

Article

Kinship Riddles

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Abstract: In the medieval to early modern eras, legal manuals used visual cues to help teach the church laws of consanguinity and affinity as well as concepts of inheritance. Visual aids such as the trees of consanguinity or affinity helped the viewer such as a notary, law student or member of the clergy to do the ‘computation,’ or reckon how closely kin were related to each other by blood or by marriage and by lines of descent or collateral relations. Printed riddles in these early legal manuals were exercises to test how well the reader could calculate whether a marriage should be deemed incest. The riddles moved from legal textbooks into visual culture in the form of paintings and cheap broadside prints. This article examines a riddle painting ‘devoted’ to William Cecil when he was Elizabeth I’s principal secretary, before he became Lord Burghley and explores the painting’s links to the Dutch and Flemish kinship riddles circulating in the Low Countries in manuscript, print and painting. Cecil had a keen interest in genealogies and pedigrees as well as puzzles and ciphers. As a remarried widower with an eldest son from a first marriage and children from his longer second marriage, Cecil lived in a stepfamily typical of the sixteenth century in England and Europe. The visual kinship riddles in England and the Low Countries had a common root but branched into separate traditions. A shared element was the young woman at the centre of the images. To solve the riddle the viewer needed to determine how all the men in the painting were related to her as if she were the ego, or self, at the centre of a consanguinity tree. This article seeks to compare the elements that connect and diverge in the visual kinship riddle traditions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the Low Countries and England.

Keywords: consanguinity; affinity; riddles; stepfamily; William Cecil; Lord Burghley; Anglo-Netherlandish paintings; incest; England; Nijmegen; Low Countries; The Netherlands



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1. Introduction

Let’s start with a riddle. A count had twelve knights, four of which were his sons, four his brothers-in-law and the remaining four his sons-in-law, but all were born of one woman. In the late medieval era to the early 1500s, this type of riddle invited the reader to grapple with kinship networks and family relationships. How could so many sons of one woman be related to a single man through such varied relationships as son, son-in-law and brother-in-law? Were the relationships outlined in the riddle within the laws of consanguinity and affinity governing incest by blood or by marriage? As early as the seventh century, trees of consanguinity and affinity were created as visual schema to help the viewer calculate the degrees of a relationship defined as incestuous and thus forbidden (Klapisch-Zuber 1991).

The consanguinity tree diagram helped to determine who could marry whom without impediment. The viewer counted from the centre—the position of the ego, or the self—outwards beyond six degrees of separation (McDermott 2020). The ego changed depending on the situation, so in a couple the man and woman each counted back in the family line to a common ancestor such as a great-great-grandparent to calculate the degree (Worby 2007, p. 449). More lenient Catholic canon laws of consanguinity were introduced at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 so that a couple related by blood at the fourth degree could marry (Canon 50, ‘On the restriction of prohibitions to matrimony’; Tanner 1990, I, 257). Couples in Catholic regions or in the pre-Reformation era more closely related than the

fourth degree by blood, marriage or sexual relations could seek and pay for a dispensation by the pope through a local diocese (Worby 2007, p. 451; Lanzinger 2018).

The thirteenth-century church also loosened the restrictions on affinity that had forbidden a marital union or sexual relations between step-relatives linked to each other through the previous marriage of a family member. A remarrying widower or widow had to be careful not to choose a new partner to whom they were related up to the fourth degree through their deceased spouse. For example, a widower seeking to remarry was forbidden to marry blood relatives and in-laws of his deceased wife from the first degree, such as a stepdaughter to the fourth degree such as a ‘third cousin of a deceased spouse’ (Sabeau et al. 2007, p. 20; Ruggiu 2010, p. 231; Henry 2003, p. 151; Saurer 1998). However, other extended kin and in-laws within a stepfamily could marry if more than one marriage intervened between the spouses; for instance, a man could not marry his wife’s daughter from a previous marriage (his stepdaughter), but he could marry his wife’s first husband’s daughter (Lee 1946, pp. 54–55, n. 3). Or if a widower with a daughter remarried a widow with a son—making their children stepsister and stepbrother to each other—these stepsiblings could marry without a need for dispensation because the (step)daughter and (step)son were not related to each other by blood or by marriage ‘personally’. (Canon 50, ‘On the restriction of prohibitions to matrimony’; Tanner 1990, I, 257; Warner 2018c, p. 239; Erdélyi 2018, pp. 152–62). In medieval treatises in England the canon law trees of consanguinity and affinity were even copied into civil law books and sometimes also used within the common law tradition as ‘teaching treatises’ for ‘beginners’ to learn ‘how to count’ (Worby 2007, pp. 453–54). We see a similar scenario in Figure 1, where Johannes Andreae’s trees of consanguinity and affinity are bound within a fourteenth-century volume of the customary laws of Normandy (Andreae Mid 1300s). We can witness this learning at work in a hand-drawn tree of consanguinity accompanying a student’s notes from ‘a course on the Roman law of inheritance and succession’ in the early modern period (Widener and Weiner 2017, p. 70, 3.03). In another fine digitized example from the Lilian Goldman Law Library at Yale, a 1513 edition of Johannes Andreae’s *Super arboribus* from Vienna shows reader(s) annotating and working through the types of relationships by blood and marriage and even drawing diagrams to ‘compute’ or calculate the degrees (Andreae 1513, ev). Although the systems of tracing an inheritance or succession and computing kinship were different in each legal system, notaries, law students and clergy needed to master the rudiments so the trees of consanguinity and affinity trained the reader visually with ‘examples, calculating by how many degrees X is related to Y over and over again’ (Worby 2007, pp. 466–67).

Then came the Reformation and the varying levels of reform of the churches to complicate matters further according to the principles of Lutheran, Calvinist, Anglican or the myriad Protestant sects. In general, states or cities that adopted reform got rid of the marital dispensations practised by Catholics because they were tainted as money transactions and controlled by remote authorities (Schmugge 2012, pp. 42, 55). As a legal scholar in Elizabethan England declared, the marriages that ‘proceeded vnder coloures of dispensations by mans power ... usurped ... for no man, of what estate degree or co[n]dition soeuer he be, hath power to dispence with Gods laws’ (Clerke 1594, p. 77 or sig. L 3r). For the most part, Protestants returned to the Bible and adapted the consanguinity and affinity laws of Leviticus 18:6–18 and 20:11–12, 14, 17, 19, 20 in the Old Testament, applying these rules to both the male and female collateral equivalents by line and degree (Clerke 1594, sig. M 3r-v).

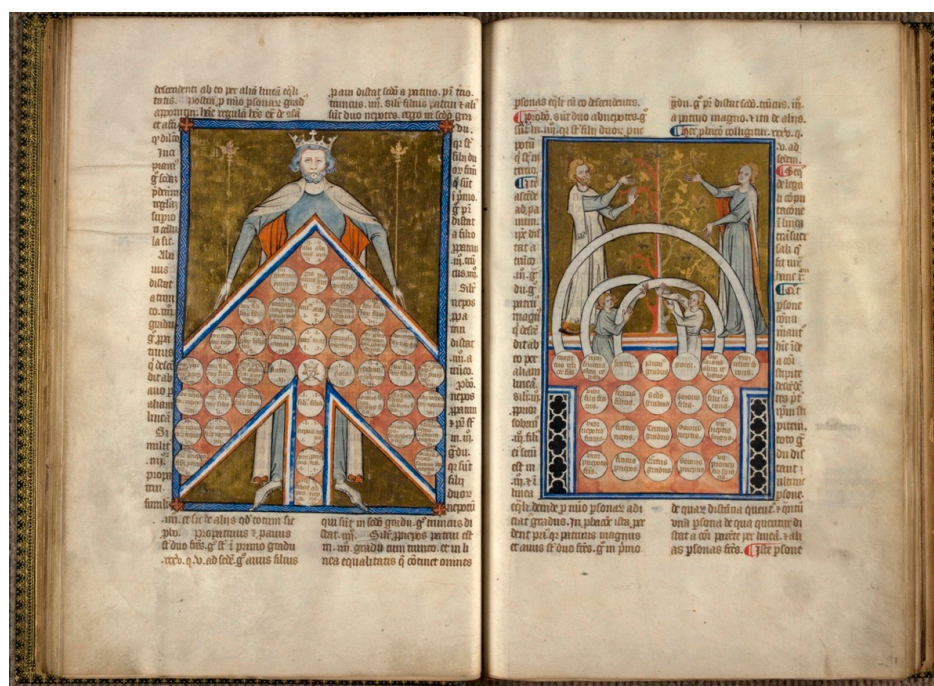


Figure 1. Johannes Andreae, *Super arboribus consanguinitatis et affinitatis* bound within a volume of the customary laws of Normandy, *Grand Coutumier de Normandie*. Consanguinity is on the left, 30^v, affinity is on the right, 31^r. Attribution: Petit Palais, Musée des Beaux-Arts de la ville de Paris. LDUT 0095. f. 030^v—031. CC BY-NC 3.0.

Determining how closely a person was related and whom they could marry did not always come so easily. The printing of figures of consanguinity and affinity as visual aids with explanation of how to use them for ‘computation’ continued even in Protestant reform jurisdictions where the Catholic canon law no longer applied, especially because the figures could also prove useful for ‘readie understanding . . . practised daily in inheritances’ (Clerke 1594, p. 22 or sig. D 3r; Figure 2).

