

*Patterns of Polite Discourse
in Middle English Letters:
A Study of Petitions and
Requests*

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Abstract

The thesis is a study of nineteen late medieval letters of petition and request from the *Corpus of Middle English Local Documents* (Stenroos, Thengs and Bergström 2017-) based on politeness theory and speech act theory. The letters are from the fifteenth century and were written by men and women from different social backgrounds and addressed to the prior of Durham or other authorities. The study deals with the politeness strategies men and women from different social classes used to formulate their requests.

The study is based on two assumptions: that patterns of polite speech varied according to social class and gender, and that there exist specific formal characteristics that distinguish a petition from a request. Thus, this thesis sets out to investigate two research questions: 1) to what extent do gender and hierarchical interrelationships determine the choice of polite and direct language in petitions and requests, 2) to what extent do the formal characteristics of the letters reflect the subcategories “petitions” and “requests”?

Because of its historical distance, this thesis takes a historical pragmatic approach. First, this thesis considers the socio-historical context in which these letters were produced and provides an overview of the social order, literacy levels, the letter-writing practices, and the genre expectations. Second, it considers two theories as the groundwork for this study: politeness theory and Speech Act theory.

As the study is qualitative and based on a limited corpus, it does not to produce overall generalisations; however, it offers some interesting results. There seems to be manifestations of politeness strategies that varied according to social class in terms of the first assumption. The nobility used positive politeness strategies frequently, employing ‘promises of future help’ and ‘expressions of trust’ as supporting moves towards their requests. Social class also turns out to play a role in terms of the choice of speech acts. While the nobility preferred the performative directive *pray*, other classes employed the performative *beseech*. In terms of the second assumption, this thesis concludes that the formal characteristic of a particular group of letters of petition might have implications for the function and, thus, categorisation of the letters in the *Corpus of Middle English Local Documents*.

This thesis contributes to the research area of historical pragmatics, more specifically to the research concerning Late Medieval correspondence.

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List of abbreviations and notes on reference practice

DUL	Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections
FTA	Face threatening act
MED	<i>Middle English Dictionary</i>
MELD	Corpus of Middle English Local Documents
OED	<i>The Oxford English Dictionary</i>

Letters are referred to by their respective MELD codes. Each letter has its own code that starts with D or L followed by four digits (e.g. D0286 and L1126). Archival references are provided in the analysis chapter (Chapter 5) and the appendices. In chapter 5, a reference link to the archive website is provided in a footnote whenever it is available, especially for letters from Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections, since they offer a summary and a description of the physical appearance of each letter.

For ease of reading and understanding, this thesis offers a list of texts in numerical order of MELD codes, with the archive reference and name and social class of the sender, in Appendix 3.

1. Introduction

This thesis provides a pragmatic study of nineteen Middle English letters of petition and request within the framework of Politeness and Speech Act Theory. The letters were authored by men and women of different social backgrounds in the fifteenth century, and are all addressed to people in a position of power; most of them are addressed to the prior of Durham. As these are letters of petition and request, they deal with requests for personal favours or for matters of public concern. The present study examines the variation found in these letters with regard to patterns of polite discourse, including the use of letter-writing formulae, and directness in the formulations of requests. The patterns are related both to the content and type of letter and to the gender and social status of the sender. Two main research questions will be addressed:

- 1) to what extent do gender and social class determine the choice of polite and direct language in petitions and requests?
- 2) to what extent do the formal characteristics of the letters reflect the subcategories “petition” and “request”?

The research questions are based on two assumptions. The first assumption is that patterns of polite speech varied according to social class and gender. As Medieval England was a hierarchical society with strict rules of decorum, patterns of polite speech in writing also followed the ‘strict etiquette bound primarily to the social position and its power implications’ (Held 2010: 208). For example, studies on the wide variety of forms of address used in Late Medieval and Early Modern English have shown that the vocabulary of address forms reflects the respect for the social hierarchy (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995).

The second assumption regards text type and function: that there are specific formal characteristics that distinguish a petition from a request. This assumption is based on the categorisation used in *A Corpus of Middle English Local Documents* (henceforth MELD, Stenroos, Thengs and Bergstrøm 2017-), from which the studied letters have been selected. MELD consists of over 2,000 local documents covering the period 1399-1525. A local document is a text meant to fulfil a specific pragmatic function and belongs to a specific location rather than being produced by central government (Stenroos and Thengs 2020: 11). The categorization of texts in MELD separates form and function, the main categories applied so far being based on function only (Stenroos, Bergstrøm and Thengs 2020: 45). Of the ten

overarching functional categories in MELD, “Correspondence” is relevant for this thesis. It is divided into four subcategories: “petitions”, “requests”, “complaints” and the miscellaneous category “letters”. The distinction between the subcategories “petitions” and “requests” is based on the social interrelationship between the sender and the addressee: while in requests the senders asks a social equal for a specific favour, in petitions the sender asks an authority or social superior. One of the main aims of this thesis is to problematize these definitions by examining the formal characteristics of these texts.

The letters selected for study have all been defined as either “petitions” or “requests” in MELD. They were transcribed by members of the MELD team and are included in MELD 2017.1 (<http://www.uis.no/meld>). This study has made use both of the MELD transcriptions and of photographic images of the texts, made available by the team; in addition, a translation of all the letters into present-day English was carried out as part of the project and is provided as Appendix 1.

As this thesis deals with variation in patterns of politeness in the intersection of the parameters of gender and social status, the letters were selected to include both female and male senders, representing the nobility, gentry, clergy and middle/lower class. However, as these categories are not evenly represented in MELD (or in the surviving late medieval materials), the proportions are inevitably skewed in the favour of men and upper classes, something that naturally limits the generalizations that can be made.

Studying the different ways used by writers to request favours will throw light on the roles played by social order and power in written communication, and in these types of letters in particular. In order to make sense of these practices, the thesis considers the socio-historical context in which these letters were produced. Levels of literacy varied according to gender, social status, and residence, with the upper classes having the highest number of literate members (Palander-Collin 2010: 654) and literacy being generally more common among men and in urban areas. Moreover, the tradition of the *ars dictaminis*— an ecclesiastical rhetorical guide on how to compose epistolary documents - systematised a ‘linguistic coding of hierarchical relationship’ which helped writers to show respect and social distance in writing (Palander-Collin 2010: 655). While this tradition facilitated “ready-to-use” formulas of respect to all sorts of writers, it also allowed a refashioning of conventional phrases to convey individual messages adequately (Davis 1965: 237).

This thesis considers politeness theory as the groundwork for the study of the different grades of directness, social distance, and polite language which the writers adopted in the composition of these letters. Politeness theory has been one of the most used modern theories

in the field of historical pragmatics (Nevala 2010: 419), with the framework developed by Brown and Levinson (1987) forming the basis of much of the later work. This framework has also been adopted for the present study.

The two central concepts of Brown and Levinson's approach are: "face" and "face-threatening acts". The first concept refers to the public self-image that all people have. While the need to be appreciated and liked by others is called "positive face", the desire to maintain one's freedom to act and not to be imposed upon is referred as "negative face" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61). Both in oral and written communication, interlocutors make strategic linguistic decisions to pay respect to the addressee's positive or negative face (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 115). The purpose of these strategies is to mitigate a possible threat against the hearer's face, or "face-threatening acts" (henceforth FTAs) (Brown and Levinson 1987: 65). Interlocutors may use two different strategies to avoid committing a FTA: positive and negative politeness strategies. While positive politeness strategies aim to emphasise a common ground between the interlocutors, negative politeness strategies aim to minimize an imposition by increasing the social distance (Nevala 2010: 423). As Held (2010:195) notes, letters requesting favours in particular are 'seen as apparent face-threatening acts' because they are 'highly invasive into personal territories'. Because of their nature, then, letters of petition and request provide highly interesting material for the study of how politeness strategies relate to particular social settings.

In order to describe how politeness strategies work in these types of letter, this thesis uses Speech Act Theory. Speech acts refer to the ways in which language performs actions. Archer (2010: 402) notes the close relationship between speech acts and "face work" saying that the former helps us 'to "do" things with language and when we "do" those things we impact upon our interlocutors' and/or our own actions (...) in some way'. Based on Searle's (1979) classification of speech acts, this study focuses on two types of speech acts which relate closely to the purpose of the letters: *directives* and *commissives*. Directives refer to utterances in which the speaker's intention is to get the hearer to do something, such as requests and orders (Searle 1979: 13), while commissives refer to utterances which commit the speaker to do some future act, such a promise (Searle 1979: 14). This thesis examines all occurrences of directive and commissive speech acts in the material and considers them in terms of politeness theory.

This thesis contributes to the field of historical pragmatics, and, more specifically, to the study of English correspondence from the late medieval period. As Palander-Collin (2010: 651) observes, for the past few decades, epistolary correspondence has been regarded as a

particularly rich source of information on sociolinguistic variation. Moreover, the fact that the sender and addressee are often identifiable makes this text type valuable material for pragmatic and historical studies (Palander-Collin 2010: 653). As letters of petition were ‘one of the most common acts of public communication between subjects and their governors’ (Held 2010: 195), these historical documents have the potential of showing how social affairs were treated at a particular time and place. By setting these letters in context, this thesis offers an insight into how social roles and power discourse affected the composition of petitions and requests, thus helping to uncover power relations among and across social ranks.

Chapter 2 considers the epistolary setting in which these letters were produced. It describes briefly the late medieval social order and the variation of literacy levels according to social class and gender. It also discusses the letter-writing practices of the time. Chapter 3 introduces the theoretical framework used in the study, with particular reference to politeness studies and Speech Act Theory. Chapter 4 then presents an overview of the material and explains the selection process. It also provides a description of the methodological approach to the texts.

The findings are presented in Chapter 5, with an individual analysis of each letter. Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the findings, relating them to the research questions and the theoretical concepts discussed. Chapter 7 presents the conclusions of this study.

The appendices include translations to Present-day English and the transcriptions from MELD 2017.1 (<http://www.uis.no/meld>).

2. Late medieval correspondence in England

2.1. The use of correspondence in historical linguistic studies

Until very recently, letters were the only available form of communication when oral interaction was not possible. As such, public and personal letters from the past provide insight into everyday matters as well as broader socio-political issues. For example, the vast collection of the Paston letters from the fifteenth century has interested historians and linguists alike for their accounts of the life in this period and their choice of language and style (Wood 2007: 48). Even though letters from the medieval period complied with a relatively rigid body of theory concerning appropriate style and form (see p. 12), the genre itself was varied including different types of letters having different functions (Palander-Collin 2010: 652). It is also worth noting that while some types of documents were commonly

written in Latin, late medieval correspondence was very commonly written in English, making it an important source for linguistic studies (Stenroos et al. 2020: 56-58).

Historical linguists engaged in various lines of research have acknowledged the importance of historical letters, which have allowed them to reconstruct social, discursive and linguistic aspects from the past (Palander-Collin 2010: 651). For example, in their study of address formulae in Early English correspondence, Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 541) refer to letters as ‘one of the most useful sources for English social history and sociohistorical linguistics’ and use them to investigate the growth of positive politeness strategies of this period (see p. 22). In terms of discourse, Bergs (2004: 221) argues that, since letters have long been used to communicate different kinds of messages, letters as a text type can be further subdivided into more precise categories based on their socio-pragmatic aspects, such as the different rhetorical strategies used in reports, requests, and orders. In her study of linguistic variation in royal letters from the Tudor and Stuart period, Nevalainen (2013: 117) shows that, even though officials letters tend to be conservative in their linguistic choices, both merchants and government officials promoted various linguistic changes. In sum, setting these “writer-centred” texts from the past in their sociohistorical context is crucial for understanding ‘the interplay of the individual, language and society’ (Palander-Collin 2010: 651-9).

This chapter aims to contextualise the documents studied in this thesis. It provides an overview of the social context in which the letters in this study were produced, as well as a general discussion of the social order and state of literacy in Late Medieval England. In addition, it considers the letter-writing practices of the time, including both the genre expectations and models, and the practical aspects of writing, sending and receiving letters. It is worth noting that, while this study is concerned with public letters of petition and request, much research on private letters is also relevant and will be discussed here.

2.2. The social context of letter-writing

2.2.1. Social order and literacy

In the fifteenth century, British society was traditionally divided into three estates: the clergy, the aristocracy (nobility and gentry), and the commons (labourers) (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 549; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 79). Further, each of these estates had its own hierarchy; for example, there was a great social distance between an Archbishop and a rural priest (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 79).

Levels of literacy varied according to gender, social rank, and residence, with the upper ranks having the highest number of literate members (Palander-Collin 2010: 654). Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 552-553) estimate the following approximate levels of literacy in England from 1420 to 1680. At the top of the ‘social hierarchy of literacy’ were the professionals, such as clergymen and lawyers, with 100 per cent literacy, followed by nobility and gentry (97-98 per cent). Yeomen and wealthy merchants had relatively high chances of receiving an education (40 per cent of London’s merchants were able to read by the fourteenth century), followed by craftsmen, while servants and labourers were at the bottom. Women from all social levels were excluded from the privilege of receiving an education in grammar schools, probably having literacy levels ‘on a par with that of the lowest status men’ (Palander-Collin 2010: 654).

There are no records establishing the exact number of literate people, nor is it straightforward to define what should be considered literacy in historical periods. One of the resources scholars have used is looking at the number of people signing their names manually. While many people left a mark on their letters as their signatures, others could sign their names, which might indicate their ability to read (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 552). According to Cressy (2006: 176), only 10 per cent of men and 1 per cent of women could sign their names by 1500.

Evidence from early modern schools indicates an understanding of reading and writing as two separate skills, with a greater focus on reading (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 552). Learning to read meant first learning to recognise and pronounce words in Latin, without knowing their meaning, and, later, studying the language itself (Orme 2006: 59-60). According to Orme (2006: 130), not everyone got to that level, and only a couple of years in grammar school provided the necessary knowledge for following a trade or business. For instance, for noblemen and men of merchant status reading was a necessary skill to conduct their businesses (Morrison 2016: 10).

Even though “bookish” education in the Middle Ages did not have the same prominence as it now has, several formal institutions were dedicated to education: grammar schools, universities, and for lawyers, the Inns of Court (Given-Wilson 1996: 2-3). Aristocratic boys usually attended grammar schools, like the prestige schools of Winchester and Eton, where they would learn Latin (Moran Cruz 2009: 461; Morrison 2016: 11). The younger sons of the aristocracy, who would often become members of the church, were typically sent into formal educational institutions by the age of twelve, usually ‘by being given a benefice in the family’s gift’ (Given-Wilson 1996: 5). By the fourteenth century, a

growing number of noblemen was well-educated: not only could they read different kinds of texts but also, in some cases, write them themselves (Carpenter 2009: 275; Given-Wilson 1996: 4).

Since getting an education was expensive, most people had access to it either by birth or patronage (Lepine 2009: 372). The church had its patronage system, which gave access to benefices, education, and service, and it was, indeed, this patronage that distinguished the higher clergy from the unbeneficed (Lepine 2009: 372). However, literacy was not limited only to the nobility and clergy (Gillingham and Griffith 2000: 143). Sons of lower and middle class families were often sent away by the age of twelve to learn a craft and receive some degree of “bookish” education, something that might be interpreted as a sign of increasing social mobility in this period (Moran Cruz 2009: 462-463). Scriveners and priests often acted as private teachers, teaching how to write to whoever could afford the fee (Moran Cruz 2009: 462). Since they taught according to the *ars dictaminis* tradition (see p. 12), the chief purpose of writing was a practical one: producing letters and other administrative documents (Moran Cruz 2009: 462). The *ars dictaminis* tradition standardised a ‘linguistic coding of hierarchical relationship’ that allowed writers to show social deference in writing (Palander-Collin 2010: 655). In other words, it facilitated “ready-to-use” formulae of respect to all sorts of writers making the complex process of writing and reading letters more accessible. Numerous documents penned or dictated by men and women across different social ranks serve as evidence for this evolution (Stenroos et al. 2020: 54).

2.2.2. Female literacy

As it is true for later periods, there were significant gender-based inequalities in the fifteenth century. As Wood (2007: 53) explains, women did not participate in politics and public office, and nothing definite is known concerning the education of women, only that they received less education than men and as a rule were not admitted to grammar schools. There is, however, evidence that suggests the existence of some formal education for women, especially for the wives of estate owners (Archer 1992, as cited in Wood 2007: 53). Since married women of property would often be left in charge of the estate while their husbands were absent, these women might have learnt some management skills (Archer 1992, as cited in Wood 2007: 53). Many records suggest that widows exercised full control of their properties (Wood 2007: 53). For instance, in letter D0075 (MELD), of 1459, Kateryn Bonell of Salop writes to the Earl of Shrewsbury explaining that her tenants had been swindled by an

esquire pretending to collect payments on her name, which not only implies that she was a landowner but also that she oversaw her tenants' payments (see p. 66).

The distinction between reading and writing literacies is probably even more apparent in women's education than in men's (Moran Cruz 2009: 466). Noble girls who were taught to read learned the vernacular, and sometimes some Latin, at home by a tutor or in a convent (Moran Cruz 2009: 461; Morrison 2016: 10). The main reason for teaching women to read was to allow them to access religious texts, and their particular interest in books picks up by the end of the Middle Ages (Moran Cruz 2009: 466; Morrison 2016: 10). Wills from the fifteenth century suggest that many women owned books and that reading was a valued skill: for example, Joan Buckland, a fishmonger's daughter, left religious books to Syon Abbey, and in exchange 'asked for the nuns to pray for her soul' (Morrison 2016: 11-2). On the other hand, learning to write belonged to school education and professional writing, which were not available for women. However, even though women's writing literacy was rare, there is evidence of women becoming writers, teachers, students and benefactors (Moran Cruz 2009: 464).

2.2.3. Social order and influence

In medieval England, land was the determining factor for wealth, social influence, and political power (Carpenter 2009: 261; Gillingham and Griffiths 2000: 100). A clear majority of English subjects, both in the countryside and in towns, were subordinate workers, dependent on those who controlled the land (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 549). Together with the Crown and church, the nobility and gentry were by definition those who owned land in Britain (Carpenter 2009: 261). By the end of the fourteenth century, there was a 'growing status- and rank- consciousness' among the landowners who made up "the gentry", that is, landowners below the peerage (Given-Wilson 1996: 69). As holding a title became more and more important for all landowners, and a new range of titles, such as duke and baron, was introduced in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, those who did not make it to the peerage were left in need of a differentiated title (Carpenter 2009: 264-265). Some of these landowners received other honorific titles, such as that of knight¹, esquire, and gentlemen (Carpenter 2009: 265; Given-Wilson 1996: 69-70). Additionally, some lawyers and other professionals also acquired the title of "gentlemen" (Carpenter 2009: 265).

¹ In the 14th and 15th centuries, the concept of knighthood underwent a redefinition process, being less related to its original martial purpose; and by the 16th century, it was reduced to an honorific title (cf. entry *Knight* in Britannica Encyclopaedia).

Each county had between fifty and seventy gentry families formed by knights and esquires (Given-Wilson 1996: 71). These families formed the “political community” of the shire’ performing roles such as sheriffs and parliament members (Given-Wilson 1996: 71-73). To hold to their hegemony, county families conducted all sorts of legal affairs within each other, such as marriage and feoffments (Given-Wilson 1996: 73).

The medieval households of the nobility employed thousands of people (Given-Wilson 1996: 87). As Given-Wilson (1996: 87) explains, ‘[t]he size, splendour and cost of noble households is testimony to one of the most striking differences between medieval and modern society, that is, the extent to which the public and private lives of medieval people were interwoven’. Particularly interesting for this thesis is the close relationship of nobles and their chaplains. Since all noble houses had their own chapels, chaplains were permanent domestic service members (Given-Wilson 1996: 87-92). Chaplains held daily mass for all household members, heard their confessions, and were responsible for distributing alms (Given-Wilson 1996: 92). Given-Wilson (1996: 92) notes that chaplains were often so close to their lords that they were ‘named as executors of the lord’s will, or as trustees in his business affairs’. Moreover, while large households would often employ many clerks to write letters, writs and other documents for the lord of the house, chaplains would also perform this task in smaller households (Given-Wilson 1996: 92).

Even though those chaplains employed in households from the nobility and gentry enjoyed a secure way of living, only 15 per cent of all chaplains could expect to find a benefice with an independent income (Lepine 2009: 371). For example, in three of the letters included in this thesis, influential members of the nobility request the prior of Durham to secure a vicarage for their chaplains (cf. Appendix 1 D0285; D0286; D0291). In letter D0291, the Countess of Salisbury recommends her chaplain to the prior of Durham and refers to him as *our welbiloued chapilain ser hugh Noon. of virtuous desposiconn* ‘our well-beloved chaplain sir Hugh Noon, who is of virtuous disposition’.

Like the noble houses, abbeys and priories were also landowners and many people depended on them directly and indirectly (Neville 2000: 220; Newman 2000: 43). The medieval church was such an embracing institution that ‘medieval life would have been unimaginable without it’ (Lepine 2009: 360). The whole institution was managed by the powerful and highly educated ecclesiastical elite (Lepine 2009: 361), which, by owning land, had an ‘earthly authority that complemented their hold on men’s mind and soul’ (Gillingham and Griffiths 2000: 101). In terms of their political power, bishops sat in Parliament with

direct influence on the Crown, a reason why many wanted to be on good terms with the church (Gillingham and Griffiths 2000: 137).

Considering that the clear majority of the letters studied in this thesis belong to the Durham Cathedral archive,² it is of special significance to comment on the prominence of the Priory of Durham had in the Late Medieval period. The abundant number of documents and records that have survived and are kept in the Durham University Library (henceforth DUL) archives are evidence of the priory's status (Newman 2000: 44). In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Durham Cathedral Priory and its bishops and priors were the largest landowners of the county palatine of Durham and held jurisdiction there until the reign of Henry VIII (Brown 2014: 701; Halcrow 1955: 70; Neville 2000: 220, 231). The priors intervene in administering common law justice (Neville 2000: 220) and other social and political matters, for example, King James asked the prior of Durham in 1429 to intervene in the affair of the Scottish Marches (Halcrow 1955: 72-74). In many of the surviving letters, powerful magnates ask the prior of Durham for diverse favours, such as securing appointments at Oxford College and other administrative offices, presenting one of their protégés to vacant vicarages, attending ceremonies, or keeping valuables at the priory (Halcrow 1955: 75-77). As Halcrow (1955: 78) concludes, this evidence points to the significant influence the prior had and his 'ability to win favour and concessions from the great men of the land by the exercise of his patronage'.

2.3. Letter-writing as a genre in medieval England

A central characteristic of the correspondence genre is its ambiguity in the private-public distinction (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 547; Palander-Collin 2010: 652). Because writers drew on the medieval tradition of *ars dictaminis* (see p. 12), many public and private letters show overlapping tendencies, and personal issues could be discussed in letters of otherwise more public character (Palander-Collin 2010: 652). Some of the earliest private English letters written in the fifteenth century are examples of this ambivalent practice, which continued throughout later centuries (Palander-Collin 2010: 652, 656). In the Renaissance period, humanist models of letter-writing do not seem to make a clear distinction between the private/public classification either (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 547; Palander-

² Durham University Library offers a thorough description of their archives and special collection catalogue on their website: http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml#qxj-4551 .

Collin 2010: 652). On the contrary, the familiar letter did not belong in the realm of categorisation, where the rhetorical function of letters was the primary concern. Letters, accordingly, fell into three main categories irrespective of their domain: persuasive, demonstrative, and judicial. (Erasmus 1522, as cited in Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 547; Palander-Collin 2010: 652). This ambiguity continued into the Enlightenment period, when many intellectuals discussed their ideas by sending letters to each other, establishing, among others, the scientific article genre (Bazerman 1999 and Goodman 1994, as cited in Palander-Collin 2010: 652).

Just as with private letters, the fact that the sender and addressee of public correspondence are often identifiable makes this text type valuable material for pragmatic studies (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 548; Palander-Collin 2010: 652). According to Bergs (2004: 207), it is possible to categorise letters according to their ‘pragmatic and communicative function’, and the interlocutors’ social roles. In other words, the function of the letter both determines and is determined by its language. For example, letters of petitions, supplications or requests, usually addressed to governmental superiors or church members, are interesting for their pragmatic use of politeness (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 548). Moreover, as many public letters functioned as legal evidence, they were adequately archived and, therefore, have survived the test of time (Stenroos 2014: 358; Stenroos and Thengs 2020: 12).

When it comes to public letters, two categories predominate in the surviving documents: petitions and complaints (Stenroos 2014: 359). The similarities between these two categories are many; however, the main difference lies in the emphasis of the subject matter (Stenroos 2014: 359). Complaints usually consisted of descriptions ‘of events or a state of affairs shown or implied to be unfair’, and, most commonly, the rectification was left to be inferred (Stenroos 2014: 359). MELD 2017.1 (www.uis.no/meld) defines petitions as letters ‘addressed to an authority of superior status/position, requesting a specific decision or course of action, usually a favour of some kind’. Held (2010: 197) observes that these humble requests represent, pragmatically, a negotiation towards a specific goal ‘between two unequal communicating partners, one humbling and abasing himself, the other being praised and thus automatically elevated’ (Held 2010: 197).

Both petitions and requests have an appellative function that focuses on the importance of its fulfilment (Bergs 2004: 213). MELD defines requests as letters ‘requesting a specific course of action, usually a favour of some kind, addressed to a social equal’. Even though the subject matter of both petitions and requests is a ‘favour of some kind’, the

difference lies in the social status of the addressee. In other words, while requests are addressed to a social equal, petitions are directed to a social superior.

2.4. Traditions and conventions

During the medieval period, the practice of letter-writing had a strongly conventionalised nature (Bergs 2004: 209; Davis 1965: 236; Held 2010: 200; Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 545). Scholars have widely agreed that the medieval theory on letter-writing, known as *ars dictaminis*, had its roots in Italy and that, by the twelfth century, it had already spread across Europe (Davis 1965: 241; Held 2010:198; Palander-Collin 2010: 657; Wood 2007:53). The principles of *ars dictaminis* started as an ecclesiastical rhetorical guide on composing epistolary documents that was later applied to letter-composition in the vernacular (Davis 1965: 241). The educational aim of the widely-propagated dictaminal treatises on letter-writing was twofold: to instruct readers on the correct form and the appropriate style (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 545; Palander-Collin 2010:657).

2.4.1. Form

Letters from the medieval period present a relatively fixed structure. The traditional Latin model structure may be divided into five parts: the *salutatio*, the *captatio benevolentiae*, the *narratio*, the *petitio* or *dispositio*, and the *conclusio* (Wood 2007: 53; Held 2010: 200).

A well-phrased *salutatio*, that is, a formulaic greeting, was of considerable importance. Senders were expected to choose forms of address that would show suitable deference to their recipients, most commonly starting with the formula: intensifier + adjective of respect + appropriate noun (Davis 1965: 236). For example, in letter D0292 Elinor Lady Percy addresses the prior of Durham as *Ryght worshipful sir in god* ‘Right worshipful sir in God’. The choice of terms would change according to the social relation between sender and addressee and the recipient’s social status (Palander-Collin 2010: 655; Wood 2007: 59). To demonstrate this interplay, Palander-Collin (2010: 655) discusses one of the earliest English manuals on correspondence, Angel Day’s *The English Secretorie* from 1586, which advises the writer to consider ‘the estate and reputation on the partie, as whether he be our better, our equal, or inferior’. The *salutatio* was, thus, an assertion of the already defined social hierarchy.

The other four rhetorical elements followed a similar pattern. The *captatio benevolentiae* functioned as an extension to the *salutatio*, where the writer would secure ‘a bond of good will with the recipient’ (Palander-Collin 2010: 657). The *narratio* and *petitio* legitimised the request or cause of writing by explicitly narrating the situation and asserting, usually implicitly, ‘what was hoped for from the recipient’ (Palander-Collin 2010: 657). According to Held (2010: 201), both the *captatio benevolentiae* and the *petitio* worked as pragmatic strategies aiming to motivate the reader to fulfil the favour. Finally, the *conclusio* usually consisted of a ‘brief formulaic expression’ of valediction (Held 2010: 204).

Regardless of this strict structure, it is possible to find traces of ‘individual stylistic freedom’ performing different communicative goals (Bergs 2004: 207). Bergs (2004: 209) argues that, even in Late Middle English letters interlocutors were free to ‘fill the empty spaces between the various formulae’. Moreover, supporting evidence shows that writers also adapted fixed formulae, although very little, to convey more personal sentiments (Wood 2007; Davis 1965: 237). However, as Stenroos (2014: 356) reminds us, the literacy levels of both the writer and the reader, the specific function and the context of the letter would play a role in the degree of stylistic freedom. In other words, writers would rely on this fivefold structure and formulae to secure the function of the letter and make the content intelligible (Stenroos 2014: 356).

Using English letters from children to parents as models, Davis (1965) offers a critical conceptual framework for understanding the standardised elements used in personal letters. Davis (1965: 239) lists the formulae which were systematically used and argues that, even though the Latin structure is manifested in the surviving English letters from this period, there is evidence of a specifically Anglo-Norman pattern. According to Davis (1965: 239), familiar letters include:

- 1) a form of address, consisting of the intensifier *Right*, an adjective of respect and an appropriate head noun;
- 2) the commendation of the writer to the addressee with
 - a. ‘an expression of humility’
 - b. ‘a request for a blessing’;
- 3) ‘an expression of desire to hear of the recipient’s welfare’;
- 4) ‘a prayer [...] for the continuation and increase of this welfare “to your heart’s desire”’;
- 5) ‘a conditional clause deferentially offering news of the writer’s welfare’;
- 6) ‘a report of the writer’s good health’;

7) ‘thanks to God for it’.

There are two particular formulas that English writers added to their private correspondence: a set of phrases dedicated to the writer’s good health and the query of the recipient’s health (3-7), referred to as the “health formula” by Davis (1965: 236), and a ‘closing formula, “no more to you at this time”’ (Wood 2007: 54).

2.4.2. Style

In Medieval England, the hierarchical social order affected many aspects of life, including letter-writing (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 550). For the sake of the preservation of social order in writing, one of the most important considerations people would take when composing a letter was establishing a respectful social distance between themselves and the addressee. For this purpose, Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 549) distinguish four different social classes from 1420-1680: the gentry and nobility, citizens and merchants, yeomen, and labourers. In Tudor England, each social class carried its correspondent titles (see Table 1), such as *Lord* and *Lady* for members of the royalty and nobility, *Sir* and *Dame* for the gentry, and *Goodman* and *Goodwife* for merchants and yeomen (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 550).

Also, as it was a product of feudal times, the tradition of *ars dictaminis* emphasised the hierarchical social order through a series of conventional phrases and terms of address (Richardson 2001, as cited in Wood 2007: 54). In the fifteenth century, writers marked social deference with ‘complex noun phrases premodified by the intensifier *right* (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 546). The strict rules of *decorum* and the need for ‘a moral justification’ for writing resulted in lengthy sentences where the writers would demonstrate ‘a constant level of self-consciousness’ towards their social superiors (Held 2010: 202).

<i>Estate</i>		<i>Grade</i>	<i>Title</i>
<i>GENTRY</i>	Nobility	Royalty Duke, <i>Archbishop</i> Marquees, Earl, Viscount Baron, <i>Bishop</i>	Lord, Lady
	Gentry (proper)	Baronet 1611-, Knight Esquire Gentleman	Sir, Dame Mr, Mrs
	Professions	Army Officer (Captain, etc.), Government Official (Secretary of State, etc.), Medical Doctor (Doctor), Merchant, Lawyer, Clergyman, etc.	
<i>NON-GENTRY</i>		Yeoman, Merchant, Husbandman	Goodman, Goodwife
		Craftman, Tradesman, Artificer	(Name of Craft: Carpenter, etc.) none
		Labourer, Servant, Cottager	(Labourer, etc.)
		Pauper	(none)

(Note: occupational titles given in brackets)

Table 1: Rank and status in Tudor and Stuart England. From Nevalainen, T. & Raumolin-Brunberg, H. (1995: 550).

Rather than being a matter of style, the choice between the pronouns *ye* and *thou* in Middle English depended upon the ‘situational power at a given moment in an interaction’, where the social status and the relationship between interlocutors, combined with the dynamics of the conversation played a role in this choice (Jucker 2014: 18). As a result of French influence, English speakers of the thirteenth century started to use two different pronouns when addressing a single person: *thou* and *ye* (Jucker 2014: 17). As a rule, the speaker opted for the pronoun *thou*, unless the addressee was unfamiliar or older and of higher social rank, in which case the pronoun *ye* was used (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 78). However, in fifteenth-century letter writing, people of higher social status regularly refer to each other with *ye* to express politeness and respect, even in intimate relationships, such as those between husbands and wives (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 78).

Because of the collective respect for the hierarchical order of the time, it is not surprising that many scholars have looked at the terms of address in letters (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 543; Palander-Collin 2010: 660). For example, Sánchez Roura (2001: 337), looking at the flexibility of choice in formulae, argues that shorter versions of formulaic phrases and address terms could imply a closer relationship between writers and recipients. Similarly, some studies conclude that the use of certain personal pronouns and verbs might demonstrate the interpersonal relationship and the power hierarchies between the correspondents (Palander-Collin 2010: 659).

