EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES

'They would not for a world transgresse the bounds of Civility': The 'Otherness' of Early Modern Female Vices and Virtues Reassessed[1]

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I. Introduction

Religious discourse in both pre- and post-Reformation England associated many vices and virtues with women,[2] either by explicit assignation, e.g. female curiosity as the reason for the Fall, or by using aspects of female behaviour to exemplify a given vice or virtue.[3] Due to multiple intersections of religious and social discourse, in turn, a moral (or ideological) and secular rationale behind describing women in such terms was asserted and reinforced both by authors of texts prescribing rules of female conduct, and

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[2] The following discussion focuses on women who were city dwellers, and members of communities in which women were differentiated according to their birth and trade, but in which many laws and texts were written for a relatively generalized 'woman', a church-goer, faithful wife, and a participant in the social and economic life of her community. While the social and moral expectations towards women in rural areas were very different from those towards noble-born women, and within the 'middle' class there were likewise distinctions in accordance with status, wealth, and profession, the majority of conduct texts and other writings for and about women that comprise the textual basis for the present essay are centred on a fairly generalized 'gentlewoman' (i.e. 'middle-class'); the discussion is further generalized by the relative independence of notions of female vices and virtues (vices in particular) of class distinctions (for instance, pre-Reformation texts comparing the body of sin to the body of a woman did not indicate whether such 'woman' was of a particular class). At the same time, the paper will indicate a correlation to a specific social class of a given vice or virtue wherever it is deemed relevant.

[3] Many allegorical texts (morality plays, dream vision poems, etc) use female characters as representative of vices and virtues, e.g. 'Why I can't be a nun', or the *Castle of Perseverance*.

by their addressees. By focusing on conceptualizations of the virtues of piety and humility, and the vices of unruly speech, anger, and lust in the context of their social significance and methods of their definition, this paper will outline how the early modern understanding of these vices and virtues was a result of a complex process that involved cultural and social norms, the social importance of religion and religiously informed models of behaviours, as well as ideals about the commonwealth, arguing that the definitions of female vices and virtues were negotiated and reinforced both by the authors of social and moralistic instruction, and women themselves. The core interest of this paper is thus to examine how the constructed boundaries of female behaviour fitted into broader social policies and agendas. By proposing and illustrating a continuity between pre- and post-Reformation Protestant approaches to female vices and virtues the paper further examines how the prescribed theory and female practice of behaviour perpetuated many of these approaches across both periods as a social rather than religious device, through a process of prescription and implementation ingrained in the performativity of social roles. First, however, I will set my discussion within a particular approach to periodization and explain the relevance of placing my inquiry in a social, rather than a religious context.

Religious conceptualizations of vices and virtues stemmed from moral and social concerns relevant to a given time in history. According to Morton Bloomfield (1952), in its early days moral thought was primarily concerned with carnal sins (lust and gluttony), later pride and envy, and in the late Middle Ages the emphasis of a considerable amount of texts shifted to re-defined avarice and sloth.[4] Richard Newhauser suggests that the changes in the prominence, or weight, assigned to particular sins occurred relatively frequently throughout the Middle Ages and, since the concept of sin was responsive to social and cultural changes, definitions of vices and virtues remained dynamic also after the Reformation.[5] Thus, any similarities of moralistic interests in pre- and post-Reformation texts are indicative of shared concerns and through that, of shared aspects of a cultural, social, and religious context that helped to form these concerns. Even though the concept of sin underwent doctrinal changes in post-Reformation theology, many commonplaces of discourse on sin remained popular and doctrinally sound,[6] and moralistic thought remained an important source of social

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[4] Morton W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins* (Michigan: Michigan State College Press, 1952), p. xiv.

[5] Richard Newhauser, *The Treatises of Vices and Virtues in Latin and the Vernacular* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), p. 114.