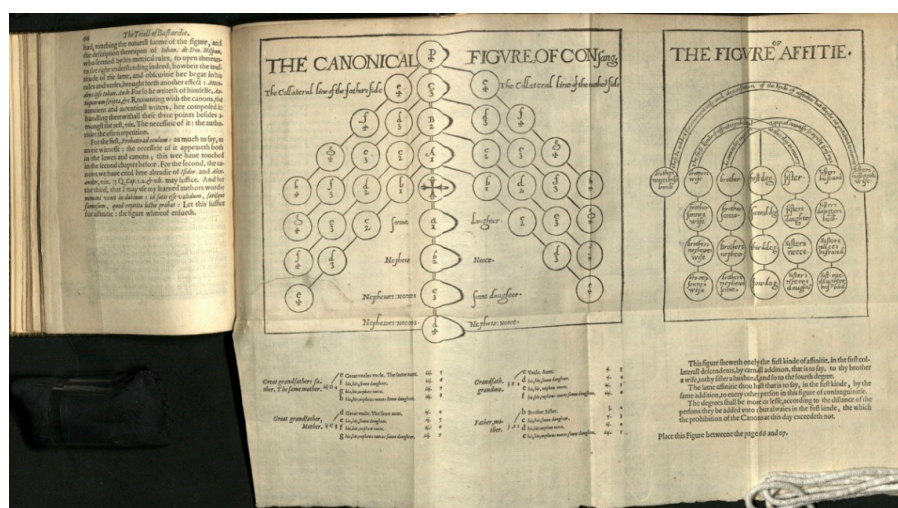


Figure 2. The Canonical Figure of Consang[uinity]/The Figure of Affi[n]tie, tables inserted between pages 66 and 67 in William Clerke, *The Triall of Bastardie: That Part of the Second Part of Policie, or Maner of Governement of the Realme of England . . . Annexed at the end of this Treatise, touching the prohibition of marriage, A Table of the Leuitical, English, and Positiue Canon Catalogues, their concordance and difference*. London: Printed by Adam Islip, 1594. Courtesy Rare Book Collection, Lillian Goldman Law Library, Yale Law School.

Taking the training a step further, a medieval manuscript or early modern text could present a textual puzzle or visual challenge to help the reader to practice these kinship calculations such as the riddle of the count and the twelve knights who were his sons, sons-in-law and brothers-in-law all born of one woman (Heyman 1504, 8r-v; Clerke 1594, pp. 62–65 or sigs. I 3v-Kr). Eventually the kinship riddles moved from legal manuals and textbooks into art in the form of paintings and cheap prints, with the most well-known examples in The Netherlands from the 1500s to the 1800s.

2. Kinship Riddles

How could one solve the riddle of the count with twelve knights, which circulated in printed German editions of Johannes Andreae's *Super arboribus consanguinitatis* in the late 1400s? The text encouraged the reader to view the links of blood and marriage in a drawing or visual schema (Figure 3) to understand how all of the sons born of one woman could become the sons, brothers-in-law or sons-in-law of the count (Teuscher 2013, pp. 89–90; Andreae 1482/83, 10r).

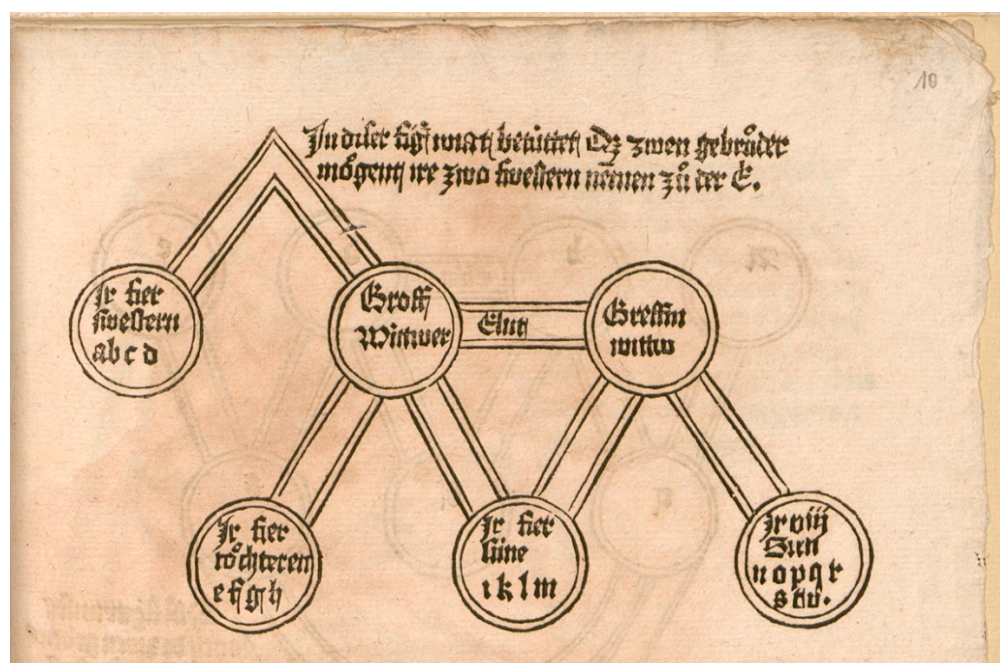


Figure 3. A visual solution of the riddle of the count and the twelve knights as it appears in a German-language printed edition of Johannes Andreae, *Super arboribus consanguinitatis et affinitatis*, Strasbourg: Heinrich Knobloch, c. 1482/3, 10r. Attribution: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Germany. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

The count had four sisters, and then in a marriage with his first wife he had four daughters. After his wife's death, the count remarried a widow who had eight sons from a former marriage. The count's stepsons 'marry his four sisters and his four daughters'; thus his stepsons also became his brothers-in-law and sons-in-law. Meanwhile, in a second marriage for both spouses, the count and the remarried widow had four sons (Figure 4). The riddle solution for the count and his twelve knights required calculation and skill to map out the complex stepfamily of marriage, remarriage, in-laws, stepfather, stepmother and children of first and second marriage beds.

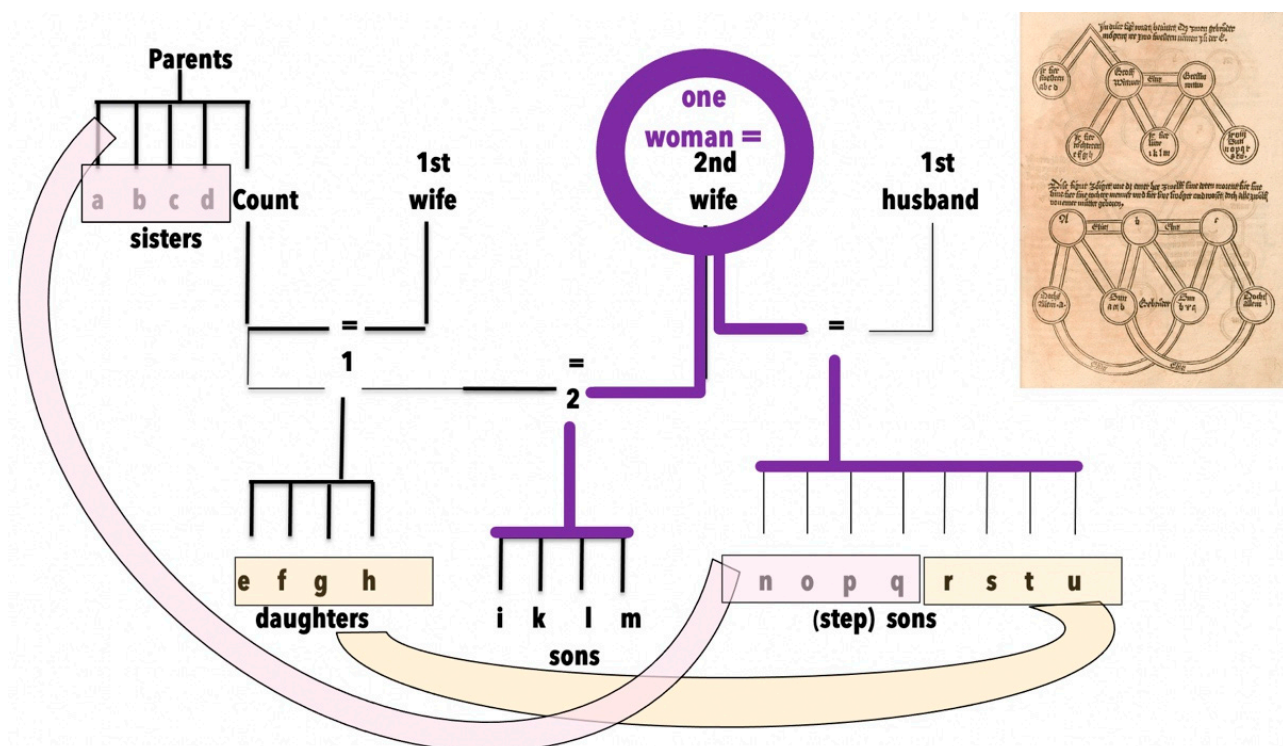


Figure 4. The solution to the riddle of the count with the twelve knights who were his sons, brothers-in-law or sons-in-law, all born of one woman. Drawing credit: Lyndan Warner. Inset: Johannes Andreae, *Super arboribus consanguinitatis et affinitatis*, Strasbourg: Heinrich Knoblochster, c. 1482/3, 10^r. Attribution: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Germany. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0.

At some point, a kinship riddle made the transition from a law book challenge to a painting. In the *Riddle of Nijmegen* attributed by the Museum Het Valkhof to Cornelis Ketel, a young woman at the centre of the painting looks directly at the viewer (Figure 5; Ketel 1576). She is surrounded by a group of males of various ages, from boys to a weak old man. Inserted into the indoor scene are a series of cartouches with text labelled A to E. Lying across her lap, an old man draws attention to cartouche A. The text, inscribed on a wooden chest, invites the viewer to solve a ‘subtle’ riddle and dates the painting to 1576.

The young woman leans on framed cartouche B, which gives clues about how the figures in the painting are related from her perspective within the family as if she were the ego, or self, at the centre of a consanguinity tree. Two men with beards on the left are older. They have receding hairlines, and the young woman says that these two in purple are her uncles, her father’s brothers. The two younger bearded men with curly hair and dressed in red in the centre of the painting, the young woman explains are her mother’s brothers. The two boys or adolescents in yellow, the woman identifies as ‘my own children’, and she explains that their father—whom she ‘wed according to GOD’s Law’ (*getrout na GODTS Wet*)—is the man in her lap. Then cartouche C, pointed to by one of the older balding brothers, adds hints about their niece and their father who were married before the Church (*voor de Kercke ghetrout*). A brother’s index finger touches the word ‘Natueren’ to hint that their father is ‘natural’ with a biological link by blood. This was not a riddle trick of marriage or remarriage creating a son-in-law or stepson. Cartouche D, held by one of the middle brothers in red, echoes the clues about their niece and their father. Cartouche E from the boys in yellow confirms that their father is the old man who had married ‘both of our grandmothers’ and that the four brothers of these boys are their mother’s uncles.