2.5. Production and distribution of letters

2.5.1. Writing

Composing a letter involved making linguistic decisions and taking into account the physicality of letters (Palander-Collin 2010: 656). The choices of materials and visual aspects had a significant impact on the message being conveyed. Because some documents were legally binding and, thus, needed to be preserved, it can be inferred that the document's function determined the quality of the materials (Stenroos et al. 2020: 63). For example, documents such as wills and sales contracts would be made on parchment because they were meant for long-term storage, but for letters paper was most commonly used (Stenroos et al. 2020: 63-64). In her study of the Paston letters, Wood (2007: 55) notes that because paper was first manufactured in England at the end of the fifteenth century, the Pastons used imported paper from France and Italy. After writing their letter, writers would cut and save the rest of the unused sheet of paper (Wood 2007: 55). Therefore, letters usually appear on small rectangular pieces of paper or parchment (Stenroos et al. 2020: 65). However, senders from higher social ranks would leave blank spaces in their letters and large margins, thus consuming more paper to indicate their high status (Stenroos et al. 2020: 65). Being generous with the material could also be an expression of respect towards the receiver: in the seventeenth century, writers were advised to use large pieces of paper in important letters because that would show 'reverence and esteem' (de Courtin 1671, as cited in Palander-Collin 2010: 656).

Similarly, the quality of the handwriting as well as the distribution of text on paper were signals of status and respect (Palander-Collin 2010: 656). For example, it has been suggested that the size of the blank space between the address form and the rest of the letter

represented the social distance between sender and addressee (de Courtin 1671, as cited in Palander-Collin 2010: 656).

Additionally, the vast number of conventional phrases, terms of address, and other implied rules in letter-writing suggest that those composing and producing letters had to have some formal training (Palander-Collin 2010: 657; Stenroos 2014: 358). Stenroos et al. (2020: 53-54) use the concept of “scribal community” to describe the body of scribes in a particular time and place. Scribes were ‘anonymous, clearly literate and, as far as we know, nearly always male’ and came from different levels of society (Stenroos et al. 2020: 54). Even though it seems highly unlikely that every village in England would have had a scribe of its own, there is evidence of a widely-distributed competence throughout the country (Stenroos et al. 2020: 53). Also, there is evidence that many noblemen were able to pen letters in their own right (Stenroos et al. 2020: 54).

Regardless of their ability to write, men and women would usually rely on scribes to compose all sort of documents including their correspondence (Stenroos et al. 2020: 54). As many medieval vernacular documents were dictated to a scribe, traces of oral language have left a mark on them (Fitzmaurice and Taavitsainen 2007: 19). Ong (1982, as cited in Fitzmaurice and Taavitsainen 2007: 19) suggested that additive sentence structures (using connectors such as *and*, *then*, *thus*, among others), which are prevalent in late medieval non-literary prose, are evidence of how much oral practices, such as dictation to a scribe, influenced the written language.

Even though professional scribes and amanuenses were usually those doing the writing, one can still find traces of individual voices (Palander-Collin 2010: 657). The person composing the content of the letter did not need to be the one doing the actual writing (Richardson 1997, as cited in Wood 2007: 56). Stenroos (2014: 358-359) identifies four different degrees of scribal participation in the composition of letters: ‘a) composed and written down by the sender; b) dictated by the sender to a scribe; c) drafted by the sender, fair copy produced by a scribe; d) drafted and written down by a scribe on behalf of the sender’. It is, however, difficult to establish which method was used (Stenroos 2014: 359). The contents and style of the letters might help to draw certain conclusions; for example, while letters with expressive language might indicate that the sender composed and wrote the letter (Stenroos 2014: 359), a more emotionally distant language might translate into higher scribal participation (Stenroos 2014: 359). Simultaneously, signs of otherwise inexplicable variation of form and style within a single letter might indicate the sender’s influence in the composition (Wood 2007: 56).

The concept of authorship with regard to late medieval letters is, then, rather complicated. The responsibility for their production rested both on those ‘who physically wrote the documents and those who commissioned and used them’ (Stenroos et al. 2020: 53). Wood (2007: 56) makes use of Goffman’s (1981) terms “animator”, “author”, and “principal” to discuss this multi-layered activity. The “animator” refers to the person who does the actual writing – in many cases, the scribe. The “author” refers to ‘the person responsible for the wording’ (Wood 2007: 56), who could be the person dictating the letter. Moreover, in some cases the “author” would be both the sender – responsible for the content – and the scribe – responsible for the correct formulae-. Finally, the “principal” indicates ‘the person whose position is represented’ in the subject matter of the letter, usually in letters where the sender writes on behalf of a third party (Wood 2007: 56-57). For example, the “principal” function is represented in letter D0285, where Thomas Lord Clifford and of Westmorland writes on behalf of his aunt, *worshipfull lady of Cambridge*, to the prior of Durham to remind him of his aunt’s desire for a vicarage.

2.5.2. Sending and receiving

The late Middle Ages saw the beginnings of an organized postal service. Until the mid-fifteenth century, royal messengers would travel the whole journey to deliver royal postal communication (Hemmeon 1912: 3). This practice changed during the war with Scotland in 1482, when King Edward IV saw the need of a faster way of communication (Hemmeon 1912: 3). During his reign, the establishment of local posts at intervals of thirty kilometres, where fresh horses and riders would stand by, all coordinated by a postmaster general, eased the transportation of correspondence (Hemmeon 1912: 3; Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 554). Before this improvement, private correspondence was usually ‘carried by a servant, a messenger, or a friend’, as the earlier Paston letters show (Hemmeon 1912: 4). The later Paston letters refer to carriers travelling between London and Norwich, witnessing the beginnings of the postal services (Hemmeon 1912: 4). Letters could be distributed in two different ways: with one messenger who would ride from post to post until reaching the destination, or through “the packet” (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 554). When an official packet arrived at one post, the master would attach other letters within the same route (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 554). This waiting time had, of course, serious implications for messages, especially for the most urgent ones, as the timespan between the composition and the reception of a letter could be unpredictably long

(Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 554). Therefore, sending one's own servant would often be the faster way, even though it could take some time.

Relying the distribution of their messages and letters to servants or acquaintances also implied that senders had to trust them. Sometimes, they would also supplement the letters with verbal messages that were perhaps too sensitive to write (Wood 2007: 57). For example, in letter D0290 the Countess of Cambridge employs a trustworthy servant to bear a verbal message: *that ye will yife credence to my well- beloued seruaunt Rawlyn' Axe . the berer of this . what he sall disclose yow on my behalfe in' . this mater* 'Please, give credence to my well-beloved servant Rawlyn Axe, the bearer of this letter, for what he shall disclose to you on my behalf in this matter'. Also, as Wood (2007: 57) observes, the scribes' participation in the composition and the oral practice conducted by messengers complicate the idea of a single sender even further.

3. Theoretical background

3.1. Historical pragmatics

Historical pragmatics provides a range of useful approaches to the study of how writers and readers negotiated meaning in letters from the past. According to Jucker and Taavitsainen (2013: 3), its main concern is 'the study of patterns of language use in the past and the way in which these patterns change over time'. Pragmatics has from the start had a strong focus on spoken language (Jacobs and Jucker 1995: 6). Because of their oral quality, letters have been recognized as important source material for historical pragmatic studies, even if their formulaic character has sometimes been seen as a drawback (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 541; Stenroos 2014: 355; Wood 2007: 48). However, it is increasingly accepted that written texts should be regarded as interesting sources of research, and not in lieu of oral data (Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice 2007: 11; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 2).

One of the biggest challenges within historical pragmatics is the adaptation and application of modern theoretical frameworks (Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice 2007: 15). Meaning is culture-bound, and, as such, it is also sensitive to time (Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice 2007: 16, 26). To overcome these difficulties, historical pragmaticists need to "think historically" considering cultural and historical features as well as the speaker's identity, such as age, gender, and social rank (Taavitsainen and Fitzmaurice 2007: 25).

Jucker (2008: 898-902) suggests a model of analysis that is extremely helpful in historical pragmatics. First, we should look at the expression level, at features such as interjections, discourse markers and address terms (Jucker 2008: 899). At the second level, we find utterances, usually represented by speech acts (Jucker 2008: 899-900). The next level is much larger and comprises genres and discourses (Jucker 2008: 900-901). Finally, the fourth level is the discourse domain the text belongs to, that is, ‘the socially defined institutions and frameworks for the formulation and dissemination of texts’ (Jucker 2008: 901-902). In the analysis, this thesis will consider aspects of politeness in the levels proposed by Jucker (2008), but with a special focus on the first two.

There are two widely applied theories in historical pragmatics: politeness theory, particularly that of Brown and Levinson (1987), and Speech Act theory.

3.2. Politeness theory

Politeness is a central aspect of our everyday interaction (Nevala 2010: 419). As Nevala (2010: 419) observes, politeness concerns how we show our respect (or the lack of it) towards the other person and how our words affect the hearer and the interaction as a whole. Brown and Levinson’s politeness theory (1987), which was introduced over four decades ago, has been the preferred model in historical pragmatics (Nevala 2010: 419; Jucker & Taavitsainen 2013: 115). The concept of “face” is central in this theory, and is defined as the public self-image that people have (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62). Thus, “face” is understood as a universal concept which can ‘be lost, maintained or enhanced, and must be constantly attended to’ in any form of social interaction (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61). In a sense, politeness is a mutual activity because ‘everyone’s face depends on everyone else’s being maintained’: the maintenance involves actively employing linguistic choices that minimize threat (Brown and Levinson 1987: 61).

Brown and Levinson (1987) distinguish between two forms of “face”. The universal wish to be appreciated and liked by others is termed “positive face”; while the desire to maintain one’s freedom to act and not to be imposed upon is referred to as “negative face” (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62). In oral and written communication, interlocutors use different ‘forms of linguistic behaviour that pay respect to the addressee’s positive or negative face wants’ (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 115). These ‘forms of linguistic behaviour’ are generally termed positive and negative politeness (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 115). Positive politeness refers to the linguistic strategies that minimize the distance between interlocutors by maintaining the recipient’s positive face (e.g. using terms of endearment),

and negative politeness strategies accentuate the distance between them by emphasising the recipient's freedom of choice (e.g. using interrogative forms) (Nevala 2010: 423; Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 115; Stenroos and Mäkinen 2011: 93).

There are, however, instances when the purpose of the interaction automatically threatens the hearer's "face"; these are called "face-threatening acts" or FTAs (Brown and Levinson 1987: 65). For example, an order, or even a request, threatens the recipient's negative face since it compromises the recipient's freedom of choice; while a criticism can threaten the recipient's positive face as he/she may not feel approved (Stenroos and Mäkinen 2011: 93). Furthermore, the speaker might decide to threaten his/her own "face" by enhancing the distance between him/herself and the recipient (Stenroos and Mäkinen 2011: 93). For example, when a sender focuses on the virtues and social position of the addressee while at the same time uses self-humbling adjectives to refer to him- or herself, might represent FTAs against the sender's positive face.

Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory has been criticized by various scholars for making universal claims of politeness. Notions of socially correct language behaviour are culture-specific, and, therefore, we should not expect to find a universal definition of polite speech (Meier 1995: 351, as cited in Nevala 2010: 421). Jucker (2014: 7-8) notes that politeness is no longer understood as fixed strategic behaviour destined to avoid interactional problems. Speakers choose situationally appropriate language, named "politic behaviour" (Watts 2003, as cited in Jucker 2014: 8), and accommodate their speech according to their rank in society or role in the interaction and the hearer's, termed "discernment politeness" (Ide 1989, as cited in Jucker 2014: 8). Conventions also changed over time: while speakers of Present-day English prefer negative politeness strategies (e.g. using the modal *would* and *please*), speakers in the late Middle English period valued positive politeness (see p. 26 for further discussion; cf. also Stenroos and Mäkinen 2011: 93). Similarly, using excessive polite speech when interacting with a subordinate, for example, from a boss to an employee, may be interpreted as sarcastic speech (Jucker 2014: 8).

For these reasons, it is important to distinguish between the specific cultural definition of politeness, or first order politeness, and the technical term used by pragmatics, or second order politeness (Jucker 2014: 8). While first order politeness changes over time and place, second order politeness is a stable analytical tool formulated as precise definitions used in scholarly research to 'find out whether the forms of behaviour described in the definitions exist in a particular society at a given time or not' (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 114-115). Having this in mind, Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness classification is considered

satisfactory for this thesis as it allows to examine situations of possible FTAs and the strategic politeness the senders of the selected letters used.

3.2.1. Terms of address and politeness

Politeness theory has been applied to the study of address terms in English letters from earlier periods (Nevala 2010: 424; Williams 2013: 174). The drive behind much scholarship on letters from late Middle and Early Modern English periods has been a desire to investigate aspects of politeness between private individuals, such as those in the Pastons' and Thynne's letters (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995; Williams 2013; Wood 2007). The wide variety of address terms is an indicator of how crucial it was to maintain the 'carefully graduated scale of social hierarchy, thus reflecting the power relations of Late Medieval and Early Modern English society' (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 547).

Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995) offer an extensive study on terms of address in private English letters from 1420 to 1680. The correct use of specific terms of address and the implications they had are relevant for this thesis. For example, different ranks and professions had their specific titles: members of the nobility, archbishops and bishops were referred to as *Lord* and *Lady*, esquires were addressed to as *Mr.*, and professional were addressed with their respective professional titles such as *Doctor* or *Lawyer* (see Table 1 in p. 15) (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 550). Similarly, there seems to be a connection between the social interrelation of the sender and the addressee, and the choice of head nouns, intensifiers, and adjectives of deference (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995). Terms of address highlighting social deference, such as honorific titles and adjectives, seem to attend the negative face of the addressee, while terms of address highlighting an in-group membership, such as terms of endearment or not using an honorific title seem to be strategies attending the positive face of the addressee (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 563). Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995) note that some adjectives of respect were frequently paired with the intensifier *right* and conventionally used to address members of a particular social rank, for example:

- *Right honourable*: usually followed by the title *lord*, used to address members of the nobility (558);
- *Right reverend*: to address members of the clergy and usually attached to clerical titles (558);

- *Right worshipful*: in official language, usually addressing members of the gentry (558)
- *No-naming strategy*: common in official correspondence (573), especially the nobility addressed their social inferiors with phrases with ‘no nominal headword’, for example *trusty and well-beloved* (578).

In terms of the choice of head noun, Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg’s study (1995) observed different patterns and trends through the 250 years covered. The following are the most relevant for the present study:

- *Lord*: almost exclusively reserved for male members of the nobility, also used among bishops. (574, 576)
- *Master*: usually modifying a professional title held by a gentleman, a surname, or used by social inferiors to address their employers, for example knights. Ordinary gentlemen could also salute each other with *master* (574, 577)
- *Friend*: except for letters to family members, letters among friends observe the least social distance, and ‘differences in social rank did not always hinder the use of intimate forms between friends’ (570).

The Middle English period saw a change in the use of personal pronouns (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 121). Entering English through French influence, the second-person plural pronoun *ye* gradually replaced the second person singular *thou* to address a higher-ranking individual in writing (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 121). Jucker and Taavitsainen (2013: 121) explain that this development is also a direct consequence of the growing status-consciousness and the ‘social decorum of appropriate behavior towards people of different social classes’. However, in their comprehensive work on address formulae in Early English correspondence (1420-1680), Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 547) question the assumption of looking at these forms of address as face-saving strategies. They argue that ‘these pronouns would be an obligatory aspect of speech, automatic and ever-present, and hence would no longer serve as a politeness strategy (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 547).

3.3. Speech Act theory

In a groundbreaking lecture series, Austin (1975) presented a view of language as something performative: we do not only use language descriptively but also to ‘do’ things with it. What Austin (1975: 6) calls *performative utterances* refers to certain types of utterances that are not concerned with stating facts or describing conditions, but instead with performing an action and creating certain expectations just by being uttered. To use one of Austin’s first examples, when a priest says, ‘I *pronounce* you man and wife’, we accept the verb *pronounce* as completing a marriage ceremony (Williams 2013: 114). This utterance may be classified as a *performative speech act*. Thus, the concept of speech acts refers to the idea of how ‘a socially recognized act’ is performed through language (Williams 2013: 114). Consequently, when we ‘do’ things with the power of our words, we also make an impact on our interlocutors (Archer 2010: 402). It has been precisely those speech acts that are likely to constitute face-threatening acts, such as requests, apologies, and complaints, that have received the most attention in the field of historical pragmatics (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008: 7).

If we wish to understand how people in the past interacted with one another and constructed social activities through language, we need to consider the speech acts they used (Williams 2013: 114; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007: 108). In their diachronic study of speech acts, Taavitsainen and Jucker (2007: 108) explain that speech acts are ‘fuzzy concepts’ because of two reasons: first, they are deeply rooted in culture, second, they are prone to change over time. They conclude that ‘every speech community creates its own inventory of speech acts and its own set of speech act verbs with which they can talk about the speech act themselves’ (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007: 108). Thus, the specific meaning of a speech act varies according to the time it was uttered, the role of the individual who uttered it, and the cultural expectations of its performance (Arnovick 1999, as cited in Archer 2010: 382).

Most scholars use as a starting point Searle’s (1979) classification of speech acts into *assertives, directives, commissives, expressives, and declarations* (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007: 109). An *assertive* is an utterance in which the speaker commits to its truth, for example utterances in which the speaker concludes or deducts something (Searle 1979: 12-13). In a *directive*, the speaker intends to get the hearer to do something, such as requests, invitations and orders (Searle 1979: 13). A *comissive* is an utterance which commits the speaker to do some future act, such a promise (Searle 1979: 14). *Expressives* are utterances which express the speaker’s emotions, for example apologies, congratulations and insults (Searle 1979: 15). Finally, *declaratives* refer to socially recognized performatives that ‘bring about some

alteration in the status or condition of the referred object', such as the Queen naming a ship (Searle 1979: 16-17). Taavitsainen and Jucker (2007: 110) remind us, however, that this classification is by no means constant. While some speech acts might 'behave in different ways' according to the message being uttered, other speech acts might be performed with other verbs or phrases than the expected ones (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007: 110). For example, insults are expressive speech acts which are generally not performed by the verb *insult* itself, but rather by other phrases or speech act verbs (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007: 110).

This thesis will focus particularly on two of Searle's speech act types: directives and commissives.

3.3.1. Directives

According to Searle's definition (1979: 13), directives are 'attempts (of varying degree...) by a speaker to get the hearer to do something'. Directives include, then, requests and orders (Archer 2010: 382). Per definition, directives are face-threatening acts because their purpose is to make the 'the addressee to do something that he might not have done otherwise, and thus it limits, in a relevant way, his freedom of action and freedom from imposition' (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008: 11). Even though directives seem to always threaten the addressee's negative face, their degree of imposition can vary from mere suggestions to orders and commands, from recommendations to supplications, and from invitations or permits to prohibitions (Archer 2010: 383; Searle 1979: 13; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008: 11). In other words, different strategies help us to mitigate possible impositions.

Today, English speakers usually try to formulate requests indirectly by using modal verbs or conditionals, or even questions, in order to sound polite (Archer 2010: 383). Indirect speech acts refer to 'cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another' (Searle 1975: 60, as cited in Culpeper and Archer 2008: 51). Searle (1979: 31-32) defines indirect speech acts as utterances in which

the speaker communicates to the hearer more than he actually says by way of relying on their mutually shared background information, both linguistic and nonlinguistic, together with the general powers of rationality and inference on the part of the hearer (Searle 1979: 31-32).

This means that an indirect request is formulated so that the addressee needs to infer some information to ‘bridge the gap between the direct speech act and the indirect speech act’ (Culpeper and Archer 2008: 51). Indirectness is associated with negative politeness, as giving the addressees a sense of autonomy in their decision-making, regardless of how realistic this might be, makes the request ‘less explicitly manipulative’, thus saving the addressees’ negative face (Archer 2010: 383). Therefore, speakers seeking to maintain the hearer’s negative face might choose to formulate their *directives* as questions, as in asking whether the hearer is willing to or capable of performing the act, rather than directly imposing their wish to the hearer (Sadock 2004: 71).

Resorting to some grade of indirectness seems to be the appropriate and polite way of requesting something in Present-Day English. However, this does not seem to have been the case for Middle English to the same extent (Archer 2010: 384; Kohnen 2009: 19-20; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008: 8). Many scholars have noted an evolution of these face-saving strategies throughout the English language history, from more direct to more indirect directives (Archer 2010: 384; Kohnen 2009: 19; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008: 8). It has been suggested that, during the Middle English period, requests tended to state the speaker’s desire more directly (Kohnen 2002, as cited in Archer 2010: 385; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008: 8). However, by the end of the period, and especially in Early Modern English, direct requests became less appropriate, and the focus shifted towards the ‘co-operation of the addressee’ with the help of face-saving strategies (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008: 8).

In terms of politeness, a significant effect of this move is the evolution ‘from a positively oriented politeness culture (historically) to a negatively oriented politeness culture (today)’ (Archer 2010: 384). Kohnen (2009: 19) questions the extent to which ‘the requirements of politeness’ are either linked to historical periods or determined by genre conventions. On the first matter, Kohnen (2009: 20) points to Culpeper and Archer’s (2008) study of Early Modern English trial proceedings and play texts, where the authors conclude that the documented evidence on directness should be understood as culture-specific and not necessarily as impolite speech. A clear majority of directives analysed used, in fact, the imperative form, that is, ‘the most direct requisitive strategy’ (Archer 2010: 386). This study shows that the conventional indirectness in directive speech acts that we expect today was not developed, and that most speakers employed impositives: ‘imperatives, performatives, hedged performatives, obligation- and want-statements’ (Culpeper and Archer 2008, as cited in Kohnen 2009: 20). Moreover, the authors argue that even people with less power opted for these types of direct requests when addressing people of higher ranks (Culpeper and Archer

2008: 80). This evidence suggests that, at least in late Early Modern England, society did not yet associate indirectness (i.e. negative politeness) ‘with respect for the autonomy of the individual’ to the extent that modern English speakers might expect today (Archer 2010: 386-7).

Even though this evidence points to aspects of politeness specific for their historical period, different genre conventions show separate developments. A move in the opposite direction, that is towards positive politeness, is observed in the use of terms of address in private letters (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008: 8). Archer (2010: 389) refers to various corpus-based studies of English correspondence from 1418-1680, and points to the shift from negatively polite honorifics (such as titles indicating social status) to more positive nicknames and terms of endearment in private letters. It has been suggested that this shift was probably a consequence of the growth and development of private letter writing in Early Modern English.

The focus of letters of petition and request is the directive speech act itself. Indeed, one of the most common reasons for letter-writing in the past was the sender’s desire ‘to obtain material ends and social favor’ (Williams 2013: 133). This means that, as far as the favour itself is concerned, there is an inverse power relationship between the interlocutors. Letters of petition may, then, be defined as ‘speech acts carried out in an asymmetric interpersonal relationship’ and possible FTAs (Held 2010: 195).

A performative verb is a verb that names explicitly the act that wants to perform: ‘it names an illocutionary force’ (SIL *Glossary of Linguistic Terms*). Utterances with a performative verb, such as *J pray yow wt all myn’ hert / that ye will graunte . hym’ the seid vicary* ‘I pray you with all my heart that you will grant him the said vicarage’ (D0290), are called explicit performatives since they include a performative verb (Huang 2006: 96). Performatives in directive speech acts usually contain a performative verb in the first person singular and an ‘object referring to the addressee and the requested act’ and are considered the most ‘potentially face-threatening manifestation of directives’ (Kohnen 2007: 143-144).

Performative verbs are, however, not always necessary, for example, the utterance *J haue a preste which that J desire were there-in* ‘I have a priest whom I desire to be appointed there’ (D0290) implies a request for an appointment; such utterances are called implicit performatives.

Especially interesting for this thesis are the performatives *pray*, *beseech* and *desire*. As far as Early Modern English correspondence goes, the performative verb *pray* was the most common one, followed by *desire* and *beseech* (Williams 2013: 134). One of them, which is

common in many of the letters in this thesis, is the phrase listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (henceforth OED) for *pray*: ‘I pray you (also thee, ye): (used to add urgency, solicitation, or deference to a question or request) “I beg of you”; “please”’.

In the OED, the performative verb *beseech* is defined as ‘to supplicate, entreat, implore (a person)’. Williams (2013: 138) suggests that *beseech* was used in a more ‘negatively polite and deferential way’ than *pray*, which had a more neutral connotation, at least in Early Modern English. Writers who wanted to express urgency, or even desperation, while communicating social deference, often used *beseech* in their requests (Williams 2013: 138-139). Pragmatically speaking, this indicates that *pray* did not always convey the degree of urgency and politeness that the senders intended (Williams 2013: 146).

The speech act verb *desire* was another usual way of expressing a directive. The definition of *desire* that is most relevant for this thesis is the directive sense of ‘To express a wish to (a person); to request, pray, entreat. (c) to d[esire] a person *to do* something (the most frequent construction); (d) to d[esire] a person *that*, or *of* a person *that...*’ (OED). Williams (2013: 143) argues that, at least in Early Modern English, the directive sense of this speech act verb was less direct than that of *pray* and *beseech*, as the ‘speaker’s attitude towards the request’ relates to a wish, a longing or craving rather than a direct request.

Performatives may be made less direct by including a hedge of some kind. A hedge performative has been defined as ‘an indirect illocution whose illocutionary force is expressed directly by a performative verb but is given an additional illocutionary force by some device, such as modalization or subordination’ (SIL *Glossary of Linguistic Terms*). For example, in letter L0380 included in this study, the utterance *if my praar myght be plesyng to our worthy lordschipe J wald beseike our gudnes to prefair* ‘If it may please your worthy lordship, I would beseech your goodness to prefer’ includes the hedge performative *if my praar myght be plesyng to our worthy lordschipe J wald*, which adds indirectness.

Finally, the adverb *heartly*, which is present in many of the petitions and requests of this study, intends to express a sense of sincerity from the sender’s side. The OED defines it as ‘in a heartfelt manner; with expression of real feeling; cordially; earnestly, sincerely; thoroughly’ (it also notes that it is now rare in use).

3.3.2. Commissives

In commissives, the speakers obligate themselves to do something for the addressee (Archer 2010: 382; Williams 2013: 117). According to Searle (1969: 60), a promise must fulfil three conditions: what is promised must be something that the hearer wants; it should be something

not expected to happen otherwise; and the speaker must believe in the possibility of fulfilling it. In terms of politeness, ‘the speaker threatens her own negative face in that she reduces her own freedom of action by committing herself to a particular course of action’ (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008: 11). Typically, commissives speech act verbs include, among others, *promise, commit, threaten, vow, pledge, offer, and swear* (Pakkala-Weckström 2008: 137; Williams 2013: 117). Sworn testimony in court and an exchange of vows in a marriage ceremony are examples of the performativity effect speech acts have (Williams 2013: 117). For example, in medieval England, a marriage could be considered legal with just ‘two individuals speaking words of present consent’ (Kittel 1980: 125, as cited in Archer 2010: 391).

The concept of ‘binding promise’ deserves special attention (Pakkala-Weckström 2008: 134). In Middle English, a promise created not just a belief but rather a sense of moral obligation to perform the promised action (Archer 2010: 390). Honour was a central idea, and a person could suffer from public and private humiliation if he/she did not keep his/her oral promise (Pakkala-Weckström 2008: 138). Pakkala-Weckström (2008: 134) defines binding promise as ‘an oral commitment given by way of a speech act which usually takes a certain formula’, usually by performative such as *sweren* (to swear), *plighthen* (to pledge), *wedden* (marrying, promising), *bihighthen* (to promise), and the noun *trouthe* (truth). Along the same lines, Lenker (2007) discusses the epistemic changes from Old English to Present-Day English of adverbs expressing a commitment to the truth by the speaker. Lenker (2007: 92-93) argues that, by the course of the Middle English period, the adverb *trewely* was commonly used as an emphaser of truth and as a highlighting device, reinforcing personal opinions.

A final point relevant to commissives, not considered by Pakkala-Weckström (2008) or Lenker (2007), is the use of modal verbs as commissives. While the modal verbs *will* and *shall* still carry pragmatic associations to a promise, the intention and perlocutionary effect in Old English and Middle English were much stronger than they are today (Archer 2010: 391-392). The modals *wol* (will) and *shal* (shall) started to develop the sense of futurity they have today in the Middle English period, however they still kept the significance they had in Old English (*ic wille* ‘I wish to’ and *ic sceal* ‘I am obliged to’), that is, volition and obligation respectively (Barber, Beal and Shaw 2009: 171- 172; Horobin and Smith 2002: 97). The modals *may* and *might* had the original sense of possibility, but they started to develop the sense of hypothesis present in Present-Day English (Horobin and Smith 2002: 98). As many

senders in this study express a form of a ‘promise of future help’ using the modals *will*, *shall* and *may*, this study will consider them as commissive speech acts without performatives.

4. Materials and methodology

The materials used in this study are drawn from MELD. MELD consists of transcriptions of over 2,000 documentary texts covering the period 1399-1525 that allow us to follow their linguistic development (Stenroos and Thengs 2020: 6, 15). The definition of documentary texts consists of two criteria: that they have a pragmatic function, and that they belong to a specific historical context (Stenroos and Thengs 2020: 11). In other words, documentary texts are meant to fulfil very specific pragmatic functions, such as transferring land rights or communicating a message to a particular person, and are not concerned with didactic, aesthetic or devotional matters. In addition, MELD is delimited to documentary texts that belong to a specific location rather than representing central government (Stenroos and Thengs 2020: 11).

For this time period, literary texts have so far received the most scholarly attention, which leaves documentary texts as an ‘underresearched source of linguistic evidence’ (Stenroos and Thengs 2020: 3). Local documents from the late Middle English period may offer a more precise context in terms of location, the people involved, and the date of production than literary texts do (Stenroos and Thengs 2020: 3-4). Therefore, and despite their relatively formulaic nature, these text types may be suitable for many different linguistic studies, concerned with aspects such as language variation, multilingual practices, and politeness strategies (Stenroos et al. 2020: 37). With 67 functional categories, MELD aims to provide material for research on linguistic variation, focusing on these less studied text types (Stenroos and Thengs 2020: 6, 46). The category relevant for this study is “Correspondence”, which consist of official, business and private letters divided into three specific functions (complaints, petitions and requests) as well as a miscellaneous category denominated ‘letters’ (Stenroos and Thengs 2020: 50).

Exploring patterns of politeness and power relations in the intersection of social class and gender has been a departing point for this study. In terms of politeness theory, letters of petition and request are particularly interesting because the social position of the sender and the addressee are generally either explicit or easy to deduce, something that allows us to study how power relations might be reflected in the language.

The selected letters have already been transcribed by members of the MELD team and are included in MELD 2017.1 (www.uis.no/meld). This version of MELD has a total of 156 texts in the “Correspondence” superordinate category, with 25 texts in the “Petition” subcategory and 34 categorised as “Request” (Stenroos, Bergstrøm and Thengs 2020: 47). These two categories have been defined for MELD on the basis of relative social status. In a letter of request, the sender asks for a specific course of action or favour to a social equal. A petition also asks for a specific favour, but is addressed to an authority of superior status (cf. ‘Classification According to Function’, 2016 MELD working document).

MELD contains altogether 25 letters defined as petitions and 34 letters defined as requests. From this total of 59 letters, a sample of 19 texts was selected. The scope of the sample was determined on two grounds: on the one hand it had to be possible to study each text in detail in the time frame available, while on the other hand, the sample had to provide enough material to address the research questions:

- to what extent do gender and hierarchical interrelationships determine the choice of polite and direct language in petitions and requests?
- to what extent do the formal characteristics of the letters reflect these categories?

For this purpose, the selection of texts was carried out following three criteria:

- (1) *A distribution of texts in terms of social class:* given the extent to which hierarchical interrelationships determine the choice of polite discourse in petitions and requests, having a reasonably even social class representation is necessary. Unfortunately, as is the case otherwise in most surviving texts from the Middle English period, in MELD, most letters are from the nobility, especially those from women. Of those written by men, seven letters are by members of the nobility, six by members of the gentry, two by middle class members, and three by priests. Of the women, seven letters are from the nobility, one from a gentry member, and one from a middle-class woman. To address this shortcoming, it was decided that the final selection should include, insofar it is possible, an equal number of texts from the social classes below the nobility and an even number of texts from noblewomen and men that allow for comparison.
- (2) *A distribution of texts in terms of gender:* to consider the extent to which gender determines the choice of polite discourse in petitions and requests, it is essential to have an even range of gender representation. As noted above, most letters are from

men: in the original selection, nine letters are by women, and 18 by men. The final selection should include all nine letters from women and an even number from men.

- (3) *A proportional representation of requests and petitions*: provided that this study explores the choice of polite speech in petitions and requests and the extent to which the formal characteristics of the letters reflect these categories, having enough material from both text types is necessary. As MELD considers “petitions” as letters asking for a favour to a social superior, and most letters are from the nobility to the prior of Durham, the majority of letters are, indeed, categorised as “requests”. To address this limitation, it was decided that the final selection should group the letters into different groups that allow for comparison between these two text types.

