throughout the realm, the proclamations were accessible to all her subjects. Thus, the working women who petitioned their monarch likely were influenced by these propagandistic images.

Like proclamations, works by poets and authors glorifying the Queen also served to spread crown

propaganda across the country. Maternal images of Queen Anne were perhaps most prevalent in work created in honour of the Acts of Union 1707, which formally merged the kingdoms of England and Scotland. According to historian Kevin Sharpe, “to underscore the queen’s dominant role and to personalize the achievement of union, poets deployed gendered language and metaphors of birth that also figured the (now) childless Anne as the mother of a truly vigorous offspring.”<sup>68</sup> This metaphor is especially significant in “Union: A Poem Humbly Dedicated to the Queen,” by Charles Darby (c. 1635-1709). In this poem, “Darby describes the joining of Anne’s kingdoms as a substitute for the child she could not have,”<sup>69</sup> declaring that “May You to many happy Years arrive/ To see your *Britain* by this UNION thrive/ And if an Off-spring Heav’n should You deny/ Be this your Child, and Royal Progeny.”<sup>70</sup> In Elkanah Settle (1648-1724)’s poem, “Carmen Irenicum: The Union of the Imperial Crowns of Great Britain: An Heroick Poem,” the author declares that the queen’s “glorious labour” and “vast Maternal Raptures” led to the Union, which he terms “her Filial Charge.”<sup>71</sup> Finally, the writer Lewis Theobald (1688-1744) hails the Union’s “Christ’ning Day!” deeming it the “ovely, long expected Child!/ On whom our *English Queen* has smil’d.”<sup>72</sup> These odes portray the Queen as the mother of the nation, who brings peace and prosperity to her people. The existence of these works not only highlights the acceptance of crown propaganda by authors not

<sup>62</sup> Bowers, *The Politics of Motherhood*, 42.

<sup>63</sup> Kevin Sharpe, *Rebranding Rule: The Restoration and Revolution Monarchy, 1660-1714* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 518.

<sup>64</sup> Sharpe, 618-19.

<sup>65</sup> Sharpe, 518.

<sup>66</sup> Sharpe, 518.

<sup>67</sup> Sharpe, 520.

<sup>68</sup> Sharpe, 549.

<sup>69</sup> James Anderson Winn, *Queen Anne: Patroness of Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 449.

<sup>70</sup> Charles Darby, “Union: A Poem Humbly Dedicated to the Queen,” (London: The Rose, 1707) from *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, Grinnell College, accessed 25 Feb. 2018,

<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=grin67026&tabID=T001&docId=CW113803792&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0&docLevel=FASCIMILE>.

<sup>71</sup> Elkanah Settle, “Carmen Irenicum: The Union of the Imperial Crowns of Great Britain: An Heroick Poem,” (London: Printed for the author, 1707) from *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, Grinnell College, accessed 15 May 2018,

<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&docLevel=FASCIMILE&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=grin67026&tabID=T001&docId=CW3311492273&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0>.

<sup>72</sup> Lewis Theobald, “A Pindarick Ode on the Union,” (London: printed for T. C. and sold by J. Morphew, near Stationers-Hall, 1707), from *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*, Gale, Grinnell College, accessed May 16, 2018,

<http://find.galegroup.com/ecco/infomark.do?&source=gale&docLevel=FASCIMILE&prodId=ECCO&userGroupName=grin67026&tabID=T001&docId=CW3311229326&type=multipage&contentSet=ECCOArticles&version=1.0>, 6.

directly associated with the monarchy, but also illuminates another way which this propaganda was popularized and broadcasted to the masses.

Many historians deem Anne's matronly image as the "official court myth of the queen" and believe that it was ineffective.<sup>73</sup> According to Bowers, "representations of Anne as national mother backfired," and "throughout her reign, the queen's efforts to exercise explicitly maternal authority would enjoy much more success in the spiritual realm than in the world of practical politics."<sup>74</sup> This is not entirely true. Certainly, politicians in Parliament may not have believed this self-representation of the monarch. However, as shown above, subjects throughout the kingdom—such as the poets who wrote odes to her—accepted her widely broadcasted maternal metaphor. And, like the middle to upper class poets, the lower class women who petitioned Queen Anne reflected an understanding of these maternal images in their letters.