Figure 5. Cornelis Ketel (attribution). *Riddle of Nijmegen*, 1576, Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen, Netherlands, inventory number: C.XVI.233. Oil painting on wood, 78.5 cm × 107.5 cm. Photo: Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

The 1576 visual riddle was closely imitated in 1577 by an artist of the ‘Flemish School’ (Mouton 2019), and again into the 1600s by an unknown artist¹, with a further variation attributed to Christiaan Coevershoff in the early 1600s (Coevershoff attribution ca. 1625–1630). Sixteenth- and seventeenth-century variants of the indoor scenes could be found across The Netherlands in Groningen, in Schoonhoven² and over the border in Dresden, Germany (Roes 2018, p. 114; Ouweneel 2011, pp. 118–19; Lemmens 1982, pp. 166–67, n. 29–31). Despite the title ‘Riddle of Nijmegen’ given to these Dutch paintings today, the visual riddle only came to be associated with the town of Nijmegen in the seventeenth century. Pauwels van Schooten painted a version of the interior scene in 1619 with a view through a window onto the Great Market and the spire of the Stevenskerk peeking over the buildings. Eighteenth-century Dutch prints of the riddle announced that the painting hung in the town hall of Nijmegen (Roes 2018, p. 114; van Campen 1765; van Schooten 1619). Dutch printers in Amsterdam and Nijmegen cashed in on the popularity of the kinship riddle theme in the 1600s and 1700s with frequent editions as souvenirs of Nijmegen until the last illustrated print around 1900 (Lemmens 1982, p. 166; van Wesel 1698; Thieme 1821). For our purposes, it is important to remember that this association of the kinship riddle with Nijmegen in the Duchy of Guelders (or Gelderland) occurred in the seventeenth century, a generation after the 1576 painting. Two of the so-called *Riddle of Nijmegen* paintings only entered the municipal collection in Nijmegen in the twentieth century (Lemmens 1982, pp. 166–67, n. 30–31).

So how was it possible to solve this 1576 kinship puzzle? The answer lies in the stepfamily and requires the viewer, like the visual and textual puzzle about the count, one mother and the twelve knights, to think about widowhood, remarriage and children of different marriage beds—frequent occurrences in the 1500s (Warner 2018a). A man married a widow who had a son from her previous marriage—a stepson for the man. The couple had two sons (the older brothers in grey and purple). This first wife of the man died, and he remarried another widow who had a daughter from her previous marriage—a

stepdaughter for the man—and the remarried couple had the two sons in red. We can see the interval between the two marriages in the age differences between the sets of half-brothers with their bald spots or curly locks (Figure 6). The stepson married the stepdaughter, and if we recall the canon law reforms to affinity in the thirteenth century, such a marriage between stepsiblings was allowed because the remarriage did not involve the stepsiblings personally and the stepbrother and stepsister were not related by blood (Henry 2003; Tanner 1990, I, 257; Reichel 1896, pp. 361–62). The stepsibling couple had a daughter. The daughter's deceased grandmothers were the man's first and second wives. When the daughter became a young woman, she married the (by now) old man as his third wife and they had the two sons in yellow. All the brothers—in purple, red or yellow—were sons of the old man, whereas the two sets of older brothers were the uncles of the young woman through her father and mother. The young woman was granddaughter of her husband's first and second wives but not related by blood to her husband, the old man in her lap. Her four uncles in purple and red are the half-brothers of her sons in yellow.

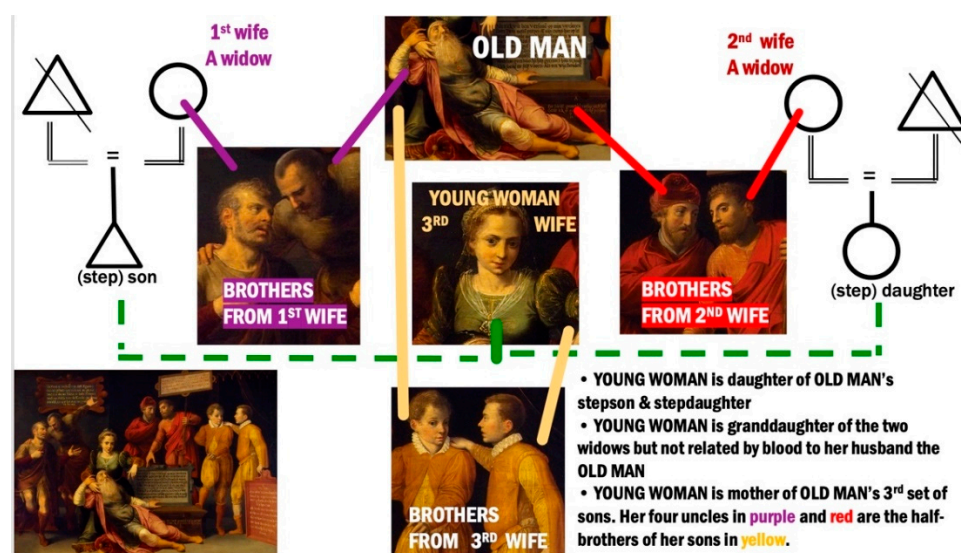


Figure 6. Solution to the 1576 riddle painting. Insets: Cornelis Ketel (attribution). *Riddle of Nijmegen*, 1576, Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen, Netherlands, inventory number: C.XVI.233. Oil painting on wood, 78.5 cm × 107.5 cm. Photo: Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen, The Netherlands. Drawing credit: Lyndan Warner.

Even as we unravel the dynamics of this complex stepfamily, we might consider whether it was a plausible scenario, and to do so we need to delve into the religious and legal context. In the 1560s and 1570s, the Dutch sought religious toleration and began to rebel against their Spanish Catholic rulers. In 1579, seven provinces of The Netherlands formed a union of Protestant states, although control of the territories went back and forth between Spanish Catholic and Dutch Calvinist forces until the 1590s (Parker 1976, pp. 59–62; 1977, pp. 198, 219, 232, 236–37). To get a sense of the legal provisions in the united provinces, we can consider the 1580 Political Ordinance of Holland, which post-dates the earliest known versions of the visual riddle paintings in 1576 and 1577. The 1580 ordinance and its corollaries in other Dutch regions extended the forbidden incest relationships by blood to the equivalent marital relationships so that for ‘affinity, marriage is also forbidden within the same degrees, as of consanguinity’ (*In zwagherschap is verboden te huwelicken binnen de leden vooren van bloede vermaent*) (Grocius 1845, I.v.9: 24–25; Grocius 1977, I.v.9: 24). The marriage of the stepson to the stepdaughter was legal, as it had been since the Fourth Lateran Council reforms of canon law in the thirteenth century. However, the 1580 Holland ordinance, like other Protestant reform jurisdictions, followed the incest rules in the Bible more closely, such as Leviticus 18:17 in the Old Testament: ‘Thou shalt not uncover

the nakedness of a woman and her daughter, neither shalt thou take her son's daughter, or her daughter's daughter, to uncover her nakedness; *for they are* her near kinswomen: it is wickedness'. The ordinance explicitly states that the old man would not have been allowed to marry his stepgranddaughter, stating, 'nor his stepdaughter, or any of his late wife's descendants' (Roes 2018, p. 115; Grotius 1977, I.v.10: 24–25). Moreover, as Protestant regions tended to do, the ordinance outlined the equivalent prohibitions for a woman, and this included that she may not marry her stepfather or 'the widower of any of her ancestors [*ofte den weduwnaer van iemand haerer voor-ouders*]' (Grotius 1977, I.v.10: 24–25; Ordinance 1580, articles 8–9, 290–91). In the 1576 riddle solution, the old man married a stepgranddaughter related to him, not once, but twice, as the granddaughter of both of his late wives.

These 1576 and 1577 paintings were created when Catholic canon law had not yet been displaced or superseded. Under the Catholic canon law system, a couple could petition the pope and pay for a dispensation to marry, and we will examine that possibility more closely in Section 5. A later gloss of Hugo Grotius's seventeenth-century overview of Dutch jurisprudence mentions that 'some inhabitants have obtained permission' when the closeness of 'degrees does not appear to be so strictly inconsistent with propriety'. Yet, the commentary cites two cases in the 1620s, one from the Hague, the other Amsterdam, where the publication of banns to marry a 'late wife's daughter' was 'refused by resolution of the States' (Grotius 1977, I.v.13: 23, n.17). The 1580 ordinance was clear on 'persons committing incest' that those 'related to each other in the aforesaid degrees of blood and affinity' who decided to 'marry notwithstanding the aforesaid prohibitions' would be 'punished for the same without compromise' (Ordinance 1580, article 13, 291). Nevertheless, imitators of the painting in the 1600s and into the 1800s continued the same stepfamily solution to the riddle, despite the young woman's claim that her marriage to the old man was under 'God's law' and that her sons were legitimate.

2.1. *The Traffic in Kinship Riddles and Painters between England and the Low Countries*

The 1576 riddle painting helps to raise some questions about the connections between the Dutch tradition of these visual riddles and a parallel tradition in England. Cornelis Ketel, the artist from Gouda to whom the 1576 painting is attributed, trained in Delft, then moved to France in the 1560s, before returning to Gouda and moving onto London from 1573–1581 and eventually settling back in The Netherlands in Amsterdam (van Mander 1936, p. 331; RKD Cornelis Ketel 2022). In late 1576, the year of the *Riddle of Nijmegen* painting attributed to Ketel, the Netherlandish painter received a commission in England for a series of works relating to the expeditions to find the Northwest Passage. Figure 7 is the only work of this commission to survive—a portrait of the explorer Martin Frobisher dated 1577 and signed with the initials CK (Ketel 1577).