Based on these criteria, this study determined that grouping together letters in relation to their purpose and, if possible, having the same addressee was a good starting point. Having letters addressed to the same person may facilitate a relatively objective basis of comparison for this paper, allowing to address the question of how members from both genders and different social ranks addressed the prior of Durham and how they formulated their requests. At the same time, letters with a similar agenda could also facilitate a comparable basis for this study: the degree of seriousness and urgency could be potentially similar.

The 19 letters that were selected were grouped into three main groups for the analysis. The first two groups consist of requests from women and men respectively, all written to the prior of Durham. The subject matter of all letters in this group is the same: to recommend and request the appointment of a priest they know to the prior of Durham. The third group consists of petitions, and involve a more varied range of senders and addressees. A comparison of the first two groups will make it possible to explore the similarities and differences in the ways in which noblewomen and men from different social ranks addressed the prior of Durham and the degree of directness in their requests. For the third group, the intention here is to compare the results with the other two groups and explore the possible differences. This comparison will then address the question whether the subject matter determines the degree of politeness more than social class and gender.

The first group consists of seven letters written by noblewomen (see also 5.1., pp. 37-51). Two of these letters, D0286 and D0290, have the same sender, Maud Clifford, Countess of Cambridge. Table 2 shows the selected letters for this section and provides the MELD codes, archive references and other relevant information. As letters normally provide the day

and month of the writing, but not the year, some of the dates are uncertain, and are marked with <?>.

MELD Code	Archive reference	Content	Gender	Class	Date	Place	Function
D0286	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus XXV: 130*	Letter from Countess of Cambridge to the prior of Durham	Female	Nobility	23 Jan 1441?	Turnham Hall	Request
D0290	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus XXV: 142	Letter from the Countess of Cambridge to the prior of Durham	Female	Nobility	25 Jan 1416-1446?	Conisbrough	Request
D0287	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus XXV: 133	Letter from Elizabeth countess of Westmorland to the prior of Durham	Female	Nobility	28 May 1436	Hart	Request
D0288	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus XXV: 135	Letter from Elizabeth Lady Grey to the prior of Durham	Female	Nobility	8 April 1419-1448?	Stamford	Request
D0291	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus XXV: 143	Letter from Aleis Countesse of Salisbury, Ladi of Muntehermez to the prior of Durham	Female	Nobility	4 May 1434	Middleham	Request
D0292	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus XXV: 145	Letter from Eleanor Lady Percy to the prior of Durham	Female	Nobility	31 May 1434-1446	Dragenham	Request
D0314	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Misc. Charters 1078	Letter from Margaret, countess of Westmorland to the prior of Durham	Female	Nobility	2 Nov nd (15 th c)	Brauncepeth	Request

Table 2. Letters from noblewomen requesting the appointment of their chaplain or priest.

The second group (Table 3) includes seven letters written by men from different social classes (see also 5.2., pp. 51-65). It consists of one middle class member, one priest, two members of the gentry, and three from the nobility.

MELD Code	Archive reference	Content	Gender	Class	Date	Place	Function
D0267	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments : Locellus XXV: 15	Letter from Thomas Kar of York, a draper, to the prior of Durham	Male	Middle	11 Aug 1437	York	Petition
L0380	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments : XXV: 18	Letter from Richard Cliff to the prior of Durham	Male	Priest	21 Nov 1432	Hemingbrough	Petition
D0268	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments : Locellus XXV: 16	Letter from Robert Danby to the prior of Durham	Male	Gentry	10 Jan 1440-1455	Yafford	Request
D0272	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments : Locellus XXV: 29	Letter from Sir Robert Babthorp to the prior of Durham	Male	Gentry	17 Jan 1436	Babthorp e	Request
D0285	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments : Locellus XXV: 130	Letter from Thomas Lord Clifford and of Westmorland to the prior of Durham	Male	Nobility	23 Jan 1441?	Turnham Hall	Request
D0293	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments : XXV: 150	Letter from Thomas Percy to the prior of Durnham	Male	Nobility	4 Nov 1440-1449	Helay	Request
D0296	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments : Locellus XXV: 159	Letter from Henry Percy, Lord of Northumberland to the prior of Durham	Male	Nobility	6 Mar 1424	Warkwor th	Request

Table 3. Letters from men recommending or requesting the appointment of a priest.

As Table 4 shows, the third group (see also 5.3., pp. 65-77) is miscellaneous in character, consisting of a total of five letters, of which four were categorised as “petitions” in MELD. The starting point for this selection was the subject matter: it concerns financial problems, and the sender asks the addressee to intervene in the matter. The remaining two letters written by women are in this group, one of them from a member of the gentry and the other from a

middle-class woman. Of those written by men, one is from a priest, one is from a middle-class man, and one is from a nobleman. The latter is the only one categorised as “request” in MELD, and it was selected to allow for a comparison between the different social classes. The intention behind this particular grouping is to explore the similarities and differences in polite speech between letters requesting the appointment of a priest and those petitioning for intervention in financial problems, which could be understood as a more urgent and serious matter than the first one.

MELD Code	Archive reference	Content	Gender	Class	Date	Place	Function according to MELD
D0075	Shrewsbury, Shropshire Archives: 1831/1/1/1	From Katherine Bonell to Earl of Salop	Female	Gentry	3 Jan 1459	Shrewsbury	Petition
D0295	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus XXV:154	From Lord Scrop to the prior of Durham	Male	Nobility	4 Aug 1440-1443	York	Request
D4464	Lincoln, Lincolnshire Archives: Cragg/4/8	From Sir John Bowde vicar of Deopham to the prior of Canterbury	Male	Priest	22 March 1465	Deopham	Petition
L0329	DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus XXV:13	From Janet Thalzour of Bamburgh to the prior of Durham	Female	Middle	18 July 1436-1439	Bamburgh	Petition
L1126	Beverley, Humberside County RO DDHE 20, fol. 271 r	From Barnard of Hornsea to mayor of Hedon	Male	Middle	nd, (15th c.)	Hornsea	Petition

Table 4. Letters concerning monetary difficulties and petitioning intervention.

In total, this study is then based on 19 letters of petition and request, nine of which are by women. Ideally, gender and social class would have been evenly distributed between letters of petition and request. However, the materials available for this present study reflect another reality. The majority of female writers come from the nobility, and their social position may

determine the purpose of writing: it was customary for the nobility to sponsor a priest who would pray for their souls and intervene in religious matters. Figure 1 presents the distribution of social class and gender in the selected materials.

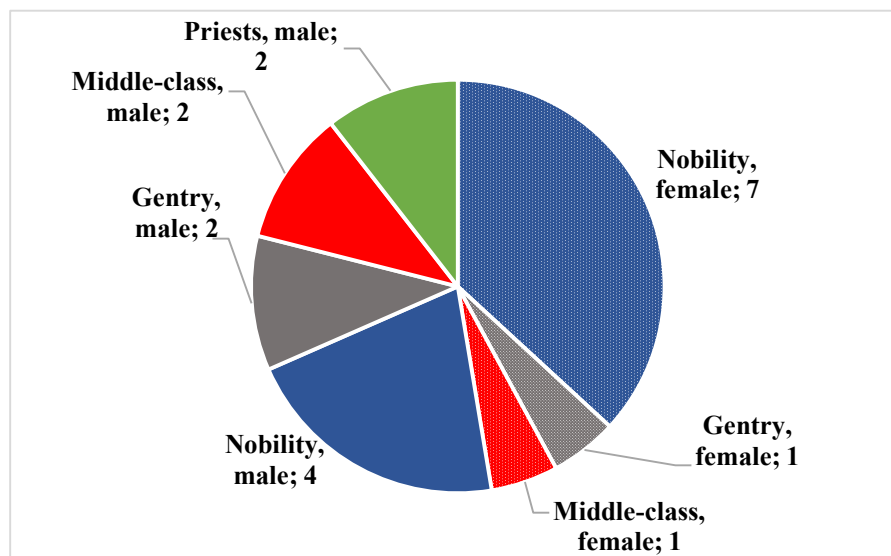


Figure 1. Distribution of social class and gender in the selected letters.

The study includes a thematic analysis of the letters in which each letter is first treated separately, except for D0286 and D0290, which have the same sender, within its main group in the analysis chapter, and later compared with others in the discussion section. The analysis offers an individual description divided into three levels: context, a summary of the content, and pragmatic analysis. In terms of context, it introduces the people involved, their social positions, and date and place of composition. Here, the genre and discourse domain the letter belongs to will be considered, that is, which institutions were involved (Jucker 2008: 900-902) (see p. 20). The next level gives a brief description of the contents of the letter, considering the purpose and all other information that might be relevant for the next level of analysis. Whenever it is relevant, it offers a brief description of the materiality of the letter, that is, the distribution of text in paper and any important features. Finally, the pragmatic analysis records all occurrences of address terms and *directive* and *commissive* speech acts in the letters and considers them in terms of politeness theory. Despite the vague boundaries of categorization for speech acts (see p. 24), *directives* and *commissives* tend to be well differentiated in petitions and requests, precisely because they are the purpose of the letters. It will consider the degrees of (in)directness the *directives* might have by examining possible face-saving strategies. The pragmatic analysis also investigates the structure and form of the

letter; more specifically, if it follows the appropriate structure and style determined by the *ars dictaminis* tradition and which politeness strategies were used to mitigate possible FTAs.

The findings are then brought together and discussed in relation to gender, social status, and subject matter. As the study is qualitative and based on a limited corpus, the aim is not to produce overall generalisations; however, such trends or patterns that are noted in the present material are discussed and compared with earlier studies.

5. Analysis

5.1. Letters from noblewomen to the prior of Durham requesting the appointment of a man in their service

Seven letters in the present material are written by female members of the nobility and addressed to the prior of Durham. The subject matter of all letters is, essentially, very similar: they wish to secure an appointment for a man in their service, most commonly a priest or a steward.

5.1.1. D0286 and D0290: Two letters from the Countess of Cambridge to the Prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:130* and DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:142

The material includes two letters from Maud Clifford, Countess of Cambridge.³ She married Richard of Conisbrough, 3rd Earl of Cambridge, in circa 1414. He was created Earl of Cambridge in 1414 and, in 1415, was executed for plotting against King Henry V. After her husband's death, Maud Clifford lived in Conisbrough castle.

In letter D0286, the Countess of Cambridge writes to the prior of Durham, John Wessington. The letter was written at Turnham Hall on 23 January, possibly in 1441.

The countess first reminds the prior of their previous correspondence concerning the promotion of her chaplain, John Lorimer, to a vicarage in the collegiate church of Hemingbrough, and his promise of giving her the next vacancy. She notes that there is a vacancy now due to the permanent absence of John Hertte and asks the prior to appoint her chaplain Lorimer there. Lorimer is said to be the bearer of the letter. In another letter included

³ For a short biography of Maud Clifford, see <http://www.thepeerage.com/p10746.htm#i107455> .

in this material, her nephew, Thomas Lord Clifford, also writes to the prior reminding him of this correspondence and requests the appointment of Lorimer (see letter D0285 in 5.2.5., p.59).

In letter D0290, the Countess of Cambridge also writes to the prior of Durham. The letter was written at Conisbrough on 25 January; the year is not known but the letter has been dated to the period 1416-1446.

The countess notes that the vicarage in the collegiate church of Hemingbrough has fallen vacant. There is no direct indication whether this might be written before or after D0286; however, her reference in D0286 to an earlier letter, resulting in the promise of the next vacancy suggests that D0290 is the earlier of the two; this would help date D0290 to the period 1416-1441. She asks the prior to appoint her priest there, who is well-governed and a good choirman. She asks him to disclose his answer to Rawlyn Axe, her servant and the bearer of the letter.

Both letters begin with an appropriate *salutatio* from a social superior addressing a prior. In D0286, she addresses the prior as *Worshipfull Fadre in godde J grete yow welle* ‘Worshipful fader in God, I greet you well’, and in D0290, she extends the term of address as *Worshipfull and my well-beloued fadre in god J grete yow well* ‘Worshipful and my well-beloved father in God, I greet you well’. Both include the adjective of deference *worshipful*, which was conventional in official language (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995:558), and the term *father in God*, paying respect to the prior’s ecclesiastical status. The use of the latter term of address and the opening formula *I greet you well* appear to be especially common in letters from the nobility addressing the prior. Combining the possessive pronoun *my* and the adjective *well-beloved* is a positive politeness strategy meant to imply a sense of in-group membership.

In both letters, the Countess continues with a short *narratio* in which she states that there is a vacant vicarage. In D0290, she adds an implicit performative *J haue a preste which that J desire were there-in* ‘I have a priest whom I desire to be appointed there’. By expressing her desire, she is indirectly uttering a request, something that could be considered a ‘hint’. In D0286, she begins by thanking the prior for previous favours, which could represent a positive politeness strategy praising his kindness. However, she also reminds the prior of a previous promise, which seems to be connected to her request in D0290:

in especiall that yow lyked þe las tyme' that j wrote vnto yow for a Chapeleyn' of myne' for a vicary of your Colage of hemmyngburgh to to graunte me the next avoidance as my seruante þe brynger brynger of that letre reported me

‘And especially, that it pleased you, the last time I wrote to you about a vicarage in your Collage of Hemingbrough for a chaplain of mine, to grant me the next vacancy, as my servant, the bringer of that letter, reported me’.

Reminding the prior about their previous communication seems to turn into an expectation of acceptance of her present request, making this an inverse commissive speech act: a promise from the addressee to the sender. This could be considered to represent a FTA against the prior’s negative face, since this could morally deprive the prior of rejecting the request.

In letter D0290, which probably pre-dates D0286, she asks the prior to give credence to her servant, the bearer of the letter: *J pray yow w^t all myn' hert [...] that ye will yife credence to my well-beloued seruaunt Rawlyn' Axe . the berer of this . what he sall disclose yow on my behalfe in' . this mater* ‘I pray you with all my heart that [...] you to give credence to my beloved servant Rawlyn Axe, the bearer of this letter, regarding what he will disclose to you in this matter on my behalf’. It might be noted that these passages demonstrate the different layers of people involved in letter-writing and the delivery of the missives (see pp. 16-19).

Further, in both letters the *petitio* starts with the directive performative *j pray yow* ‘I pray you’, where she expresses her desire directly, constituting a possible FTA against the prior’s negative face balanced with deferential language.

The requests in D0286 and D0290 are formulated as follows:

j pray yow hertely that ye wold graunte me to my said Chapeleyn' ser william lorymer the Berer of this letre the presentacion' of the said vicarye as my full trust is in' yow. And as J may do thing that for yow in' tyme comynge that myght be to your plesire. (D0286)

‘I pray you heartily that you would grant me, for my said chaplain sir William Lorymer, the bearer of this letter, the presentation of that said vicarage, as my full trust is in you, and as I will be able to do things for you in the future that might please you’,

J pray yow wt all myn' hert that ye will graunte . hym' the seid vicary at the cause of my Prayer as J may do thing for yow that myght be to your plesire in' case semblable a-noþer tyme (D0290)

'I pray you with all my heart that you will grant him the said vicarage for the sake of my request, as I may grant any request that you may have in another similar matter at another time'

Both directive speech acts are modified with *heartly* or *with all my heart*. This modification could be considered to denote sincerity and gravity in her request. Moreover, the speech act verb *pray you*, as the OED notes, was used to 'add urgency, solicitation, or deference to a question or request' and is equivalent to 'I beg of you'; 'please'. Even though directives are, per definition, FTAs against the addressee's negative face, the countess mitigates the FTA with deferential language. In addition, she states her belief that the prior will be accepting her request as her *full trust is in him* and *at the cause of [her] prayer*. Highlighting trust is, as it will be seen, a rather popular strategy among the nobility. It could be interpreted as a positive politeness strategy in which, by signalling their higher social position, the nobility lessens the social distance between them and, in this case, the prior of Durham.

The expression of trust is followed by a commissive speech acts in both letters:

as J may do thing that for yow in' tyme comynge that myght be to your plesire
(D0286)

*as J may do thing for yow that myght be to your plesire in' case semblable a-
noþer tyme* in (D0290)

These promises could similarly be seen to represent a positive politeness strategy counteracting the possible FTA of the request. As the countess is making a promise of future help, she may also be considered to direct a FTA against her own negative face. However, considering the social influence she had, the promise could be considered to be a supportive move towards the request, or as a guarantee. As it will be shown in the following letters, the combination of a directive, a commissive and an expression of trust seems to be a popular way for the nobility and upper gentry to finish their letters of request.

Both letters end with a *conclusio* in the form of a 'health' formula (Davis 1965: 236): *That knoweth our lorde who haue yow allwais in' his saue kepynge* 'as our Lord knows, who

may always have you in his safe keeping' (D2086), and *Beseching the Trinite haue yow in' his kepyng* 'Beseeching the Trinity to have you in his keeping' (D2090). This could be considered an appropriate way of ending a letter to a clergy member, as the absence of any closing formula would contrast with the positively oriented tone of the letter.

Both letters end with a conventional 'place-and-date formula' (Stenroos and Mäkinen 2011: 97). Interestingly, in D0290, she writes: *writen' at my Castell of Connesburgh* 'Written at my Castle of Conisbrough', highlighting that it was her castle and evidence for dating the letter after her husband's execution. Since she would have been a widow then, this could represent a strategy to maintain her own positive face to accentuate her autonomy.

5.1.2. D0287: Letter from Elizabeth, Countess of Westmorland to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:133

This is a letter of request from Elizabeth, Countess of Westmorland, to the prior of Durham, John Wessington. In 1426, Elizabeth Percy, daughter of Sir Henry Percy (Hotspur), married, John Clifford, with whom she had a son, later Sir Thomas Clifford, 8th Baron de Clifford (see letter D0285 in 5.2.5., pp. 56-60). After John Clifford's death, she married Ralph Neville, 2nd Earl of Westmorland.⁴ After her death in 1437, he married Margaret Cobham (see letter D0314 in 5.1.6., pp. 49-51). The letter was written at Hart, on Whit Monday (28 May 1436).

In this letter, Elizabeth, Countess of Westmorland, first notes that her husband, advised by his brothers John and Thomas Neville, has already written to the prior asking for the appointment of the Countess's steward, William Hoton, as his steward in replacement of Langton. Then, she repeats the request.⁵

The *salutatio* and *captatio benevolentiae* begin with *Right Reuerent fader yn gode J gret zowe Hartly well* 'Right reverent fader in God, I greet you heartily well'. The form of address includes the head noun *father in God* modified by the intensifier *right* and the adjective *reverend*, denoting respect for the prior's ecclesiastical position. Also, she chooses the popular greeting among the nobility, *I greet you well* which seems to be a positive politeness strategy. This is followed by a thanking note from the countess, reminding the prior of previous favours he has done to her:

⁴ For a short biography of Elizabeth Percy, see <http://www.thepeerage.com/p1053.htm#i10529> .

⁵ DUL

http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=loc.XXV:133#1 .

J thank zowe w' all my . hart of zowre kyndnes the wiche ze haue don at all tymes to me & my Children gode of his mercy giff ham grace to thenk appon it in tyme to com'

'I thank you with all my heart for your kindness which you have always shown to me and my children - may God in his mercy give them the grace to remember it in times to come'.

This could attest a close relationship between the Earl and Countess of Westmorland and the prior of Durham, a further evidence of the prior's high level of social and political influence (Halcrow 1955: 74). At the same time, this thanking note might be setting the tone of the request: they acknowledge and appreciate his help in previous matters and will continue to do so. This is a positive politeness strategy to attend to the prior's positive face by praising his kind demeanour.

The letter continues with the *narratio*, in which the countess offers several reasons for her request. First, she notes that her *Right worshipfull lord & husband* 'right worshipful lord and husband' has written to him (see pp. 56-60), *by y^e avice of bothe his brethe sir sir John & sir Thomas* 'on the advice of both his brothers Sir John and Sir Thomas', recommending her *full hartly beloued & trusted seruant willm Hoton* 'very greatly beloved and trusted servant William Hoton' *to be preferrid to be the Steward of zowre land in this Contre* 'so that he might be appointed steward of your lands in this country' as this post has become vacant. Here, the Countess could be reinforcing her request with the Nevilles' endorsement, making clear that it is not only a noblewoman making this request but also three noblemen. At the same time, by noting that two other powerful Neville men are acknowledging the social influence of the prior, this remark could represent a positive politeness strategy paying respect to the prior's positive face wants.

Secondly, she notes that Hoton is a capable man who will be at the prior's service and will also help and support her while she lives. Finally, this is followed by what might be the most important reason, a form of communal justification: *he shall Cause more goode accord & peis between his tenandis & zowres at all tymes if ony trauers fall pt gode deffend* ', he will always be able to cause more accord and peace between his tenants and yours, in case there will be any troubles, which God forbid'.

The *petitio* begins with a double directive speech act *J besek zowe & pray zowe he may. be y^e nerer for p^s my Symple request & prayer* 'I beseech you and pray you that my

simple request and prayer will help him towards this appointment'. The double request emphasizes the Countess's desire, making this a direct request. Moreover, as she seems to be equating the performatives *beseech* and *pray*, there does not seem to be any pragmatic difference in this case.

Further, she asks the prior to *send me zowre intent in þs mater wt my herty trustid esquyer willm Garthe and at ze will giffe credens' to him in thes mater* 'you will send me your intention in this matter with my trustworthy esquire William Garthe, and that you will give credence to him in this matter'. This is an example of the complexity involved in correspondence of the time, where servants, acquaintances or messengers were engaged in the sending, reading and in the response of letters (see pp. 16-19).

Finally, in the *conclusio* she adds a long prayer of good health: *god for his mercy giffe zowe lang liffe wt good helthe longe to indure* 'And may God in his mercy give you a long life with lasting good health'. As this closing prayer seems to be a deviation from the more popular *May God have you in his keeping* and its variations found in this study, it could represent an honest and elaborated final greeting. This corresponds with the positively oriented face-work of the rest of the letter. The letter ends with a conventional 'place-and-date formula': *wretyn at Harte on whisson monday* 'Written at Hart on Whit Monday'.

5.1.3. D0288: Letter from Elizabeth Lady Grey to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:135

This is a letter of request from Elizabeth Lady Grey to the prior of Durham. Elizabeth was married to Richard Lord Grey, the fourth Baron Grey of Codnor, a soldier and diplomat.⁶ The letter is dated on 8 April between the years 1419 and 1448, at Stamford.

At the beginning of her letter, Lady Grey notes the poor health of the prior of St. Leonard in Newstead, near Stamford. She also notes that the present prior is willing to resign in favour of Dom John, "his brother", and asks the prior of Durham to appoint him. She notes that Dom John is very well-liked in Stamford. She finally notifies the prior that she will be

⁶ Kingsford and Griffith (2008) 'Grey, Richard, fourth Baron Grey of Codnor' in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, retrieved from <https://www.oxforddnb.com/search?q='Grey%2C+Richard%2C+fourth+Baron+Grey+of+Codnor'+&searchBtn=Search&isQuickSearch=true> ; and Durham Cathedral Muniments: Catalogue of Locelli, retrieved from http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml#qxj-4551 .

particularly helpful (a ‘good lady’) to St Leonard if Dom John is the next incumbent there. She also warns him that she will not do as much if anybody else is appointed.⁷

Lady Grey’s letter begins with a well-phrased and complex *salutatio*: *Ryght trusty and with alle my hert Right entirely welbeloued in god J grete you oft tymes wele with hooll hert* ‘Right trusty and with all my heart right entirely well-beloved in God, I greet you oftentimes well with all my heart’. The positively oriented form of address is balanced with a combination of intensifiers and adjectives of deference without a head noun (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 559). This form of address mainly highlights Lady Grey’s affection and admiration towards the prior, maintaining the prior’s positive face. Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 578) note that people from the nobility addressed their social inferiors with this positive oriented formula, usually without a head noun (see p. 23). She also chooses a positively oriented modification of the popular greeting formula *I greet you well*.

The *salutatio* is immediately followed by the *narratio*, which legitimizes Lady Grey’s reasons to write (Held 2010: 203). Lady Grey states that she has been informed about the prior of Newstead’s poor health and that he intends to resign in favour of Dom John.

The *petitio* starts in a rather subtle way, as she asserts that Dom John could only be appointed if it were *þ^t it liked vnto you as ye þ^t ben souerein and fadur os in god to amytte and accept him þerto* ‘if you, being you the sovereign and father in God, were to agree to admit and accept him there’. This is a negative politeness strategy, as Lady Grey focuses on the prior’s autonomy and authority to decide. She then states that the lords, ladies and members of the gentry in Stamford are quite fond of Dom John because of his many good qualities. However, this is immediately followed by the request itself, where she writes *J pray yow tendurly at þe reuerence of me þis tyme ye wille graunte þe Resignacion’ of þe saide place vnto þe saide dan John it to Reyoise as priour* ‘I pray you tenderly, for the sake of me, that you will consent to the resignation of the said place to the said Dom John, to become its prior’. In this directive speech act, Lady Grey expresses her desire directly, something that could be considered to represent a FTA against the prior’s negative face. This corresponds with the findings on politeness in the Middle English period being a ‘positively oriented politeness culture’ (Archer 2010: 384) (see p. 26). Nevertheless, the speech act verb *pray you* adds a sense of deference to the request (*cf.* OED P1.a.).

⁷ DUL

http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=Loc.XXV:135%20%20#1 .

In the next passages, Lady Grey compares the two possible outcomes: either Dom John is appointed prior of St. Leonard, or not. First, if Dom John is the next incumbent, she states that *trewly J wil be gode and tendur lady vnto þat saide place / And sture and pray alle o þur þat wolle do for me in þe same wise wt-owten ow any feintise* ‘I will truly be an extra good and caring lady for that place, and also direct and pray all others to do similarly for my sake’. However, if the prior appoints another person, she warns him saying *trewly J wille not do so moche as J wolde do for þe said dan John* ‘I will truly not do so much as I would do for the said Dom John’. As a speech act, these two conditional sentences are commissives that function as a threat. Remarking her social influence is a possible FTA against the prior’s positive face and a threat to the prior. Also, the modal verb *will* had a stronger pragmatic association to a promise in Middle English, and the adverb *trewly* displays sincerity. This warning demonstrates the social power Elizabeth had: she could refrain from helping the priory if her wish was not fulfilled.

In the last passage, Lady Grey asks the prior to consider her proposition and to weigh it against her promise of future help: *This matere J pray yow to tendre like J may do for yow ony þing in tyme Comyng in case like or in ony othir wiche trewly J wil do withe alle my hert* ‘I ask you to consider this matter just as I may do anything for you in the future, which I truly will do with all my heart’. The commissive speech act intends to neutralise the FTA against the negative face of the request. Commissives are usually FTA against the speaker’s negative face as they commit themselves to a future action. However, as this matter seems to be of immense importance for Lady Grey, it could also represent a positive politeness strategy to her own positive face as she is emphasising the social influence her position had.

Finally, she combines her promise with the conventional valediction: *That knows oure lorde God þe wche yow euer-more haue in his keping* ‘as our Lord knows, who may have you in his keeping forevermore’. The letter concludes with the ‘place-and-time’ formula and her signature.

5.1.4. D0291: Letter from Alice, Countess of Salisbury, Lady Montehermer, to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:143

This is a letter of request from Alice, Countess of Salisbury, Lady Montehermer, to the prior of Durham, John Wessington. Alice Montagu, daughter to Thomas Montagu, 4th Earl of

Salisbury, married Richard Neville before 1421.⁸ Richard Neville became the 5th Earl of Salisbury by right of his wife. Her eldest son was Richard Neville, 16th Earl of Warwick, known as the Kingmaker. The letter was written at Middleham, 4 May 1434.

In this letter, the Countess of Salisbury notes that there is a vacancy at the church of Blyborough in the diocese of Lincoln due to the passing of Robert *Conyng*. Then, she requests the appointment of her chaplain, Hugh Noon.⁹

The *salutatio* begins with a double and coordinated term of address, mixing respect and affection: *Reuerent ser in god / and Rizte welbeloued / we grete yow oftymes wele* ‘Reverent sir in God and right well-beloved, we greet you oftentimes well’. The first form, *Reuerent ser in god*, is a negatively oriented form of address which intends to pay respect to the prior’s social status as the adjective of respect *reverend* was usually used to address members of the clergy (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 558). The second form, which does not include a head noun, is a more positively oriented form of address possibly suggesting a friendly relationship between the sender and the addressee (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 559). The conventional and positively oriented greeting *we grete yow oftymes wele* complements the salutation.

The letter continues with the *narratio*, in which the Countess of Salisbury notes that *And for as moch as we be enfourmed þ^t þe chirch of Bliburgh [...]is fallen voide* ‘And forasmuch as we are informed that the church of Blyborough [...] has a vacancy’. The pronoun *we* could refer to the Countess herself and her husband, the Earl of Salisbury; it was not uncommonly used by the higher nobility in a singular sense (cf. OED ‘royal we’), and the lack of any mention of the Earl might suggest that this is indeed the case here.

The *petitio* follows immediately with the request *we prai yow hertli for our sake to haue for tenderly Recomendid toward yow. our welbiloued chapilain ser hugh Noon* ‘We pray you heartily for our sake to accept our kind recommendation of our well-beloved chaplain sir Hugh Noon’. In the directive speech act *we prai yow hertli for our sake*, the Countess directly asks the prior, producing what could be considered to represent a FTA against the prior’s negative face. However, by adding *hertli for our sake*, the effect is significantly mitigated, suggesting an earnest supplication. Also, as the request focuses on

⁸ For a short biography of Alice Montagu, see <http://www.thepeerage.com/p10741.htm#i107406> .

⁹ DUL

http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=Loc.XXV:143#1 .

accepting the recommendation rather than asking directly for an appointment, this formulation of a directive can be seen as a strategy of negative politeness.

The *petitio* ends with *And this ye wolle doo / as oure gode trust is in yow* ‘if you will do this, as our good trust is in you’. This utterance might represent a FTA against the prior’s negative face, as it directly expresses the outcome of the petition: the prior will appoint sir Hugh Noon because she trusts him. Nevertheless, as will be shown below, this seems to be a rather conventional way of finishing the *petitio* and might not be intended as a threat or FTA. Rather, by signalling her trust, she shortens the social distance between herself and the prior and the prior, the comment becoming a possible positive politeness strategy.

The brief *conclusio* consists of a formulaic religious prayer expressing her desire for the prior’s good health: *þe blessid Trinite haue yow in his holi proteccionn* ‘May the blessed Trinity have you in his holy protection’. The last line includes the conventional ‘place-and-date formula’: *writen at Middilham þe iij dai of Maij* ‘Written at Middleham, 4 May’.

5.1.5. D0292: Letter from Alianor, Lady Percy, to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:145

This is a letter of request from Alianor (Eleanor), Lady Percy, to the prior of Durham. Eleanor was the daughter of Ralph Neville, 1st Earl of Westmorland. She married, secondly, Henry Percy, 1st Earl of Northumberland after October 1414. After her marriage, she was styled as Countess of Northumberland;¹⁰ however, in the present letter her title appears as ‘Lady Percy’. The letter was written at Dagenham (now E. London), 31 May 1434-1446.

In this letter of request, Eleanor first notes that she and her husband have not a benefice in their gift yet. Then she requests that the next vacancy in the collegiate church of Howden be given to her clerk, master, and teacher of her brothers,¹¹

The *salutatio* begins with a common term of address in official language, *Ryght worshipful . sir in god y recomand me vnto you* ‘Right worshipful sir in God, I commend myself to you’ (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 558). The title *sir* appears to be appropriate for a member of the clergy below the bishop (Nevalainen Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 576). As with the rest of the letters from the nobility, Lady Percy chooses to modify the

¹⁰ <http://www.thepeerage.com/p10743.htm#i107425> .

¹¹ DUL

[http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=Eleanor%20\[Percy\],%20Lady%20Percy#1](http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=Eleanor%20[Percy],%20Lady%20Percy#1) .

noun with *in god*, however, as *sir* is an honorific title, this combination seems to be negatively oriented as it is paying respect to the prior's social status. Moreover, the use of *I commend myself to you*, which appears to be more common in letters from men and people below the peerage, contributes to the negative politeness of the *salutatio*.

In the *narratio*, Lady Percy notes that: *And for as moche as my Lord my hoseband and J haue no benyfyce in oure yiffit as yit And desir hertely the promocionn off oure welbeloued clerke* 'And forasmuch as my lord my husband and I have no benefice in our gift as yet, we heartily desire the promotion of our well-beloved clerk'. The most relevant sense for the verb *desire* would be 'to express a wish for (an object); to ask for, request' (OED). In this sense, the verb could either be an expressive or a directive speech act (Williams 2013: 142). According to Searle (1979: 15), *expressives* are utterances which express the speaker's emotions, which could perfectly represent the sense in this context. However, since this utterance is directly connected to the clause *my Lord my hoseband and J. haue no benyfyce in oure yiffit as yit*, it could also convey a directive sense in which they first give a reason and then request the promotion; adding more evidence to the fuzziness of speech acts (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2007: 108; see 3.3). As Williams (2013: 143) argues, the directive sense of *desire* is strongly attached to the earl's and the countess's wish, making it a direct request with seemingly no face-saving strategy. Consequently, this is consistent with scholarly findings from the Middle English period where the focus was on the speaker's desire (see p. 26; Kohnen 2002 as cited in Archer 2010: 385; Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008: 8).