In their petitions, the women heavily emphasize their families, detailing the exact number of children and how they would suffer if they or their husband were executed. In her petition to Anne, Anne Pritchett states that she "hath had 8 children" by her husband, and that his death would cause their ruin.<sup>75</sup> Sarah White, under sentence of death at Newgate Prison in London for stealing silk, mentions her children many times throughout her petition, saying her "Extravagant Husband" has "left her with three Children" and that additionally "she being now Quit with Child of another" implores for a pardon "for the sake of her poors [sic] Children."<sup>76</sup> Perhaps most dramatically and obviously, in her petition to the Queen, Mary Swift, wife of robber Stephen Swift cites in a bigger script than the rest of the petition that she is "Enceint"—the French word for pregnant—and "past her reckoning." She further hopes that "her Innocent Children are become [sic] objects of Your Ma[ties] Compassion."<sup>77</sup>

Describing how the execution would affect the children is a common theme throughout the petitions. The wife of the convicted highwayman Robert Husher, Elizabeth, tells the queen that she has many children "whose whole Subsistance Relyes on him for Maintenance."<sup>78</sup> Anne Avery seems to try to relate to the Queen's loss of children by pointing out that she "hath been married to the said Jacob Avery for the space of 15 years by whom she hath had 8 children—3 of which are now living." She further states that his "Condemnation" would lead to "the utter ruin of your distressed petitioner and her Children."<sup>79</sup> Counterfeiter Jane Houston also pleads for her life on behalf of her "four small children in a sad Deplorable condicon which must... inevitably perish." She later once more asks for the pardon only for "the sake of her poore disatisfied children."<sup>80</sup> Yet the most dramatic of all pleas on behalf of her children is that of felon Margaret Green, who declares that her execution is "rendered a thousand times more terrible, by leaving her inocent Babes."<sup>81</sup> These pleas show that these women focused attention on their families in their petitions and how their death or the death of their male relative would impact the children. As Queen Anne so frequently was depicted as the nurturing and protecting mother of the nation, the women likely stressed their children in order to gain sympathy.

Mentioning children when petitioning monarchs or court officials certainly was not unique to Queen Anne's reign. In letters of petition to previous monarchs, especially King William III of England (1650-1702), women did sometimes mention their children. Furthermore, some letters to the secretaries of Queen Anne bring up their children as well. The difference lies in the frequency and extent to which children are utilized in petitions as a sympathy-gaining technique. For example, a group of condemned women in Newgate Prison wrote a petition to Secretary Hedges, asking him to intercede

<sup>73</sup> Anderson Winn, *Queen Anne*, xix.

<sup>74</sup> Bowers, *The Politics of Motherhood*, 49, 59.

<sup>75</sup> Petition to the queen from Anne Pritchett..., undated, SP 34/34 f.30.

<sup>76</sup> Petition of Sarah White a convict in Newgate, May 1706, TNA, PRO, SP 34/7 f.131.

<sup>77</sup> Petition of Mary Smith to queen..., undated, SP 34/35 f.92.

<sup>78</sup> Petition to the queen from Elizabeth Husher..., 1712, TNA, PRO, SP 34/32 f.13.

<sup>79</sup> Petition to the queen from Anne Avery..., undated, SP 34/34 f.198.

<sup>80</sup> Petition to the queen from Jane Houston..., March 1711/12, TNA, PRO, SP 34/33 f.51.

<sup>81</sup> Petition of Margaret Green, prisoner in Newgate to queen..., undated, TNA, PRO, SP 34/35 f.54.

to the Queen on their behalf in order to receive a pardon, or at least have their sentences commuted to transportation. Somewhat surprisingly, none of these women mentions children as a reason for a reprieve.<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, felon Martha Rogers, condemned for shoplifting, petitioned both the Queen and Secretary Hedges. In her petition to the Queen, Martha quickly mentions that she has “six small Children living” and that fact rendering “life...much more Enjoyable than Death, and Repentance than the Grave.”<sup>83</sup> However, in her petition to Hedges, Martha merely mentions that she has “a great family of Children,” with no mention of the number or how her death would affect them. Thus, while petitions written by women to people other than Queen Anne did mention children, the emphasis on the relationship between parent and child is not as strong.

Furthermore, Queen Anne's public image may be the reason why so many women's petitions exist in the State Papers. Throughout her reign, Anne “worked hard to maintain the most fervent and continuous public support enjoyed by any monarch since Elizabeth.”<sup>84</sup> She cultivated this support by portraying herself as a mother, but also as an “ideal of domestic womanhood” who was “defining, representing, and deploying the interests and values of her...subjects.”<sup>85</sup> Thus, she did not want to simply declare herself mother of the nation, but also to be a mother to whom her subjects could relate. She also felt or at least publicized great compassion for her people, shown through her public acts such as reinstating the tradition of touching for scrofula, during which she would “heal” as many as four hundred suffers a week.<sup>86</sup> These events were obviously extremely popular. Another way that Queen Anne could demonstrate her compassion while simultaneously performing a vital political act, was through granting reprieves. When all these factors are taken together, it is unsurprising that so many women's petitions are found in the State Papers. Women likely felt comfortable writing to a Queen

who portrayed herself as relatable. While women previously had written petitions to monarchs, the prevalence of petitions from women of all backgrounds in the State Papers likely stems from the fact that Anne considered her royal prerogative of pardoning essential, personally reading hundreds of petitions submitted by subjects.<sup>87</sup> There are a voluminous number of petitions in the State Papers because Queen Anne, in defending one of her last important prerogatives, took them seriously.