The fashions in Ketel's portrait of Frobisher (Blackwood 2016, p. 32) echo the yellow doublet worn by one of youngest sons in the 1576 riddle painting—the white lace collars worn by both sons and the mustard–golden tones and style of the sons' breeches. Yet, the 1576 date of the Dutch riddle painting now in the museum in Nijmegen and its attribution to Ketel remain problematic; indeed, it has been questioned (Lemmens 1982, p. 167, n. 30), especially as an almost identical Dutch copy of the riddle painting seems to have been produced in quick succession in 1577 (Mouton 2019).



Figure 7. Cornelis Ketel, *Portrait of Sir Martin Frobisher* (1535?–1594) Bodleian Library LP 50. Copyright holder Photo: © Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, UK. Creative Commons licence CC-BY-NC 4.0.

Nevertheless, the artist's residence in England in the 1570s and the pattern of Cornelis Ketel's career provide entry points to understanding the traffic in kinship riddles and their visual traditions. Ketel was part of a large influx of Dutch and Flemish immigrants into Tudor London—so many that in 1568 the Privy Council ordered a series of surveys to count and track these 'strangers' and 'aliens'. The surveys of the 'Returns of Aliens' suggest that the Netherlandish migrants in London and the surrounding area numbered around 5000, clustering near parish churches such as Austin Friars, re-established in 1560 to cater to the growing foreign populations (Tittler 2022b, pp. 35–36; Walker 2013, pp. 59, 64; Hearn 2015, pp. 279–80). According to Hope Walker, more than twenty of the Netherlandish painters in the returns of the late 1560s and early 1570s attended Austin Friars (Walker 2013, p. 69). Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder arrived as part of this wave of religious refugees in the

late 1560s with his son Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger, who would become the painter of the famous Ditchley Portrait of Elizabeth I around 1592 (Gheeraerts 1592; Hearn 2013, p. 37). Hans Eworth (Ewourts), Lucas de Heere and Joris Hoefnagel, too, were all part of the cluster of ‘stranger-painters’ creating a community together in London (Tittler 2022a). In 1571 at the Austin Friars church, Gheeraerts the Elder remarried another Flemish-born migrant, Susanna de Critz, whose brother was apprenticing with Lucas de Heere (Town 2015, p. 313; Martens and Peeters 2003, pp. 34–37). Hans Eworth had arrived as part of an earlier influx of migrants, and a portrait of a visibly pregnant Mildred Cooke Cecil attributed to him has been dated to circa 1563, the year Robert Cecil was born in June (Hearn 2021; Croft and Hearn 2002, pp. 19, 22). Joris Hoefnagel, like many Netherlandish refugees, had an itinerant life in these years of religious turmoil, but spent part of 1568–1569 in London joining his merchant brothers in the parish of St Martin’s, when he sketched views of Nonsuch Palace and Windsor Castle (Vignau-Wilberg 2017, pp. 29–30; Hendrix and Vignau-Wilberg 2020, pp. 17–18). The discovery of a hidden inscription on the painting *A fête at Bermondsey* connects the Hoefnagels’ father with the artist Marcus Gheeraerts the Elder. Hoefnagel the father was known to William Cecil as a merchant, along with his trading partner Andreas de Loos. Based on their acquaintance, Edward Town has cautiously suggested a theory for how the lively 1570s painting of a village scene on the Thames might have entered the Cecil collection (Town 2015, pp. 309, 313). Lucas de Heere arrived in London in 1566 from Ghent, settled near the Dutch reformed church and became a minister at Austin Friars for part of his stay in England (Walker 2013, pp. 66, 69, 71). About a decade later, de Heere, who had a friendship with Joris Hoefnagel, returned to his native Ghent, where a Flemish version of the kinship riddle circulated in a manuscript.

2.2. William Cecil and an English Kinship Riddle Painting

Although the more well-known kinship riddle paintings date to the 1570s in the Low Countries, a tradition also emerged in England, and of the known or surviving visual riddles, the example now at Hatfield House (Figure 8) predates its Continental counterparts. The existence of the riddle painting connected to William Cecil first came to public attention in Lady Theresa Lewis’s nineteenth-century account of the portrait collection of Lord Chancellor Clarendon, modernized and updated by Robin Gibson in the late 1970s. Gibson noted that the kinship riddle painting was absent from Cecil family records, but appeared in a 1750 inventory of the collection of the Earl of Clarendon (Lewis 1852, pp. 259, 286, no. 12; Gibson 1977, pp. 131–32, cat. no. 145) and suggested connections to the Flemish circle of painters Eworth, Hoefnagel and de Heere. Karen Hearn exhibited the kinship riddle painting in the Tate Gallery’s *Dynasties: Painting in Tudor and Jacobean England 1530–1630* exhibition in the mid 1990s and linked its theme to another Elizabethan painting, *The Allegory of a Faire Ladye* (Unidentified Artist 1570–1579), in the Fogg Museum at Harvard University (Hearn 1995, p. 98, cat. no. 50).

Then, in 2010, the Clarendon collection went up for auction at Sotheby’s and the painting entered the collection at Hatfield House, the home of the Marquess of Salisbury, descendant of William Cecil through his son Robert. The Sotheby’s catalogue, following Gibson, suggested a few possible contenders for the artist, noting that the painting was ‘attributable to one of the Netherlandish painters working in Britain at this period, such as Hans Eworth, Joris Hoefnagel or Lucas de Heere’ (Sotheby’s 2010). However, the Flemish genealogist Pieter Donche has pointed out that the auction house, in its own research and relying on previous English scholarship, did not seem to be aware of a connection to the parallel tradition of kinship riddles in The Netherlands that have come to be associated with Nijmegen (Donche 2011, p. 239). Here we examine the elements that connect and separate these visual kinship riddle traditions in the Low Countries and England.



Figure 8. Riddle devoted to Sir William Cecil, c. 1565–70. Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, UK. Courtesy of the Marquess of Salisbury. Photo credit: Lyndan Warner.

William Cecil's coat of arms is on display in the centre at the top of the painting, and despite some paint loss the text of the dedication reads, 'This Ryddle is dyvotyd to the/Right Honourable Syr Wylliam/Cecyll, Knyght, Principall Secreatry to [the Quenes Ma^{tie}]' (Figure 9). The fashions of the figures in the painting and the fact that Cecil is named as Principal Secretary and not yet Lord Burghley places the painting before Cecil's elevation as the first Baron Burghley in February 1571. The quartered Cecil coat of arms also lacks the garter encircling it, as appears in later versions after Cecil's nomination to the Order of the Garter in 1572. The word AVDAX can be perceived as part of a motto, but the other text and letters are faded or missing.



Figure 9. William Cecil's coat of arms and the dedication on the painting, 'A Riddle devoted to . . . Sir William Cecil', c. 1565–70. Hatfield House, UK. Courtesy of the Marquess of Salisbury. Photo credit: Lyndan Warner.

In the version of the riddle dedicated to Cecil, a stranger emerges from the edge of the scene and comes upon a young woman with an old man lying in her lap. Beyond the couple, three males in feathered caps approach from a castle. There are two men and an adolescent—one dressed in yellow, one in red and the youngest in white with a black cape. The stranger gestures to a wooden sign with text, which asks about the lineage of the three figures: 'My faire Lady, I pray yove tell Me/What And of whens, be yonder thre[e]/That cometh ovt of the castell, in svch degre[e]/And of ther dyscent, And, Natyvity'?

The young woman's reply appears on a wooden plank in the foreground at the feet of the old man in her lap. She explains that one of the men is her brother on her father's side, whereas the other is her brother through her mother. The third, younger man is her 'own son', but all three are the legitimate sons of her husband, who sleeps in her lap. She challenges the stranger to reason an understanding of the family relationships: 'Syr. the one ys My brother, of My fathers syede the Trewthe, you to show/The other by My Mothers syede, Ys My brother also/The thyrde ys my own sonne lawfvly begat/And all be sonnes to My husband That sleepes here on my lappe/Without hurt of lynnege in any degre[e]/Showe Me by Reason how that May be'.

The painting is a visual kinship puzzle, by now familiar to us, requiring the viewer to reckon or calculate kinship just as the reader of fifteenth-century consanguinity manuals needed to determine how twelve knights who were brothers, sons and sons-in-law of the count were born of one woman, or the how the 1576 Dutch riddle painting challenged the viewer to calculate how the sons and uncles of the young woman could all be offspring of the old man.

3. William Cecil, Genealogy and Stepfamilies

William Cecil's interest in genealogy and kinship networks shows in his habit of drawing the noble and royal lineages of Europe (CP 140/8), and in his requests to Sir Henry Norris in 1567, then ambassador to France, to send the names of the nobility and 'with whom they be married' and the 'knowledge of the lineage and degrees'. Cecil mapped family names in the counties and borderlands of northern England and Scotland and designed ways to showcase the Cecil pedigree at Theobalds (Jones 2015, pp. 16, 68; Cole 2017, pp. 88–89). Combined with his professional use of codes and ciphers, the gift to Cecil of a challenge to solve a visual kinship riddle may indeed have earned some favour

with the Principal Secretary to the Queen's Majesty in the 1560s (CP 140/57). Apart from his professional interests in genealogy, from 1561 Cecil held the position of Master of the Court of Wards, handling the affairs of children orphaned by their fathers, whose mothers, if living, might remarry. Notably, his wife Mildred and some of their kin, too, had a stake in this enterprise (Allen 2013, pp. 142–44; Hurstfield 1949). Moreover, the complex relationships within Cecil's own life course suggest further reasons why Cecil might be intrigued to solve the visual riddle asked by the passing stranger to guess the 'descent' and 'nativity' of the figures coming out of the castle.