The *petitio* itself follows with a combination of a directive and a commissive speech act: *J pray yowe . as euer y may do tynge thay may please you þat ye wol graunt . vnto my . said clerke þe next prebend avoydinge in youre collage off howden* 'I pray you, as I ever may do anything that might please you, that you would grant my said clerk the next vacancy in your college of Howden Minister'. As one of the definitions for *pray* in the OED is 'to ask earnestly, beseech (God, a person, etc.) to do something, or that something may be done', *J pray yowe [...] þat ye wol graunt* could certainly be interpreted as a directive speech act. Indeed, there is also a high level of directness in this utterance. The commissive *as euer y may do tynge thay may please you* 'as I ever may do anything that might please you', counters the directive speech act by committing herself to return the favour, thus, committing a FTA against her negative face.

Her directive speech act continues with: *And this my first desir and herty prayere ye wol effectuosely . tak to ht and exequite as my said lord my hoseband and J may haue cause*

to fulfille any off your' desires herafftur 'and that you will effectively carry out this my first wish and earnest request as my said lord my husband and I may have the opportunity to fulfil any of your wishes in the future'. Lady Percy indicates that this is her first time asking for this kind of favour. As noted earlier, prayer conveys 'an earnest request or appeal' (OED), meaning that she is being honest and, thus, mitigating the impending FTA against the negative face of the prior of her request. Accordingly, this could also represent a positive politeness strategy in which Lady Percy shortens the social distance between herself and the prior with the conventional 'promise of returning the favour'.

In the *conclusio*, Lady Percy continues her request by asking the prior to give his reply to the bearer of the letter, who was, most likely, a man of her service: *And what ye wol do for me in this mater please hit you to signifye me by . the brynger her- off* 'And may it please you to let me know of your decision in this matter through the bearer of this.'. As commented earlier, this exemplifies the complexity of letter-writing, where servants or messengers were directly involved in the correspondence (see pp. 18-19).

The valediction includes a 'health formula' (Davis 1965: 236) in form of a short prayer: *And þe blessed trinite kep you in gracieux gouernance* 'And may the blessed Trinity keep you in gracious governance'. This is followed by a conventional place-and-date formula: *writenn . at Dakenhams in Essex' the Last day offe Maij* 'Written at Dagenham in Essex, the last day of May'.

Finally, the signature also corresponds with the positive politeness tone of the letter, in that she signs with the positive oriented: *your' awn' Alianor Lady Percy* 'your own Eleanor Lady Percy'.

5.1.6. D0314: Letter from Margaret Neville, Countess of Westmorland, to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Misc. Charters 1078

This is a letter of request from Margaret Neville, Countess of Westmorland, to the prior of Durham.¹² DUL dates this letter between the years 1442 and 1470. MELD notes that Margaret (de Stafford) died in 1396,¹³ which would mean that this letter might be from the 14th century. However, it is more likely that the present writer is Margaret de Cobham, Baroness Cobham

¹² Images and descriptions of this letter are available at DUL:

http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w34v.xml;query=1078#1 .

¹³ <http://www.thepeerage.com/p210.htm#i2093> .

(d. between 1466 and 1471), who married Richard Neville, 2nd Earl of Westmorland, before 1442.¹⁴ This is a relatively short letter, in which Margaret, Countess of Westmorland, asks for the next avoidance of a church in the prior's gift.

She begins her letter with an appropriate *salutatio*: *Right reuerent sir in god J grete zou wele* 'Right reverent sir in God, I greet you well'. As Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 550, 558) note, until the early modern area, the address phrase *right reverend* and the honorific title *sir* were most frequently used to address members of the clergy. She adds a *captatio benevolentiae*: *desiryng' euermore to here of zour prosperite & gude hele the which J besech allmyghty god graunte zou to his plesaunce & to zour herts desire* 'desiring to hear evermore of your prosperity and good health, which I beseech almighty God to grant you to his pleasure and to your heart's desire'. This corresponds word for word with Davis' (1965: 236) taxonomy of formulae for 15th-century letters, including the 'health' formulae: a) 'an expression of desire to hear of the recipient's welfare – [...] introduced by a participle'; b) 'a prayer, introduced by a relative, for the continuation and increase of this welfare 'to your heart's desire''.

The countess continues with her request: *Praying' zou right hertly pat ze will gyfte me the next awoydaunce of a kyrke pat longeth to zoure gyfte for it is the first thyng' pat J desire of zou* 'Praying you very earnestly that you will give me the next avoidance of a church that is in your gift, for this is my first request to you'. The request is a FTA against the prior's negative face because it restricts him from his freedom of choice. However, the modifying adverb *right heartly* suggests sincerity from the countess, which might mitigate the FTA.

A commissive speech act follows the *petitio*: *And if zou like to graunte me this at this tyme : J sall do as much for' . zou* 'And if it pleases you at this time, I will do as much for you'. She matches her request with a promise headed by the modal *shall*. According to the OED, from the early Middle English period, *shall* was used to express 'voluntary action or its intended result'. The OED also notes that 'in the 16th cent. and earlier, *I shall* often occurs where *I will* would now be used'. The pragmatic association to a promise that *shall* has is strong, making this a promise, and, therefore, a FTA against her negative face. However, as it has been noted, this 'promise of future help' acts as a reminder of her own social influence and, thus, as a guarantee for her request.

The letter ends with a valediction: *with the grace of god whome J besech euermore haue zou in his gracyous gouernance & kepyng'* 'with the grace of God who I constantly pray

¹⁴ <http://www.thepeerage.com/p93.htm#i923>.

to have you in his gracious governance and keeping'. This is a conventional formulaic expression of goodwill and a prayer dedicated to prior's soul. Although this is a conventional phrase, it is also a positively polite formulation aimed to maintain the prior's positive face.

5.1.7. Summarizing remarks

The seven letters from noblewomen to the Prior of Durham are formally highly similar. Except for letter D0288 from Elizabeth, Lady Grey, all salutations include a head noun, either *sir in God* or *father in God*, and a variation of the popular greeting among the nobility *I greet you well*. Also, they all include a variation of the conventional valediction *May God have you in his keeping* as a final greeting, except for letter D0287 which includes a more elaborated 'health formula' (Davis 1965).

The use of the performative *pray* in their requests is predominant in this selection. Also, the senders seem to balance their directives with promises of returning the favour. Finally, it is worth noting that only two letters use the 'expression of trust' formula *and this you will do as my trust is in you*, which is prevalent in letters from noble- and gentlemen.

5.2. Letters from men recommending or requesting the appointment of a priest

Seven letters written by men involve the same subject matter as that of the letters discussed in 5.1.: they recommend a priest to be presented to a vicarage that has newly fallen vacant. These letters show a considerably wider social range compared to those written by women: one is from a member of the middle class, one is from a priest, two are from members of the gentry, and three from members of the nobility. They are all addressed to the prior of Durham.

5.2.1. D0267: Letter from Thomas Kar, a draper, to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:15

Thomas Kar, a draper,¹⁵ sent this letter of petition to the prior of Durham, John Wessington, on 11 August 1437. It was written at York. As a draper, he is a merchant, and, accordingly, a member of the middle class.

¹⁵ OED 'Originally: a person who made (woollen) cloth. Subsequently: a dealer in cloth, and now by extension, in other articles of textile manufacture: often qualified as *woollen draper*, *linen draper*'.

Thomas Kar notes that he has been informed that the parson of Holtby, William Barker, has fallen sick and intends to resign in favour of John Holgate. Thomas Kar states that John Holgate, the son of his neighbour, is a good and honest priest. He asks the prior to accept William Barker's resignation and appoint John Holgate as the new priest. Further, he assures the prior that John Holgate will be a special orator for him.¹⁶

The *salutatio* begins with the complex and negatively oriented greeting *Right der Reuerent and ay wrichifull lord J commande \wedge ^{me} vn-to 3ow & to 3our worthy lordschip* 'Right dear, reverent and rightful lord, I command myself to you and your worthy lordship'. The choice of three adjectives of deference modifying the honorific title *lord* seems to pay respect to the prior's social status. According to Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 576), the title *lord* was invariably reserved to members of the nobility, with some exceptions, such as archbishops and bishops. In this case, *lord* and *worthy lordschip* might imply a negative polite strategy in which the merchant emphasises their respective positions in the social hierarchy. Further, Kar opts to greet with the conventional phrase of negative orientation *I command myself to you*, which conveys some subordination.

In contrast to most letters from the nobility and gentry, Kar begins his *narratio* with conditional wording: *if it lyk 3ow to wyt it* 'If it pleases you to know'. The contrast lies in that Kar acknowledges the prior's negative face or, in this case, his freedom to be interested in the letters. Further, Kar notes that the parson of Holtby intends to resign in favour of John Holgate, where Kar repeats the conditional wording by noting that it is, indeed, the prior who decides in this matter: *if he may get 3our gracious lordescip & 3our leeffes* 'if he gets your gracious lordship's permission'. The authority of the prior is central in this formulation: Kar maintains the prior's negative face.

The *petitio* follows: *J pray \wedge ^{3ow} specially of gud lordschip in yis mater* 'I pray you especially for your good lordship in this matter'. The directive speech act *I pray you* is attached with *good lordship in this matter*, becoming a possible FTA in the sense that Kar insists the prior to accept the resignation and present Holgate, which lay within the prior's authority. Presenting Holgate as the new priest might represent showing *good lordship*. However, this is mitigated by the positive oriented reasons Kar gives, where he assures the prior that he will like Holgate since he is a very capable priest who will specially pray for the prior. Also, he guarantees the prior that *y^t be ye grace of god to lyk hys gouernance right*

¹⁶DUL

http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=Loc.XXV:15#1.

weell ze to be hys worthy & gracious lord ‘by the grace of God, you will like his good demeanour and be his worthy and gracious lord’. Thus, Kar maintains the prior’s positive face by emphasising the prior’s worthiness and referring to him as a *lord*.

Finally, Kar ends his letter with a relatively long prayer *J pray to our lord god allmyghty to haf 3ow in e euer-mor in hys kepyng bodh body & saull to his most plesaunce* ‘I pray to our Lord God almighty to have you ever more in his keeping both body and soul to his most delight’. Even though this final greeting is a variation of the popular *May God have you in his keeping*, it is an elaborated variation, a form of exaltation which might indicate a negative politeness strategy. The letter also adds the conventional ‘place-and-date formula’. Interestingly, the signature reinforces Kar’s social position by noting twice that he is a merchant: *3our awen drapour Thomas / kar of 3ork drapour* ‘Your own draper Thomas / Kar of York draper’. Using *3our awen drapour* could imply that Kar in effect knew the prior. This could explain why a merchant would request an appointment of a priest, something which generally seems to be reserved for people above the gentry. Nevertheless, the choice of words indicates subordination, making the signature a further negative politeness strategy, consistent to the rest of the letter.

5.2.2. L0380: Letter from Richard Cliff, a priest, to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: XXV: 18

This is a letter of petition from Richard Cliff, a priest, to the prior of Durham, John Wessington. It was written at Hemingbrough, the day after the feast of St Edmund (21 November) 1432.

In this letter, Cliff notes that the fifth vicarage of the collegiate church of Hemingbrough has fallen vacant due to the induction of John Rockcliff into a perpetual chantry at Hull. He recommends a parson to be presented there. He describes the parson as a qualified and knowledgeable man, warm, and well-read.¹⁷

In slight contrast to the rest of the letters addressed to the prior of Durham in this study, in the *salutatio* the prior is referred to as *sovereign*.¹⁸ *Reuerente And wirschipfull*

¹⁷DUL http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=Richard%20Cliff#1

¹⁸MED ‘One vested with religious authority by the church, a member of the clergy, a religious superior, esp. the superior of a religious house’.

suffirane J commaund' me to 3our suffiraunys 'Reverent and worshipful sovereign, I command myself to your sovereignty'. The choice of head noun might be connected to the social status of Cliff: he was a priest writing to his prior, indicating that this is a negatively oriented term of address. The adjectives *reverent* and *worshipful* were, as previously noted, usually attached to members of the clergy and in official language. Moreover, Cliff chooses the greeting of negative orientation *commaund' me to 3our suffiraunys* implying subordination.

The letter continues with the *narratio*, in which Cliff notes about an opening in the fifth vicarage. Then, Cliff justifies his letters proving many good reasons for his recommendation of a parson, who he curiously does not name. He introduces his reasons with a conditional wording: *if it like 3our gudnes to presente* 'If it pleased your goodness to present'. Using this type of conditional formulations intensifies the degree of indirectness in the request; Cliff is not directly asking to present this priest, but rather pointing out the possibility if it pleases the prior. This utterance appears to attend to the prior's negative face.

In the next passage, Cliff praises the many virtues of the parson, including his good singing voice, *synge a tribull til faburdun* 'sing in treble to a faburden', which the men of that church very much value. The *petitio* as such follows: *And per-for if my praar myght be plesyng to 3our worthy lordschipe J wald beseike 3our gudnes to prefair a-n'abill mane of þ^e pariche* 'And therefore, if my prayer may please your worthy lordship, I would beseech your goodness to appoint a competent man of the parish'. The directive is first modified by the conditional phrase, which adds a degree of indirectness to the request, thus representing a negative politeness strategy. As it was previously noted, if considered pragmatically, *prayer* conveys a sincere request, signalling that Cliff is humbly asking the prior, still maintaining the prior's negative face. The performative directive *beseech*, first modified by the modal *would* which corresponds with the conditional formulation of the request, continues the negative politeness tendency of the request. Then, it is further modified by the positively oriented phrase *worthy lordschipe*, showing deference and elevating the prior.

Interestingly, the letter does not include any form of final salutation, as it would be expected from a letter sent by a priest, but only includes the 'place-and-date formula' (Stenroos and Mäkinen 2011: 97). The signature reads: *Be 3our preste / Ric'Cliff* 'By your priest, Richard Cliff', which is consistent with the subordination one would expect in a letter from a priest to his prior.

5.2.3. D0268: Letter from Sir Robert Danby to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:16

This is a letter of request from Sir Robert Danby, of Yafforth, to the prior of Durham. Sir Robert was the prior's serjant-at-law from 1442 and later a king's serjeant until 1452.¹⁹ The letter was written at Yafforth, 10 January 1440-1455.

In the letter, he refers to James Strangeways as his master. James Strangeways was appointed High Sheriff of Yorkshire in 1446, 1453, and 1469. He was a close political ally of the Yorkist fraction.²⁰

Sir Robert Danby recommends the son of Thomas Rudd of Allerton to the next vacancy in Durham College Oxford. He describes Rudd as being well-learnt in grammar. Also, he notes that his master, James Strangeways, has previously written about the same matter.²¹

In the *salutatio*, Danby greets the prior of Durham as *Right worschipfull & reuerent / and my full good & worthy maister . as lawly as J kan J recommaund me to you* 'Right worshipful and reverent and my very good and worthy master, as humbly as I can, I commend myself to you'. DUL notes that the head noun *master* might imply that the letter was composed while Danby was the prior's serjant-at-law. Nevertheless, Danby deferentially addresses the prior's social status with this complex and negatively oriented phrase as he is distancing himself from the prior. Moreover, *as lawly as J kan J recommaund me to you* further reinforces the negative politeness strategy of the rest of the greeting, in which Danby emphasizes his subordination.

The letter continues with the *petitio*: *besechyng you as hertly as J kan to be good lord . to Thomas Rudd* 'beseeching you as heartily as I can to be a good lord to Thomas Rudd'. The performative *beseech*, which had a 'more negatively polite and deferential way of performing a directive speech act than [...] *pray*' (Williams 2013: 138), modified by the adverbial *as hertly as J kan* corresponds with the negative-politeness orientation of the letter.

¹⁹ For a short biography of Sir Robert Danby, see: https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dictionary_of_National_Biography,_1901_supplement/Danby,_Robert.
DUL http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=Thomas%20Rudd#1.

²⁰ For a short biography of James Strangeways, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Strangeways.

²¹DUL http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=Thomas%20Rudd#1.

Although the request is a possible FTA against the prior's negative face, this sense of self-humbling request could also represent a FTA against Danby's positive face.

Further, Danby gives a form of *narratio* where he reminds the prior about previous recommendations: *my maister sir James Strangeways . hath afore bis wreten to you for þe same cause . & J haue as . a pouer simple person prayed ^{you} full hertly also for him diers tymes afore* 'My master sir James Strangeways has previously written to you about him, and as the poor and simple person that I am, I have also very heartily prayed you for him many times before'. Congruent to the rest of the letter, Danby reinforces his subordination, possibly to reduce a FTA against the prior's negative face by the repetition of the request.

Danby indirectly turns his request towards God, *J trust to god þat wol \wedge ^{ye} vouchesaue to be his good lord þerin . and J beseche you with all my hert \wedge ^{so} to be as my gret trust is ye wol be* 'I trust God that you will vouchsafe to be his good lord there and I beseech you with all my heart to be so, as I trust greatly that you will'. Williams (2013: 136-137) notes that stating requests 'indirectly through God [...] suggests an interesting way of accomplishing an indirect request' since they become less direct and may function as a politeness strategy. In conjunction with modal verb *wol*, this might indicate an attempt of negative politeness strategy in which the request is stated in the form of a personal wish. Danby uses the performative *beseech* once more in combination with *all my hert* to reinforce his wish, also contributing to the negative politeness tone of the rest of the letter. Finally, as it is common in letters from the nobility to the prior of Durham, Danby finishes his request an 'expression of trust'. 'Expressions of trust' seem to act as positive politeness strategies where the sender praises the addressee, maintaining his positive face.

The letter does not include any form of final salutation or prayer directed to the prior's good health. However, it does not include the conventional 'place-and-time' formula (Stenroos and Mäkinen 2011: 97). Danby reiterates the negative-face strategy of the rest of the letter with a self-humbling signature, in which he reduces himself to a poor servant: *your pouer seruant Robert Danby* 'Your poor servant, Robert Danby'.

5.2.4. D0272: Letter from Sir Robert Babthorpe to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus XXV: 29

This is a letter of request from Sir Robert Babthorpe to the prior of Durham. Babthorpe was knighted by 1416 and served as a steward in Henry V and Henry VI's households. He was also a member of the King's council in 1433. His manor in Babthorpe was in the parish of

Heminbrough, which belonged to the priory of Durham.²² The letter was written at Babthorpe, 17 January 1436.

This is a curious and rather long letter in which Sir Robert Babthorpe confesses a series of seemingly inappropriate actions which he had committed in the name of the prior and convent as their officer and steward at Hemingbrough and Hunsley. The purpose of the letter is to request the appointment of his priest to the next vacancy in the church of Eastington. He also asks the prior to give credence to what the bearer of the letters says to him and send him an answer.

In the *salutatio*, Babthorpe greets the prior as *Right wirschipfull sir and Fader J recomaunde me vn-to yow As hertely as J can* ‘Right worshipful sir and father, I recommend myself to you as heartily as I can’. The form of address has two head nouns, the title *sir* and *fader*, which could indicate the social and ecclesiastical status. The conventional phrase *I recomaunde me vn-to yow* might convey a sense of subordination from the sender. As it will be discussed later, this phrasing seems to be rare in letters from the nobility but common for the other social classes.

The *narratio* begins with Babthorpe inviting the prior to remember all the favour he has done to the prior and the convent, *Prayng yow that ze wole vouche ^{saf} to remembr* ‘praying that you be so gracious as to remember’. Babthorpe reminds the prior that he has, among other things, repositioned stolen goods for the convent, turned away the King’s officers, and other services he has done to retain the rights and the franchise of St Cuthbert. Admitting these deeds is a FTA against his and the prior’s positive face; however, Babthorpe seems to use them to secure an approval for his request. Babthorpe seems to suggest that these special services he has provided were a favour for which he expects some reciprocation from the prior and the convent have given to him, something that he is now claiming. In this sense, it constitutes a FTA against the prior’s positive and negative face. By suggesting that the prior knew about these actions, he is incriminating the prior’s reputation and, thus, comprising a FTA against his positive face. At the same time by claiming the counter-favour, Babthorpe compromises the prior’s freedom of choice significantly.

After stating all he has done while in service of the priory, Babthorpe begins his *petitio* with a double speech act: a commissive and a directive. First, he commits himself to continue helping the prior in exchange for an approval of his request: *and zit wole do at my*

²² <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-50145>

power myn ‘and will still do as far as is in power’. He then continues with his request: *That ze wole vouche-saf for my prayer at this tyme to graunt me At this tyme the next avoidaunce of the kirke of Estrington For a preest of* ‘that you would be so kind to grant my present request and grant me the next vacancy in the church of Eastrington for a priest of mine’. Although promises are FTAs against the speaker’s negative face, in this case it seems to behave as a threat or extortion, thus becoming a FTA against the prior’s negative face. There is no specific performative in the directive, only the expression of a wish *That ze wole vouche-saf for my prayer*, which seems to balance the directness and threatening tone of the request.

After praising his priest, Babthorpe asks the prior to give credence to what his servant has to say on his behalf: *that ze wole vouche-saff to gif feyth & credence . vn-to my well-beloued seruaunt willam laton brynger of this lettr of this matere and of all oder materes . that he shall sey & enforme zou of be mouthe* ‘that you will be so kind as to give faith and credence to my well-beloved servant William Laton, the bearer of this letter, about this and other matters of which he will speak and inform you by mouth’. As it has been observed, it was a regular practice to have messengers pass on verbal messages along with the letters. Frequently, messenger would communicate messages too sensitive to be on paper. However, considering the contents of the letter, this might imply a further FTA against the prior’s negative face. His directive speech act continues, in which he asks the prior to send him an answer: *that ze wole sende me Answer ageyn be the bryngere of this lettr* ‘and that you will send me back an answer by the bearer of this letter’. This seems to be a rather urgent matter for Babthorpe.

The letter ends with an ‘expression of trust’, commonly found in letters from the nobility in this study, *as J trist vppon zou* ‘I trust you’, and an extension of his ‘promise of future help’ *J may do zou . seruice in tyme coming* ‘I may do you service in the future’. Together, the ‘expression of trust’ and the ‘promise of future help’ are a positive politeness strategy as it they establish a common ground between the sender and the addressee. Finally, he finishes with a standard valediction and ‘place-and-date’ formula. In his signature, *By sir Robt Babthorp knyght* ‘By sir Robert Babthorp, knight’, he maintains his own positive face by using the honorific titles *sir* and *knight*.

5.2.5. D0285: Letter from Thomas Lord Clifford and of Westmorland to the prior of Durham
DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus XXV: 130

This is a letter of request from Thomas Lord Clifford and of Westmorland to the prior of Durham. Lord Clifford was made 8th Baron of Clifford and High Sheriff of Westmorland at the age of seven.²³ The letter was written at Turnham Hall, 23 January 1441 (?).

In this letter, Lord Clifford reminds the prior about the correspondence which his aunt, the Countess of Cambridge, has had with him (see letter D0286 in 5.1.1., pp. 37-41) about her desire for a vicarage in Hemingbrough for her chaplain. He repeats his aunt's request.

In the *salutatio*, Lord Clifford begins with *Worshipfull father in godde I grete yow welle* \wedge *comaunde me to yowe* 'Worshipful father in God I greet you well and command myself to you'. Here, the greeting formula commonly used by the nobility 'I greet you well' has been crossed over and replaced by the more deferent 'I commend myself to you'. This seems to be a deliberate choice of greeting, in which a nobleman decides to greet the prior with a deferential phrase rather than with the downwards 'I greet you well'.

In the *captatio benevolentiae*, Lord Clifford continues with a thanking note for previous favours: *thonkyngge yow right hertely of all kyndenes . that ye haue done to me before this tyme praynge yowe of gode continuance* 'thanking you very earnestly for all the kindness you have previously done to me, praying you for a good continuation'. This is consistent with the corresponding letter D0286 (see p. 39), where the Countess of Cambridge also thanks the prior for his many favours. As with D0286, this may indicate a close relationship between this family and the prior of Durham, representing, then, a positive politeness strategy. However, the action of *praynge yowe of gode continuance* constitutes a FTA against the prior's negative face since it impends his freedom of choice.

In the *narratio*, Lord Clifford repeats his aunt's request for the presentation of a vicarage for her chaplain, noting that there is a vacancy there. Further, Lord Clifford makes a connection between the *narratio* and the *petitio* with:

wherfore j pray yow that ye will graunte to my said ladys Chapeleyn the said vicarye nowe at this tyme as my full trust is in yow And as ye will that j .do thing for yow in case semblable a-nother tyme

²³ [https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dictionary_of_National_Biography,_1885-1900/Clifford,_Thomas_de_\(1414-1455\)](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Dictionary_of_National_Biography,_1885-1900/Clifford,_Thomas_de_(1414-1455)).

‘I therefore pray you that you will grant my lady’s chaplain the said vicarage at this time, as I fully trust you and as you may wish that I will help you in a similar matter at another time’

As in D0286, the request is directly expressed in this directive speech act, constituting a possible FTA against the prior’s negative face. Contrary to D0286, Lord Clifford does not modify his directive with *heartly*, giving his request a higher grade of directness than his aunt does.

As with D0286 (see p. 40) and other letters from the nobility, the commissive speech act *j do thing for yow in case semblable a-nother tyme* could represent a positive politeness strategy counteracting the FTA of the request. Even though commissives represent a FTA against the speaker’s negative face, the frequent use of this type of promise found in this study might represent a positive politeness strategy, by which members of the nobility acknowledge their influential position and willingness to help the prior in the future, thus establishing a common ground of interaction.

The letter ends with a valediction very similar, yet shorter, to that in D0286, possibly indicating the scribe’s influence in these two letters, which were written in the same hand: *That knoweth our lorde who haue yow in his kepyng* ‘This knows our Lord, who may have you in his keeping’. In this case, the valediction is directly connected to his ‘promise of future help’ and his ‘expression of trust’, which is a frequent move in letters from the nobility. Finally, it includes the conventional ‘place-and-date formula’, confirming that the letter was written at the same time and place as D0286: *writen at Turnam’hall / xxij day of Januer* ‘Written at Turnham Hall, 23 January’.

5.2.6. D0293: Letter from Thomas Percy to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: XXV: 150

This is a letter of request from Thomas Percy to the prior of Durham. It was written at Helay (21 km NW of Ripon), 4 November 1440-1449. DUL notes that this letter is probably from the younger son of Henry Percy, 2nd Earl of Northumberland (see p. 62) and that Thomas was created Lord Egremont in 1449. Since his signature does not include this title, it is assumed that the letter precedes this date.²⁴

²⁴DUL [http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=T.%20\[Thomas\]%20Percy#1](http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=T.%20[Thomas]%20Percy#1).

In this letter, Thomas Percy notes that there is, or soon will be a vacancy at the church of Normanton in Lincolnshire. He requests the prior to grant this vacancy to his priest.²⁵ He notes that the church is of little value and that it is his first request to the prior.

The *salutatio* begins with the conventional *Right worshipfull and reuerent fader in god . J comaunde me to you* ‘Right worshipful and reverent father in God, I command myself to you’. The status noun *fader in god* seems to be common in letters addressed to the prior of Durham, which could be interpreted as a negatively oriented term of address meant to give deference to the prior’s social status (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 557). Moreover, the adjectives *worshipful* and *reverend* seem to be connected with social status, conveying a sense of deep respect (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 557-558).

In the *narratio*, Percy notes that *þe kirke of Normanton vpon Soeur’in Notynghamshire is voide or ellis like in full shorte . tyme to be voide . weroff . ye and . your Couent be patrons* ‘that the church of Normanton upon Soar in Nottinghamshire,²⁶ where you and your convent are patrons, has fallen, or soon will fall vacant’. Further, he notes that this church is *of litell valew* ‘of little value’, and that a priest from that country is with him. The significant comment of the value of the church to the directive performs as a valid justification for the request.

This is immediately followed by the *petitio*. Percy begins his directive speech act with a negative politeness strategy: *if it likid you and your’brethryn to grante me . þe next avoidance of þe seid . kirke . J wolde he ad it* ‘if it would please you and your brethren to grant me the next vacancy of the said church, I would like him to have it’. With a conditional construction, this utterance suggests a degree of indirectness in the request maintaining the addressees’ negative face.

Further, he develops his directive by giving two reasons for his request: *werfore J . pray you and your’ Couent . hertly sethyn þe seid kirke is of litell valew and . þe first þat euer J . askid of you . þat ye wole grante me þe seid avoidance* ‘Wherefore I pray you and your convent earnestly, since the church is of little value and also the first one I have ever asked you for, that you may grant me the said vacancy’. The performative verb *pray*, common in the letters from nobility analysed in this paper, performs as a deferential request (see pp. 27-28). The addition of *þe first þat euer J . askid of you* could imply a FTA against the prior’s negative face as it might be intended to press him into granting the request.

²⁵ DUL [http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=T.%20\[Thomas\]%20Percy#1](http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=T.%20[Thomas]%20Percy#1).

²⁶ Now known as Normaton on Soar.

As in other letters from the nobility in this study, Percy involves the messenger further in this matter, asking the prior: *J pray you send me answeere ageyn wretyn bi my seruant berar of his letter as my gret trust is . in you* ‘I pray you to send me a written answer of your decision with my servant, the bearer of this letter, as my great trust is in you’.

Similarly, a ‘promise of future help’, which is also a common pragmatic feature in many of the letters from the nobility, follows this: *And . J . shal do as mich for you if it like you desir it in tyme coming* ‘And I will do as much for you in the future if it will please you to ask for it in the future’. This utterance suggests a positive politeness strategy counteracting the possible FTA of the request.

Finally, the letter ends with a valediction dedicated to the prior’s well-being: *bi þe grace of god who haue you in his keping bodi and saule* ‘by the grace of God, who may have you in his keeping, body and soul’, and a ‘place-and-time formula’.

5.2.7. D0296: Letter from Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland and lord of the honor of Cocker mouth to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter muniments: XXV: 159

This is a letter of request from Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland and lord of the honor of Cocker mouth, to the prior and convent of Durham. It was written at Warkworth Castle, 6 March 1424 (?). If the dating is correct, this is Henry Percy, 2nd Earl of Northumberland (1393-1455), son of Henry Percy Hotspur and father of Thomas Percy (5.2.6. D0293).²⁷

In this letter, the earl of Northumberland repeats his request that his priest be given a licence to exchange benefices with the vicar of Billingham.²⁸ He emphasises his priest’s qualities and notes that this would be granted by the Roman curia, if asked. He also indicates that any form of criticism from Robert Jackson should not interfere in this matter.

The letter begins with a heading centred at the top, which reads *Henry percy Erle of Northumb’ and / lorde of the honoure of Cokirmouth* ‘Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland and / lord of the honour of Cocker mouth’. An elevated signature at the top becomes central in the layout of the letter, and it could represent a positive politeness strategy to Percy’s positive face and, also, a signal of social superiority.

²⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Percy,_2nd_Earl_of_Northumberland.

²⁸ DUL http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=Cockermouth%20Wearmouth#1.

In the *salutatio*, Percy greets the prior with a positive oriented form of address: *Right dere & with all oure hert enterly wele-be-louede sire in god we grete zou welle* ‘Right dear and with all our hearts entirely well-beloved sir in God, we greet you well’. Percy uses the plural pronoun *we* throughout the letter, which might either mean that he is writing on behalf of his house; however, it is more likely to be used here as a singular pronoun (the “royal we”) indicating his high social standing. The chosen form of address is rather complex, combining the positively oriented adjectives *dear* and *well-beloved* with the honorific title *sir in God*. In this way, Percy shows respect to the prior’s social position and a form of affection to the ecclesiastical status.

In the *narratio*, Percy reminds the prior of a previous correspondence giving a licence to his well-beloved priest, sir John of Warmouth, to exchange benefices with the vicar of Billingham. However, Percy notes that nothing has been done about the exchange yet.

The *petitio* begins with what seems to be a straightforward recommendation, and picks up a rather daring tone. The request itself consists of three parts. First, a request and a recommendation: *Neuer-ye-lesse we pray zou & also we counsaille zou to graunte hyme lefe & licence to permute with ye forsaide Vycar* ‘we nevertheless pray you and counsel you to give him permission and licence to exchange benefices with the said vicar’. The directness of the request is striking, as it consists of the performative *we pray zou* and an advice, or even a command, *we counsaille zou*, both representing a FTA against the prior’s negative face as they are imposing their wish. Kohnen (2008: 32) explains that, as far as Old English texts show, the use of the performative speech act *advise* was usually connected to a public office or official position in society and that the advice ‘will assume a binding force’ since it comes from a person of power. Similarly, the use of *we counsaille zou* might indicate a strong persuasive suggestion.

The second part consists of a justification for the request and a form of warning: *& it peasseably to reioyes for his desire is bot lawfull & resonable for we doo zou to witt yat and he send vnto ye Courte of Rome for licence he may gett it at ye first worde* ‘and to enjoy it peacefully, because his request is nothing but lawful and reasonable. For we inform you that, if he sent a request for a licence to the Roman Curia, he may get it at the first word’. The warning constitutes a FTA against the prior’s positive face in the form of a hypothesis and its probable result. This statement displays an aggressive attitude by explicitly noting that his influential power reaches the Roman Curia, an office well above the prior’s. The third part includes a negation of the conditional: *whilk we wold nozt wer done in no wyse in als mekill as ze er verray Patrone* \wedge ^{yer-of} *bot at ze wald graunte it hyme with your will & lefe* ‘which we

would not wish to be done as you are the real patron thereof, unless you would like to grant it to him with your good will and leave'. While this addition might seem to counteract the FTA of the previous line, reassuring the prior that he would never do such a thing, it may also be interpreted as turning the wish into a direct command, as it leaves no room for the 'patron' to make up his own mind, constituting a new FTA against the prior's negative face.