[6] Even the concept of venial and mortal sins, as in, for example, Richard Baxter's *The Right Method for a Settled Peace of Conscience* (1653): 'And so we may call idle words, and rash expressions in our heart, and such like, Sins of Infirmity, in comparison of Murder, Perjury, or the like gross sinnes; which we commonly call Crimes, or wickedness, when the former we use to call but Faults. These Infirmities are

instruction. While some Protestants followed Calvin's ridicule of distinguishing sins into branches, they did not dismiss the sins such distinctions listed, because neither was the concept of sin as evil within the soul different from its late medieval definition, nor were the social concerns various kinds of sin objectified appeased. In other words, because the understating of sin is inseparably connected to the development of society and culture, and moralistic concerns are a reflection of this development, commonalities between certain notions about sin are to be expected in periods in which religion had a formative effect on society. Pre- and post-Reformation England is particularly illustrative of the immense influence religion and religious moral notions had on social norms and standards of behaviour, which made sin not only a socially responsive concept, but also one which could be, and often was, viewed primarily as socially consequential. To late medieval and early modern audiences sin was a social problem, and among social definitions of sin, vices and virtues of women stand out prominently as related much more to social policy than straightforward theology.

A question thus might be asked whether the Reformation had any direct, significant influence on the changes in the discourse on female vices and virtues, a question to which, I propose, the answer should be 'no', with a number of reservations.[7] The

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they which the Papists (and some Learned Divines of our own (as Rob. Baronitu in his excellent *Tractate de Spiritual Peace and Comfort* '*de Veccat. Mortaii & Veniali*') do call Venial sinnes: Some of them in a fair and honest sense, viz,. Because they are such sinnes as a true Christian may live and die in, though not unrepented or unrested, ... and yet they are pardoned' (pp. 262-3).

[7] For the sake of brevity it is not possible to discuss these in much detail. Primarily, potential reservations to this claim could touch upon notions of theology, particularly due to the influence of religion on social norms, as signalled above. However, given the wide dissemination of pre-Reformation religious and devotional texts in early modern England, the Protestant overt and covert engagement with the pre-Reformation devotional and theological tradition, as well as the, in many ways, theologically-free shape of practical social implementations of concepts originating in Christian doctrine and the lack of immediate influence of theological disputes onto many other aspects of Protestant life (e.g. legal culture), it can be posited fairly certainly that, while the general impact of the Reformation on early modernity was vast, the specificities of social applications of originally religious concepts, particularly for the sake of social agendas and polities, need not be considered as immediately relevant. For instance, the way medieval texts discussed both the spiritual, and carnal features of women was influential enough to survive into the early modern period via the advent of print (such as William Caxton's translation of Geoffrey de La Tour Landry's *Livre du Chevalier de la Tour Landry pour l'enseignement de ses filles* (1372), printed in 1484). More widely, after the 1470s, many English printers reached to the large bulk of late medieval devotional writings as a very popular and printable genre; see Jennifer Bryan, *Looking Inward: Devotional Reading and the Private Self in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), p. 10. Texts such as the *Scale of Perfection,* William Flete's *Remedies Against Temptations*, or *The Book of Vices and Virtues* were printed and reprinted well into the second half of the seventeenth century: the *Scale,* for instance, was printed at least five times, in 1494, 1507, 1525, 1533 and 1659. Thus, while not always as acknowledged inspirations, pre-Reformation texts of a various kind,

importance of the Reformation to various aspects of social life,[8] such as the increased lay participation in worship through the use of the vernacular in liturgy and translations of the Bible was, after all, immense, but these changes can in places easily be viewed as only indirectly related to the position of women in society.[9] While connected to other aspects of life influenced by the *Zeitgeist* (such as the ambience of intensified reformatory movements within the Church, an emerging awareness of nationhood, or changes in theories of kingship), discourse on female vices and virtues remained also firmly anchored within the realm of continuity with the past, consciously and unconsciously placed there by writers, men and women, for a variety of purposes. Brian Cummings and James Simpson view the complexities of literary, cultural, and social history spanning between the late fourteenth and late seventeenth century as indicative of a set of continuities and discontinuities dynamically negotiated and renegotiated in old and new ideologies, political and religious agendas, and social, cultural, and literary discourse, devotional practice, and as influenced by new discoveries, geographical findings, and developing scientific thought. In other words, they talk about 'the period unbound', proposing a view onto the cultural and literary history in England between the fourteenth and seventeenth century as one complex period in which the past, present, and hopes for the future coexisted and remained mutually influential, a 'historical temporality'.[10] Such a view on history allows to approach the, in many ways unquestionably different, pre-and post-Reformation England(s) as favourable to continuity as much as change, and discuss discourse on women in those two periods as connected rather than divided by the Reformation. Thus, while history inevitably contains 'revolutionary moments' which 'claim to provide… liberating points of origin…' and which 'characteristically claim to restart the very measures of time and

which included writings for and by women, were widely disseminated and available for post-Reformation audiences, and their popularity attests to the relevance of ideas on female vices and virtues they contained to early modern audiences, for whom Protestantism did not pose serious inhibitions in reading such texts. See also e.g. Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Christopher Brooks, *Law, Politics, and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[8] As discussed, for instance, in *Getting Along? Religious Identities and Confessional Relations in Early Modern England*, ed. by Nadine Lewicky and Adam Morton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