In commissioned group portraits and funerary monuments, what we see on the surface does not always reveal the complex family relationships to the untrained eye (Warner 2011, 2018b). The sketch for a funerary monument of the Cecil family in 1562 shows William Cecil kneeling in a suit of armour directly under his coat of arms and across from his wife, Mildred, as his firstborn son Thomas and daughter Anne inhabit the foreground. The proposed funerary monument, Figure 10, looks like a nuclear family of father, mother, son and daughter. '[I]nscriptions at the base of the monument commemorate the death of three younger Cecil children', in particular, the deaths of two sons named William Cecil (CPM II/14; Croft 2002, p. 293). However, in the early 1560s, there was no acknowledgement of Cecil's first wife, Mary Cheke (d. 1543), the mother of Thomas Cecil, nor of the stepfamily dynamic within the family—that Mildred was Thomas' stepmother. Thomas would have been about twenty, and Anne was the only surviving child of William and Mildred Cecil, about six years old. Less than a decade later, after Thomas married, he would name his third daughter after his stepmother Mildred, quite a widespread practice in early modern stepfamilies as a way to reinforce and tighten the stepfamily bond (Warner 2018b, p. 216). In Saint Martin's church in Stamford, at the end of his life, William Cecil's funerary monument would eventually honour his first wife, Mary Cheke, and display her family crest with his own and in equal placement with his long-time second wife, Mildred.

Cecil, as a remarried father, created a stepfamily, and he had stepfamilies all throughout his kinship network through his in-laws. Cecil had grown up with stepfamily kin among his grandparents and uncles and aunt. William Heckington, Cecil's maternal grandfather, was a remarried father who, when he died in 1508, chose to be buried in Bourne 'under a stone slab' with his first wife in the Church of St Peter and St Paul, where William Cecil was baptised. William Heckington's second wife, Alice, became the stepmother of Jane Heckington, William Cecil's mother. As a young girl of about eight at her father's death, Jane Heckington became his heir, while her stepmother had a widow's life interest in her stepdaughter's properties (Alford 2008, p. 9). William Cecil's father also grew up in a stepfamily. David Cecil of Stamford had two sons with his first wife; Richard, the 'eldest son' and eventual father of William Cecil; and David, his 'second son', as he is called in their father's 1530s drafts and copies of his will (TNA PROB 11/29/71). David Cecil's second wife, Joan[e] (sometimes written as 'Jane' in David Cecil (Cissell/Cyssell)'s will), became the brothers' stepmother, and from this second marriage bed David and Joan Cecil had a daughter also called Joan, who was Richard Cecil's younger half-sister. However, the paternal grandfather's second wife, Joan née Roos, had already been married and widowed twice when the widower Cecil remarried her. From her second marriage, Joan's son Anthony Villiers entered David Cecil's life as a stepson (Foster 1897, pp. 135–36, 206–7). William Cecil's father, Richard, therefore had a full brother, David; a half-sister, Joan; and at least one stepbrother, Anthony Villiers. The connection is acknowledged in David Cecil's will when he gives to his son Richard his 'best gown'; to 'Anthony Vyllers' his 'second gowne', his best doublet and 'my velvet Jackett'; and to David, 'my sone', he bequeathed his black gown of cloth 'lyned with damaske', a doublet of satin, a jacket and 'my grene coate' (TNA PROB 11/29/71; Rowse 1960, p. 64). William Cecil's grandfather and stepgrandmother were present in his life until he was an adolescent of about 16.



Figure 10. Scheme for a funeral monument, 1562, Cecil Papers, CPM II/14, Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, UK. Courtesy of the Marquess of Salisbury.

Elizabeth Cooke was William Cecil's sister-in-law through his wife Mildred. The widow of Thomas Hoby and a mother, Elizabeth Cooke remarried Lord John Russell, an attentive stepfather to her two Hoby sons. Elizabeth Cooke Hoby Russell eventually designed funerary monuments with Latin, Greek and English epitaphs for both her husbands, the fathers of four surviving children from two marriage beds. Thomas Hoby was buried with his half-brother Philip, for whom William Cecil was executor (Phillippy 2011, pp. 77–87). Her two Hoby sons from her first marriage were half-siblings to their younger Russell sisters (Lamb 2009, p. 108; Alford 2008, p. 3). Edward Hoby honoured his stepfather on Russell's funerary monument in Westminster Abbey with a Latin inscription:

Who, of what sort, how great you were, your pedigree indicates,
 [Your] spotless life teaches, and [your] death requiring grief shows:
 Let it be enough for the stepson [*privigno*] to have erected these few verses;
 You his parent in mind, he your son.
 Quis, qualis, quantus fueris tua stemmata monstrant,
Integra vita docet, morsque dolenda probat:
Sat sit privigno, posuisse haec camina pauca;
Tu sibi mente parens, filius ille tibi. (Phillippy 2011, pp. 176–77; Westminster Abbey 2021)

Elizabeth and Mildred's sister Anne married a close friend of William Cecil's, Nicholas Bacon, who rose to power as a privy councillor and lord keeper of the great seal at Elizabeth's accession to the throne. As his second wife, Lady Anne Bacon became stepmother to several stepchildren—Nicholas, Nathaniel and Elizabeth—and eventually mother to her own sons, their half-brothers Anthony and Francis Bacon (Allen 2014, pp. 7–12). Last, but

not least, two of William Cecil's widowed sisters, Elizabeth and Margaret, embarked on remarriages, introducing stepfathers into the lives of their children and extending the Cecil family horizontally through in-laws. In short, William Cecil was immersed in stepfamily relationships throughout his genealogy and kinship networks.

3.1. William Cecil's Kinship Riddle Solution

So how was it possible to solve the English riddle painting 'devoted' to William Cecil? As we have seen in the riddle of the count in the fifteenth-century consanguinity manual and in the Dutch riddle paintings, the solution often involved a series of marriages or remarriages creating a complex stepfamily. The keen reader may have noticed a subtle difference between the pre-1571 riddle, now at Hatfield House, and its counterparts on the Continent. In the riddles in the Low Countries, the young woman explains how the pairs of adult sons of the old man are her 'father's brothers' and her 'mother's brothers'—in other words, her husband's sons are her uncles, whereas the youngest sons are her own from legitimate marriage with the old man. Yet in the English tradition the fair Lady introduces two of the figures to the stranger as 'my brother, of my father's side' and the 'other by my mother's side, is my brother also'. The third figure is her 'own son', all 'sons to my husband'. How are the two figures—one in yellow and one in red—related to the lady as brothers rather than uncles?

If we return to the Sotheby's catalogue of 2010, the auction house presented a nineteenth-century solution borrowed from Lady Theresa Lewis (Figure 11) and later scholars (Lewis 1852, III, 259, 286, no. 12; Gibson 1977, p. 132; Hearn 1995, p. 98). Sotheby's suggested that the 'answer to the riddle can be explained by the fact that the first two men, the lady's half-brothers, must have married the daughters of her husband by a previous marriage, making them sons (or sons-in-law) to her husband and brothers to her own son, the third man' (Sotheby's 2010).

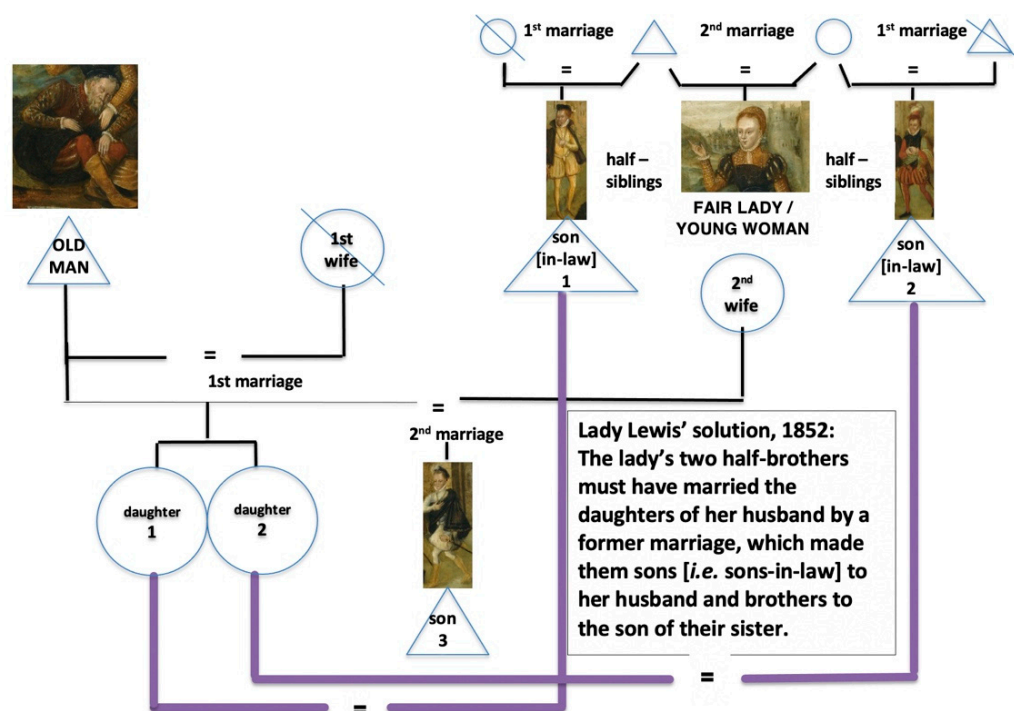


Figure 11. A drawing of the solution as presented in the text of Lady Theresa Lewis, *Lives of the Friends and Contemporaries of Lord Chancellor Clarendon*, III, 286, no. 12. London. Shown with the figures from 'A Riddle devoted to . . . Sir William Cecil', c. 1565–70, sold from the estate of the 7th Earl of Clarendon and now at Hatfield House, UK. Drawing credit: Lyndan Warner.

The Treasurer Barlegh's will for Consequency;

A wayfaring man travelling on & on by a Lay sitting on a greene hill, did an ancient Knight going asleepe on
his lappe; And also discerning three young gentlemen coming downe an hill from a fayre Castle: he sheweth to the Lay
and sayd, O pray you faire Lay tell me,
What hat it where the Tower lieth.
That come out of the Castle in fild degree?

The Lay, answered and sayde, The first is my brother of S. Lullis side
he truly to serve.
The second is my brother of the other
side, called the.
The third is mine owne sonne came to
quitty, beggett:
And ask somas to my husband to sleepe
in my lappe.