The most convincing evidence of the acceptance of Queen Anne's broadcasted image as a mother is found in the petition of Martha Elton. In prison for counterfeiting with her husband, Alexander Reynolds, Martha relates the fairly familiar tale of “an Ignorant Countrymaid being forced in Compliance by her Husband” in the big, dangerous city. However, when addressing the Queen at the beginning of her petition, Martha styles herself “your [Maj[ties] Petitioner's Daughter.”<sup>88</sup> This statement clearly displays that Martha Elton, a lowly country girl, has correctly interpreted Queen Anne's broadcasted image as a mother, understands how to use this to her advantage, and accordingly positions herself as the Queen's daughter in need of her mother's help.

This simple declaration, along with the extensive references to children in order to plea for pardons, proves that Anne's maternal image was embraced by her subject. Women across the country and across different social classes understood the metaphor and used to flatter the Queen and their attempt to pardon. It is possible that they believed the propaganda and considered themselves children of England and their monarch. This perceived personal relationship with their monarch could certainly explain why Anne became one of the most popular early modern English monarchs. At the very least, these petitions suggest that women of all classes across England shared an understanding of monarchical representations and how to interpret those images. This shared cultural

<sup>82</sup> Petition of certain condemned women in Newgate to Secretary Hedges, 1702-1706, TNA, PRO, SP 34/36 f.324.

<sup>83</sup> Petition of Martha Rogers, prisoner in Newgate, to queen..., undated, TNA, PRO, SP 34/36 f.147.

<sup>84</sup> Gregg, *Queen Anne*, 150.

<sup>85</sup> Bowers, *The Politics of Motherhood*, 44.

<sup>86</sup> R. O. Bucholz, “‘Nothing but Ceremony’: Queen Anne and the Limitations of Royal Ritual,” *Journal of British Studies* vol. 30, no. 3 (July 1991): 298.

<sup>87</sup> Gregg, *Queen Anne*, 144.

<sup>88</sup> Petition of Martha Elton to queen..., undated, TNA, PRO, SP 34/36 f.198.

knowledge of the Queen's self-representation shows that the propaganda worked.

### Conclusion

In his book, *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685-1789*, historian Murray Pittock argues that an English shared society did not emerge until the 1760s, when religious divisions amongst the English finally became unimportant.<sup>89</sup> However, the petitions of women from all classes show that shared cultural understandings existed in Britain as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century. As the petitions written by women to Queen Anne display, even if many of the English disagreed with one another, they shared understandings about cultural practices, beliefs and images. Women of all social classes understood the necessary steps and rhetoric to utilize when facing their own or a relative's incarceration. Petitioners and royalty alike shared a common understanding of the traits of a worthy criminal. Finally, propaganda broadcasted by the court and its supporters reached far and wide, was embraced by subjects of all backgrounds, and could be affirmed by petitioners in order to flatter and gain the sympathy of Queen Anne. Thus, although these petitions only represent a small segment of shared cultural practices and beliefs, they do suggest that by the reign of Queen Anne, the concept of "the English," rather than "the Protestants" or "the Catholics" or "the Rich" or "the Poor" had emerged.

These petitions also reveal the ongoing importance of the role of the monarch in post-Glorious Revolution England, challenging those who considered the crown constitutionalized by the reign of Queen Anne. However, the sheer number of the petitions prove that Anne actively used her closely guarded royal prerogative of the pardon. Not only was it a power that the Queen wanted to employ, but it was vital to the continued stability of the nation, especially as the list of criminal offenses grew. The judicial and parliamentary systems relied on this royal pardon to ensure that the number of executions would not climb too high and instigate public protest. Therefore, rather than the monarch being cast aside

politically after the Glorious Revolution, the monarch's role as head of the judicial system, at the very least, was as important as ever.

These pardon petitions written by women to Queen Anne remained untouched and abandoned in the State Papers for centuries. Not one has been cited in other historical work, yet they reveal a plethora of information about gender, class, crime, morals, propaganda, politics and monarchy. The fact that these petitions were mostly submitted by poor, illiterate women, does not mean they should be ignored or discounted. This study shows that historians must continue to study the role of the monarchy post-Glorious Revolution and continue to dig through the State Papers to find new evidence and stories to tell. In particular, Queen Anne has largely been brushed aside by scholars and treated as a woman molded by advisers and only remembered for her maternal failure. However, these petitions shed light on the greater complexities of her reign, and her vital role in her kingdom. Perhaps most of all, these petitions prove that women should never be forgotten or overlooked in the historical narrative.

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<sup>89</sup> Murray G. H. Pittock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain and Ireland, 1685-1789* (New York: St, Martin's Press, 1997), 128.

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