[9] The notions of the idealized 'compassionate marriage' did influence the role of women within their families and had, perhaps, impact on the relationships between the spouses, but whether this was a change compared to the practicalities of marriage before the Reformation remains unclear, especially since the evidence that Protestant ideals on marriage translated into practice remains scarce. See William Haller and Malleville Haller, 'The Puritan Art of Love', *Huntington Library Quarterly* 5 (1942), 235-72 (pp. 242, 249, 265-7).

[10] Brian Cummings and James Simpson (eds.), 'Introduction' in: *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance Literary History*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 2-4.

sequence',[11] discourse on female vices and virtues did not experience any such revolutionary moment redefining its foundations, form, or purpose.[12] Instead, it remained in what Cummings and Simpson term 'a relation of visible continuity' with its past, which fits comfortably between other kinds of relations, of contrast, hidden continuity, or 'hydraulics of culture'.[13] The perception of female vices and virtues, in other words, developed along lines which were connected to, yet not uniform with, the history of the Reformation in England.[14] While the Reformation did have influence on instructive writings for women, as they were phrased in religious vocabulary and relied on religious concepts pervaded by ideals on female social roles and conduct, continuity with the pre-Reformation tradition and a degree of detachment from some of the crucial aspects of the Reformation prevail, in my opinion, over some aspects of change which of course, inevitably, occurred. The discourse on female vices and virtues performed first and foremost a social function that adapted religious discourse as useful, traditional and thus well recognized in social contexts connected to the core foundations of how society was intended to function, and to the roles assigned to particular social performances of vices and virtues.

This assignation, as some sociologists and anthropologists assert, relies on both conscious agendas and on unconscious interpersonal dynamics. The definition of social roles relies on the premise that 'human interaction ... depends ... on what [people] *believe* themselves to be', and that 'the individual's representation of his own self ... is

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[11] Ibid, p. 3.

[12] The existence of literate, educated women, or female rulers in the early modern period does not preclude there were none such women earlier, in the fourteenth or fifteenth century and so, in my view, even such exceptional women as Elizabeth I or Margaret Cavendish cannot be viewed as 'milestones' of the role of women in society because not only were there many such women present in the public sphere earlier (such as Christine de Pizan, Marie de France, Margaret of Sweden, Hildegard of Bingen, or Margaret Beaufort), but also because there was no one single moment in the history of women that would correspond in terms of magnitude and significance to such events as the breakthrough of the Reformation, or the beheading of Charles I. This is, of course, not to diminish the role, importance, and dynamics of the development of women in history, but to say that there seems to be no one moment of change similar to those used as markers of changes in historical periods, for instance.

[13] Cummings and Simpson, 'Introduction', p. 6.

[14] Such as the efficacy of indulgences, the meaning of justification, and the doctrine of penance. Heiko A. Oberman (2001) and Berndt Hamm (2001, 2003) argued that the Reformation was not so much a breaking point with the late Middle Ages, but a natural and immediate continuity of late medieval theology and piety, and so any examinations of religion in the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth and even seventeenth century should not be inhibited by a sense of a break where there is none. In the words of Thomas Cartwright, the Reformation was not 'innovation but renovation, and the doctrine not new but renewed' (*A replye to an ansvvere made of M. Doctor VVhitgifte Against the admonition to the Parliament*, 1573, STC (2nd ed.)/ 4712, EEBO, p. 38).

