

Introduction

What is chastity? For those contemporary westerners who do not observe the virtue for religious reasons, chastity usually means very little. It is perhaps considered an archaic form of social and sexual restriction, demarcation, or even control; a first-wave feminist act of sexual and social autonomy; a Petrarchan love-object's refusal to 'pity' her petitioner; or the cornerstone of Elizabeth I's statecraft. To most readers of English literature – both specialist and lay – chastity is perhaps a virtue or behaviour with an inherently literary nature. And with good reason: female assertions of chastity, as much as male attacks upon female chastity, have for centuries been a condition of English literary production. The gendered dynamic of Petrarchan desire underpinned the sonnet and romance traditions up to and well beyond their prodigious flowering in Renaissance England. Romance literature's long-standing concern with chastity also evolved into a theatrical interest when Shakespeare re-modelled the genre for the stage: his late plays all investigate the means by which women might defend their chastity against threats of sexual violence or wrongful accusations of adultery and fornication. And when in Richardson's extraordinarily popular *Pamela*, a serving girl unexpectedly defended her chastity against her master's advances, the novel form exploded into England's literary history.

In the early modern period, the relationship between chastity and literary production was especially insistent. A new generation of poets, who began to print and circulate their work more widely than their predecessors did, utilised chastity figuratively as a means of excusing their desire to make money from their wits. In *The Imprint of Gender*, Wendy Wall details the early modern culture of 'prefatorial disclosures' in which authors justified their decision to depart from the gentlemanly tradition of manuscript circulation by prefacing their works with elaborate disclaimers. Denying any consent in the unseemly act of 'pressing' and 'circulating' (bawdy puns introduced into the English language by the printing press),

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these prefaces figure the text as an unruly, wanton, or reluctantly debased daughter/lover who willingly or forcibly goes into the arms of another man (the reader) against the author's wishes.¹

However, the period's figurative and literary concern with chastity was matched by a non-literary and very serious interest in the virtue as a moral imperative for men and women of all ages and stations. 'More than our brother is our chastity': Isabella's fraught attempt to preserve herself from the infectious and dissolute society closing in around her would have seemed rather valiant to many theatre-goers on the Bankside – an area of London as corrupt as *Measure for Measure's* Vienna. For early moderns, chastity was not only one of the most important Christian virtues, both doctrinally and culturally, but one of the key conceptual frameworks through which individual men and women understood their relationship to their own bodies, to their community, to the wider Christian world, and to God. Importantly, chastity was not the same as virginity. Virginity was an anatomical state that preceded sexual activity; chastity was a state, both spiritual and physiological, of sexual integrity that could be observed through all stages of a person's adult life. When Leontes condemns Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* for the adultery he wrongfully believes she has committed with Polixenes, he is accusing her of unchastity.

Shakespeare's late plays initiated the flourishing of tragicomic drama which spanned the 1620s, 1630s and 1640s, when Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger, Shirley, Brome, Ford, and others were all producing plays concerned with women's chastity at the thematic level. One of the aims of this book is to begin to explain why tragicomedy and the culture from which the genre emerged were so preoccupied with chastity, but it approaches this question from an oblique angle. In seeking reasons for chastity's importance in early Stuart England, I have looked to other disciplines and discourses beyond the theatre: medicine, theology, and politics. A definite interest in chastity can be traced in each of these areas, but only by first acknowledging the period's investment in figurative renderings of the virtue.

As this book will argue, the period of England's history which saw the greatest and most varied deployment of chastity figures was that spanning the reigns of Elizabeth I to Charles I. While much has been written on Elizabethan chastity, the importance of chastity to English public life in the period between the Virgin Queen's death and the Civil Wars remains

¹ Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 169.

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under-explored. Amid the political and doctrinal revolutions of the early seventeenth century, chastity came to occupy a special place in the figurative language through which poets and dramatists depicted a range of human experiences, from personal adornment to penitence and from participation in the Eucharist to the operations of legal justice. In the hands of polemical prose writers – especially those circulating pamphlets in the 1630s and 1640s – the figurative language of chastity became crucial to arguments about England's surest road to prosperity and salvation. To a large extent, this book explores chastity at the linguistic, figurative, and discursive levels because it is only by acknowledging the breadth of chastity's presence in the various forms of written language left to us that we are able to appreciate how influential the virtue must have been for the individuals who wrote and read them.