Without hard of language in any degree,
Told mee, good Sir, how many they are.

```
graph TD
    TS[The Treasures Supplication] --- TF[The Tresses fallen]
    TS --- AK[The ancient Knight]
    TF --- AK
    TF --- L[The Lay]
    LM[The Layes Mother] --- AK
    LM --- L
    LS[The Layes step-sister] --- L
    AK --- LKS[A Lady's sister in the castle]
    AK --- LKSO[A lady's sonne who commeth out of the castle]
    AK --- LKSC[A lady's sonne of the castle]
    L --- LKSC
    L --- LLS[The Lay's sister do her children's side]
```

Tell mee, good Sir, how may this bee?

The drawn solution of ‘Lord Treasurer Burleigh’s riddle’ resembles the consanguinity ‘computations’ in early modern legal manuals and shows that the ‘ancient Knight’ had a first and a second son before the ‘third sonne . . . by y^e Lady’ (Figure 13).



Figure 13. ‘The L[or]d Treasurer Burleigh’s riddle for Consanguinity’, The William Andrews Clark Memorial Library, University of California, Los Angeles, shown with the inset figures from the riddle painting ‘devoted’ to Sir William Cecil, Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, UK, courtesy of the Marquess of Salisbury.

All three sons are described as ‘comeing out of y^e castle’. The Lady’s sister ‘by her father’s side’ is shown as the child of the Lady’s father and ‘stepmother’, whereas the Lady’s sister ‘by her Mother’s side’ is shown as the child of the Lady’s ‘Mother’ and ‘steppfather’, which means that the Lady’s mother and father each had a daughter from another marriage—stepsisters to each other, but half-sisters to the Lady. In this early modern handwritten solution, assuming all three of the Knights are ‘lawfully begott’, the ancient Knight was a remarrying widower with sons from an earlier marriage or marriages. The Knight’s ‘first sonne’ married the Lady’s sister ‘by her father’s side’ while his ‘second sonne’ married the Lady’s sister ‘by her Mother’s side’. A modernized version of the solution to ‘Lord Treasurer Burleigh’s riddle for Consanguinity’ in Figure 14 shows how we might visualize the relationships in a kinship diagram or family tree today.

Not to complicate matters further, but the Lady could either be the middle sister or the youngest sister; it does not really matter for the riddle solution, except that it is interesting that these marriage partners are named in the solution to Lord Treasurer Burleigh’s riddle as stepparents. In one scenario, the Lady’s father marries her ‘stepmother’, they have a daughter, then the father is widowed and he remarries the Lady’s mother and the Lady is born. Then the father dies and the Lady’s mother remarries the Lady’s ‘steppfather’ and they have a daughter. The other possibility is that the Lady’s mother and father each brought to their conjugal union a daughter from a former marriage—stepsisters to each other, but half-sisters to their younger sister, the Lady.

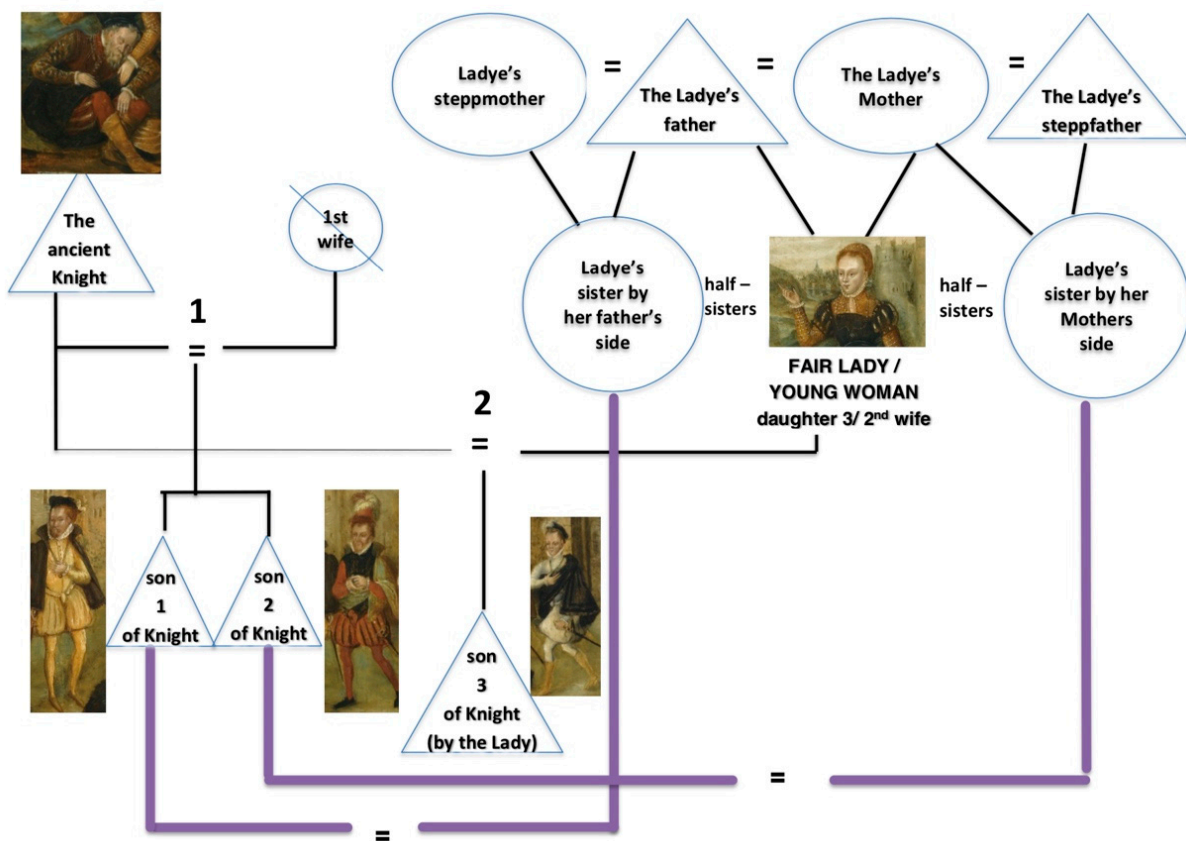


Figure 14. Modernized diagram of ‘The L[or]d Treasurer Burleigh’s riddle for Consanguinity’, shown with figures from the riddle painting ‘devoted’ to Sir William Cecil, Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, UK, courtesy of the Marquess of Salisbury. Drawing credit: Lyndan Warner.

4. Choices of Visual Representation of Kinship Riddles in England and the Low Countries

There are clear structural similarities between the pre-1571 English visual riddle now at Hatfield House, UK, and the 1576 painting in Nijmegen. Both paintings feature an old man on the lap of a young woman, but whereas the 1576 painting has three pairs of brothers or six sons, the pre-1571 painting has only three sons. The range of ages among the sons comes across in both paintings: The sons wear distinct colours and the older sons have beards while the younger sons are fresh-faced youths.

David Evett has suggested that Netherlandish painters tended to introduce outdoor scenes with architectural features to create a three-dimensional space in their allegories, whereas English-born or trained painters used indoor scenes or a colour plane that relied on juxtaposed groupings, which he terms 'planar parataxis' (Evett 1989, pp. 154, 156). Hans Eworth's 1569 *Elizabeth I and the Three Goddesses* or his 1570 *Allegory of the Wise and Foolish Virgins* fit into the Netherlandish type of allegory set in a painted landscape of trees and lawn embellished with ruins or castles (Eworth 1569, Eworth 1570). This observation about interiors and landscape settings complicates matters for unravelling the direction of traffic in the kinship riddle visual traditions in England and The Netherlands.

The pre-1571 painting in England devoted to William Cecil is set in a landscape with trees, a castle and a body of water in the background, whereas numerous sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Dutch variations of painted kinship riddles in Schoonhoven and Nijmegen occur in a nondescript interior with a tile floor and often without furnishings. In the Dutch paintings, the young woman and the pairs of sons speak directly to the viewer. The English versions continuing from the 1570s into the 1600s continue the scenario of the 'wayfarer' coming upon a 'Lady' with an ancient knight lying in her lap, set in a green

landscape with a moated castle and a drawbridge, with one son per marriage rather than a pair or trio of sons. The traveller and the Lady engage in conversation with each other as the viewer looks on.

A Flemish legal manuscript dating to 1504 (Donche 1999, p. 274; Roes 2018, p. 116) gives hints to the roots of both the English and Netherlandish visual traditions of kinship riddles. In 2011, the Flemish genealogist Pieter Donche drew attention to a Ghent collection of inheritance and customary law with a riddle in the opening pages that might help a reader ‘warm up’ or exercise their consanguinity calculus skills as a playful training tool. The riddle has no sketch or drawing of the solution; rather, the riddle tells a story (Figure 15a,b). Donche characterizes the riddle as very ‘Burgundian’—that is, reminiscent of the late medieval era of Flanders, because every man in the story is a knight and everything takes place in a castle with a drawbridge (Donche 1999, p. 271). Yet, the description of the riddle is so visual it is easy to imagine the scene that perhaps exists or existed somewhere in a manuscript illumination or painted version. In the Ghent manuscript, a wayfarer comes across a castle with a drawbridge and sees three knights (*rudders*) dressed in white. Upon the shore he sees three knights in black, and within the castle he enters the hall and encounters three knights in red. Entering the dining chamber, he finds a beautiful young woman (*scoone joncvrauwe*) with an old man (*ouden man*) lying in her lap. The wayfarer asks the young woman about the three knights in white, and she explains that the three men are her uncles from her father’s side. Then he asks about the knights in black and she explains they are her three uncles from her mother’s side. When asked about the knights in red she replies that the three are her ‘own children’ (*alle drie mijne kindre*), and that this ‘old man’ in her lap is the father of the nine, born of lawful marriage without blood ties. The old man has three sets of three sons distinguished by marriage beds with the colours white, black and red.