a product of social interaction and communication: The individual imagines and conceives himself to be the kind of person that he believes others judge him to be'. This judgement varies in various groups and contexts so that each individual has more than one social role, and a 'social circle within which the individual performs it [the social role], that is, a set of agents who accept him and cooperate with him'. Finally, and most importantly, 'social roles are ... culturally patterned; individuals who perform them are supposed to learn the patterns and follow them'.[15] In other words, the coining of definitions of particular female vices and virtues relied on two mechanisms: that of a culturally defined set of patterns of behaviour that each individual was familiar with and which guided their perception of themselves and others (social roles), and that of performing these roles. The performativity of social roles in early modern England in the context of female vices and virtues can be productively elucidated with the notions of face and face threatening and saving acts. Connected to the concept of politeness outlined by linguists Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levison (1987)[16] the notion of face, originally developed by Erving Goffman,[17] is understood as a set of strategies that occur in communication allowing the speaker to achieve specific purposes. In Levinson's and Brown's interpretation, Goffman's face is the 'public self-image' every participant in social life wishes to maintain and protect, and can be divided into two kinds: positive face (the desire to be accepted) and negative face (the desire for autonomy and independence, 'freedom of action and freedom from imposition').[18] Face threatening acts are actions (or language) that damage the positive or negative face of the addressee (hearer) by threatening either their desire to be liked or their need for autonomy, and are countered by face saving acts applied to allow the hearer to save their face from the face threatening act. These notions were originally developed as linguistic tools for the study of spoken utterances (thus their use of the terms 'speaker' and 'hearer'), but have since been incorporated into the field of historical sociopragmatics which is interested in the study of historical and textual sources, and thus one which is more relevant to the present study. Particularly, the notions of face in historical societies will be of importance here, as through an investigation of how early modern writers and women negotiated what it meant to be accepted (positive face) and

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[15] Florian Znaniecki, *Social Relations and Social Roles: The Unfinished Systematic Sociology* (California: Chandler Publishing Company, 1955), pp. 201-2, 203, 204.

[16] Penelope Brown and Stephen C. Levison, *Politeness: Some Universals in Language Use* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

[17] Erving Goffman, *Interaction Ritual: Essays on Face-to-Face Behavior* (New York: Doubleday, 1967). See also Jonathan Culpeper, *Language and Characterisation: People in Plays and Other Texts* (Harlow: Longman, 2001), for a discussion of how face represents not only 'the self, but includes all that the self identifies with', as a bridge between the notions of social roles and face.

[18] Brown and Levinson, p. 61.

independent (negative face) it becomes possible to elucidate more clearly how the understanding of female vices and virtues was defined and reinforced in post-Reformation England, in the context of social roles and connections to the pre-Reformation tradition of models for female conduct.

However, certain adjustments, and restrictions, to this theoretical approach need to be made. This paper is not linguistically-oriented, and its main purpose is not, as it would be for a paper in the field of historical sociopragmatics, to analyze utterances, or the discourse on female vices and virtues linguistically; rather, it is interested in social communication defined more broadly, as comprised of texts of a variety of genres as well as social behaviours communicating aims, agendas, opinions, and levels of acceptability of certain behaviours, or its lack. In other words, the focus of this paper lies more within the realm of cultural history than linguistics. At the same time, however, it adapts the notions of positive and negative face as its interpretive tools because, as the examples below will indicate, the relationship between prescriptions for female behaviour and female practice in early modern England occurs in a peculiar version of social discourse, a textual, verbal, and non-verbal conversation between texts, their authors, recipients, and individuals influenced by the norms these texts establish or contest. The performative nature of social roles which defined female behaviour likewise relies on a relationship between textual, verbal, and non-verbal communication, and in this context, historical sociopragmatics is extremely useful: it is a framework for understanding the importance of social context to language use,[19] here applied with a shift of focus away from raw linguistic data and analysis towards a cultural consideration of a dynamic, two-way relationship between historical, textually-recorded discourse and historical social structures.[20] The second departure from a classic understanding of sociopragmatics and its linguistic focus this article makes is related to the aims of the use of face in its subject material. While modern politeness strategies (i.e. strategies connected to maintaining positive and negative face) concentrate on face threatening acts and on saving the face of the hearer and not the self, in the early modern period, as this article will show, the opposite was most often the case: priority rested primarily on saving the face of the writer (author of a given text) and the face of the audience was secondary (albeit nevertheless important).[21]

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[19] See Jonathan Culpeper, 'Historical Sociopragmatics. An Introduction', *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 10.2 (2009), 179-86.

[20] For work on similar approaches to historical discourse and social structure, but with a more linguistic bent, see for instance Johanna L. Wood, 'Structures and expectations. A systematic analysis of Margaret Paston's formulaic and expressive language', *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 10.2 (2009), 187-214.