In the following passage, the earl makes two promises. First, he guarantees that his priest will be *of gude gouernance to 3ou & all 3our Tenante3 & Paryshynes* 'good conduct towards you and all your tenants and parishioners'. Then, he makes a promise that also seems rather daring: *gif 3e trist ye contrary we will be bonden vnto 3ou with other knyghte3 & Squyers yat he sall be of gude beryng vnto 3ou & all 3our Tenante3 & Paryshynges soo hyn furth* 'And if you think the contrary, we and other knights and squires will be bound to you to make sure that he behaves well towards you and all your tenants and parishioners'. Although commissives are FTA against the speaker's negative face, in this case, it seems to attend to the earl's positive face by giving another manifestation of social power.

The request itself follows with the common 'expression of trust' for the nobility: *wharfor we pray 3ou . tendrely to take this matere till hart & do als oure trist is in 3ou* 'Therefore, we pray you kindly to take this matter to heart and do as our trust is in you'. The performative directive *pray* is modified by *tenderly*, mitigating the FTA against the negative face of the prior. At the same time, the focus of the request is the consideration of the matter and not an actual request of exchanging benefices.

The following passage comprises another warning or command, constituting another FTA against the prior's negative face. However, the promise of alliance serves as a positive politeness strategy, claiming a common ground between them:

And gif so be yat outhur Rob't Jakeson or any other yat is no3t \wedge ^{his} wele wyllandes haue complenyd vnto 3ow or *purpose* for to pleyn agayn ye forsaide sire John . that yis yis oure prayer & writing be neuer y^e more differd bot fortherd & execuytt als we may be halden to 3ou in tyme to come

'And if so be that either Robert Jackson or any other has complained to you or intend to complain against the aforesaid sir John, that this request and letter from us will not be opposed but furthered and carried out, as we may remain loyal to you in time to come'

The final passage is a variation of the conventional valediction *May God have you in his keeping* and a ‘place-and-time formula’: *writen at oure Castell of warkeworth* ‘Written at our castle of Warkworth’.

5.2.8. Summarizing remarks

There are two letters that are strikingly direct in their formulations: letter D0272, from Sir Robert Babthorpe, and letter D0296, from Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland. With conditional formulations and verbs of command, the letters acquire an authoritative tone compared to the others. The letter from Henry Percy has various features emphasising his high rank, allowing him to ‘counsel’ the prior rather than just asking him. Also, together with the Countess of Cambridge, he is the only one to use the singular ‘we’. In this sense, this letter differs from the others. Babthorpe’s letter, on the other hand, uses earlier, rather unlawful, favours as leverage. The boldness of the request is not grounded on social rank but rather on arrogance, very similar to blackmail.

The use of ‘expressions of trust’ in combination with ‘promises of future help’, seem to be common in letters from the higher classes as positive politeness strategies. Although these formulations seem to be frequent, they serve as reminders of the nobility’s powerful position in society, with enough coercive force to justify their requests.

5.3. Letters concerning monetary difficulties and petitioning intervention.

This section includes five letters, two of them written by women, and representing four different social classes: middle class, gentry, nobility and clergy. Two of the letters have the same addressee as the rest of the materials in this study, that is the prior of Durham, while the other addresses are from aristocratic or ecclesiastical background: the Earl of Shrewsbury, the Prior of Canterbury and the mayor of Hedon.

The letters in this group differ from the two previous groups considered, as they deal with financial matters rather than requests for vacancies, and may be considered to relate to situations of more pressing, or real, need. Apart from letter D4464, the senders ask the addressee to intervene in a dispute involving some monetary issues. In letter D4464, addressed to the prior of Canterbury, the sender is a priest asking the prior for an augmentation of living.

The selection is intended as a comparison with the other two groups, bringing in subject matter as a variable: the purpose is to explore the similarities and differences between

petitions on financial matters and appointment requests. The question this selection aims to answer is: what makes a larger difference in politeness strategies, subject matter, social class, or gender?

5.3.1. D0075: Letter from Katherine Bonell of Shrewsbury to the Earl of Shrewsbury
Shrewsbury, Shropshire Archives: 1831/1/1/1.

This is a letter of petition from *kateryne Bonell of Salop* ‘Katherine Bonell of Salop (Shrewsbury)’ to the earl of Salop, John Talbot, 2nd Earl of Shrewsbury. Katherine Bonell writes about her tenants, which implies that she is a landowner and, accordingly, a member of the gentry. Bonell addresses the letter to the *Erle of Salop and tresourer of ynglond* ‘Earl of Salop and treasurer of England’. Lord Talbot was treasurer of England between 1456-1458.²⁹ The letter was written at Shrewsbury, on Wednesday after the Circumcision of the Lord in the 37th Henry VI (3 January 1458-1459).

This is a rather extensive letter with complex administrative formulations. Katherine Bonell claims that she has been a victim of a swindle by the esquire John Colle of Salop, esquire, who has been collecting money from her tenants.

The letter may be divided into three parts. First, Katherine Bonell reminds the earl of Salop about an existing bond of £100, stipulating that John Colle of Salop, an esquire, would not vex Katherine Bonell by pretending to act on her name, as he has previously done. Then, she declares that John Colle has, indeed, been *renewynge his olde malice* ‘renewing his old malice’ by taking, receiving and stopping payments from her tenants for a total of £5, 10 shillings and 11 pence. She lists the tenants involved in this swindle and the amount of money that each of them had paid John Colle. Finally, the tenants attest that this has indeed happened and that they did it in good faith. The tenants have added their seals to the letter.

The *salutatio* is brief and it is placed on the top centre of the letter. It reads *To the ryght high and gracious lord / Erle of Salop and tresourer of ynglond* ‘To the right high and gracious lord/ Earl of Salop and treasurer of England’. The form of address has a combination of one intensifier, *right*, and two modifiers, *high and gracious*, followed by the head noun *lord*. This is the appropriate one addressing a nobleman. In the late Middle English period, noblemen were always addressed with the head noun *lord* preceded by deferential adjectives, such as *high, gracious, and worshipful* (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 576). In

²⁹ <http://thepeerage.com/p1229.htm>.

addition, those holding high administrative posts, such as the Treasurer of England, would be addressed with the negatively polite honorific *lord* by their inferiors (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 576). The *salutatio* does not include any other formulae of salutation or *captatio benevolentiae*: Katherine does not express any bond of goodwill. This might accentuate the letter's sense of urgency.

The letter itself begins with an elaborated *narratio* that makes up half of the letter. The first sentence is lengthy and complex, with a series of subordinate clauses that makes it difficult to split the sentence into shorter ones. It is, in fact, a good example of the administrative style of this letter, which is worth citing here:

Shewith vnto youre gracious lordship youre pouere oratrice kateryne Bonell of Salop that where afore this tyme hit plesyd youre gracious lordship vppon diuerse Jniuries don to youre said oratrice by John Colle of Salop aforsayd Esquyer by advyse of high discrecon to ordeyne and award in eschewynge of alle suche wrongfull vexaconns that the said John shulde be bounde by his obligacon of an C li that after the tyme of the awarde made and ordeyned by the decre and Jugement of youre excellent lordship he shulde in no wyse attempte nor presume to done vnto youre said oratryce eny wronge or preiudice by feynynge of eny vniust title as he by-fore had don

'Shows your poor oratrice Katherine Bonell of Salop, that where earlier it pleased your gracious lordship, concerning diverse injuries done to your said oratrice by John Colle of Salop, esquire, to ordain and award by advice of high discretion in order to put an end to such wrongful vexations, that the said John should be bound by his obligation of 100 pounds, that after the time of the award, judgement and decree of your excellent lordship, he should in no way attempt or presume to cause your said oratrice any more wrong or unfairness by feigning any unjust title, as he has done before'.

She refers to herself as *youre pouere oratrice*. Adding the possessive pronoun *youre* and the adjective *pouere* accentuates her smallness and subordination, which is expected in petitions (Held 2010: 209). Since this was common practice, it would not represent a possible FTA against Bonell's negative face. Instead, Bonell attends to the earl's positive face by highlighting her subordination to him.

Further, Bonell reminds the earl about his mediation at a previous occasion: *that where afore this tyme hit plesyd youre gracious lordship* 'that where earlier it pleased your

gracious lordship'. This is a negative politeness strategy in which Bonell emphasises the earl's autonomy and authority in ordering a bond of 100 pounds to prevent future aggravations.

The *narratio* explains the current situation, acting as a justification for the petition. Bonell particularly emphasizes John Colle's disloyalty towards the earl, remarking that, despite the earl's previous mediation and decree, he has disregarded the earl's award and *hath taken receyvid and stopped in the handes of diuerse tenants holdynge of youre said oratrice* 'has taken, received and stopped payments from diverse tenants holding land of your said oratrice'. John Colle's contempt is juxtaposed with earl's superior authority, signalling a possible FTA against the earl's positive face from John Colle: *in contempte of the awarde Jugement and decree ordeyned by youre most gracious lordship* 'in contempt of the award, judgement and decree that your most gracious lordship has ordained'. At the same time, this acts as a positive politeness strategy, in which Bonell appeals to the earl's positive face, highlighting his authority. The use of synonyms, such as *awarde Jugement and decree* 'award, judgement and decree', and detailed formulations are consistent with a conventional administrative language that maintains the social distance between the earl, addressing him with the terms of deference *your most gracious lordship* 'your most gracious lordship', and Bonell. Moreover, this repetitive language might strengthen the urgent tone of the petition.

The *narratio* continues with Bonell naming her tenants and the amount of money they have given to John Colle. This is followed by the *petitio*, in which she confirms that John Colle continues to trouble her *with wrongfull vexacions and hurtes importable to hir fynall vndoynge and destruccoon* 'with wrongful vexations and unbearable hurts to her final undoing and destruction'. Then, she pleads:

with-owte that hit please your most gracious lordship after youre high discrecion in these pmisses to fynde dewe remedy This bysechith meokely youre said oratrice at the reuerence of god and in wey of Chartyte

'unless it will please your most gracious lordship after your high discretion to find due remedy. This is what your said poor oratrice meekly beseeches, for the reverence of God and in way of charity'.

This is a subtle and almost implicit, directive speech act, in which Bonell explains that only the earl could put an end to her distress, only if it pleases him. With this negative politeness

strategy, she accentuates the earl's freedom of choice, maintaining his negative face. According to the OED, the verb *beseech* is defined as 'to supplicate, entreat, implore (a person)'. This directive speech act verb was used in a more deferential way than the verb *pray*; and it also had a sense of urgency, or even desperation (Williams 2013: 138). Thus, the directive speech act *bysechith meokely* is a negative politeness strategy. It is also consistent with the content and style of the letter, in which Bonell appears as a submissive petitioner being wronged by Colle and dependent on the earl's help.

Finally, the testimony from her tenants follows the *petitio*. They attest that Bonell's account is *credible feithfull and verry trewth* 'credible, faithful and the very truth', and acted in good faith. They present their seals.

The letter does not have a *conclusio* or any form of valediction.

5.3.2. D0295: Letter from Henry Lord Scrope to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:154

This is a letter of request from Henry Lord Scrope, 4th Baron Scrope (1418-1459)³⁰ to the prior of Durham, John Wessington.³¹ The letter was written at York, 4 August between the years 1440-1443.

In this letter,³² Lord Scrope reports that his chaplain, Sir Alan Buckingham, has been appointed to the parish church of St Mary in Stamford and that the prior of St Leonard in Stamford unjustly claims a pension of five marks from that church. He asks the prior of Durham to write to the prior of St Leonard requiring him to drop his claim.

Lord Scrope begins his letter with a conventional *salutatio*, involving both negative and positive politeness strategies: *Worshipfull Sir in god My right trusty and welbeloued Frende J grete yow hertly wele* 'Worshipful Sir in God, my right trusty and well-beloved friend, I greet you heartily well'. The respectful form *Worshipfull Sir in god* consists of the conventionalised adjective *worshipful*, which was usually used to address those 'distinguished in respect of character or rank' (OED), and honorific *Sir*. Even though the title *sir* would

³⁰ For Lord Scrope's biography, see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Scrope,_4th_Baron_Scrope_of_Bolton

³¹ For John Wessington's biography, see <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-29074>.

³²DUL http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=loc.XXV:154#1

usually be used to address members of the gentry, evidence shows that even bishops were addressed with this head noun (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 576). The positively modified phrase *My right trusty and welbeloued Frende* combines an intensifier, *right*, and an adjective expressing deference, *trusty*, with a positively oriented adjective, *welbeloued*. According to Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 578), this positively oriented formula, including the noun *friend*, was standard among noblemen and bishops addressing their inferiors. This is consistent with this case, as Lord Scrope being a baron would have been of a superior social status (see Table 1, p. 15). However, as Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 570) note, ‘socially equal friends preferred terms of positive politeness, although the neutral and routinised *sir* was also an acceptable variant’, this combination of negative and positive politeness terms could be an example of the blurred borderline between a baron and an influential prior.

Lord Scrope omits a *captatio benevolentiae*. The *narratio* follows immediately after the *salutatio* and includes a short account of his reason for writing. He informs the prior that his chaplain, Sir Alan Buckingham, is the incumbent of the parish church of St Mary in Stamford and that the prior of St Leonard of the same town, which is a cell of prior of Durham Priory, claims to have a yearly pension of five marks from the parish church. Further, Lord Scrope reports that, as far as he has been informed by the parish church and the house of St Leonard, such claim is invalid.

The *petitio* could be divided into two parts, with two specific desired actions, the second depending on the outcome of the first. First, Lord Scrope asks the prior to write to the prior of St Leonard, asking him to stop the demands on the chaplain unless it can be proved by documentation that they are lawful. Secondly, he adds a request in case the demands would indeed turn out to be lawful, asking the prior to intervene and ask the house of St Leonard to show friendliness to the chaplain by discontinuing the demands for a pension. Finally, he argues that his chaplain deserves this considering the small size of this benefice, stating that he would do anything to this matter.

Lord Scrope begins with a double directive speech act: *J wolde pray yow and desire yow as troweth and gode Conscience wold þat yee wold write to þe Priour of your seid Cellez* ‘I would pray you, and desire of you, as truth and good conscience would, that you would write to the Prior of your said cell’. The performative *pray yow* adds a sense of urgency to the request, while *desire yow* focuses on the sender’s wish. This is a direct speech act in which Lord Scrope’s desire is explicitly expressed. Similarly, he requests *J wold desire for my seid Chapelleyn tyme þat yee wold write vnto hem þat. þei wold gouerne hen so frendely vnto him*

for þis my prayer ‘I would ask for my said chaplain that you would write to them that they would behave in such a friendly manner towards him, for the sake of my prayer’. Lord Scrope ends with a promise of benevolence towards the house of St Leonard’s if they cooperate: *as þei wolde gyfe me cause to do any thyng þat may ligge in my power for her wele or ease* ‘as they would like to give me reason to do anything that may lie within my power for their well-being or ease’.

The letter does not include a *conclusio* or any form of farewell salutation.

5.3.3. D4464: Letter from sir John Bowde, vicar of Deopham, to the prior of Canterbury
Lincoln, Lincolnshire Archives: Cragg/4/8

This is a letter of petition from the vicar of Deopham, sir John Bowde, who was the rector of the church between 1461-1468,³³ to the prior of Canterbury, Thomas Goldstone.³⁴ It was written in Deopham, 22 March 1465.

In this letter of petition, the vicar of Deopham, Sir John Bowde, asks for an augmentation of this income. He asks the prior to consider the great poverty of his benefice and among the common people of Deopham and his benefice, pointing out that, under these conditions, some may not ‘live to pay their duties’. He also notes that he himself is not capable of carrying out his own hospitality duties as his household is in a poor state. Accordingly, if nothing is done, he will have to either leave his cure or seek the remedy of the law. The letter carries the seal of 22 of his tenants (see p.82 for an image of the letter) and faithful parishioners and lists 23 names, two with the same surname.

The *salutatio* is placed in the top centre of the letter and reads *To the right Reuerent And wurschippulle Fadir in god / my lorde And patronn the Priour of Caunterbury* ‘To the right reverent and worshipful father in God / my lord and patron, the prior of Canterbury’. Members of the clergy, particularly those with high ranks, were usually addressed by phrases like *right reuere[n]d and worshipful father*, especially by lower clergy writing to their superiors (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 576-7). This negatively oriented salutation adds a sense of social deference and respect towards the prior’s status, which would be the appropriate address form. Also, the head noun *father in God* seems to be preferred when addressing a prior. The combination of *lord* and *patron* indicates that Bowde is

³³ for the history of Deopham and a list of the rectors there, see <http://www.deophamhistory.co.uk/Blomefield.htm>.

³⁴ for a list of deans and priors of Canterbury, see <https://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-kent/vol11/pp425-460>.

acknowledging the prior's office and hierarchical superiority, adding to the negative politeness orientation of the letter.

The letter begins with the *petitio*:

Withe Alle lowlynesse besechithe . youre pore Prest And Chapeleynn . Sir John Bowde. Vicour of your chirche of Depham . in the Counte of Norff . besechyng your lordschip . in weye of pite and conscience . to considir and tender my pouerte . stondyng the Cure and charge . the whiche J hafe in your pore paryssche forseid

‘With all lowliness beseeches your poor priest and chaplain, sir John Bowde, vicar of your church of Deopham in the county of Norfolk, beseeching your lordship by way of pity and conscience to consider and alleviate my poverty, as I carry out the cure and charge I have in your above said poor parish’

The speech act verb *beseech*, which had a ‘more negatively polite and deferential way of performing a directive speech act than [...] *pray*’ (Williams 2013: 138), modified by *Withe Alle lowlynesse* correspond with the act of supplication to an authority, such as the prior of Canterbury, maintaining his negative face. This also corresponds with the urgency of Bowde’s message: the impoverishment of his parish church.

The letter continues with a short *narratio* of the situation of his church, where Bowde tells the prior that *my benefice so exile and decayed . that J may not leve to kepe my charges . nothyng acordyng to the lawe* ‘My benefice is so poorly endowed and decayed that I may not live to keep my mandate according to the law’.

Then, the *petitio* continues in an orderly matter, in which Bowde presents *ij . thynges to be considerd by your grete wysdome* ‘asking your great wisdom to consider two things’. The phrase *your grete wysdome* appeals to the prior’s positive face, in terms that it is an appreciation of the prior’s good judgement. This directive speech act does not contain an explicit directive speech act verb, such as *pray*, *beseech*, *desire*, which may be a FTA against the prior’s negative face. As Bowde lists his reasons, he is imposing the prior to consider them, without an actual question of request. Thus, this is a very direct request. The first thing to be considered is the *grete pouerte that now regnythe amonges the comyn peple* ‘the great poverty that now reigns among the common people’, and the second is *the charge of repayre of my pore howsold .and kepyng of hospitalite . the whiche may not be left . w^t-owt grevous*

rewardes to the Bysschoppis Officers ‘the cost of repairing my poor household and keeping up hospitality, which may not be denied without great payments to the Bishop’s officers’. The reason for his second demand may also represent a FTA against the prior’s positive face, in that Bowde remarks that state of the benefice might disconcert the prior’s superiors.

Bowde continues with a commissive speech act: a promise that works as a possible threat. He tells the prior that *ethur . J must a-voyde my Cure . and leve your tenauntes on-served . or elle to seke the remedy of the lawe . the whiche in no wyse . J intende not to do* ‘I must either make my cure void and leave your tenants unserved, or seek the remedy of the law, which by no means I intend to do’. This commissive speech act performs as a FTA against the prior’s positive face because Bowde commits himself to leaving his post or to seeking help from the prior’s superiors if the conditions are not fulfilled. Still, Bowde carefully adds that this *no wyse . J intende not to do*. This reverses the threat, making it untrue and, thus, preserving—albeit to some extent—the prior’s positive face. Henry Percy’s letter has the same pattern that counteracts the FTA of the previous line (see p. 64): he reassures reassuring the prior that he does not intend to do such a thing. Further, Bowde states that he has full trust in the prior’s *conscience and charite* ‘conscience and charity’ to assign the augmentation.

Finally, Bowde closes his petition with a promise of prayer: *to praye for you and alle yowris . as J am bounde to do* ‘I will pray for you and all of yours as I am bound to. Interestingly, this closing formula adds to the petition itself and may constitute a new FTA against the prior’s negative face.

In the last passage of the letter, Bowde lists all 23 names of *youre trewe tenauntes and my parysschouns* ‘your true tenants and my parishioners’ present at the moment of writing, who also present their seals. This confirms the veracity of the vicar’s narrative, adding to the sense of urgency and desperation to the request.

The letter does not conclude with a valediction or a prayer formula as one might expect from a priest. The last line is a conventional place-and-date formula: *writonn at your towne of Depham forsaid the xxij^e daye of Marche the Reyngne of oure Souerayne lorde kyng Edward p^e iiij^e the v^e yere* ‘Written at your aforesaid town of Deopham, 22 March the fifth year of the reign of our sovereign lord King Edward IV’.

5.3.4. L0329: Letter from Janet Thalzour to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:13

This is a letter of petition from Janet Thalzour of Bamburgh, a widow, to the prior of Durham, John Wessington. It was written at Bamburgh, 18 July 1436-1439.

Janet Thalzour complains that the master of the monastery on Farne, Richard Kellow, wrongfully accuses her of owing three shillings and four dimes, a sum of money that her husband had bequeathed in his testament for the glazing of a window at the monastery, but which she claims was paid when Thomas Morby was master there. She informs that she is being summoned to go to Farne, but she is sick and asks the prior to intervene on her behalf so that this matter can be solved in Bamburgh.³⁵

The *salutatio* corresponds with what might be expected in a letter of petition from a middle-class member addressing a prior: *Ryght reuerent & wyrchypfull fadyr in gode J recomande me vn-to 3ow wyth all my hart als lawly os J cann or may* ‘Right reverent and worshipful father in God, I recommend myself to you with all my heart, as lowly as I can or may’. The address term consists of the intensifier *right* and two adjectives of respect, *reverend* and *worshipful*, which were usually used to address members of the clergy and in administrative language (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 558). This address term is a negative politeness strategy as it accentuates the social distance between Thalzour and the prior.

Immediately after, Thalzour excuses herself for troubling the prior with her letter: *beseking 3ow to hawe me excusit of my febill writing vn-to 3our worthi presens* ‘beseeking you to have me excused for my feeble writing to your worthy presence’. This is a negatively polite formulation; an expression of deference, where the sender reduces her writing to a feeble action not worthy of the prior’s time, embodying the respect for the social order and the power relations of the time. Thus, it represents a FTA against Thalzour’s positive face, while elevating the prior’s positive face.

In the *narratio*, Thalzour explains that the master of Farne, Richard Kellowe, wrongfully demands the payment for a glazed window that her husband had bequeathed and that was paid for to the then master’s fellow, Richard Fowyn. She adds that, due to sickness, she is unable to travel to Farne to resolve this matter. The petition follows: *J beseke 3ow y’ 3e will vokesafe to make y’ mastir’ of Farne 3our Attornay y’ it may be determent at Bawmburgh & yer y’ troath to be knawynn* ‘I beseech you that you will agree to make the master of Farne your attorney, so that the case may be determined in Bamburgh and that the truth may be

³⁵ DUL

http://reed.dur.ac.uk/xtf/view?docId=ark/32150_s1wd375w28x.xml;query=loc.XXV:13#1.

known there'. The performative *beseech*, as it was previously noted, conveyed a more deferential and urgent, even desperate sense than *pray* (Williams 2013: 138). As this study will later demonstrate, this speech act verb is common in letters from social inferior, contributing towards the negative politeness expected in petitions. In this case, then, *beseech* is consistent with the negatively oriented style of the letter.

Her letter ends with a conventional *No mor at yis bot J beseke y^e holi trinite have 3ow in his keeping* 'Not more at this, but that I beseech the Holy Trinity to have you in his keeping'. This also contributes to the negative politeness tone of the rest of the letter. Moreover, Thalzour signs as *Be 3our pur' wedew &/ bedewoman Janet / Thal3our of Bawmburgh* 'Be your poor widow and / beadswoman Janet / Thalzour of Bamburgh'. As a petitioner, Thalzour refers humbly to herself, which might represent a FTA against her positive face. However, as petitioners were expected by convention to emphasize their smallness to the authority (Held 2010: 209), it could be interpreting as an additional positive politeness strategy towards the prior's positive face.

5.3.5. L1126: Letter from Barnard of Hornsea to the mayor of Hedon

Beverly Humberside County RO DDHE 20, fol. 271r

This is a letter of petition from Barnard of Hornsea to the mayor of Hedon. The letter was written at Hornsea and the dating is uncertain. There are some damages on the paper which make some parts of the text illegible and are marked as [...] in the transcribed and translated versions.

In this letter, Barnard of Hornsea first notes that he had sent his wife to visit the mayor, but that he had been absent at the time. However, the mayor's wife seems to have suggested this petition. Next, the sender notes that a tinker has recently found dwelling at Hedon, and that he owes the sender money. He asks the mayor to arbitrate in this issue.

The letter begins with the *salutatio* and a *captatio benevolentiae*, which is short, appropriate for a letter to a superior. According to Sánchez Roura (2001: 337), it was not uncommon to include a short *captatio benevolentiae* when there was a considerate social distance between the sender and the addressee, and it was usually being indirect and deferential. Barnard greets the mayor as *Wyrchipfull Syr J recomend me vn-to yow . wyth all my hert dezyryng youur welle-far . qwhyk all-myghty god increase to youur [...]- hese & wyrchyp* 'Worshipful sir, I recommend myself to you with all my heart. Desiring your welfare, may almighty God increase it to your [...]- hese and worship'. He refers to the mayor

with the status indicator *sir* with one modifier, appropriate for an official (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 576). Moreover, he uses the conventional *J recomend me vn-to yow*, which seems to be, as it has been stated, the preferred salutation phrase for members below the nobility status in in this study.

Then, Barnard of Hornsea informs that his wife had been at the mayor's house, but, as he was not home, she spoke instead with the mayor's wife, who seems to have encouraged them to write to the mayor. Including the account about the mayor's wife could represent a negative politeness strategy as it ascribes the reason for the request to the mayor's wife, deviating a possible FTA against his negative face. This is followed by the *narratio*, which starts as an introduction for the request *j be-seke yow of gude maistryr-schyp and of gud supportacion . as my grette trist in yow* 'I beseech you for your good mastership and good support, as my great trust is in you'. 'Expressions of trust' seem to be dominant in letters from the higher classes. Here, it performs as a manifestation of trust towards the office the mayor holds, representing a positive politeness strategy attending the mayor's positive face. He then continues with a detailed account about a significant amount of money (5 shillings and 9 pence) that a tinker dwelling in Hodon owes the sender.

Barnard of Hornsea continues with a directive speech act: *be-sekyng yow wyrchipfull Syr to be my gud maister and supportor yat J may hafe yis rasyd and demen(...) ye mater (...) ye costage as yhe think best & J sall mak (...) gude* 'Beseeching your worshipful sir to be my good master and support that I may have this raised and demand (...) in the matter (...) the cost as you think it is best and I will make (...) good'. This directive is balanced with negative politeness strategies, such as the negatively oriented *wyrchipfull Syr*. Also, by requesting his *gud maister and supportor*, the request is directed to the office the mayor holds.

Finally, the letter ends with a conventional *No mor J kan bot god kepe yow in gude helle* 'Nothing more, but God keep you in good health', followed by the 'place-and-time formula'.

5.3.6. Summarizing remarks

Except for letter D0295 from Lord Scrope, all letters appear to employ more strategies of negative politeness than those requesting an appointment. The seriousness of the subject matter is reflected in the use of deferential language and self-humbling adjectives.

The speech act verb *beseech* seems to be the preferred verb in letters of petition concerning monetary problems. Moreover, there are no occurrences of commissives except

for a promise of prayer from a priest in letter D4464 and in letter D0295 from Lord Scrope. The latter is consistent with the other letters from noblemen to the prior of Durham.

Also, letters D0075 and D4464 are similar in structure as the senders seem to imply that the addressee is responsible for bringing a solution to the matter; they both include the attestation of witnesses and do not include any form of valediction.

6. Discussion

This chapter is divided into six separate subsections, one for each part of the medieval letter based on the *ars dictaminis* tradition (*salutatio*, *captatio benevolentiae*, *narratio*, *petitio* and *conclusio*) and a summarizing subsection. Each part will discuss and compare the instances of politeness strategies observed in the three groups of letters, as well as any special features that might be relevant for this study.

Except for a few examples, this chapter does not provide translations into Present-day English as it only discusses particular linguistic features of interest. For translations, see Appendix 1. Finally, bold type and underlining is used throughout the discussion to highlight linguistic features relevant for the discussion.

6.1. *Salutatio*: Terms of address and salutations

The structure of the late medieval English forms of address are, as Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 559) point out, complex. Members of the nobility, women and men alike, preferred the term *fader in god* or *sir in god* when addressing the prior of Durham. There is, however, one instance of *fader in god* used by a middle-class woman, which might indicate that the use of this term was not restricted to the higher classes. Usually, the head noun is modified by the adjectives *worshipful*, *reverend* or a combination of both. This is congruent with Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg's (1995: 578) findings that show that the combination *Right reverend* was frequently used to address members of the clergy and *Right worshipful* was used in official language.

The number of adjectives does not seem to differ in relation to the addresser's social position or gender. However, the positively oriented adjective *well-beloved* appears in letters from the nobility only, correlating with the positive politeness strategy one would expect from social superiors writing to social inferiors (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 578).

Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg (1995: 559) discern between the different grades of modification in address forms in terms of politeness theory, something that may also be useful in this study. Regarding the letters from noblewomen, the forms of address could be classified as follows:

- (1) *Worshipfull Fadre in godde* (D0286)
- (2) *Right Reuerent fader yn gode* (D0287)
- (3) *Right reuerent sir in god* (D0314)
- (4) *Ryght worshipful sir in god* (D0292)
- (5) *Worshipfull and my **well-beloued** fadre in god* (D0290)
- (6) *Reuerent ser in god and Rizte **welbeloued*** (D0291)
- (7) *Ryght trusty and withe alle my hert Right enterely **welbeloued** in god* (D0288)

The modification may consist of one modifier (example 1), one intensified modifier (2-4), or two coordinated modifications. In addition, there may be a head noun (5-6), or no head noun, but instead two intensified coordinated modifications (7). The last example seems to illustrate the practice whereby the nobility would often address their social inferiors with phrases with ‘no nominal headword’ (Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 1995: 578).

Letters from noblemen follow similar patterns, including a modified form of address (8) and two instances of intensified and coordinated modifications (9-10).

- (8) *Worshipfull fadre in godde* (D0285)
- (9) *Right worshipfull and reuerent fader in god* (D0293)
- (10) *Right dere & with all oure hert enterly **wel-be-louede** sire in god* (D0296)

In contrast, members of other social strata relied on other head nouns: *lord*, *master* and *sovereign*. In letter D0272, Robert Babthorpe, a knight, uses the honorific *sir* in combination with the head noun *Fader*, without the phrase *in god* (11). The terms *master* and *sovereign* seem to be connected to the hierarchical relationship the addresser had with the addressee: Sir Robert Danby (12) (D0268) worked for the priory and Richard Cliff (13) (L0380) was a priest. This corresponds with the findings in Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg’s (1995: 577) study, in which they observe that in letters sent to gentlemen by other gentlemen in their service could usually contain the address forms *master* or *sir*. Besides the choice of head noun, the forms of address are modified in a similar manner to those from the nobility. In

terms of the choice of adjectives, as noted above, it is only in letters from the nobility that *well-beloved* is found.

(11) *Right wirschipfull sir and Fader* (D0272; gentry)

(12) *Right worshipfull & reuerent and my full good & worthy maister* (D0268; gentry)

(13) *Reuerent And wirschipfull sufferane* (L0380; priest)

(14) *Right der Reuerent and ay wrichifull lord* (D0267; middle class)

In letters concerning monetary difficulties, the forms of address seem to be more negatively oriented than in the other groups. The only instance of *well-beloved* is found in (17) from Lord Scrope to the prior of Durham. He writes this letter on behalf of his chaplain, and it is not Lord Scrope who is in financial difficulties. Moreover, the form of address that Lord Scrope uses, *Frende*, implies either a close relationship with the prior or a positive politeness strategy. As Nevala (2007: 106; 2009: 87) observes, the use of the term *friend* in letters from social superiors to inferiors could either represent a closer relationship than between strangers, or a way of expressing goodwill to the addressee. The forms of address in these letters include a modified form of address (15), one instance of intensified and coordinated modifications (16), one instance of two modified head nouns (17), and two instances marking the addressee with the preposition 'To' and explicitly naming the addressee (18-19). Moreover, in the last two examples (18-19) the address form is centred at the top of the letter, conveying a formal petition.