To recognise the full scope of chastity's significance as a moral imperative in both the rhetoric of public discourse and the consciousness of individuals in the early modern period requires acknowledging those instances when the virtue is evoked but not necessarily mentioned by name. Such evocations are usually barely recognisable to the modern eye as references to chastity. Often when the body was used figuratively to describe an organisation or institution, chastity was also evoked. This is because figurative descriptions of social or political organisations were rarely deployed without reference to some moral imperative and chastity was the virtue governing the moral state of bodies. When Elizabeth I's body was used as a figure for the emerging nation (as it was in a number of her portraits for instance), her chastity in turn figured the impenetrability of England's borders. Early modern descriptions of incorporated institutions – city, state, nation, Parliament, Crown, Church, family – made full use of their bodily figuration to assert the importance of maintaining the integrity (or chastity) of bodily boundaries against outside assault or inside corruption or schism. To this end, chastity was evoked either positively (as in the case of Elizabeth I's body as a figure for chaste England) or negatively (as in descriptions of the Roman Church, the Whore of Babylon, as that corrupted body from which the chaste Protestant English Church must be protected). In the early decades of the seventeenth century, reformed theologians were preoccupied with theorising the relationship between the English and Roman Churches. But under Charles I, when tension grew more fierce within the English Church between Laudian and Puritan approaches to doctrine and worship, churchmen were debating the relationship between the monarch's two bodies (his body natural and body politic), the relationship between the monarch and

the church, between the monarch and Parliament, Parliament and the church, and between the visible church and the invisible church. These debates often thought through the relationships between the various figurative bodies in terms of marital or extra-marital unions, chaste or unchaste bodies.

One of the main inconsistencies in this kind of metaphorical thinking is the fact that ensuring the chastity or integrity of institutions by policing their borders denies a fundamental reality of institutional organisation: people must be able to come and go. For a 'body' to be totally sound, its infected parts must be either rejected or healed and re-absorbed, but this kind of maintenance means that the institution's chastity is actually only secured through a continual process of change. Such 'bodies' are therefore never truly contained. However, where one vision of chastity broke down, another – opposing – vision of chastity could be deployed. The conceptual and linguistic correlation between chastity and containment could also be reversed in descriptions of purging as chastisement. The pre-Reformation Church had a long history of ensuring that the sins of individual members were absolved before they could infect the whole. A similar model of 'purging' communal bodies became one of the defining features of the English Civil Wars, both rhetorically and actually. The final scenes of early Stuart drama routinely staged similar purging and purification of the families and states whose lives they depicted: from the tearful penitence of sinners to the punishment of transgressors who are 'removed' from the communal body by death. Indeed, it is on this point that tragicomedy often diverged from tragedy. Tragicomedies staged the purification of a community through the penitence and cleansing of its unchaste transgressors and their re-absorption into the collective body, while tragedies saw the communal body purged through death. Tragicomedy's interest in the restoration of familial, dynastic, or state unity through the punishment, reform, and healing of erroneous members is one of the areas in which the genre's thematic interest in chastity coincides with its structural interest in chastity: those sinners who are chastened and re-absorbed into the communal body in the plays' final scenes are so after being healed of their crimes against chastity (*The Winter's Tale's* Leontes, *Cymbeline's* Iachimo and Posthumus, *The Broken Heart's* Bassanes).

It is not only in descriptions of bodies and boundaries that chastity was utilised but also in the many figurative descriptions of coupling and issue that flourished in early modern English. The period saw a range of parental tropes emerging as descriptions for all sorts of human endeavour. This linguistic field offered opportunities to compare legitimate with