[21] See, for instance, Marcel Bax, 'Epistolary Presentation Rituals. Face-Work, Politeness and Ritual Display in Early Modern Dutch Letter-Writing', *Historical (Im)Politeness*, ed. by Jonathan Culpeper and

In other words, in what follows texts and social responses to texts are analyzed through the lens of the concept of face, but it is applied in a historical, cultural, and social setting rather than linguistically; a reciprocal, negotiative relationship between the 'speakers' and 'hearers' is posited. The 'speakers' are authors of the definitions of chosen female vices and virtues as well as women who reacted to these definitions by reacting towards the authors and against other women. The 'hearers' are women to whom the definitions of vices and virtues are addressed as well as the authors of these prescriptions to whom reactions to their definitions were addressed by the audiences of their texts. The discussion is contextualized by the social purposes to which the definitions of female vices and virtues are applied, as well as the general and individual aims and behaviours of the speakers and hearers. I thus view historical, social, and religious context as formative of the formulation and responses to face-related acts as well as female vices and virtues, and I extend the understanding of face and face threatening acts onto a broadly conceived female identity and social norms of male and female behaviour, defining face as both the speakers' and the hearers' desired reputation and acceptability, and a face threatening act as any text or behaviour that might result in the disruption or destruction of that face. The authors and enactors of prescriptive definitions and responses ('speakers'), and the addressees of these prescriptions and responses ('hearers') are locked in a complex, reciprocal relation of action and reaction, in texts and contexts, which occurs on three levels: the discourse of instructive texts and texts that communicated instruction while not being conduct manuals as such, the contents of which carried the potential of threatening and/or saving the speaker's or the hearer's positive or negative face; the discourse of answers to these instructions (reinforcement or opposition) which participated in the formation of patterns of female behaviour in relation to prescriptions; and finally, the level of behaviour and action connected to the prescriptive and responsive discourse on female vices and virtues, i.e. female practice.

Such an approach allows to further expand the revisionist approach to the role of women in society.[22] Existing research in the history of early modern women has

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Dániel Z. Kádár, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 37-86, for a discussion of the orientation of politeness strategies in historical contexts. For a contrasting view, see, e.g. Krisda Chaemsaithong, 'Self-face and self-politeness in the Salem witchcraft trials', *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 10.1 (2009), 56-83.

[22] See, for instance, Susan Broomhall (ed.), *Gender and Emotions in Medieval and Early Modern Europe: Destroying Order, Structuring Disorder* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015); Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England: The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Laura Gowing and Patricia Caldwell (eds.), *Women's Worlds in Seventeenth-Century England: A Sourcebook* (London: Routledge, 2005); Laura Gowing, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014).

significantly changed our way of viewing the dynamics of the roles, agency, and participation of women in cultural, social, and literary history, and this paper intends to add another point of view to this dialogue by pointing out the social functions of a specific set of religiously motivated 'utterances' on and by women. Therefore, instead of participating in a conversation about whether women were or were not oppressed in the early modern period I wish instead to focus on some of the features of discourse on and by women and propose a face-oriented, cultural-historical analysis of its purposes, origin, and a distinct independence from the majority of the tenets of the Reformation in that context. My intention here is to look not at doctrine or consequences of theological changes, but rather on the underlying practical uses of a certain set of vices and virtues in a social context that will focus on the nature and reasons of continuity with a pre-Reformation past, not on highlighting differences in devotional practice related to female vices and virtues. In other words, the following discussion focuses on an underlying social, practical use of a certain set of 'building blocks' to communicate meaning connected to, yet not uniform with, their theological origin.

This dynamic is visible in a variety of texts available to early modern audiences, all in well-established genres ranging from conduct manuals to literary works. Many of them were written by popular authors and were widely read, and can thus be viewed as indicative of a certain degree of popularity of the ideas on women they propose. Texts, their authors, and audiences all had their place in a network of mutual 'conversation'. Regarding face-related mechanisms, the general rule of thumb that can be observed is that the prescribers of rules of female conduct tended to protect both their own positive face (i.e. of being accepted) and the validity of their (perhaps self-proclaimed) social role of moral instructor, as well as the positive and negative face of women (by a selection of textual strategies that made women feel positive about these rules). In turn, women accepted and implemented these rules in order to keep their own positive face (being accepted in society for being virtuous and 'good' in accordance with the prescriptions), corrected and/or punished women who did not conform (and thus threatened the general female positive face), or propagated these rules as an attempt to preserve the female negative face (of independence). They also allowed the prescribers to maintain their own positive face by complying with their prescriptions willingly. Christine de Pizan, as an example, in her *Treasure of the City of Ladies* (ca. 1405), pointed out the powerful nature of female speech and its ability to structure relationships, as long as women abided by certain rules that could be translated into useful qualities, including meekness, cheerfulness, and prudence; she thus reinforced norms about female behaviour, but turned their potential as negative face threatening devices into devices of saving the female negative face (using norms to their own