(15) *Wyrchipfull Syr* (L1126; from a middle-class member to the mayor of Hedon)

(16) *Ryght reuerent & wyrchypfull fadyr in gode* (L0329; from a middle-class woman to the prior of Durham)

(17) *Worshipfull Sir in god My right trusty and **welbeloued** Frende* (D0295; from a nobleman to the prior of Durham)

(18) *To the right Reuerent And wurschipfulle Fadir in god / my lorde And patronn the Priour of Caunterbury* (D4464; from a priest to the prior of Canterbury)

(19) *To the ryght high and gracious lord / Erle of Salop and tresourer of ynglond* (D0075; from a gentlewoman to the earl of Shrewsbury)

Examples (18) and (19) correspond with the salutation called *costructio politica*. Held (2010: 202) notes that this particular style was common in formal petitions, using an 'inversion of

normal syntactic order from SPO to the respectful social order OPS', with the addressee 'deferentially named at the very beginning of every letter'. Held (2010: 210) argues that this form of address, together with other features of letters of petition, embodies the deferential poses of 'bending the head and kneeling down' in face-to-face petitioning. For example, following the *costructio politica* in (18), the *salutatio* reads:

To the right Reuerent And wurschifulle Fadir in god /my lorde And patronn the
 Priour of Caunterbury [O=object] Withe Alle lowlynesse besechithe
 [P=predicate] . youre pore Prest And Chapeleynn . Sir John Bowde . Vicour of
 your chirche of Depham [S=subject]

'To the right reverent and worshipful father in God / my lord and patron, the prior of
 Canterbury' [O=object] 'With all lowliness beseeches' [P=predicate]' your poor priest,
 sir John Bowde, chaplain, and vicar of your church of Deopham' [S=subject]

Having this in mind, it is only in these two letters where the petition embodiment is reflected, pointing to a format and style difference between D0075 and D4464, and the rest of the material collected in this study.

In terms of the salutation, there are two distinctive forms in the material: variants of *I greet you well*, and variants of *I command myself to you*. As Figure 2 shows, the *I greet you well* formula is limited to members of the nobility. This indicates that the salutation *I greet you well* was used from social superiors to social inferiors. Interestingly, in letter D0285 (27) from Thomas, lord Clifford, the salutation *I greet you well* is crossed out and replaced with *I command myself to you*. This letter was written at the same time and place as letter D0286 (20) from the Countess of Cambridge, which uses *I greet you well*. This change might indicate a deliberate choice of wording from lord Clifford, implying a negative politeness strategy to show deference. The list below shows the salutations from the nobility to the prior of Durham, where (20-26) are from noblewomen and the remaining are from men.

- (20) *J grete yow welle* (D0286)
- (21) *J grete yow well* (D0290)
- (22) *J gret zowe Hartly . well* (D0287)
- (23) *J grete you oft tymes wele with hooll hert* (D0288)
- (24) *we grete yow oftymes wele* (D0291)

- (25) *y recomand me vnto you* (D0292)
 (26) *J grete 3ou wele* (D0314)
 (27) *J grete yow welle* \wedge *comaunde me to yowe* (D0285)
 (28) *J comaunde me to you* (D0293)
 (29) *we grete 3owe welle* (D0296)

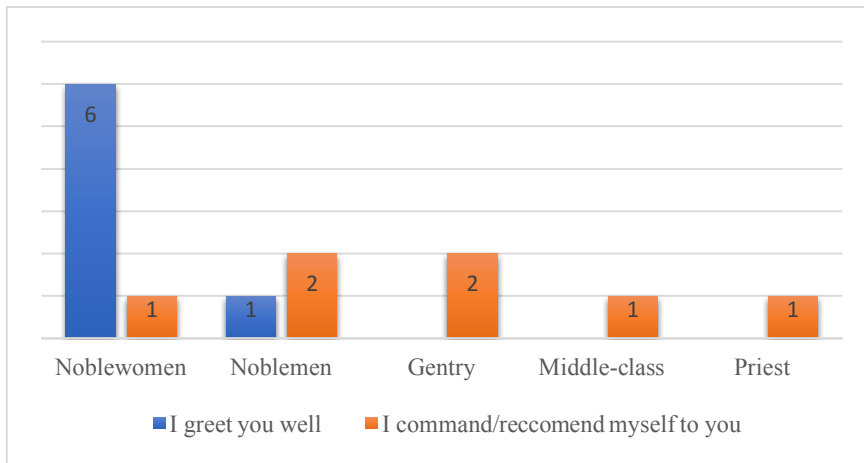


Figure 2: Distribution of greeting formula in letters to the prior of Durham requesting an appointment

In terms of letters concerning monetary difficulties, the results seem to have varied according to the urgency of the request. Letters D0075 (see pp- 66-69) and D4464 (see pp. 71-74), from a gentlewoman and a priest respectively, do not include any form of greeting. These letters share some specific features. The address forms are prefixed by the preposition *to* and placed at the top centre (see Image 1) and follow the *costructio politica* formula. Also, the narrative describes a rather urgent matter which the sender implies it is the addressee's responsibility or jurisdiction to intervene. Finally, the addressers provide witnesses who attest with their seals, and the letters do not conclude with a final valediction (see p. 96). As it was observed above, this could imply that these letters are following a specific administrative style of petition and therefore differ from the rest.



Image 1: Letter D4464, Lincoln, Lincolnshire Archives: Cragg/4/8. A petition for augmentation of income. The address is placed at the top centre of the letter and it includes 22 seals from witnesses. Image courtesy of MELD

In the other three letters dealing with monetary matters, the addressers use conventional greetings in accordance to their social status: one variation of *I greet you well* from a nobleman (30), and two modified variations of *I command myself to you* from middle-class members (31-32). Example (31) stresses the humbling act of petitioning, which becomes a FTA to the sender's positive face to compensate for the face-threatening directive speech act of the request.

(30) *J grete yow hertly wele* (D0295)

(31) *J recomande me vn-to 3ow wyth all my hart als lawly os J cann or may* (L0329; middle-class woman)

(32) *J recomend me vn-to yow . wyth all my hert* (L1126; middle-class man)

Finally, all the letters, apart from one instance, employ the formal second person pronoun *you* throughout, which corresponds with the social decorum of the time (Jucker and Taavitsainen 2013: 121).

To sum up, the choice of form of address seems to be constant for the different social classes and between men and women. There are, however, two differences: the nobility seem

to prefer the term *fader/sir in god* to refer to the prior of Durham and, especially women, the positively oriented adjective *well-beloved*. The nobility frequently choose the greeting *I greet you well*, while the other classes use a form of *I command myself to you*, with occasional self-humbling modifications to compensate for the FTA of the request. Petitions involving several people seem to adapt other formats than the rest of the letters, which are especially noticeable in the *salutatio* and *conclusio*.

6.2. *Captatio benevolentiae*

Regarding form, the letters in this study generally obey the conventions of *ars dictaminis*. However, it seems as if including a *captatio benevolentiae* was not very common in letters of petition and request. This corresponds with Sánchez Roura's (2001: 337) findings, in which she observes that the more socially distant the interlocutors are, 'the less *captatio* is present, although such instances as occur are of the more winding indirect and deferential type'. When used, the *captatio benevolentiae* sets to stimulate 'the addressee's goodwill for complying with the favour' (Held 2010: 201).

Letter D0314 from Margaret, Countess of Westmorland, is the only letter from the nobility including a distinctive *captatio benevolentiae* that follows Davis (1965: 236) taxonomy (see pp. 13-14), including (A) 'an expression of desire to hear of the recipient's welfare'; (B) 'a prayer, introduced by a relative, for the continuation and increase of this welfare "to your heart's desire", or the like'

- (33) (A) desiryng' euermore to here of 3our prosperite & gude hele / (B) the ~~~ which J
besech allmyghty god *graunte* 3ou to his plesaunce & to 3our herts desire (D0314)

'desiring to hear evermore of your prosperity and good health, which I beseech
almighty God to grant you to his pleasure and to your heart's desire'

Letter L1126 from a middle-class man, Barnard of Honsea, to the mayor of Hedon, also uses a *captatio benevolentiae* which follows Davis (1965: 236) pattern, albeit in a briefer form and perhaps conveying more social distance than D0314:

- (34) (A) dezyryng youur welle-far .(B) qwhylyk all-myghty god increse to youur [...] - hese
& wyrchyp

Desiring your welfare, may almighty God increase it to your [...] ease and worship

Three more letters from the nobility include a thanking note following the *salutatio*:

(35) *And J thank zowe w^l all my . hart of zowre kyndnes the wiche ze haue don at all tymes to me & my Children / gode of his mercy giff ham grace to thenk appon it in tyme to com'* (D0287; the Countess of Westmorland)

(36) *And J thonke yow hertely of all kyndenes that ye haue done' to me before this tyme* (D0286; the Countess of Cambridge)

(37) *thonkyng yow right hertely of all kyndenes . that ye haue done to me before this tyme / praynge yowe of gode contynuance* (D0285; Thomas Lord Clifford and of Westmorland)

Expressions of gratitude include the performative expressive *thank*, and constitute positive politeness strategies as they attend to the hearer's positive face by demonstrating social closeness. Examples (35-36) includes the performative expressive *thank* modified by *with all my heart* or *heartily*, while (37) reverses the positive politeness strategy into a possible FTA against the prior's negative face by asking him to continue his favours. It is worth bearing in mind that letter D0285 (37) was written at the same time and place as D0286, on behalf of the Countess of Cambridge, which might explain the similarities in the letters. As noted in 5.1.2., these examples are evidence of the close relationship between the prior of Durham and the nobility, attesting the prior's social and political influence (Halcrow 1955: 74).

In sum, the letters included in this study do not seem to be preoccupied with prayers of good health to the addressee. Rather, their main concern is to pay respect to the addressee's office and social status, unless there is a necessity from the nobility to acknowledge previous social favours. Some letters from the nobility include expressions of gratitude, which corroborates with the well-known influential position the priors of Durham had (Halcrow 1955).

6.3. *Narratio*: introducing the request

Most letters include a narrative as a means of introduction for the request. It may be lengthy and rich in detail, as in example (38) from Elizabeth Lady Grey, or very brief and pertinent, as in (39) from the Countess M of Cambridge:

(38) And forasmoche as J am enformed þ^t for diuerse sikenesse & othur cause wiche þat ben fallen by þe suffrance of oure creatur vnto þe *priour* of Newsted ^{Senct leonerd} biside Stanford furst for þe most pleisance vnto oure saide creatur secondly proufit and welfar of his owne *persone* / withe gode wille is pourposed to Resigne þe saide priorye vnto dan John his Broþer þ^t now is þere (D0288)

‘And forasmuch as I am informed that, because of diverse sickness and other causes that by the sufferance of our Creator have affected the prior of Newstead Saint Leonard, near Stamford, he has, firstly to please best our said Creator, and secondly, for his own benefit and welfare, intended-to resign in good will from this priory in favour of Dom John, his brother who now is there’

(39) forasmuch as J am enfourmed that ther is a Vicary voide w'in' your Collage of hemmyngburgh . / and J haue a preste which that J desire were there-in' (D0290)

‘Forasmuch as I am informed, there is a vacant vicarage within your College of Hemingbrough. I have a priest whom I desire to be appointed there’

Held (2010: 203) states that the constructions introducing the *narratio* 'work as pragmatic disclaimers that adequately motivate and legitimise the petitioner's reasons and needs'. In other words, they present the reasons that justify the FTA of the request and, sometimes introduce strategies of negative politeness. In most letters from the nobility, the *narratio* is introduced by a variation of the clause conjunction *forasmuch as I am informed*. As this construction is speaker-oriented, it does not seem to include any form of politeness strategy towards the hearer, but rather it concentrates on the speaker's needs. Letters from other social classes employed other strategies, usually a conditional construction as a way of introduction. For example, in (41) Thomas Kar, a draper, begins the *narratio* with *if it lyk 3ow to wyt it es donn me to vnderstand yat* 'If it pleases you to know, I have been made to understand that'.

This conditional structure focuses on the hearer, thus becoming a negative politeness strategy to maintain the hearer's negative face.

The list below shows that, except for (40), the lower classes employed constructions with negative politeness strategies, focusing on the hearer's negative face, that is, emphasising the hearer's freedom of action. In fact, some of them use a directive speech act to introduce their reasons (42-46) as a way of kindly asking the addressee to continue reading. Example (45) is the most self-humbling example, representing an FTA against the addresser's positive face. It also uses a conditional structure as a way of introducing the *narratio*, representing a negative politeness strategy as it pays attention to the addressee's freedom of choice.

(40) *lik it 3owe to vnderstand that* (D0287; noblewoman)

(41) *if it lyk 3ow to wyt it is donn me to vnderstand yat* (D0267; middle-class man)

(42) *als a preste of 3ours Makang opyne to 3our here* (lit. 'making open to your ear') (L0380; priest)

(43) *Prayng yow that 3e wole vouche-^{saf} to remembr 3ou* (D0272; gentleman)

(44) *besechyng your lordschip . in weye of pite and conscience . to considir* (D4464; priest)

(45) *beseking 3ow to hawe me excusit of my febill writing vn-to 3our worthi presens if it like vn'-to 3ow to wete y^e cawse of my wrytyng is yis* (L0329; middle-class woman)

(46) *Lattyng yow wytt y^t J* (L1126; middle-class man)

In sum, members of nobility begin their *narratios* with the construction *forasmuch as I am informed*, a thanking note referring to the request (37) or did not include any form of justification (33). Members of other classes seem to employ negative politeness strategies in their *narratios*, as a way of anticipating the FTA of the request by emphasising the addressee's freedom of choice.

6.4. *Petitio*

6.4.1. Directive speech acts

Whereas "face-saving" performative directives were rare in Old English (Kohnen 2008a: 33), they seem to be more common in Middle English letters of petition and request. As Figure 3 and 4 show, by far the most common performative directives in this study are *pray* and *beseech*. The use of performative directives, such as *pray* or its variations – the participle *praying* or the noun *prayer* – is particularly popular among the nobility. The performative

beseech seems to be the preferred one in petitions where the subject matter is of a more urgent character than in letters requesting an appointment. This corresponds with the definition of the performative verb *beseech* in the OED as ‘to supplicate, entreat, implore (a person)’, and, as Williams (2013: 146) observes, this sense of *beseech* conveys a higher degree of urgency and deference than the performative *pray*.

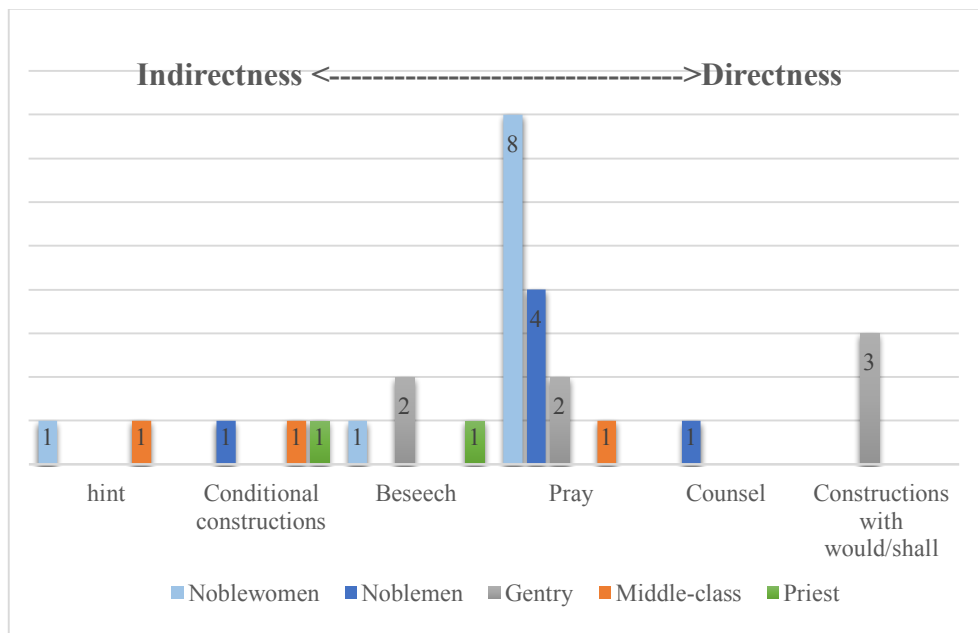


Figure 3: Distribution of directives in letters to the prior of Durham requesting the appointment of a priest or similar.

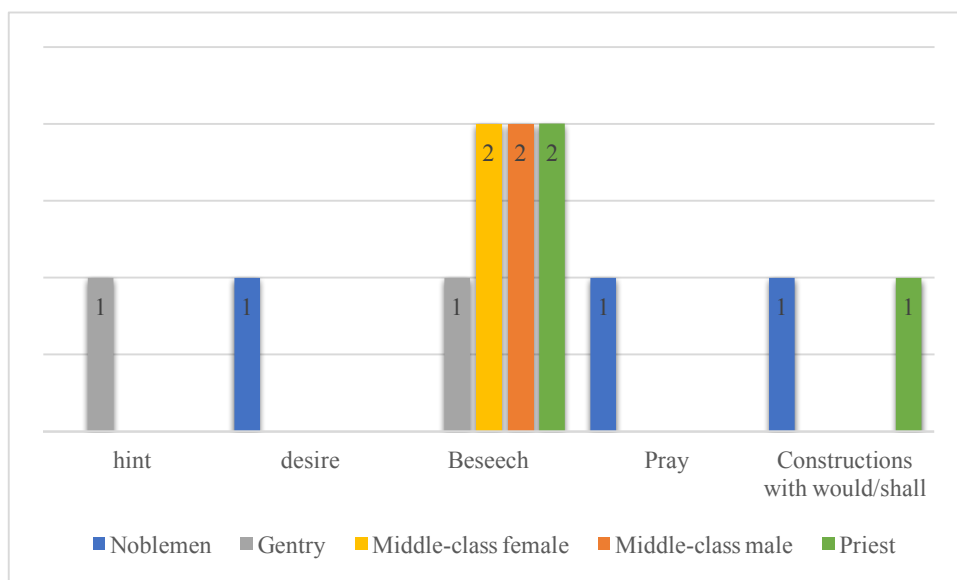


Figure 4: Distribution of directives in letters concerning monetary difficulties.

In the case of noblewomen, they fairly often modified the performative verb with the adverb *heartily* or a similar internal modifier (Kohnen 2008a: 50) emphasising sincerity, thus mitigating the FTA against the negative face (47-52). In a study of directives in Old English, Kohnen (2008: 33-34) examines the manifestations of constructions with *would* and *shall* and argues that they are commonly used in situations when the speaker is in a superior position, and the request tends to be presented in a ‘plain and straightforward way’ without ‘further comment’. This corresponds with the findings in most letters from noblewomen, where the performative directive is usually followed by the directive construction *that you will/would do something*:

- (47) *J pray yowe [...] þat ye wol graunt* (D0292, noblewoman)
 (48) *wherfore j pray yow hertely that ye wold graunte me* (D0286, noblewoman)
 (49) *Praying’ 3ou right hertly þat 3e will gyfe me* (D0314, noblewoman)
 (50) *J pray yow tendurly at þe reuerence of me þis tyme ye wille graunte* (D0288, noblewoman)
 (51) *wherfore J pray yow w’ all myn’ hert that ye will graunte hym* (D0290, noblewoman)
 (52) *This matere J pray yow to tendre* (D0288, noblewoman)
 (53) *we prai yow hertli for our sake to haue for tenderly Recomendid toward yow* (D0291, noblewoman)
 (54) *And this my first desir and herty prayere ye wol effectuosely . tak to ht and exequite* (D0292, noblewoman)

Example (47) includes the performative *pray you* and the directive construction *that you would do something*; examples (48-51) follow the pattern: performative directive + internal modifier + *that you will/would do something*. Example (52) includes only the performative *pray you*, implying directness in the request, which could also be seen as a command, while in example (53), the internal modifiers *hertli* and *for our sake* help mitigate the FTA of the directive. Example (54) does not include a performative, but it is a self-reference to the request as a sincere prayer.

In example (55), the countess of Westmorland emphasises her directive speech act with the repetition of the performatives *beseech* and *pray*, and the nouns *request* and *prayer*. Del Lungo Camiciotti (2002: 215 as cited in Williams 2013: 146) observes that the practice of

using repetitions in Middle English wills seems to ‘strengthen the “illocutionary force of the speech act”’.

(55) *J besek 3owe & pray 3owe he may. be y^e nerer for þ^s my Symple request & prayer*
(D0287, noblewoman)

In the case of noblemen (56-58), their directives follow similar patterns to those of noblewomen, also with the *that you will do something* directive:

(56) *wherfore j pray yow that ye will graunte to my said ladys Chapeleyn* (D0285, nobleman)

(57) *we pray 3ou & also we counsaile 3ou to graunte hyme* (D0296, nobleman)

(58) *werfore J. pray you and your’ Couent. hertly [...] þat ye wole grante me*
(D0296, nobleman)

In example (57) the use of the performative *counsel* suggests that the sender is in a position to give the prior advice, giving the request nearly the force of a command. In fact, as this letter uses several instances of warnings throughout its *narratio* and *petitio* (see pp. 62-65), the use of the performative *counsel* corresponds with the general tone of the letter in which Henry Percy emphasises his superiority, something that is not present in most letters.

In examples (59-60), the use of the modal *would* and the performative *desire* implies a speaker centred request, where his needs and wants are the focus of the speech act. The low use of these hedge performatives (both examples come from the same letter) fits with the scholarly findings of a speaker-centred politeness culture in the Middle English period and the movement towards a hearer-centred politeness culture in the Early Modern period (Taavitsainen and Jucker 2008: 8).

(59) *J wolde pray yow and desire yow as troweth and gode Conscience wold*
þat þee wold (D0295, nobleman)

(60) *J wold desire for my seid Chappelleyne tyme þat yee wold write* (D0295, nobleman)

Example (60) conveys the sense of ‘to have a strong wish for; to long for, covet, crave’ (OED), implying an expressive speech act, that is, the expression of a personal wish. However, in (59), the speaker uses the transitive form, conveying the sense ‘to express a wish

to (a person); to request, pray, entreat. (d) to d[esire] a person *that*, or *of* a person *that ...*’ (OED). This is another example of the fuzziness that Taavitsainen and Jucker (2007: 108) observe, in which the performative *desire* may function as an expressive or directive. Further, one could argue that the expression of a wish from a nobleman might indirectly imply a request.

In example (61), as the sender prays for *good lordship in this matter*, the addressee is to infer what the request is based on the reasons and narrative of the *narratio*. Thus, this is an indirect request, a negative politeness strategy categorised here as a ‘hint’, as the sender asks for consideration:

(61) *J pray* \wedge ^{30w} *specially of gud lordschip in yis mater* (D0267, middle-class)

Examples (62-68) use the performative directive *beseech* or the participle *beseeching* followed by *to do something*, or *of something*.

(62) *And þer-for if my praar myght be plesyng to 3our worthy lordschipe J wald beseike 3our gudnes to prefair* (L0380, priest)

(63) *besechyng you as htly as J kan to be good lord* (D0268, gentry)

(64) ^{ye} *wol vouchesaue to be his good lord þerin . and J beseche you with all my ht* \wedge ^{so} *to be* (D0268, gentry)

(65) *to fynde dewe remedy This bysechith meokely youre said oratrice at the reuerence of god and in wey of Chartyte* (D0075, gentlewoman)

(66) *Withe Alle lowlynesse besechithe . youre pore Prest [...]. besechyng your lordschip . in weye of pite and conscience . to considir and tender* (D4464, priest)

(67) *be-sekyng yow wyrchipfull Syr to be my gud maister and supportor yat* (L1126, middle-class man)

(68) *j be-seke yow of gude maistryr-schyp and of gud supportacion* (L1126, middle-class man)

As discussed above (3.3.1.), the performative verb *beseech* conveyed urgency, or even desperation, while still expressing social deference (Williams 2013: 138-9). Except for (55), the nobility seemed to prefer the use of *pray* in letters of request, while other social classes would use *beseech*, usually modified by an adverb of sincerity or self-humbling. Moreover,

the absence FTA against the negative face of the direct construction *that you will do something* common in letters from the nobility implies a seemingly cautious choice of constructions.

Example (69) is the only one in which a member of the lower classes uses the more direct form *beseech* + *that you will do something*.

(69) *J beseke 3ow y' ze will vochesafe to make* (L0329, middle-class woman)

Moreover, there are manifestations of other types of directives without performative verbs in the material (see Figures 3 and 4, p. 87). Hearer-based conditional constructions present the request in a conditional clause (Kohnen 2008b: 300) and are less straightforward manifestations of directives – indirectness - which could be today considered polite requests using a negative politeness strategy. However, they do not seem to be frequent in this type of letters, which could be the result of the overrepresentation of the nobility compared to other social classes. Nevertheless, there is one instance of a conditional construction in a letter from a nobleman (70) and two from a priest (62, 71).

(70) *if it likid you and your'brethryn to grante me . þe next avoidance of þe seid . kirke . J wolde he ad it* (D0293, nobleman)

(71) *if it like 3our gudnes to prenste* (L0380, priest)

Finally, in example (72) from the knight Robert Babthorpe, there are no performatives or conditional constructions. It seems that Babthorpe's uses a direct construction, which still focuses on the sender's wants, rather than using negative politeness strategies, such as conditionals or questions.

(72) *That 3e wole vouche-saf for my prayer at this tyme to graunt me the next avoidaunce* 'that you would be so kind to grant my present request and grant me the next vacancy' (D0272, gentry)

To sum up, most of the requests are explicitly formulated with the use of the performatives *pray* and *beseech*. The politeness strategies may be summarized as follows: the nobility mitigates the FTA of direct requests with modifiers as *heartily*, while other classes use less direct requests also modified in the same way as the nobility. The nobility seems to prefer the

direct construction *pray you that you will/would do something*, while the other classes use *besech you to do something*. This implies a deliberate use of the performative *pray* and *besech* in relation to the functionality of the letter and the social class of the sender. Even though there are some examples of conditional constructions and hints, these are too scanty to generalize from.

6.4.2. Commissives and Expressions of trust

This subsection will discuss the instances of constructions formed by ‘promises of future help’ and ‘expressions of trust’. By ‘expression of trust’, this paper refers to direct and explicit utterances in which the sender informs the addressee of their confidence in the addressee and, as a result, in the completion of their request. They can appear on their own (73-75), usually by men below the peerage, or in conjunction with a ‘promise of returning the favour’, most frequently by noblemen. The promises made in the material do not include any form of performative commissives, such as *promise* or *swear*. Rather, they are usually of a formulaic character, using modal verbs – usually *may* or *shall* –, and refer to the request. They seem to have a supporting character towards the request, in most cases, as a self-acknowledgement of being able to return the favour (77-86). As such, these promises are restricted to the nobility who had the means of doing this. There is, however, one exception (80) in which a knight uses this combination of expression of trust + commissive (see p. 58).

Examples (73-75) show instances of ‘expressions of trust’ without any form of promise. These could be seen as positive politeness strategies aiming to praise the addressee, thus maintaining his positive face. Interestingly, these examples come from classes below the nobility.

(73) *as my gret trust is ye wol be* (D0268, gentleman)

(74) *but fully trust in your lordschip* (D4464, priest)

(75) *as my grette trist in yow* (L1126, middle-class man)

Example (76) shows a combination of a command (directive speech act) and an ‘expression of trust’ from Alice, Countess of Salisbury. As a command, this is a rather direct directive speech act, constituting a FTA against the addressee’s negative face:

(76) *And this ye wolle doo / as oure gode trust is in yow* (D0291, noblewoman)

Examples (77-81) show the double coercive force of the formula ‘expression of trust + promise of future favours’, which could be considered FTA against the negative face of the addressees as they further deprive them of their freedom from imposition:

(77) *as my full trust is in yow And as ye will that **j .do thing for yow** in case semblable a-nother tyme* (D0285, nobleman)

(78) *as my gret trust is . in you And . **J . shal do as mich for you** if it like you desir it in tyme coming* (D0293, nobleman)

(79) *als oure trist is in 3ou [...] als **we may be halden to 3ou** in tyme to come* (D0296, nobleman)

(80) *as J trist vppon 3ou and as **J may do 3ou . seruice** in tyme coming* (D0272, gentleman)

(81) *as my full trust is in' yow. And as **J may do thing that for yow in' tyme comunge** that myght be to your plesire* (D0286, noblewoman)

Promises are, per definition, FTAs against the speaker's negative face as he or she commits him- or herself to a future action. However, here, it could be argued that the social and political power these magnates had was of such magnitude that they might not have been troubled by the promise. In fact, as many sender choose the modal *may*, which still had a sense of possibility (Horobin and Smith 2002: 98), these commissives seem to be mere reminders of the influence the nobility had. Examples (79-81) might seem to imply this sense of possible future help rather than a strong promise. The highlighted phrases are the promises made by modals (usually *may* and *shall*).

Examples (82-86) represent the occurrences in which noblewomen commit themselves to future social or political favours to the prior of Durham:

(82) *as **J may do thing for yow** that myght be to your plesire in' case semblable a-noper tyme* (D0290, noblewoman)

(83) *like **J may do for yow** ony þing in tyme Comyng in case like or in ony othir wiche **trewly J wil do withe alle my hert*** (D0288, noblewoman)

(84) *as euer **y may do tynge thay may please you*** (D0292, noblewoman; my highlighting)

(85) *as my said lord my hoseband and J may haue cause to fulfille any off your' desires herafftur* (D0292, noblewoman)

(86) *J sall do as much for' . 3ou* (D0314, noblewoman)

As it is the case of those by noblemen, they do not contain any performatives either, but only modals - *may*, *will* and *shall*- and act as supportive moves to reinforce the request.

Considering that the modal verbs *wol* (will) and *schal* (shall) still kept the significance they had in Old English for volition and obligation respectively (Horobin and Smith 2002: 97), it could be argued that examples (83) and (86) represent stronger promises than the rest, representing FTAs against the negative face of the addressee.

Example (87) is particularly interesting as it represents a threat:

(87) *as þei wolde gyfe me cause to do any thyng þat may ligge in my power for her wele or ease* (D0295, nobleman)

Another example of a threat is found in letter D0288 from Elizabeth, Lady Grey. She states two possible outcomes: first, if her request is fulfilled (88), and then, if it is not (89). In both cases, she modifies the speech act with the adverb *trewly*, conveying sincerity and possibly strengthening the illocutionary act. Even though these are mild threats or warnings, they represent a FTA against the prior's negative and positive face: they aim to reduce his freedom of choice, and they do not seem to demonstrate closeness towards the prior:

(88) *trewly J wil be gode and tendur lady vnto þat saide place / And sture and pray alle o þur þat wolle do for me in þe same wise wt-owten ow any feintise* (D0288)

'I will truly be an extra good and caring lady for that place, and also direct and pray all others to do similarly for me'

(89) *trewy J wille not do so moche as J wolde do for þe said dan John* (D0288)

'I will truly not do so much as I would do for the said Dom John'

As Figure 5 and 6 show, noblemen used this formula more frequently than noblewomen and any other social class. Commissives, either as promises or threats, seem to be reserved for

members of higher classes and are moves to support their request, representing FTA against the negative face of the addressee.

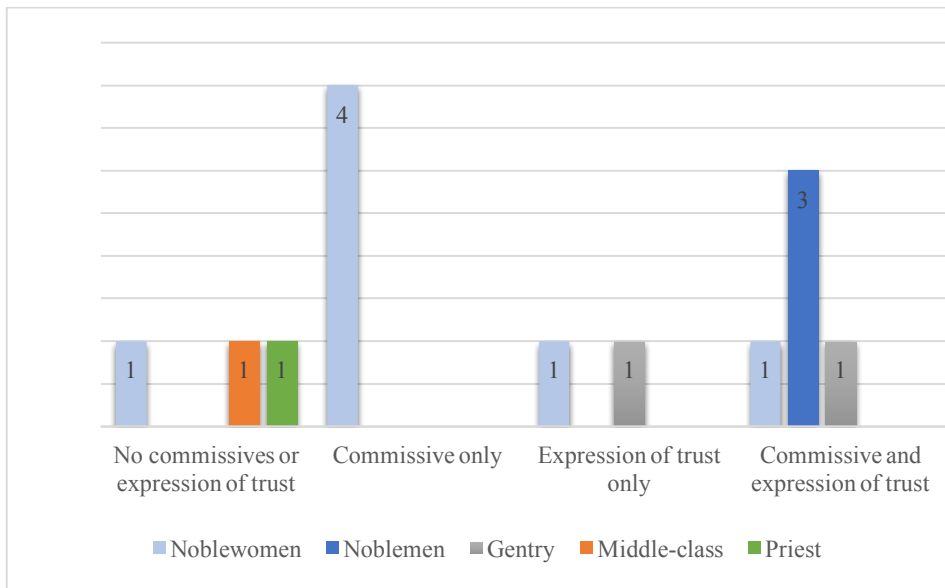


Figure 5: Distribution of commissives in letters to the prior of Durham requesting the appointment of a priest or similar.



Figure 6: Distribution of commissives in letters concerning monetary difficulties.