Although the early sixteenth-century Flemish text introduces the landscape setting with a castle familiar from the painting at Hatfield House, the riddle solutions of the 1504 Ghent manuscript and the 1576, 1577 and later Dutch paintings share the same structure. The key scene takes place in an interior setting, the dining room, where the young woman explains the solution to the traveller. The 1576 and 1577 Dutch paintings depict a sparsely furnished interior. Numerous derivative Dutch paintings and prints into the 1600s depict the complex stepfamily in a plain room—up to the most famous 1619 version by Pauwels van Schooten placing the riddle in a tiled room with a window view onto the town square of Nijmegen (Roes 2018, pp. 109–10; van Schooten 1619). In the 1504 manuscript, the old man married a widow who already had a son by her first marriage, and together they had three sons, the knights in white. When his first wife died, the old man remarried a widow with a daughter by a previous husband and together the old man and this second wife had three sons, the knights in black. The first widow’s son married the second widow’s daughter and the couple (the old man’s stepson and stepdaughter not related by blood) had a daughter. The young woman says, (*dat ben ik*) ‘that is me’. The old man married the young woman as his ‘third wife’ (*derde wijf*), she explains, and the three knights in red are (*mijn kinderen*) ‘my children’ (Heyman 1504, 8r-v; Donche 1999, p. 272).

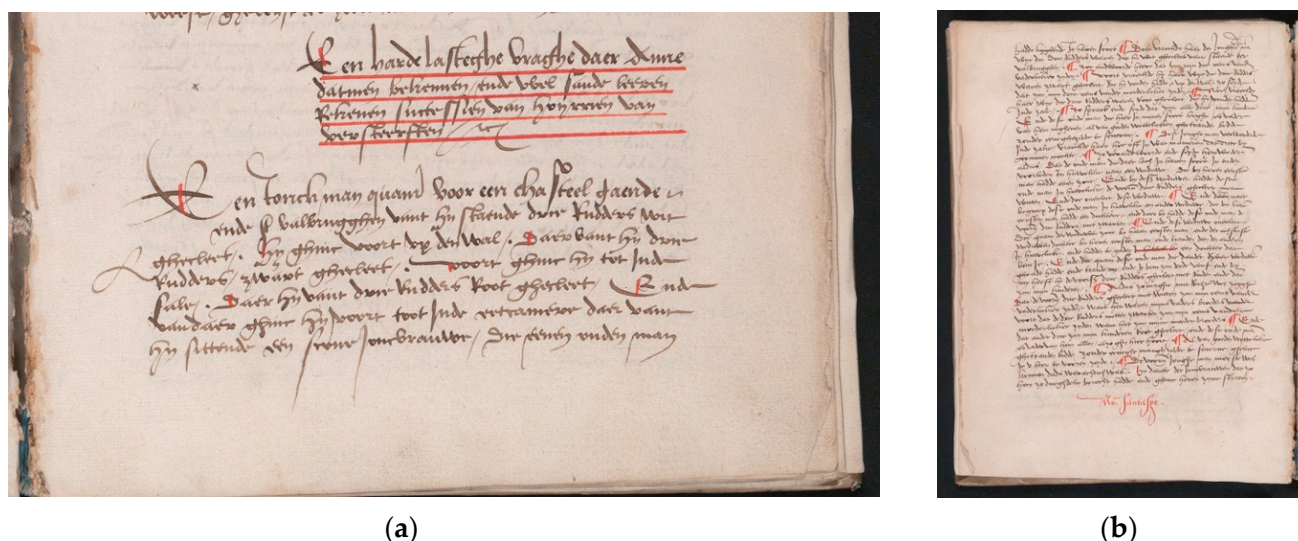


Figure 15. (a,b) The riddle of young woman, the old man and the knights in white, black and red in manuscript. Denys Heyman, *Juridische tractaten en teksten in het Nederlands betreffende Gent: kamprecht, leenrecht, vonnissen, tourben, instructiën, consultatiën*, 1504, 8^{r-v}. (a), 8^r, (b), 8^v. Credit: Ghent University Library, Ghent, Belgium, BHSL.HS.3800. CC-BY-SA license 4.0.

Whatever the source—whether a ‘stranger painter’ with Flemish origins from Ghent such as Lucas de Heere or a patron in William Cecil’s circle encountered the riddle on a trip to Flanders or an agent in the Low Countries saw a chance to enrich Cecil’s collection (Goldring 2014, p. 67)—the visual inspiration of the Hatfield House painting clearly derives from a version of the wayfarer’s tale of knights in a castle with a drawbridge set in a landscape. William Cecil himself travelled to Brussels in 1554 and again to Flanders the next year. Following a diplomatic mission to the peace conference at Marcq, he engaged in something of a small-scale Grand Tour in June 1555, visiting Bruges, Ghent, Alost, again to Brussels and then to Louvain, Mechelin, Antwerp, Thent, Courtrai, Menin and Lille, buying cloth, books, papers and items for his children (Read 1962, pp. 103, 106).

A more naïve English painting in the Fogg Museum, Harvard University, is derivative of the earlier riddle and probably dates to the 1570s. *The Allegorie of a Faire Ladye* (Figure 16, Unidentified Artist 1570–1579) shows the wayfarer, and the text of his question about the ‘three’ figures coming out of the castle is inscribed in a green bordered-red scroll held up by a bear and supported by cherubs. In this version of the riddle, the fair Lady challenges the wayfarer to show ‘by reason’ how her brothers and her son ‘lawfullye begott’ could be the sons of her husband sleeping in her lap.

The composition of the paintings is quite similar, except the older man wears chains of office (Figure 17b) in the Harvard painting. There is no coat of arms to link the later painting directly to William Cecil, who would most likely have been Lord Burghley and Lord High Treasurer (Bolland 2018, p. 58; Cooper 2009, p. 14). The *Allegorie of a Faire Ladye* has its own connection to a complex stepfamily (that we do not have space to explore here). Both paintings leave the viewer with the burden of solving the riddle.



Figure 16. Unidentified Artist, 'The Allegorie of a Faire Ladye', 1570–1579, oil on panel, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of Robert Rantoul Endicott, Photo © President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1959.143, 45.7 cm × 54.3 cm (18 × 21 3/8 in.) Harvard Art Museums collections online, <https://hvard.art/o/228438> (accessed on 5 January 2022).

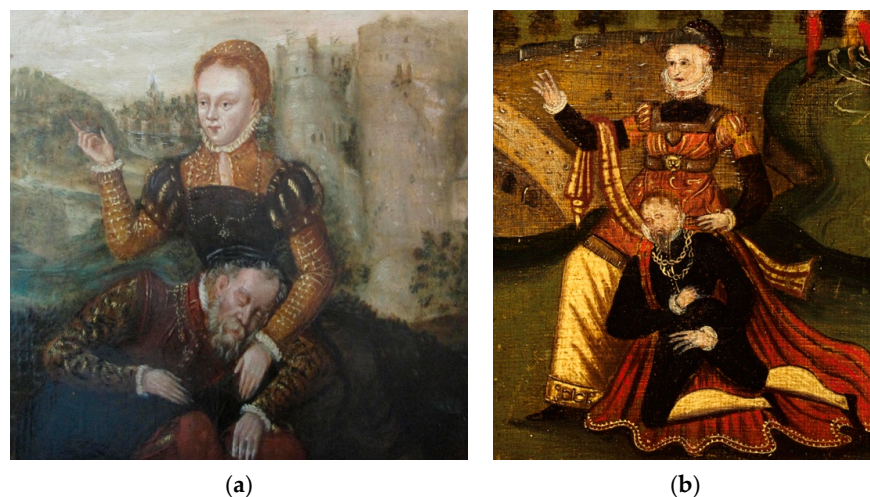


Figure 17. (a) Detail of the fair Lady and the ancient knight in the Riddle 'dyvoted' to William Cecil, Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, UK, courtesy of the Marquess of Salisbury; (b) Detail of the fair Lady and the ancient knight in Unidentified Artist, 'The Allegorie of a Faire Ladye', 1570–1579, oil on panel, Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum, Gift of Robert Rantoul Endicott, Photo © President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1959.143, 45.7 cm × 54.3 cm (18 × 21 3/8 in.) Harvard Art Museums collections online, <https://hvard.art/o/228438> (accessed on 5 January 2022).

5. The Consanguinity and Affinity Rules of England after 1563

The riddle solution of the pre-1571 painting at Hatfield House differs from the Dutch paintings of the 1570s as explained in Section 3.1, and we need to place this English version of the riddle in its historical context. Pieter Donche, the Flemish genealogist, has suggested that the English versions of the riddle painting were lost in translation from the Dutch. He argues that the Dutch, for example, of ‘my father’s brothers’ (which would mean uncles, as in the Nijmegen versions) was mistranslated in the English versions as ‘brother on my father’s side’, meaning a half-brother (Donche 2011, pp. 239–41). It is worthwhile to think about the direction of traffic in ideas, language and concepts between the Low Countries and England. The kinship riddle devoted to William Cecil predates the surviving Dutch paintings (known at this time). Rather than assume that the English painting is a poor copy, it is perhaps wiser to pay close attention to the context of the English Reformation and, in particular, the kinship reckoning in a painting dedicated to William Cecil.

The marriage of the stepson to the stepdaughter—a son from one wife of the old man marrying a daughter of his next wife, or vice versa—had been possible since the canon law reforms of the thirteenth century. It was still current practice in early modern England and could serve the function of consolidating land and property. In his explanations of how to calculate kinship in his sixteenth-century treatise, William Clerke comments on how the remarriage of a widow with a widower presented the opportunity to reinforce their marriage bonds by arranging to marry their children to loop the knot a second time (Warner 2018c, p. 242): ‘Hence it is that the father and sonne may contract and consummate marriage with the mother & daughter, as widows & widowers do & may do, & their sons and daughters, such as be so provided for their children, when they convenant themselves’ (Clerke 1594, p. 62 or sig. I 3v).