advantage).[23] She also supported the prohibition of female presence in civil courtrooms as supportive of moral propriety, taking the prescriptive norm and reinforcing it, but by making it her own: she turned around an imposed rule threatening the female negative face into an assertion of her own negative face (making it her choice to support the prohibition), reinforcing also her own positive face (by becoming part, and supporter, of the acceptable model of conduct).[24] A similar set of interrelations is visible in other texts concerned with female vices and virtues.

II. Virtues

Virtue in itself, as a general concept most easily defined simply as a lack of vice, was a desirable feature in all women. Be it prescriptively, descriptively, or discursively, a variety of pre- and post-Reformation authors – who, of course, thought of life in a 'state of virtue' as desirable in principle for every member of society and every Christian – assigned virtuousness particularly to women, both as Christians and citizens. Virtue was understood to stand for a variety of concepts. Individual virtues were usually thought to exist in various combinations, and typically were: wisdom, prudence, devoutness, meekness, humility, temperance, gentleness, charity, virginity, and so on. All these were, of course, connected to the Christian four cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, temperance, courage) and three theological virtues (faith, hope, charity) that together comprised the well-known seven theological virtues.[25] The seven virtues, in turn, were considered to be contraries to the seven deadly sins (pride, avarice, lust, envy, gluttony, wrath, sloth), and the ordering of one seven typically was matched by the other (so, for instance, if a given text gave pride as the first vice, meekness or humility were listed as the first virtue, and so on). Both vices and virtues were often allegorized as human

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[23] Charity C. Willard, *Christine de Pizan: Her Life and Works* (New York: Persea Books, 1984), p. 35; Norman F. Cantor, *Medieval Reader* (HarperCollins, 1995), p. 230.

[24] For more on Christine de Pizan's approach to social norms and body politic see Kate Langdon Forhan, *The Political Theory of Christine de Pizan* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

[25] In variant order and names (e.g. Caxton's *Royal Book* gives the virtues as faith, hope, charity, prudence, temperance, strength, justice) these recur throughout medieval and early modern literature, in texts of both a devotional and more secular nature. For an example of late medieval approaches to virtue (and the seven virtues) see, e.g., William Caxton's *Royal Book*, the anonymous *Jacob's Well*, the *Book of Vices and Virtues*, or the *Lay Folks' Catechism*. For more on the history of the virtues in the Middle Ages see Istaván P. Bejczy, *The Cardinal Virtues in the Middle Ages. A Study in Moral Thought from the Fourth to the Fourteenth Century* (Brill: Leiden, 2011). For more on the history of the genre of treatise on vices and virtues see Richard Newhauser, *The Treatise on Vices and Virtues in Latin and the Vernacular* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993). For a general study of the history of vices and virtues see Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, throughout.

figures, but there was a tendency to associate individual virtues rather than vices with individual female figures more often,[26] whereas while there were, of course, texts representing individual vices as female characters as well, it was more often the case that the seven deadly sins would appear as thieves or agents of the Devil, heads of the Beast, or limbs of the body (which could be, but not necessarily had to be, the body of a woman).[27] In other words, then, virtuousness tended to be associated with women.[28]

Chaucer, as an example, in his *Physician's Tale*, narrates a story that communicated, on the surface, a certain degree of instruction on female virtuousness. The tale describes Virginia as 'sculpted' by nature 'to the worshipe of my lord' (*Canterbury Tales*, 190, l. 26),[29] that is fashioned to reflect the worship of God, so that while 'excellent was hire beautee / A thousand foold moore vertuous was she' (*CT*, 190, ll. 39-40). In other words, Virginia's beauty derived from her being created as devoutness incarnate, and so while her physical beauty was outstanding, it was her internal beauty, virtue, that defined her character, so that

> In hire ne lakked no condicioun
> That is to preyse, as by discrecioun.
> As wel in ghoost as body chast was she
> For which she floured in virginitee
> With alle humylitee and abstinence
> With alle attemperaunce and pacience
> With mesure eek of beryng and array.
> Discreet she was in answering alway' (*CT*, 190, ll. 41-48).