6.6. *Conclusio*: Valediction and signature

Valedictions, or bidding farewell with a pious formula, are common in most of the material. As Bergs (2004: 220-221) observes, any forms of a ‘well-wishing formula’ in requests are ‘rhetorical strategies’ of support, which are, for example, rare in commands. All letters from the nobility, men and women alike, include a pious valediction. In most letters with a ‘promise of returning the favour’ or an ‘expression of trust’, the valediction follows as a

relative clause beginning with *that*, such as *That knowes oure lorde God þe wche yow euer-more haue in his keping* ‘as our Lord, who has you ever more in his keeping, knows’ (D0290). This move connects and validates the ‘promise of returning the favour’ or the ‘expression of trust’ with a deity, usually *þe blessed trinite* or *the grace of god*. When a promise or expression of trust is not present, the valediction usually begins with *And*.

In contrast, not all letters from lower classes include a final greeting, as Figure 7 and 8 show. It is particularly interesting that none of the letters from priests includes this final prayer bidding farewell, nor does letter D0268 from sir Robert Danby who might have been the prior’s serjant-at-law at the moment of writing. Hence, none of the addressers in direct dependency of the prior offer a final greeting. The same could be noted on petition D0075 from a gentlewoman to the earl of Shrewsbury (see pp. 66-69), the syntax of which is so complex that it might resemble the pre-determined structure of formal petitions studied in Held (2010).

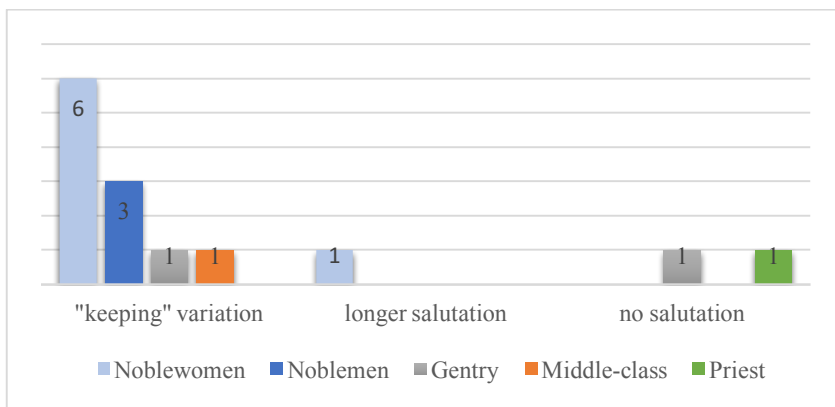


Figure 7: Distribution of valedictions in letters to the prior of Durham requesting the appointment of a priest or similar.

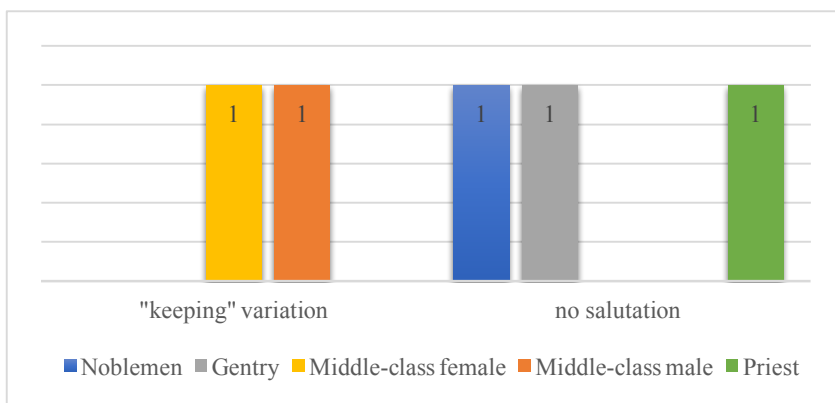


Figure 8: Distribution of valedictions in letters concerning monetary difficulties.

The feature that remains constant in all the letters is the attestation or ‘place-and-time formula’. There are, however, a few instances of positive politeness strategies towards the senders’ face (90-91), noting their lordship over the castle from which they write, and positive politeness strategy towards the addressee in (92), where the priest stresses the prior's jurisdiction.

(90) *writen' at my Castell of Connesburgh xxv . day of Januar'* (D0290; noblewoman)

(91) *writen at oure Castell of warkeworth the sext day of Marce* (D0296; nobleman)

(92) *writonn at your towne of Depham . forsaid the xxij^e . daye of Marche the Reynges of our Souerayne lorde kyng Edward þ^e iiiij^e . the v^e . yere* (D4464; priest to the prior of Canterbury)

In terms of signatures, there also seem to be some class-based differences. Except for letter D0292 from Elinor, Lady Percy, it is only in letters from lower classes where the possessive *your* appears: it is especially notable that it turns up in all three letters from middle-class senders. This is a further positive politeness strategy aimed to highlight the addressee's superiority and the addresser's humble submission, especially in (96-97) where the addressers may be considered to commit a FTA against their positive face.

(93) *your' awn' Alianor Lady Percy* (D0292, noblewoman)

(94) *your awen drapour thomas / kar of zork drapour* (D0267, middle-class man; underlined in original text)

(95) *Be your preste / Ric'Cliff* (L0380, priest)

(96) *your pouer / seruant Rob't / Danby* (D0268, gentry)

(97) *Be your pur' wedew & / bedewoman Janet / Thalyour of Bawmburgh* (L0329, middle-class woman)

(98) *By your seruant / Barnard of hornce* (L1126, middle-class man)

6.7. Summarizing remarks and categorization

Letters from the nobility use a combination of politeness strategies. They seem to include more positive politeness strategies than letters from other social classes and also tend to be more direct in focusing on the desires of the sender. Being more direct, however, they also

use various politeness strategies to mitigate the FTA of the request. At the same time, some of them may be considered commands, and they frequently include ‘reminders’ of the sender’s own social status. As far as structure goes, letters from the nobility generally obey the following pattern (letter D0293 from Thomas Percy is a good example of this pattern):

Form of address with *fader/sir in god* + reasons for writing beginning with *forasmuch as I am informed*) + a performative directive speech act (*wherefore I pray you that you would grant.*) + an ‘expression of trust’ (*as my great trust is in you*) + a ‘promise of returning the favour’ (*as I may do thing for you*) + valediction (usually connected to the promise)

Letters of petition and request from the lower social classes may include other patterns, usually including self-humbling constructions (FTAs against the sender’s positive face), and show a tendency towards indirectness in their request. It should be noted that this is a tendency only, as the vast majority of senders uses performatives but some include less direct constructions). Letter L0380 is a good example of their preferred pattern:

Form of address + reasons for writing (kindly asking the reader to continue reading) + a performative directive (*I beseech you to do something*) + valediction.

Letters of petition involving several people and concerning urgent matters that seem to be the responsibility of the addressee (as in letters D0075 and D4464), follow quite a different structure from the rest, and do not include a valediction or signature:

Costructio politica + beseeches (self-humbling construction) + long *narratio* + inverted *petitio* (*this beseeches your* + self-reference noun) + attestation of witnesses

It may be asked to what extent the MELD categories of “petitions” and “requests” (see p. 31) make sense regarding the selected letters here studied. In MELD, all documents are categorised according to their function, which is a constant textual aspect (Stenroos et al. 2020: 46). This means, then, that the ‘formal characteristics of the text (...) are not taken into account when determining the function of the text’ (Stenroos et al. 2020: 45). With regard to the categories “petition” and “request”, the distinction is mainly based on the social interrelationship: is the writer addressing a superior or an equal? While in a request the sender

asks for a specific course of action or favour from an approximate social equal, in a petition the addressee is an authority or social superior.

For the most part, this definition makes sense in the present material: it has been shown that the letters typically show different structures dependent on the social position of the sender and, accordingly, the relationship between the sender and the addressee (the latter being constant for most of the letters).

However, there are two letters that might complicate the categorisation according to the social interrelationship: letter L0380, from Robert Danby (see p. 53) and letter D0272, from Robert Babthorpe (see p. 65). Both men belonged to the gentry, and were quite powerful, but were also working for the prior at the time of writing. Therefore, answering the question of who was ‘socially superior’ to whom, the sender or addressee, becomes rather problematic. For example, as Babthorpes was the Prior’s steward, was he socially inferior to the Prior, even though he held various royal offices? Two questions arise from this matter: 1) how different must the social status be for us to classify a text as a petition?; and 2) can text patterns help us discern between these ambiguous texts?

Looking at the politeness strategies used in these letters in connection with the patterns suggested above may allow us to work out the ambiguities of social status. As both Danby and Babthorpe, are addressing the prior as their superior, these letters may be defined as petitions. However, the patterns observed in Babthorpe’s letter resemble those found in letters from the nobility. It shares specific features –for example, the use of a ‘promise of future help’ and an ‘expression of trust’- with letters from the nobility. Then, it makes sense that this specific letter is categorised as a “request” as it does not differ significantly from letters from the nobility to the prior of Durham. Also, the authoritative tone of the letter corresponds with the category “request”, as it is categorised now in MELD.

Regarding Danby’s letter, it follows the same pattern and use of deferential language as other letters from the middle-class and the clergy. Therefore, as Danby is referring to the prior as his superior, it is possible that this letter should be categorised as a petition instead.

This thesis has shown that, regarding form, two letters stand out: D0075 and D4464. As noted above (see pp. 81-82), they obey specific administrative rules for petitions which they do not share with the other letters: the address forms explicitly name the addressee (see examples 18-19, p. 80) and follow the *costructio politica* formula; the narrative describes a rather urgent and legitimate matter; the addressers provide witnesses who attest with their seals; and the letters do not conclude with a final valediction or signature.

This distinction has implications for the MELD categorisation. While MELD does not consider formal characteristics, in its categorisation of document types, it is clear that the formal differences here reflect an actual functional difference, related to the office or position of the addressee. The two “untypical” letters both carry an implication of responsibility within the addressee. In other words, these petitioners are asking the addressee to intervene because it is their responsibility to do so. While on the other letters, the favour seems to be of a personal nature, in these two, it involves a community of some kind. Consequently, the function of these letters differs from that of other letters requesting a personal favour. It is suggested, therefore, that the MELD team might consider the possibility of adding a third category for letters of request/petition: letters that present a legitimate communal request.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has examined nineteen letters of petition and request from the fifteenth century, with particular reference to two assumptions: 1) that patterns of polite discourse in letters of petition and request varied according to gender and social class, and 2) that certain formal characteristics might separate a petition from a request. While the first assumption has been discussed throughout chapter 6, the second was addressed in 6.7. Both assumptions turn out to be to some extent supported by the material, even though the corpus studied is not large enough to permit firm conclusions on its own.

Gender does not seem to make a particular difference when it comes to patterns of politeness. The only difference found in this study is that noblewomen frequently used the positively oriented adjective *well-beloved* when addressing the prior of Durham, which might indicate a positive politeness strategy as this adjective depicts social closeness. Except for one letter in which the sender seems to imply having a friendly or close relationship with the prior of Durham, noblemen do not address the prior with the adjective *well-beloved*. Other than that, the form of address, the greeting and the choice of performative directive do not vary from those by noblemen.

However, there seem to be manifestations of politeness strategies that varied according to social class. The nobility preferred the head noun *fader in God* and the greeting *I greet you well*. In terms of performative directives and the politeness strategies used in their requests, the nobility frequently combined the performative directive *pray* or one of its variations with

the construction *that you would do something*, which could be considered a further FTA against the negative face as it is a command. This aligns with Kohnen's (2008: 33-34) findings on directives in Old English, where social superiors would present their request in a rather direct way. However, the FTAs against the addressee's negative face were usually counteracted with positive politeness strategies, most frequently maintaining their own positive face in a promise of future help.

In terms of address forms and greetings, classes below the nobility frequently employed other head nouns than *fader in God*, mostly depending on their hierarchical interrelationship. For greeting forms, other classes preferred the more deferential *I command myself to you*. Moreover, the *narratio* often included face-saving strategies, such as conditional constructions as *if it pleases you*, acting as invitations to continue reading, focusing on the addressee rather than the sender.

Social class also turns out to play a role in terms of the speech acts used. Regarding directives, two aspects in particular have been of interest in the present material: directness and the choice of performatives. All senders used direct formulations in their request, which corresponds with previous findings in Middle English texts demonstrating that directness is culture-bound and may not imply any form of impoliteness, as we would expect today (Archer 2010: 384). Concerning performatives, all the senders, regardless of their social status or gender, seemed to prefer using the speech act verbs *pray* and *beseech*. The speech acts in these texts manifest two conclusions: while the nobility *prays* for personal favours, senders from other social classes *beseech* for favours. The difference between these two performative verbs implies that the level of urgency of the request and the need for a deferential attitude towards the addressee may commit the sender to choose between one of the performatives deliberately. As the function of the letter and the socio-hierarchical context may predetermine the choice of performatives, further research on the use of directives in local documents.

Concerning commissives, 'promises of future help' are restricted to the nobility who clearly had the means to do so. They seem to mostly function as leverage or as a coercive force to make their desire come true more than being actual promises. Nevertheless, 'promises of future help' could be considered to operate a double positive politeness facework. First, they support the addressee's positive face as they claim a common ground between the nobility and the prior himself. Secondly, as the senders confirm their social and political influence, a 'promise of future help' becomes a positive politeness strategy towards their own positive face.

The second assumption was that there are certain formal characteristics differentiating requests from petitions. In terms of the subcategory “petitions”, this study has shown that there are two distinct types: those that petition for the intervention in a personal matter, such as letters L0329 and L1126, and those that petition for a solution in a rather collective matter, such as D0075 and D4464. Letters categorised as “petition” requesting the appointment of a priest or similar do not differ greatly from those petitioning for a personal matter. However, in letters petitioning for the intervention in a communal conflict, the office the addressee holds seems to be responsible for bringing a solution to the matter. This is evident in the last sections of these letters, as different people confirm their involvement in the composition of the letter, implying that the petition is for the well-being of a group. Furthermore, the formal characteristics of these two letters vary greatly from those petitioning for personal favours: the *salutatio*, *narratio*, and *petitio* follow inverted constructions and offer detailed descriptions of the subject matter, and they lack a valediction. As this study set to reassess the subcategories of ‘petitions’ and ‘requests’, it modestly suggests MELD consider these aspects and a possible third category concerning “petitions of public matter”.

Moreover, this thesis has also problematised the categorisation of two particular letters of request: letters D0268 and D0272. These two letters were written by gentlemen who were working for the Prior of Durham at the time of writing. However, the patterns of polite discourse used in these letters reveal differences: while D0272 resembles those from the nobility, D0268 follows similar patterns to those from the middle-class and clergy. This comparison has raised some questions regarding the definition of the relative social status: how different must the social status be to classify a text as a petition; and can pragmatical aspects allow us to classify a text? A possible answer to these question is looking at the politeness strategies used in these letters together with the patterns suggested in 6.7. (pp. 98-99).

The present thesis has contributed to the research concerning Late Medieval correspondence, especially that of historical pragmatics. As this study has shown, studying patterns of polite speech allows us to explore the various power relations of the time which might interest, historians and linguists alike. Similarly, as this study includes many letters issued by women in the Late Middle Ages, it might be relevant for studies exploring questions of women’s literacy and authorship, of the different social practices women were concerned with, and the ways in which women managed to create a voice of their own.

Even though this thesis has produced some interesting results, it should be remembered that the nature and number of the selected material only allow for suggestive

results. This thesis has focused on differences between social classes and genders; however, applying the same methodology to other documents produced by members of the same social class or gender would yield interesting results. Still more interesting is studying the context and the extent to which men and women from the past use ‘expressions of trust’ and ‘promises of future help’ in their correspondence. There would certainly be scope for further research on politeness strategies in local documents, using a larger corpus and, if possible, a more equal distribution in terms of social class and gender.

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Appendix 1: Translations to Present-day English

The translations of the MELD transcriptions to Present-day English were carried out by the present writer to have a better understanding of the contents. The organisation of the texts follows the same order as the analysis in Chapter 5.

1. D0286: Letter of request from (Maud Clifford) the Countess of Cambridge to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:130*

Written at Turnham Hall, 23 January (1441?).

Worshipful fader in God I greet you well. And I heartily thank you for all the kindness that you have earlier done to me. And especially, that it pleased you, the last time I wrote to you about a vicarage in your Collage of Hemingbrough for a chaplain of mine, to grant me the next vacancy, as my servant, the bringer of that letter, reported me. Now lately, one of the vicars there, called sir John Hertte, is absent, and I suppose he will no longer remain there. Therefore, I pray you heartily that you would grant me, for my said chaplain sir William Lorymer, the bearer of this letter, the presentation of that said vicarage, as my full trust is in you and as I will be able to do things for you in the future that might please you, as our Lord knows, who may always have you in his safe keeping. Written at Turnham Hall, 23 January.

The Countess
of Cambridge

2. D0290: Letter of request from M. (Maud), Countess of Cambridge, to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:142

Written at Conisbrough, 25 January (1416-1446?)

Worshipful and my well-beloved father, in God I greet you well. Forasmuch as I am informed, there is a vacant vicarage within your College of Hemingbrough. I have a priest whom I desire to be appointed there. I understand that he is a well-governed man and a good choir-man. Therefore, I pray you with all my heart that you will grant him the said vicarage for the sake of my request, as I may do anything to please you in another similar time. Please, give credence to my well-beloved servant Rawlyn Axe, the bearer of this letter, for what he shall disclose to you on my behalf in this matter. Beseeching the Trinity to have you in his keeping. Written at my Castle of Conisbrough, 25 January

York

The Countess

M of Cambridge

3. D0287: Letter of request from Elizabeth, Countess of Westmorland, to the prior of Durham.

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:133

Written at Hart, 28 May 1436.

Right reverent fader in God I greet you heartily. I thank you with all my heart for your kindness which you have always shown to me and my children - may God in his mercy give them the grace to remember it in times to come. And furthermore, may it please you to understand that my right worshipful lord and husband has written to you, on the advice of both his brothers Sir John and Sir Thomas, for my very greatly beloved and trusted servant William Hoton, so that he might be appointed steward of your lands in this country, as I hear said that Langton may no longer occupy this post. I believe he will be able serve you as well as any other man of his degree in the country, and, he will be the more able to do so as he will have my help and support while I live. As he is my said worshipful lord steward, he will always be able to cause more accord and peace between his tenants and yours, in case there will be any troubles, which God forbid. I beseech you and pray you that my simple request and prayer will help him towards this appointment, and that you will send me your intention in this matter with my trustworthy esquire William Garthe, and that you will give credence to him in this matter. And may God in his mercy give you a long life with lasting good health.

Written at Hart, on Whit Monday.

Elizabeth Countess
of Westmorland

4. D0288: Letter of request from Elizabeth Lady Grey to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:135

Written at Stamford, 8 April (1419-1448?).

Right trusty and with all my heart right entirely well-beloved in God, I greet you oftentimes well with all my heart. And forasmuch as I am informed that, because of diverse sickness and other causes that by the sufferance of our Creator have affected the prior of Newstead Saint Leonard, near Stamford, he has, firstly to please best our said Creator, and secondly, for his own benefit and welfare, intended-to resign in good will from this priory in favour of Dom John, his brother who now is there, if you, being you the sovereign and father in God, were to agree to admit and accept him there. Towards which same Dom John, myself, together with our lords, ladies, and gentry in these areas, have good love and affection both because of his good reputation and his wise behaviour, as well as for the bearing and governance of the said place. Because of this I pray you tenderly, for the sake of me, that you will consent to the resignation of the said place to the said Dom John, to become its prior. If you do so, I will truly be an extra good and caring lady for that place, and also direct and pray all others to do similarly for my sake. And if you appoint anybody else, I will truly not do so much as I would do for the said Dom John. I ask you to consider this matter just as I may do anything for you in the future, which I truly will do with all my heart, as our Lord knows, who may have you in his keeping forevermore.

Written at Stanford, 8 April.

Elizabeth lady Grey

5. D029: Letter of request from Alice, Countess of Salisbury, Lady Montehermer, to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:143

Written at Middleham, 4 May (1434).

Reverent sir in God and right well-beloved, we greet you oftentimes well. And forasmuch as we are informed that the church of Blyborough in the archdeaconry of Stowe, in the dioceses of Lincoln and in your collation, has a vacancy after the death of sir Robert Conyng, the last parson of the same church, we pray you heartily for our sake, that you take kind consideration in our recommendation of our well-beloved chaplain sir Hugh Noon, who is of virtuous disposition and able to support the same benefice, not over the value of 12 marcs yearly, as it is agreed on, if you will do this, as we trust you well. May the blessed Trinity have you in his holy protection.

Written at Middleham, 4 May.

Alice, Countess of Salisbury

Lady of Monthermer

6. D029: Letter of request from Eleanor, Lady Percy, to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:145

Written at Dagenham, 31 May (1434-1446).

Right worshipful sir in God I recommend myself to you. And forasmuch as my lord my husband and I have no benefice in our gift as yet, we heartily desire the promotion of our well-beloved clerk, John Wilton, master and teacher of my brothers. As I may ever do anything to please you, I pray you that you would grant my said clerk the next vacancy in your college of Howden Minister, and that you will effectively carry out this my first wish and earnest request, as my said lord my husband and I may have the opportunity to fulfil any of your wishes in the future. Let me know of your decision in this matter through the bearer of this. And may the blessed Trinity keep you in gracious governance. Written at Dagenham in Essex, the last day of May.

Your own Alianor, Lady Percy.

7. D0314: Letter of request from Margaret (Neville), Countess of Westmorland, to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Miscellaneous Charter 1078

Written at Braucepath, 2 November (nd, 15th century)

Right reverent sir in God, I greet you well, desiring to hear evermore of your prosperity and good health, which I beseech almighty God to grant you to his pleasure and to your heart's desire. Praying you very earnestly that you will give me the next avoidance of a church that is in your gift, for this is my first request to you. And if it pleases you at this time to grant me this, I will do as much for you, with the grace of God who I constantly pray to have you in his gracious governance and keeping.

Written at Brancepeth, 27 November.

Margaret, Countess
of Westmorland

8. D0267: Letter of request from Thomas Kar of York, a draper, to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:15

Written at York, 11 August 1437.

Right dear, reverent and rightful lord, I command myself to you and your worthy lordship. If it pleases you to know, I have been made to understand that the parson of Holteby, who is your avancee, has diverse sickness and perpetual infirmities and plans to resign from your church of Holteby in favour to sir John Holgate, if he gets your gracious lordship's permission. Sir John Holgate is a good priest, innocent and honest, son of my near neighbour. Therefore, I pray you especially for your good lordship in this matter, for I fully believe that this sir John will be a true priest and will pray for you specially, and that, by the grace of God, you will like his good demeanour and be his worthy and gracious lord. I pray to our Lord God almighty to have you ever more in his keeping/protection, both body and soul to his most delight. Written at York, Sunday night after the feast of St Lawrence

Your own draper Thomas
Kar of York draper

9. L0380: Letter of request from Richard Cliff to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:18

Written at Hemingbrough, 21 November 1432.

Reverent and worshipful sovereign, I commend myself to your sovereignty as a priest of yours, letting you know (*lit.* making open to your ear) that a fellow of ours, sir John Rocklif, the fifth vicar, has left his vicarage and has been inducted into a perpetual chantry at Hull. If it pleased your goodness to present to that (vicarage) a capable and knowledgeable man, there is a son of a thrifty man who is a tenant of yours, of that parish. He is a qualified parson who could be in any college in England and a good man of living according to those who know him, as we hear say, as well as competent in reading and in singing plainsong, and he can also sing treble to a faburden, as I have heard the best qualified men of our church say about him. And that they would be glad if he came. And he is at Lichfield at their college, in habit, ministering the service of God, but his friends/kinsmen also he himself wish greatly to be near together in order to support each other. And therefore, if may prayer may please your worthy lordship, I would beseech your goodness to appoint a competent man of the parish before any other because that would please them and make them support the church, thinking that their sons might, if they were competent men, be appointed in the future. Written at Hemingbrough, on the next day after the feast of St. Edmund the king last passed.

By your priest,
Richard Cliff

10. D0268: Letter of petition from Robert Danby to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:16

Written at Yafford, 10 January between (1440-1455).

Right worshipful and reverent, and my very good and worthy master. As humbly as I can, I commend myself to you beseeching you as heartily as I can to be a good lord to Thomas Rudd, son of Allerton, to be one of the fellows in your College at Oxford when the next vacancy arises there of any of Allertonshire. He is fully virtuous and well-learnt in grammar. My master sir James Strangeways has previously written to you about him, and as the poor and simple person that I am, I have also very heartily prayed you for him many times before. I trust God that you will vouchsafe to be his good lord there and I beseech you with all my heart to be so, as I trust greatly that you will. Written at Yafforth, 10 January

Your poor
servant, Robert
Danby

11. D0272: Letter of request from Robert Babthorpe to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:29

Written at Babthorpe, 17 January 1463.

Right worshipful sir and father, I recommend myself to you as heartily as I can, praying that you be so gracious as to remember how I serve as your officer and steward at Hemingbrough and at Hunsley and how I have laboured for you in order to retain your rights and the franchise of St Cuthbert, and I have repossessed stolen goods for you there, even though you had none before, and with great labour and cost turned away the King's officers from there, so that they would have no interest in it, which will be great advantage to you and to your house and to the franchise of St. Cuthbert in time to come, together with all other profits and services that I have done for you at Hunsley and at other places also, and will still do as far as is in power that you would be so kind to grant my present request and grant me the next vacancy in the church of Eastrington for a priest of mine, who I will vouch for because he is an honest and capable priest. And that you will be so kind as to give faith and credence to my well-beloved servant William Laton, the bearer of this letter, about this and other matters of which he will speak and inform you by mouth, and that you will send me back an answer by the bearer of this letter, as I trust you and as I may do you service in the future. No more for now, but may the blessed Trinity have you in his keeping. Written at Babthorp, 17 January,

By sir Robert Babthorp, knight

12. D0285: Letter of request from Thomas Lord Clifford and of Westmorland to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:130

Written at Turnham Hall, 23 January (1441?).

Worshipful father in God ~~I greet you well~~ I command myself to you,³⁶ thanking you very earnestly for all the kindness you have previously done to me, praying you for a good continuation.

And as my worshipful lady of Cambridge, my aunt, has written to you before this time, and has also done so now, for the presentation of a vicarage in your College of Hemingbrough for her chaplain, Sir William Lorimer, and as there is now one Sir John Hertte who has left that place and, as I am informed, will no longer return for diverse reasons, I, therefore, pray you that you will grant my lady's chaplain the said vicarage at this time, as I fully trust you and as you may wish that I will help you in a similar matter another time. This knows our Lord, who may have you in his keeping. Written at Turnham Hall, 23 January.

Thomas Lord Clifford
and of Westmorland

³⁶ Corrected from "I greet you well".

13. D0293: Letter of request from T. (Thomas) Percy to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:150

Written at Helay, 4 November (1440-1449).

Right worshipful and reverent father in God, I command myself to you. Forasmuch as I am informed that the church of Normanton upon Soar in Nottinghamshire, where you and your convent are patrons, has fallen, or soon will fall vacant. This church is of little value.

Nevertheless, there is with me a priest born in those parts, if it would please you and your brethren to grant me the next vacancy of the said church, I would like him to have it.

Wherefore I pray you and your convent earnestly, since the church is of little value and also the first one I have ever asked you for,-that you may grant me the said vacancy. And with regard to this matter, I pray you to send me a written answer of your decision with my servant, the bearer of this letter, as my great trust is in you. And I will do as much for you in the future if it will please you to ask for it in the future, by the grace of God who may have you in his keeping, body and soul.

T. Percy

14. D0296: Letter of request from Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland and lord of the honour of Cockermouth, to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:159

Written at Warkworth Castle, 6 March (1424?).

Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland and
lord of the honour of Cockermouth

Right dear and, with all our hearts, entirely well-beloved sir in God, we greet you well. And for as much as we have written to you before about giving a licence to our well-beloved priest, sir John of Warmouth, to exchange benefices with the vicar of Billingham, about which, as we are informed, nothing has been done or granted because of our writing, we nevertheless pray you and counsel you to give him permission and licence to exchange benefices with the said vicar, and to enjoy it peacefully, because his request is nothing but lawful and reasonable. For we inform you that if he sent a request for a licence to the Roman Curia, he may get it at the first word, which we would not wish to be done as you are the real patron thereof, unless you would like to grant it to him with your good will and leave.

Regarding his person, he will be of good conduct towards you and all your tenants and parishioners. And if you think the contrary, we and other knights and squires will be bound to you to make sure that he behaves well towards you and all your tenants and parishioners.

Therefore, we pray you kindly to take this matter to heart and do as our trust is in you. And if so be that either Robert Jackson or any other has complained to you or intend to complain against the aforesaid sir John, that this request and letter from us will not be opposed but furthered and carried out, as we may remain loyal to you in time to come. Written at our castle of Warkworth, 6 of March

15. D0075: Letter of petition from Katherine Bonell of Salop to the Earl of Shrewsbury, Lord Treasurer

Shrewsbury, Shropshire Archives: 1831/1/1/1.

Written at Salop, 3 January 1458-1459.

To the right high and gracious lord
Earl of Salop and treasurer of England
To your gracious lordship,

Shows your poor oratrice Katherine Bonell of Salop, that where earlier it pleased your gracious lordship, concerning diverse injuries done to your said oratrice by John Colle of Salop, esquire, to ordain and award by advice of high discretion in order to put an end to such wrongful vexations, that the said John should be bound by his obligation of 100 pounds, that after the time of the award, judgement and decree of your excellent lordship, he should in no way attempt or presume to cause your said oratrice any more wrong or unfairness by feigning any unjust title, as he has done before. Notwithstanding this, your gracious lord the said John, apparently in contempt of the award, judgement and decree that your most gracious lordship has ordained, now lately renewing his old malice, has taken, received and stopped payments from diverse tenants holding land of your said oratrice, for 5 pounds 10 shillings 11 pence. This can be broken up as follows: from John Awyche, shoemaker, 48 shillings 7 pence. From John Walker, baker, 48 shillings 4 pence. From Symkyn Warynge 7 shillings. And from William Gwyllym 7 shillings. Thus, gracious lord, the said John Colle, breaking your award, does not cease to vex and trouble your said oratrice with wrongful vexations and unbearable hurts to her final undoing and destruction, unless it will please your most gracious lordship after your high discretion to find due remedy. This is what your said poor oratrice meekly beseeches, for the reverence of God and in way of charity.

And we, John Awych, John Walker Symkyn and William, the tenants above specified, witness and record in total honesty that the sum of 5 pounds 10 shillings 11 pence above mentioned has been paid by us to the said John Colle by the request of the said Katherine and also certify to your high and gracious lordship, as is requires by conscience, that this is credible, faithful and the very truth. In witness of this we have put to our seals at Salop Shrewsbury, the Wednesday next after the Circumcision of our Lord in the 37th year of the reign of our king and sovereign lord Henry VI

16. D0295: Letter of request from Lord Scrope to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:154

Written at York, 4 August (1440-1443).

Worshipful Sir in God, my right trusty and well-beloved friend, I greet you heartily well, and for as much as my right trusty chaplain, Sir Alan Buckingham, is appointed to the parish church of St Mary in Stamford and the prior of St Leonard of the same town, which is a cell of your house, claims to have a yearly pension from the same church of five marks. As I am informed, neither the church nor the house of St. Leonard have been involved in such a practice before. Therefore, I would pray you, and desire of you, as truth and good conscience would, that you would write to the Prior of your said cell telling him to cease any further demanding or vexing of my said chaplain about the said pension, unless he has a clear right and title therein by known and proven possession. And if that should be the case, then I would ask for my said chaplain that you would write to them that they would behave in such a friendly manner towards him, for the sake of my prayer about the ceasing of that pension, considering the small size of the benefice, as they would like to give me reason to do anything that may lie within my power for their well-being or ease. Written at York, 4 August

The Lord Scrope

17. D4464: Letter of petition from sir John Bowde to the prior of Canterbury

Lincoln, Lincolnshire Archives: Cragg/4/8

Written at Deopham, 22 March 1465.

To the right reverent and worshipful father in God
my lord and patron, the prior of Canterbury

With all lowliness beseeches your poor priest and chaplain, sir John Bowde, vicar of your church of Deopham in the county of Norfolk, beseeching your lordship by way of pity and conscience to consider and alleviate my poverty, as I carry out the cure and charge I have in your above said poor parish. My benefice is so poorly endowed and decayed that I may not live to keep my mandate according to the law - which I report mainly to God and to my parishioners, your true tenants - without your gracious favour and aid to relieve and augment my poor livelihood. For in truth, very necessity causes me to complain asking your great wisdom to consider two things. The first one is the great poverty that now reigns among the common people, for they may not live to pay their dues. The second one is the cost of repairing my poor household and keeping up hospitality, which may not be denied without great payments to the Bishop's officers. Considering your great goodness, I must either make my cure void and leave your tenants unserved, or seek the remedy of the law, which by no means I intend to do. But I have great trust in your lordship, as conscience and charity require, that there will be some augmentation from you to relieve my poor living, which will give me great peace in body and soul, and I will pray for you and all of yours as I am bound to do. And so that your lordship will the more favourably attend to this simple petition, all your true tenants and my parishioners have each by name added their seals to the present writing. That is to say: Thomas Bayle your farmer, Thomas Robard, John Walter, John Seman, Will Seman, Will Davy, Will Roger, Steve Cryour, Richard Colyour, John Surnay, Will Thomson, Thomas Stacy, Richard Humphrey, John Browun young, John Browun senior, John Suker, Robard Davy, Thomas Marge, Thomas Davy, John Bedwell, Will Estan, John Nebour and Nick Cuttes.