However, the old man’s marriage to the daughter of his stepson and stepdaughter—as occurred in the Ghent version of the riddle from the early 1500s—contravened Leviticus 18:17 and a similar prohibition echoed in Leviticus 20:14. In the 1400s and 1500s, petitioners across Europe could appeal to the pope for dispensation to overcome an impediment to marriage for a fee (Schmugge 2012, pp. 41, 48–49, 75). Although more remote degrees could be handled by a papal delegate, a petition to seek dispensation (or a pardon after the fact) for degrees as close as the first or second degree required the direct attention of the pope (Schmugge 2012, pp. 76, 81, 83). It is conceivable that the Ghent riddle of the early 1500s (or even the Dutch riddle paintings of the 1570s) could claim that the marriage between the old man and the young woman, his stepgranddaughter, was ‘lawful’ or permitted under ‘God’s law’—despite the canon law impediment—if it was granted through papal dispensation. Indeed, it is a key part of the riddle. Given the records of decisions for petitions seeking pardon for first- and second-degree impediments to marriage within the diocese of Utrecht in the 1400s and 1500s, a papal dispensation for the complex family situation of the riddle was highly unlikely, nigh impossible (Schmugge 2012, pp. 62, 82, 84). Thus, the written Ghent riddle and the Dutch paintings present an inventive challenge to the reader or viewer.

We have already seen how in the Political Ordinance of 1580, when the newly Protestant state of Holland replaced the old Catholic canon law, the consanguinity and affinity rules governing stepfamilies became more explicit. The old man would not have been allowed to marry his stepgranddaughter ‘nor his stepdaughter, or any of his late wife’s descendants’ (Roes 2018, p. 115; Grotius 1977, I.v.X, 24–25). Although the religious situation remained turbulent through the 1570s and 1580s in the northern Netherlands, even after the Union of Utrecht in 1579, Catholic dispensations were shifted aside in favour of state regulation of marriage across the provinces (Grotius 1845, I.v.V, note c; I.v. IX note 13, and I.v. X note 14; Lesaffer 2004, pp. 44–45). The solution presented in the Dutch riddle examples copied and reprinted into the 1600s and 1700s went against jurisprudence in the provinces that became the Dutch Republic despite the riddle claims that the young woman and old man were legally married.

Protestant reformers went back to the Bible and adapted the laws of the Old Testament to apply consanguinity and affinity impediments with a symmetry that extended prohibitions in Leviticus to the collateral equivalents by line and degree (Clerke 1594, sig. M 3r-v; Clementsson 2021). In England and Wales, for anyone intending ‘to enter the state of Matrimony’, the Archbishop of Canterbury Matthew Parker in 1563 laid out the degrees ‘against the lawe of God and the lawes of the Realm’. These restrictions were reiterated in *The Advertisements* in 1566: ‘that no persons be suffered to marry within the Levitical degrees mentioned in a table set forth by the Archbishop of Canterbury, in that behalf, anno Domini 1563; and if any such be, to be separated by order of law’ (Parker 1566; Kirby 2009, pp. 372–73).

This symmetry is perfectly illustrated in the version of the ‘table’ published as *An Admonition. To all suche as shall intende hereafter to enter the state of Matrimony Godly, and agreeably to Lawes* where the column of women ‘a man may not mary’ sits side by side with the list of men ‘a woman may not mary’. The trees of consanguinity and affinity were adapted and laid out with admirable clarity in a table with columns of English and Latin in 1563, a format reprinted throughout the period, such as the 1571 edition in Figure 18 (Parker 1571), until the publication of the Table of Kindred and Affinity in the Book of Common Prayer in 1681.

In adapting the Levitical laws to their collateral equivalents and degrees as set out by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the prohibition of Leviticus 18:17 meant that the fair Lady could not marry her ‘Grandmothers Husbände’. In addition, the ancient Knight could not marry his ‘Wives sonnes Daughter’, nor his ‘Wives daughters daughter’. The riddle could be solved in several ways following the early modern solution drawn as ‘Lord Treasurer Burleigh’s riddle for Consanguinity’ (Figures 13 and 14) or Lady Lewis’s text of a nineteenth-century solution (Figure 11).

A riddle painting intended for William Cecil would need to work within the laws of consanguinity and affinity of the realm and be true to the claim of the Fair Lady about her ‘owne sonne lawfully begott’. So, although the Dutch kinship riddles are related, I contend that an understanding of the kinship riddle painting at Hatfield House needs to consider the context of an English Reformation still in process (Jones 1985, p. 171). A painting dedicated to Sir William Cecil Knight, Principal Secretary to the Queen’s Majesty, would need to conform to the regulations introduced in Archbishop Parker’s *Admonition . . . to enter the state of Matrimony* (1563), which fits the dating of the painting c. 1564 to February 1571.

The English riddle painting versions of the 1570s represent a separate branch from the Dutch 1570s paintings, although all probably grew from a common root such as the Ghent 1504 manuscript version of the kinship riddle. The choices of visual representations differ and show most notably in the landscape or interior settings of the paintings, a choice made by patron or artist about which moment of the story to depict. Perhaps an earlier English visual riddle existed or survives in a private collection but has not been brought to scholarly attention. For the moment, it seems that the divergent structures of the riddle solutions in England and The Netherlands were probably more than a poorly worded translation, and resulted from religious and legal circumstances in flux in the sixteenth century.



Figure 18. Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, *An Admonition*. To all suche as shall intende hereafter to enter the state of Matrimony Godly, and agreably to Lawes. London: Reginald Wolfe, 1571. First published in 1563. The Bodleian Libraries, University of Oxford, MS. Bodl. Roll. 8, final section.

6. The English Kinship Riddle Paintings into the 17th Century and Beyond

The tradition of painted English kinship riddles continued into the next century, becoming more of quaint trick. By the 1620s or 1630s, a painting of the riddle in the private collection at Knole is firmly in an era of Stuart fashion, and the young woman with stylish

ringlets is addressed by the stranger as ‘Madam’³. The setting retains only the familiar three gentlemen near a castle in a landscape, the stranger approaching the woman with the man in her lap and a modernized English version of his question and her riddle response. An even later seventeenth-century version—judging from the fashion, probably the late 1630s or early 1640s—comes to light in a letter to the editor from a reader in Epping, Essex, in 1955. Guy Elwes challenges the readers of *Country Life* to ‘solve the riddle’ in the accompanying photograph of a painting that ‘belonged to John Conyers, who built Copped Hall, my wife’s home, in 1756’ (Elwes 1955).

In 1789, another reader, S.H., wrote to *Gentleman’s Magazine* to bring its attention to a ‘curious picture at Epping Inn’, which he considered ‘worth while to preserve a memorial of it, as its present situation exposes it to many dangers’. He thought that this painting at the postal house might amuse the readers ‘to consider whether the solution, as given at the inn . . . is a true one’. The letter writer’s description of figures in the painting and details of the colours and fashions do not match the painting at Knole, nor the photograph in *Country Life*. ‘The lady is in a Vandyke dress, bosom bare, hair hanging in curls on each side, necklace a single row of pearls’ (*Gentleman’s Magazine* 1789, pp. 1063–64). The painting is yet another seventeenth-century visual representation of the riddle, which repeats the same text as the one from the 1500s, with some spelling variants. This cluster in and around Knole, Kent, Copt Hall in Essex—that had a seventeenth-century connection to the Sackvilles at Knole (Phillips 1930, pp. 378–79)—and Epping, Essex, is for another story.

These later visual riddles lead us to the first (known) solution since the early modern ink drawing of ‘L[or]d Treasurer Burleigh’s riddle for consanguinity’. The riddle solution on display at Epping Inn from the eighteenth century is worthy of our attention to understand the trajectory of the English tradition because it rings true to the influence of Parker’s 1563 *Admonition*, the tables of kindred and affinity posted in churches and later published in the Book of Common Prayer. The comedic style of the solution posted in Epping Inn, however, might not have met the approval of William Cecil’s puritan sensibilities:

There was old Justice Clives
He married two wives.
By the first had a daughter, Miss Tabitha Clives.
His first wife being dead, he brought home a young bride
But by her had no issue: he sicken’d and died.
This buxom young widow a beauty was reckon’d
And, spouse being dead, she soon thought of a second
Sir John of yon castle began his addresses;
She yields as a spouse, and, to crown their caresses,
With two fine chopping boys yonder castle she blesses.
But this union, alas! did not last many years;
The good lady dies, the whole castle’s in tears
Sir John mourns three months for his dearest of wives,
And casts a sheep’s-eye at Miss Tabitha Clives.

**Look here, child, a man may not marry, my life
His grandmother, no, nor his grandfather’s wife.
Pray read on without laughter, there’s nothing comes after,
That a man may not marry his wife’s first husband’s daughter.** [emphasis added]
Sir John prevailed, Miss Tabitha commences a lady with joy,
And soon prov’d with child, and the child prov’d a boy

Like the late medieval riddle that opened this article, the solution rests on a sequence of marriage and remarriage that reconfigures the relationships of the figures in the painting. It is a stretch, but not far from the seventeenth-century realities of death, remarriage and stepfamilies. It also shows another way to explain how of the three sons, two of the

gentlemen ‘seem near the lady’s age’, whereas ‘the third is young’ (*Gentleman’s Magazine* 1789, p. 1063).

More significantly, the joke shows how the rules of consanguinity and affinity had been successfully embedded in English popular culture by the 1700s—without the need for kinship calculations and visual cues like trees of consanguinity and affinity. The Riddle at Epping Place Inn was a new branch from an old trunk, like the visual riddles in Nijmegen and the riddle dedicated to Cecil. Each variant could probably trace its roots to a puzzle or a visual schema meant to train the reader in the law, such as the Flemish manuscript riddle of the early 1500s. We just do not quite know how the riddle spread out from there.

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Notes

- ¹ Unknown 1600–1699. Raadsel van Nijmegen [Riddle of Nijmegen]. Museum Het Valkhof, Nijmegen, The Netherlands, Object Number C.XVI.16a.
- ² Unknown 1600s–. Het raadsel van de jonge vrouw, de oude man en hun zes zonen [The Riddle of the young woman, the old man and his six sons] Object number 100541909, NCRD, Nationaal Gevangenis museum, The Netherlands. Available online: <https://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=urn:gvn:NCRD01:100541909> (accessed on 17 April 2016).
- ³ Unknown 1620s–1630s. Riddle painting, Private collection, Knole, UK.

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CP 140/57, 59 Cipher, 1566.
 CP 225/3 Cobham Genealogy, 1558.
 CPM II/14 Scheme for a funeral monument, 1562.

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