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illegitimate ‘issue’, such as the true and erroneous copies produced by the printing press; true and false currency; the good (English) and ‘bastard’ (Spanish) wine in increasing commercial circulation; the good and bad blood purged by one’s barber-surgeon; or virtuous and erroneous endeavour of any kind. Shakespeare often utilised this kind of comparison to describe the relative legitimacy of thoughts, such as Leontes’ long and anxious meditation over which ‘coupling’ between his fantasy and his mind have produced the true ‘issue’ or true thought about the relative chastity of Polixenes’ and Hermione’s relationship. Early modern writing (both moral and medical) on the whole range of bodily processes involved in human reproduction was concerned with chastity. Procreation, pregnancy, childbirth, breast-feeding, weaning: each stage attracted writing on the importance of men’s and (primarily) women’s chastity as a defence against polluting the physiological and spiritual health of infants. Infants were themselves signs of their parents’ chastity: a chaste union produced a healthy baby; an unchaste union produced a sickly or monstrous baby. The Puritan pamphleteers who wrote extensively on monstrous births as signs of God’s disapproval of English orthodoxy were to a large extent making figurative use of this commonplace. Their analysis of the reasons behind monstrous births do not emphasise the unchastity of the infants’ parents but rather that of the institutional body whose illness and error found its pathological sign in unhealthy issue.

In opposition to these claims, the court announced its capacity to ensure the chastity of nation and Church and, by pointing to Henrietta Maria’s body, was able to exploit the correlation between chastity and healthy fertility. The Queen’s masques celebrated her cultural and religious influence on the chastity of the court by placing her prodigiously fertile body centre-stage. Little scholarly attention has been paid to the ceremonial elements of Henrietta Maria’s many births and their coincidence with court masques, or to the possibility that these two forms of ceremony referenced each other symbolically – most especially in their use of the Throne of State and the canopied birthing bed. My own analysis of Henrietta Maria’s births begins with the child she lost (her first son, who was baptised Charles and buried with full state ceremony) and the speculation surrounding his still-birth. With an almost tragicomic insistence on the return of her lost and mourned baby, Henrietta Maria went on to give her next, healthy, child the same name as the one she buried. The ritual circumstances of the Queen’s first, and most anxiously observed, healthy birth (that of King Charles II) have much to say about Henrietta Maria’s swift rise to popularity in the 1630s and her increased cultural influence at

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court. At a time when the Queen's French courtiers and religious were fighting to remain in England, the success of this birth (and the likelihood that it was overseen by French, Catholic midwives, and nuns) marks a crucial turning point in the court's acceptance of Henrietta Maria's cultural and spiritual tastes. Those elements of the Queen's birthing rituals that were not publicly visible did leave their symbolic trace in the very public image of the Throne of State, in which, and beside which, Henrietta Maria's fertile body became an increasingly celebrated presence in the 1630s.

In the early seventeenth century, the Throne of State emerged as an important means of thinking about the relative chastity of the royal body it represented and contained, but also of the various chaste relationships which that body needed to maintain – with its subjects and with God. The Caroline masques, together with the full range of court ceremony, asserted a particular vision of the Throne of State as an object that not only exemplified the court's chastity but made the virtue available to those subjects who beheld the throne at court. Critics of the court instead claimed that under Charles I, the Throne of State was increasingly infected by the unchaste alliances it was forced to contain. By the late-1630s, criticism of Charles' religiously 'unchaste' marriage to Henrietta Maria found expression in images of the Throne stained, liquified, and prostituted. But these images of a debased throne were also used to accuse Charles of tyranny. In early Stuart writing, tyranny and pride were often described as an unchastening of the monarch's relationship with his people or with God. These two opposing views of the Throne can be found in the Earl of Castlehaven's trial (1631), a legal performance designed to assert the Crown's chastity and authority over a wayward and apparently grossly unchaste peer. Satirical commentary on the trial instead described the Throne of State as so unchastened, so stained by pride, as to undermine its claims to chaste authority. Castlehaven's complete lack of remorse ensured that the trial ultimately failed to communicate its intended statement about the court's ability to police chastity. For this reason, Cynthia Herrup has suggested the trial contributed to the growing distrust of the King's ability to properly possess the Crown.²

This debate about the relative chastity of the Throne of State formed the backdrop for Milton's intervention into the genre of the royal masque. Milton's own developing understanding of what constituted a chaste

² Cynthia B. Herrup, *A House in Gross Disorder: Sex, Law, and the 2nd Earl of Castlehaven* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

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subject, a chaste throne, and the genre through which chastity was best realised, was a central concern of his masque. But his awareness of the very different generic demands of a performed and printed text, and how these differences could be mapped along local debates about thrones as single and revered or individual and dispersed, means that the two versions of *A Masque Performed at Ludlow Castle* emerge as subtle but definite contributions to Civil War debates about chastity.