Written at your aforesaid town of Deopham, 22 March the fifth year of the reign of our sovereign lord King Edward IV.

18. L0329: Letter of petition from Janet Thalzour of Bamburgh to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:13

Written at Bamburgh, 18 July (1436-1439).

Right reverent and worshipful father in God, I recommend myself to you with all my heart, as lowly as I can or may: beseeching you to have me excused for my feeble writing to your worthy presence. And if you would like to know, the cause of my writing is this: that my husband John Thalzour bequeathed for a glazed window in Farne 3 shillings and 4 dimes. At that time, Dan Thomas Morby was the master of Farne, and his fellow Dan Richard Fowyn received this money, and the master knew this, as well as Dan Ric Kellowe, because of which money I am now wrongfully vexed by you, first with a citation and since then with a suspension. As it is well-known, I am sick and can neither ride nor walk, which is why I beseech you that you will agree to make the master of Farne your attorney, so that the case may be determined in Bamburgh and that the truth may be known there. No more at this time but that I beseech the Holy Trinity to have you in his keeping. Written at Bamburgh, 17 July.

Be your poor widow and
beadswoman Janet
Thalzour of Bamburgh

19. L1126: Letter of petition from Barnard of Hornsea to the mayor of Hedon

Beverly, Humberside County RO DDHE 20, fol. 271r]

Written at Hornsea, on a Saturday (nd, 15th century).

Worshipful sir, I recommend myself to you with all my heart. Desiring your welfare, may almighty God increase it to your [...] ease and worship

This is to let you know that last Tuesday I sent my wife to Hedon to speak with you, but you were in Hull. Nevertheless, she spoke with your wife and she gave her good comfort.

Therefore, I beseech you for your good mastership and good support, as my great trust is in you. I understand that there is a new man coming to dwell to Hedon, a tinkler who owes me money for diverse things. He dwelled a year in a house of mine and owes me the rent of 4 shillings. Also, 3 pence for a pair of shoes and clothing. Also, 3 pence for one pair to his wife. Also, 8 pence for food and drink to him, his wife and children. Also, his wife used so much yarn that comes up to 6 pence, apart from many other things that I will not mention now. The total sum is 5 shillings, 9 pence. Beseeching your worshipful sir to be my good master and support that I may have this raised and to arbitrate [...] in the matter [...] the cost as you think it is best and I will make [...] good. May God, keep you in good health and [...].

Written at Hornsea, last Saturday.

[Latin] By your servant

Bernard of Hornsea.

Appendix 2: Transcriptions from MELD

This section includes the transcriptions from MELD 2017.1. They are reproduced from the readable text version, retaining the MELD headings. The organisation of the texts follows the same order as the analysis in Chapter 5.

1. D0286: Letter of request from (Maud Clifford) the Countess of Cambridge to the prior of Durham

County: Yorkshire East Riding

Code: D0286

Reference: Durham University Library, Dean & Chapter Muniments, Locellus 25.130

Function: Request

Worshipfull Fadre in godde J grete yow welle / And J thonke yow hertely of all kyndenes that ye haue done' to me before this tyme / And in especiall that yow lyked þe las tyme' that j wrote vnto yow for a Chapeleyn' of myne'. for a vicary' of your Colage of hemmyngburgh . to graunte me the next avoidance . as my seruante þe brynger of that *letre* reported me / Now late ther is one of the vicars there / called ser John' hertte absent . and as j suppose will no more abide there / wherfore j pray yow hertely that ye wold graunte me . to my said Chapeleyn' ser willam lorymer the Berer of this *letre* / the presentacion' of the said vicarye as my full trust is in' yow / And as J may do thing that for yow in' tyme comynge that myght be to your plesire / That knoweth our lorde who haue yow allwais in' his saue keynge / writen' at Turnam hall xxiiij day' of Ja nuer .
The Countesse
of Cambrige

2. D0290: Letter of request from M. (Maud), Countess of Cambridge, to the prior of Durham

County: Yorkshire West Riding

Code: D0290

Reference: Durham University Library, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.142

Function: Request

Worshipfull and my well-beloued fadre in god J grete yow well and forasmuch as J
am enfourmed that ther is a Vicary voide w^tin' your
Collage of hemmyngburgh . / and J haue a preste which that J desire were there-in' . / and J
. vndertake he is a well-gouerned man . /
and a gode quere-man wherefore J pray yow w^t all myn' hert / that ye
will graunte . hym' the seid vicary at the cause of my Prayer
as J may do thing for yow that myght be to *your* plesire in' case semblable a-noþer tyme / and
that ye will yife credence to my well-
beloued *seruaunt* Rawlyn' Axe . the berer of this . what he sall disclose yow on
my behalfe in' . this mater / Beseching the Trinite haue
yow in' his keypyng writen' at my Castell of Connesburgh **xxv . day** of Januar'
[nota]york
[nota] [signed: The Countesse
M of caumbrig]

3. D0287: Letter of request from Elizabeth, Countess of Westmorland, to the prior of Durham.

County: Hampshire

Code: D0287

Reference: Durham UL D&C Locellus 25.133

Function: Request

Right Reuerent fader yn gode J gret 3owe Hartly . well And J thank 3owe w^t all my . hart
of 3owre kyndnes the
wiche 3e haue don at all tymes to me & my Children / gode of his *mercy* giff *ham grace*
to thenk appon it in tyme
to com' and forthermor lik it 3owe to vnderstand that my Right worshipfull lord
& husbond hathe wretyn to 3owe
by y^e avice of bothe his brether *sir* John & *sir* Thomas for my
full hartly beloued & trustid *seruant* willm Hoton
so þ^t he myght be *preferrid* to be the Steward of 3owre land in this Contre sethe it is so þ^t J
here sey . þ^t
langton may no longer occupye and J suppose he be als abill to do 3owe *seruis*' as ony other
man in the Contre
of his degre / and y^e more abill shall be for my . help & support' while J liffe / and for
so mucche as he is
my said worshipfull lord Steward he shall Cause
more goode acord & peis betwen his tenandis ~ & 3owres
at all tymes if ony *trauers* fall þ^t gode deffend / J besek 3owe & pray 3owe he may . be
y^e nerer for þ^s my Symple
request & prayer and at 3^e will send me 3owre intent
in þ^s *mater* w^t my herty trustid esquyer willm
Garthe and at 3^e will giffe credens' to *him* in thes *mater* / And god for his
mercy giffe 3owe lang liffe w^t good
helthe longe to indure / wretyn at Harte on whisson monday .
[nota] [signed: Elizabeth Countess
of westmerland]

4. D0288: Letter of request from Elizabeth Lady Grey to the prior of Durham

County: Lincolnshire

Code: D0288

Reference: Durham University Library Dean & Chapter Locellus 25.135

Function: Request

Ryght trusty and withe alle my hert Right enterely welbeloued in god J grete you
oft tymes wele withe hooll hert / And forasmoche as J
am enformed þ^t for diuerse sikenesse & othur
causes wiche þat ben fallen
by þe suffrance of oure creatur vnto þe priour of Newsted ^{Senct leonerd} beside Stanford furst for
þe most pleisance vnto oure saide creatur secondly
proufit and welfar of his owne *persone* /
withe gode wille is pourposed to Resigne þe saide priorye vnto dan John his Broþer þ^t now
is þere yf so were þ^t it liked vnto
you as ye ^{bt} ben souerein and fadur os in god to amyttre and accept him þerto / þe wiche dan
John trewly boþe J withe othur lordes ladys and gentils in these *parties*
haue gode love and effeccion' vnto / boþe for his fame gode Name and
wise *gouernance* / als wele as for þe sustentacion' and *gouernance* of þe saide place /
wherfor J pray yow tendurly at þe reuerence of me þis tyme ye wille graunte þe Resignacion'
of þe saide place vnto þe saide dan John it to Reyoise as *priour*
And yf ye so do trewly J wil be gode and tendur lady vnto þat saide place / And sture and
pray alle oþur þat wolle ^{do} for me in þe same wise w^t-owten
ow any feintise And yf ye put any oþer þerin trewy J wille not do so moche as J wolde do
for þe said dan John / This *matere* J pray yow to tendre like J may
do for yow any þing in tyme Comyng in case like or
in any othir wiche trewly J wil do withe alle my hert / That knowes oure lorde God þe wiche
yow euer-more haue in his keping / wryten at Stanford þe viij day of Auerill
[signed: Elizabeth lady Grey]

5. D029: Letter of request from Alice, Countess of Salisbury, Lady Montehermer, to the prior of Durham

County: Yorkshire North Riding

Code: D0291

Reference: Durham University Library, Dean and Chapter Muniments, Locellus 25.143

Function: Letter

Reuerent *ser* in god / and Ri3te welbeloued / we grete yow oftymes wele / And for as moch as
we be enfourmed þ' þe chirch of
Bliburgh in þ archdeaconry of Stowe in þe diocice of lincolnn . & in *your* collaconn . is
fallen voide . bi þe deth of *ser* Robt Connyng
last *personn* of þe same ; we prai yow hertli for *our* sake /
to haue for tenderli Recomendid toward yow . *our* welbiloued
chopilain *ser* hugh Noonnn . of vertuous disposiconn & able
to passecuconn of þe same benefice . nat ouer þe valieu
of xij marc3 yereli as it is seide / And this ye wolle doo / as oure gode trust is in yow /
And þe blessid Trinite
haue yow in his holi proteccionn / writen at Middilham þe iiij dai of Maij
Aleis Countesse of salisbury
Ladi of Mounthehermer

6. D029: Letter of request from Eleanor, Lady Percy, to the prior of Durham

County: Essex

Code: D0292

Reference: Durham University Library Dean & Chapter Locellus 25.145

Function: Request

Ryght worshipful . *sir* in god y recomand me vnto you And for as moche as my Lord my .
hoseband and J . haue no benyfice in oure yiffit as yit And desir hertely the *promocionn*
off oure welbeloued clerke John Wilton' . maister and techer vnto my brederne . J *pray*
yowe . as euer y may do tynge thay may please you / þat ye wol *graunt* . vnto my . said
clerke þe next prebend avoydinge in youre collage off howden' . And this my first
desir and herty *prayer*e ye wol effectuosely . tak to ht and exequite / as my said lord my
hoseband and J . may haue cause to fulfille any off your' desires herafftur And
what ye wol do for me in this mater please hit you to signifye me by . the brynger her-
off . And þe blessed trinite kep you in gracieux gouernance writenn . at Dakenhams in
Essex' the Last day offe Maij
your' awn' Alianor Lady Percy

7. D0314: Letter of request from Margaret (Neville), Countess of Westmorland, to the prior of Durham

County: Durham

Code: D0314

Reference: Durham University Library Dean & Chapter Miscellaneous Charters 1078

Function: Request

Right reuerent *sir* in god J grete 3ou wele / desiryng' euermore to here of 3our prosperite & gude hele / the ~~~

which J besech allmyghty god *graunte* 3ou to his plesaunce & to 3our herts desire / Praying' 3ou right hertly þat 3e will gyfe me the next awoydaunce of a kyrke þat longeth to 3oure gyfte / for it is the first thyng' þat J desire of 3ou / And if 3ou like to *graunte* me this at this tyme : J sall do as much for' . 3ou with the grace of god whome J besech euermore haue 3ou in his gracyous *gouernance* & *kepyng'* / *writen'* at Brauncepath the xxvij day of Nouembr'

[signed: Margaret Countesse
of westmerland] ~~~

8. D0267: Letter of request from Thomas Kar of York, a draper, to the prior of Durham

DUL, Dean & Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV:15

County: York city

Code: D0267

Reference: Durham University Library D&C Locellus 25.15

Text: Request

Right der Reuerent and ay wrichifull lord J *commande* \wedge ^{me} vn-to 3ow &
to 3our worthy lordschip
& if it lyk 3ow to wyt it es *donn* me to vnderstand yat ye parson of holteby whilk
es 3our avauncee
for dyuers seknes & *perpetuall* infirmitez whilk yat he has es *purposed* to resigne vn-
to *sir* John
holgat ye kirk of holteby if he may get 3our *gracious* lordescip & 3our *leeffes* /
whilk *sir* John holgat
es a gud prest & *innocent* & a honest my neght neghbur son // whar-for J *pray* \wedge ^{3ow} specially
of
gud lordschip in yis *mater* / for J trow fully yat yis *sir* *Johnn* sall be a trew prest & a speciall
oratour for 3ow . & y^t be ye *grace* of god to lyk hys *gouernance* right weell 3e to
be hys worthy
& *gracious* lord . and J *pray* to our lord god allmyghty to haf 3ow in e euer-mor
in hys kepyng
bodh body & saull to his most plesaunce . wrytenn at 3ork ye sounnday neght after ye
fest of seynt lourance .
[signed: 3our awen *drapour* thomas
kar of 3ork *drapour*] .:

9. L0380: Letter of request from Richard Cliff to the prior of Durham

County: Letter

Code: L0380

Reference: Durham, Prior's Kitchen, Dean and Chapter Muniments: Locellus XXV.18

Function: Letter

Reuerente And wirschipfull suffirane J comaund' me
to *3our* suffiraunys als a *preste* of *3orus* Makang opyne to *3our* here þ' a felay of
ouris sir John Rocliff þ^e fite vicare has forsakyne his vicary and is institutus and inducte in
A *perpetuall* chauntery at hull And if it
like *3our* gudnes to *presente* þer-to a-n' abill mane
of parsonne and connyng þer is þar a tenand' sonn of *3ours* and
a thirfty mans sonn of þe pariche
þe qwilk is of parsonn a-n' abill mane to be in any college in Jnglande and
of lifyng a gude mane calide of þame þ' he is couersande
w'-all als we her say and of counyng a sufficiante in redyng and sigyng of plane sange and
to syng a tribull til faburdun
als J haue harde þe abilaste men of our kirke say
and recorde of hyme and als þay late walde be glade of \wedge ^{hijis} commyng if it suld
be And he is at lichfelde in þer college
in Abitte dayly ministryng þ^e *seruis* of gode bot hys frendis and he als so desiris feruently
to be nare to-gedir for supportacione of ilkane odir And þer-for if
my praar myght be plesyng to *3our* worthy lordschipe J wald
beseike *3our* gudnes to *prefair* a-n' abill mane of þ^e pariche be-for
any othir for þ' wald ples þame and cause þame to do
well
to þ^e kirke supposyng þ' þer sons suld if þay war abill men be *prefarde* in tyme commyng Wry
ttine at hemmyngburgh
on þ^e nexte day aftir sante Edmunde \wedge ^{day} kyng last passide ;
Be *3our* *preste*
Ric' Cliff

10. D0268: Letter of petition from Robert Danby to the prior of Durham

County: Letter

Code: D0268

Reference: Durham Univeristy Library Dean & Chapter Locellus 25.16

Text: Petition

Right worschipfull & reuerent / and my full good & worthy maister . as lawly as
J kan J recommaund
me to you / besechyng you as htly as J kan / to be good lord . to Thomas Rudd
. son . of Aluerton
to be on ^{of} þe felowes in *your* Collegge att Oxenford / after att ye
next voidaunce [sic] þere-of
any of Aluertonshire / þe whyche son . is full vertuous & wel lernned in Gramer / for
whome my maister *sir* James Strangways . hath afore þis wreten to you for þe same
cause . & J haue as . a pouer simple *person* prayed ^{you} full htly also for
him diuers tymes afore
. J trust to god / þat ^{ye} wol vouchesaue / to be his good lord þerin . and J beseche you
with all my ht ^{so} to be / as my gret trust is ye wol be / wreten att yafford þe x day
of January
[signed: *your pouer*
seruant Rob't
Danby]

11. D0272: Letter of request from Robert Babthorpe to the prior of Durham

County: Yorkshire East Riding

Code: D0272

Reference: Durham UL Dean & Chapter Muniments, Locellus 25.29

Function: Request

Right wirschipfull *sir* and Fader J recomaunde me vn-to yow As hertely as J can . Prayng yow that 3e wole vouche-^{saf} to remembr 3ou . how . J stande 3our Officer and Stywarde at hemynburgh and at hondeslowe . and how that J haue labored for yow in sauynge of 3our ryght and sent Cutbert Franches And how that J haue possessed 3ou . of felones goodes ther . wher-as 3e had non to-fore . And w^t gret labour and cost put Away . the kyngges officers therfro . that they myght haue no instrest *yere* wilk wole be gret fortheryng vn-to yow and to your hous and to Seint Cutbert Franchise in tyme comyng with all oder profete3 and *seruice* that J haue don for yow . at hondeslowe and in oder place3 also . and 3it wole do at my power That 3e wole vouche-saf for my *prayer* at this tyme to *graunt* me ~~At this tyme~~ the next avoidaunce of the kirke of Estrington For a preest of myn wilk J wole vndertake fore he is an . honeste preest and an Abull And that 3e wole vouche-saff to gif feyth & credence . vn-to my well-be-loued *seruaunt* willam laton brynger of this lettr of this *matere* and of all oder *matere* . that he shall sey & enforme 3ou of be mouthe and that 3e wole sende me Answer ageyn be the bryngere of this lettr as J trist vppon 3ou . and as J may do 3ou . *seruice* in tyme comyng No more atte this tyme but the blessed *Trinite* haue 3ou . in his kepyng Wreten at Babthorp the xvij Day of Januar [signed: [nota] By *sir* Robt Babthorp knyght]

12. D0285: Letter of request from Thomas Lord Clifford and of Westmorland to the prior of
Durham

County: Letter

Code: D0285

Reference: Durham University Library, Dean & Chapter Muniments, Locellus 25.130

Function: Letter

Worshipfull fadre in godde J ~~grete yow welle~~ ^{^ comaunde me to yowe} thonkyngge yow right hertely of
all kyndenes . that ye haue done to me before this tyme / praynge yowe
of gode contynuaunce / And for as mych as my worshipfull lady
of Cambrige myn Aunte hath writen vnto yow before this tyme & nowe
also for the presentacion of a vicary in your Colage of hemmyngburgh . for a Chapeleyn of
hers *ser* willam lorymer / and nowe late ther
is one *ser* John hertte gone from thens / & as j . am enfourmed will no more cu thider / for
. diuers thinges / wherfore j pray yow that
ye will graunte to my said ladys Chapeleyn the said vicarye nowe at this tyme . / as my full
trust is in yow / And as ye will that j .
do thing for yow in case semblable a-nother tyme / That knoweth our lorde who haue yow in
his kepyngge / writen at Turnam' hall
xxiij day of Januer .
[nota] Thomas lorde Clifford
and of westmerl

13. D0293: Letter of request from T. (Thomas) Percy to the prior of Durham

County: Letter

Code: D0293

Reference: Durham University Library Dean & Chapter Locellus 25.150

Function: Request

Right worshipfull and reuerent fader in god . J comaunde me to you . and . for-asmich J
. am enformed . þat þe kirke of
Normanton vpon Soeur' in Notyngham-Shire is voide or ellis like in full shorte . tyme to
be voide . weroff . ye and .
your Couent be patrons . wilk kirke . is of litell valew . Neuerþeles þer is . with me
. a prest of þat contrey boren
wilk if it likid you and your'brethryn to grante me . þe next avoidance of þe seid . kirke .
J wolde he ad it / . werfore J .
pray you and your'Couent / . hertly sethyn þe seid kirke is of litell valew and
. þe first þat euer J . askid of you .
þat ye wole grante me þe seid avoidance . and . how ye wole be demenid . in this matier . J
pray you send me answe
ageyn wretyn bi my *seruant* berar of þis letter . as my gret trust is . in you And . J . shal do
as mich for you if it
like you desir it in tyme comyng bi þe *grace* of god who haue you in
his keping bodi and saule . wretin at .
helay þe iiij day of Nouembr' .
[signed: T Percy]

14. D0296: Letter of request from Henry Percy, Earl of Northumberland and lord of the honour of Cockermouth, to the prior of Durham

County: Northumberland

Code: D0296

Reference: Durham University Library Dean and Chapter Muniments Locellus 25. 159

Function: Request

Henry Percy Erle of Northumb' and
lorde of the honoure of Cokirmouth
Right dere & with all oure hert enterly wele-be-louede *sire* in god we grete 3ou welle And for
als mekill as
we wrote vnto 3ou tofore yis for oure wele-be-loued Prest *sir* John of warmouthe for licence
& lefe vnto hyme
to *permutte* with the vycar of Byllynghame . to ye whilk as we er enfourmed is nothing done
nor *graunte* at
cause of oure writyng *Neuer-ye-lesse* we pray 3ou & also we counsaile 3ou to *graunte* hyme
lefe & licence
to *permutte* with ye forsaide Vycar & it peasseably to reioyes for his desire is bot lawfull &
resonable for
we doo 3ou to witt yat and he send vnto ye Courte of Rome for licence he may gett it at
y^e first worde
whilk we wold no3t wer done in no wyse in als mekill as 3e er verray Patrone . ^{yer-of} bot
at 3e wald *graunte*
it hyme with 3our gude will & lefe . And als touchaunt his awn *person* he sall be
of gude *gouernance*
to 3ou & all 3our Tenante3 & *Paryshynes* . And gif 3e trist ye contrary we will
be bonden vnto 3ou with
other knyghte3 & Squyers yat he sall be of gude beryng vnto 3ou &
all 3our Tenante3 & *Paryshynges* soo
hyn furth . wharfor we pray 3ou . tendrely to take this *matere* till hart & do als oure trist is
in 3ou . And
gif so be yat outhere Rob't Jakeson or any
other yat is no3t ^{his} wele wyllandes haue complenyd vnto 3ow or
purpose for to pleyn agayn ye forsaide *sire* John . that yis oure prayer
& writyng be *neuer* y^e more differd
bot fortherd & executyt als we may be halden to 3ou in tyme to come . And all-
myghty gode haue
3ou in his kepyng / writen at oure Castell of warkeworth the sext day of Marce ~~~

15. D0075: Letter of petition from Katherine Bonell of Salop to the Earl of Shrewsbury, Lord
Treasurer

County: Shropshire

Code: D0075

Reference: Shropshire Archives: 1831/1/1/1

Function: Letter

**To the ryght high and gracious lord
Erle of Salop and tresourer of ynglond**

Shewith vnto youre gracious lordship youre pouere oratrice kateryne Bonell of Salop that where afore this tyme hit plesyd youre gracious lordship vpon diuerse Jniuries don to youre said oratrice by *Johnn* Colle of Salop aforsayd Esquyer by advyse of high discrecon to ordeyne and award in eschewynge of alle suche wrongfull vexacons that the said John shulde be

bounde by his obligacon of an C li that *after* the tyme of the awarde made and ordeyned by the decre and Jugement of youre excellent lordship he shulde in no wyse attempte nor presume to

done vnto youre said oratryce eny wronge or *preiudice* by feynynge of eny vniust title as he by-fore had don This not withstondynge gracious lord the said *Johnn* as hit apperith in contempte of the awarde Jugement and decree ordeyned by youre most gracious lordship now late renewynge his olde malice hath taken receyvid and stopped in the handes of diuerse tenante³ holdynge of youre said oratrice . v . li . x . s . xj . d . That is to wite of *Johnn* awyche Cornesere . xlvij s . vij d . Of *Johnn* walker Baker . xlvij s . iiij d .

Of Symkyn warynge . vij s . and of willam Gwyllym . vij s . Thus gracious lord the said *Johnn* Colle brekynge youre awarde cesith not to vexe and trowble youre said oratryce with wrongfull vexacons and hurtes importable to hir fynall vndoynge and destruccon . withowte that hit please *your* most gracious lordship *after* youre high discrecon in thees *premisses* to fynde dewe remedy This bysechith meokely youre said pouere oratrice at the reuerence of god and in wey of Charyte And we . John awyche *Johnn* walkere Symkyn and willam tenantes above specified in verrey trewe witnesse and recorde that the *summe* of . v li x sxj d above rehersed is by oure handes to the said *Johnn* Colle payde . at the instaunce of the said kateryn as wele as by conscience required certefye to youre high and gracious lordship that this is credible feithfull and verrey trewth

In witnesse here-of to thes *presentes* we haue putte to oure Seale³ At Salop abovesaid the wednesday next *after* the Circumcision of oure lord In the yer of the reigne of oure kynge and soueraigne lord henry the vj^{te} . xxxvij^{ti} .

16. D0295: Letter of request from Lord Scrope to the prior of Durham

County: Letter

Code: D0295

Reference: Durham University Library Dean & Chapter Locellus 25.154

Text: Request

Worsshipfull Sir in god My right trusty and welbeloued Frende
J grete yow hertly wele And for so mich as my right trusty Chapelleyne
Sir Alan Bukyngham is avaunsed to þe parisshe Churche of Seynt MARie in Stamford
and þe Priour of Seynt leonardes in þe seid
towne which is a Celle of your howse Claymeth to haue of þe seid Chirche yeerly A
pension of v . marces . which as J
am enformed nowder þe Chirch may if it were right bere /
nor þe seid howse of seynt leonardes of no such thyng before
tyme hath been possessed wherfore J wolde pray yow and desire yow
as troweth and gode Conscience wold þat þee wold
write to þe Priour of your seid Celle þat he wold Surcesse of any
more demaundyng or vexyng of my seid Chapeleyn
Any more for þe seid pension of lesse and he haue clere right and
title yerin be possessionn knowenn and proved And yif
þat be knowenn þat J wold desire for
my seid Chapelleyne tyme þat yee wold write vnto hem þat . þei wold gouerne hen
so frendely vnto him for þis my prayer
of þe Cessyng of þat pension consideryng þe smalnesse of þe bnfitz as þei
wolde gyfe me cause to do any thyng þat may ligge in my power for her wele or
ease writen at york þe iiij^{te} day .
of August ~~~
[signed: The Lord Scrop]

17. D4464: Letter of petition from sir John Bowde to the prior of Canterbury

County: Norfolk

Code: D4464

Reference: Lincoln, Lincolnshire Archives: Cragg/4/8

Function: Petition

**To the right Reuerent And wurschipfulle Fadir in god
my lorde And patronn the Priour of Caunterbury**

Withe Alle lowlynesse besechithe . youre pore Prest And Chapeleynn . Sir
John Bowde . Vicour of your chirche of Depham . in the Counte of Norff . besechyng
your lordschip . in weye of pite and conscience . to considir and tender
my pouerte . stondyng the Cure and charge . the whiche J hafe in your pore paryssche
forseid . And my benefice so exile and decayed . that J may not leue to kepe my charges
. nothyng acordyng to the lawe . And that J reporte me prins-
pally to god . And to my parysschouns your trewe tenautes . With-owt
your gracious fauour and comfort . to be considerd in relef and augmentyng of
of my poer lyfelode . for in trowth very necessite causithe me to complayne . for
. ij . thynges to be considerd by your grete wysdome . oon is the grete
pouerte that now regnythe amonges the comyn peple . for they may not leue .
and paye there dueetes A-n othir is . the charge of repayre of my pore howsold .
and keypyng of hospitalite . the whiche may not be left . w^t-owt greuous rewardes to
the Bysschoppis Officers . Consideryng your grete godenesse . that
ethur . J must a-voyde my Cure . and leue your tenautes on-served . or elle to seke the
remedy of the lawe . the whiche in no wyse . J intende not to do . but fully trust
in your lordschip . as conscience and charite requirithe . that sum augmentacionn by you
assigned to the relef of my pore levyng . the ^{whiche} schalle cause me grete
quietnesse bothe in sowle and body . and to praye for you and alle yowris . as J
am bounde to do . And that your lordschip may the more fauorably tendir this
Symple peticionn . alle youre trewe tenautes and my parysschouns . to this
present wrytyng generally be name han set to there Seales ; That is to saye .
Thomas Bayle your Fermour . Thomas Robardes . John walter .
John Semann . wille Semann . wille Davy . wille Roger . Stephe Cryour . Richard Colyour .
John Surnay .
wille Thomson . Thom' Stacy . Ric' vmfray . John Browun Jun . John Browun sen .
John Suker . Robard Davy . Thom' Marze . Thom Davy . John
Bedwelle . wille Estan . John Nebour and Niche Cuttes . writonn at
your towne of Depham . forsaid the xxij^e . daye of Marche the Reyngne of
oure Souerayne lorde kyng Edward þ^e iiij^e . the v^e . yere .:

18. L0329: Letter of petition from Janet Thalzour of Bamburgh to the prior of Durham

County: Northumberland

Code: L0329

Reference: Durham, Priors Kitchen, Dean and Chapter Muniments, Locellus XXV.13

Function: Letter

Ryght reuerent & wyrchypfull fadyr in gode J recomande me vn-to 3ow wyth all my
hart als lawly os J cann or may : beseking
3ow to haue me excusit of my febill writing vn-to 3our worthi presens & if it like vn'-
to 3ow to wete y^e cawse of my
wrytyng is yis . y^t my hwsband Johnn Thal3our wyt to a glasin wyndow in
Farne iij s' iij d y^t tyme being dane Thmas
Morby mastir' & dane Richart Fowyn' hys felew y^e qwilk dane Richart resaut y^s mony & y^t w
yst y^e mastir' & dane Ric'
kellowe bothe for y^e qwylk mony J am now wrangwisly vexit be 3ow : first be a sitacorn &
syne be A suspencion &
J am' seke & may nothir' ride
nor ga & y^t is wele knawyn' : qwarfor' J beseke 3ow y^t 3e will vochesafe to make y^e
mastir' of Farne 3our Attornay y^t it may be determent at Bawmburgh & yer y^e troath to
be knawynn & No mor at yis bot J be-
seke y^e holi trinite hawe 3ow in his keping writtin At Bawmburgh y^e xvij day of Julij
Be 3our pur' wedew &
bedewoman Janet
Thal3our of Bawmburgh

19. L1126: Letter of petition from Barnard of Hornsea to the mayor of Hedon

County: Letter

Code: L1126

Reference: Beverley, Humberside County Record Office, DDHE 20, fol. 271r]

Text: Letter

Wyrchipfull Syr J recomend me vn-to yow . wyth all my hert dezyryng youur welle-
far . qwhylyk all-myghty god increse to youur [...] -
hese & wyrchyp ; Lattyng yow wytt y^t J sent my wyffe vn-to hedon to speke w^t yow
. apon tuesday last past . yhe being in
hull . neuer-ye-less scho spak w^t youur wyffe . and scho gaf hyr gude comforth . for
y^e qwhylyk & j be-seke yow of gude maistryr-
schyp and of gud supportacion . as my grette *trist* in yow . as itt is done me
to ondyrstande yar is a man new *commen* to hedon
to dwell a Tynkler ye qwhylyk haw me a *certayn* mone . for dyuers thinges . on^r ^{he} dwelt in
a hwse of myne a yhere yer
he haw me for ferme iiij s Allso for j pare schone cloutyng iij d Allso for j pare
to hys wyffe iij d Allso for hys mete
and drynk to hym-self and *hes* wyfe & *hes* chylde viij d Allso hys wyffe had on me
as mykyll garne as come to vj d besyde
many odyr thynges y^t J wyll spek no worde of . þ^e Sume of yis a-fore v s ix d be-
sekyng yow wyrchipfull Syr to be my gud
maister and supportor yat J may hafe yis rasyd and demen[...] ye mater [...]
ye costage as yhe think best & J sall mak [...]
gude . No mor J kan bot god kepe yow . in gude helle &
[...] wretyn att hornce on *saturday* last past

[Latin:]

[Latin:] By youur *seruant*

Barnard of hornce

Appendix 3: List of texts in numerical order of MELD code

MELD Code	Archive reference	Name of sender	Social class
D0075	Shrewsbury, Shropshire Archives: 1831/1/1/1	Katherine Bonell	Gentry
D0267	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.15	Thomas Kar of York, draper	Middle
D0268	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.16	Robert Danby	Gentry
D0272	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.29	Sir Robert Babthorp, knight	Gentry
D0285	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.130	Thomas Lord Clifford and of Westmorland	Nobility
D0286	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.130*	Countess of Cambridge	Nobility
D0287	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.133	Elizabeth countess of Westmorland	Nobility
D0288	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.135	Elizabeth Lady Grey	Nobility
D0290	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.142	Countess of Cambridge	Nobility
D0291	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.143	Aleis Countesse of Salisbury, Ladi of Mountehermez	Nobility
D0292	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.145	Eleanor Lady Percy	Nobility
D0293	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.150	T Percy	Nobility
D0295	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.154	Lord Scrope	Nobility
D0296	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.159	Henry Percy, Lord of Northumberland	Nobility
D0314	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Misc. Charters 1078	Margaret, countess of Westmorland	Nobility
D4464	Lincoln, Lincolnshire Archives: Cragg/4/8	Sir John Bowde vicar of Deopham	Clergy
L0329	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.13	Janet Thalzour of Bamburgh	Middle
L0380	Durham UL, Dean & Chapter muniments: Locellus 25.18	Sir John Bowde vicar of Deopham	Clergy
L1126	Beverley, Humberside County RO DDHE 20, fol. 271 r	Barnard of Hornsea	Middle