Milton's masque enjoyed the unique status of being both a courtly, occasional performance text and a printed and widely circulated text for private reading: it therefore offers a perfect opportunity to explore how the two genres shaped those distinct versions of chastity emerging in the Caroline period. A central concern of this book is how the court's cult of chastity built its vision of the virtue out of (and in conversation with) the formal and thematic concerns of tragicomedy and masquing, and how critics of the court similarly built their own interpretation of chastity out of the genre and technologies most available to them and most suited to their agenda: the sermon and printed pamphlet. In this way, a fuller understanding of chastity's role in the rhetorical and moral struggles of the Caroline period reveals how much the revolutionary years that were to follow were shaped by textual phenomena: by those forms of communication that best realised and articulated the oppositional voices that were in the 1620s, 1630s, and 1640s competing to claim chastity as their own.

This book traces figurative references to unchastity – sluices, illegitimate couplings, tyrannical thrones – in texts from the early Stuart period in order to demonstrate how powerfully persuasive the threat of unchastity was to readers and audiences in the politically-fraught environment that emerged in the 1640s. By doing so, it demonstrates that certain images that had come to signal unchastity could still function as signs of danger in texts that were not explicitly concerned with the problem of unchastity as such. Writers, dramatists, and masquers on both sides of the court/commonwealth divide subtly drew upon the symbolic power of unchastity in order to strengthen their warnings against collusion with the wrong political organisation, participation in the wrong religious observations, or enjoyment of the wrong dramatic or poetic texts.

The most persistent early modern medical view of unchastity drew on the Galenic theory of the unchaste body as a broken or leaky container that cannot hold onto its fluids. Chapter 1 traces the many instances in which this depiction of unchastity was used to describe real and figurative bodies and the increasingly revolutionary purpose of such uses. Focussing especially on the term 'sluice', the chapter examines Sir John Harington's

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bawdy detailing of his flushable privy in *The Metamorphosis of Ajax*, Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (in which Leontes describes Hermione's apparently adulterous body as 'sluiced'), and the many anti-court sermons and pamphlets of the 1630s and 1640s that describe England and the English Church as sluiced by the unchaste influence of Rome, Charles I, his French Queen, and Archbishop Laud. The chapter concludes with a reading of anti-court commentary on Queen Henrietta Maria's movements around London and the royal palaces, which describe the Queen's unchaste (Catholic) body as the infection opening those moral sluices in the city through which the plague could circulate more freely.

Chapter 2 inverts the argument of Chapter 1, asking instead how early moderns thought about sluicing as a way of healing unchastity, of chastising the corrupted body. It examines the growing Caroline interest in discourses of penance as spiritual purging and the theatre's interest in both medical purging (phlebotomy) and spiritual purging (tears) as means of repairing unchaste relationships and healing communities. Through its analysis of the highly emblematic death scenes in Ford's *The Broken Heart* and *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, the emblem tradition, and debates about new medical technologies, this chapter explores early modern interest in purging/chastising as a means of strengthening those communal bodies whose figurative chastity had been damaged either by the actual unchastity of individual members or by political/religious division. From early Stuart thought on the chastity of communal bodies comes that commonplace assertion that forms a crucial part of this book's analysis: unchastity as a form of pride or tyranny. This model of unchastity can be traced back to Shakespearean tragicomedy and went on to form a central part of the pre-revolutionary thought I trace through the 1630s and 1640s.

Drawing on Chapter 2's analysis of chastity's place in early Stuart thinking about communal bonds, Chapter 3 examines further chastity's role in discussions of pride and tyranny, focussing particularly on revolutionary depictions of the Throne of State. The Caroline court and its 'cult of chastity' used the many elaborate masques of the 1630s to claim that the chastity of Charles' and Henrietta Maria's marriage protected the nation as a spiritual community and confirmed the sanctity of the Throne. The success of this message can be inferred by the lengths to which court critics had to go in order to undermine it. Anti-court writers instead claimed that under Charles, the Throne of State was unchaste (sluiced, prostituted). Such images enabled writers to accuse the court of pride and tyranny – a form of erroneous and unchaste relationship with God and fellow-man that threatened the unity and stability of the nation. Chapter 3

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concentrates on a range of anti-court depictions of the Throne of State as unchaste and in need of reform, found in commentary on the high ceremony at Charles' court, anti-Catholic images of the throned 'Purple Whore' in Rome, discussions of William Harvey's discovery of blood's circulation, and the Earl of Castlehaven's trial.

Chapter 4 focusses on the Caroline court's cult of chastity in the 1630s and how it was built from cultural practices that were also tragicomic devices: familial unity, female fertility, cloistered devotional piety, spectacle, and wonder. Exploring Henrietta Maria's devotional world, and the many royal birthing rituals that coincided with her court masques, this chapter outlines that form of chastity that was most threatening to the vision of the virtue articulated by court-critics.

John Milton's masque, with its chaste maiden trapped in Comus' unchaste throne, offered a particular argument about the need to overcome both the unchaste tyranny of princes and, within the individual heart, the tyranny of pride. Milton's vision of chastity saw spiritual combat enacted through the processes of textual production and a complex deployment of the classical humility topos that placed the submission of the self to authority within a framework of political opposition. Chapter 5 offers a comparative reading of the performed and printed versions of *A Maske Performed at Ludlow Castle* because in each text, Milton drew the line between chastity and tyranny very differently. This chapter argues that Milton's individualism is most apparent in his interrogation of the human heart's unchaste propensity to pride and that for Milton the heart was therefore not only the most superior site of moral and spiritual combat but the place of the greatest human achievement and the closest proximity to the divine will. As the breach which ruptures the bond between God and individual believers, the unchastity of pride was not only the greatest of all sins in Milton's theology of virtue but the hardest to overcome – much harder than the overthrowing of tyrannical princes.

Chapter 5's analysis of Milton's performed and printed masques demonstrates how morally intentioned was Milton's translation of the performed genre into the written word. Strengthened by those anti-court and anti-Laudian arguments laid out in previous chapters, Milton's adaptation explicitly denied the chastity most associated with the court's performed masques and re-inscribed it in the language and printed discourses of political rebellion and theological introspection. In this sense, his masque constitutes a major intervention in the Caroline cult of chastity and needs to be considered as a significant marker of change in the turning of public opinion against the King.

CHAPTER I

*Unchastity in Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale,
 Caroline court performance and theological dispute*

*And many a man there is (even at this present,
 Now, while I speak this) holds his wife by th'arm,
 That little thinks she has been sluiced in's absence
 And his pond fished by his next neighbor (by
 Sir Smile, his neighbour). Nay, there's comfort in't,
 Whiles other men have gates and those gates open'd,
 (As mine), against their will . . .
 From east, west, north, and south; be it concluded,
 No barricado for a belly. Know't,
 It will let in and out the enemy
 With bag and baggage.¹*

Leontes' remarkable diatribe against adultery describes women's unchastity as a body sluiced, a pond fished, a gate opened, and a belly penetrated – a cluster of images that all depict physical and moral openness and the illegitimate movement of fluids. The speech is typical of the antifeminist rants often expressed by those male lovers on the early modern stage who are violently consumed by sexual jealousy. Leontes, however, concentrates more than his peers on one commonplace perception of the unchaste, female body: its openness and its capacity to be 'sluiced'. Although it was in circulation before Shakespeare's use in *The Winter's Tale*, the popularity of the sluice as a sign of unchastity grew rapidly after 1611, and throughout the early Stuart period, it accrued a number of associated images, all operating within the schema of fluidity and openness. The *OED* does not list any meaning for sluice other than the most material and benign, but the figurative importance of sluicing to Leontes' fear of unchastity and his descent into madness has been noted by both Gail Kern Paster and David Hillman.² In this chapter, I want to trace some of the ways in which

¹ Shakespeare, *First Folio*, p. 279.

² Gail Kern Paster, *Humoring the Body* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2004), p. 71; David Hillman, 'Visceral Knowledge: Shakespeare, Skepticism, and the Interior of the Early Modern Body',