The virtues that Virginia represents are, of course, related to the seven virtues, but their use in the story is also redesigned to make it resemble a tale of a virgin martyr (much like in the famous *Legenda Aurea*, or Chaucer's own *Legend of Good Women* and the related *Legend of Holy Women* by Osbern Bockenham). It is a tale of a virtuous woman who needs to choose between shame or death and chooses, with the counsel, and

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[26] See, for instance, *The Abbaye of the Holy Ghost*, or the *Weye of Paradys*.

[27] With the exception of Lust, which was often represented by a female figure.

[28] The association of virtues and vices with women derives, partially, from Prudentius' *Psychomachia*, an early medieval (or Late Antique) Latin poem about the battle of vices and virtues personified as women; it gave rise to a number of texts on a similar theme, and is sometimes considered to be the origin of the association of vices and virtues with women in popular devotion; see, e.g. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, pp. 49, 64; Marina Warner, *Monuments & Maidens. The Allegory of the Female Form* (Berkley and Los Angeles: University of Carolina Press, 1985).

[29] *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by F.N. Robinson, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987). All quotations from *The Canterbury Tales* are from this edition.

imposition, of her father, death. Interestingly, the father is condemned for his good-willed but ill-fated rashness in deciding to behead his daughter rather than to give her up to a corrupt and lustful judge, making the tale one not only of chastity and humbleness (Virginia) but also of the failed virtue of patience, hubris, and of misunderstood courage (Virginius). The *Physician's Tale*, then, problematizes female virtuousness: in the historical context it is set in (pre-Christian Rome) with its characteristic veneration of virginity above all else in a woman, Chaucer sees the morally innocent Virginia as a victim of this ideal, particularly because, unlike in stories of virgin martyrs, there is no reward for Virginia, no angel takes her to heaven, and no crown of sainthood is placed on her head. In the end, then, while virtuousness is the very description of an ideal woman, for Chaucer both the woman, and people around her, stand the risk of misinterpreting this ideal, impose impossible measures on performing virtuousness, and inevitably taint it by fallible interpretation that turns virtue into sin, as Chaucer states in the moral of this tale: 'Forsaketh synne, er synne yow forsake' (*CT*, 193, ll. 285-286).

In a world of moral relativity female virtuousness provides a line between two kinds of face acts. On the one hand, we have Virginius who attempted to save his daughter's positive face (as she would have been a social pariah should she submit to Apius' lust) and his own negative face in performing what he thought best himself, free from imposition from others (which, sadly, meant beheading his daughter before she could get into the hands of Apius). On the other hand, we have Virginia who for the sake of saving her own positive face (being the ideal of virtuousness which included humility and obedience) and her father's positive face (so that he would not think less of himself for doing the right thing, even if that meant dying by his hand) sacrificed her life for the ideals that her father believed in. Her behaviour, in a way, is also a reflection of Virginius' negative face saving act: much like her father, who preferred to perform the ghastly deed himself rather than allow others to hurt his daughter, so the daughter, upon consideration, consented to death out of her own will, choosing death over shame. The interaction between Virginius and Virginia concerning her death is a micro-representation of this face relationship:

> 'Doghter', quod he, 'Virginia, by thy name
> Ther ben two weyes, outher deeth or shame
> That thou most suffer; alas that I was bore!
> For nevere thoug deservedest wherefore
> To dyen with a seerd or with a knyf…
> My pitous hand moot smyten of thyn heed'…
> 'O mercy, deere fader!', quod this mayde
> And with that word she bothe his armes layde

Aboute his nekke, as she was wont to do...
Goode fader, shal I dye?
Is thermo grace, is ther no remedye?'
'No, certes, deere dogther myn', quod he.
'Thanne yif me leyser, fader myn', quod she
'My deeth for to compleyene a litel space'...
And with that word she fil aswowne anon
And after, whan hir swownyng is agon
She riseth up, and to hir fader sayde
'Blissed be God, that I shal dye a mayde!
Yif me my deth, er that I have shame
Dooth with youre child youre wil, a Goddes name!'
And with that word she preyed hym ful ofte
That with his swerd he wolde smyte softe. (*CT*, 192-3, ll. 213-52).

Virginius signals his discontent with what he believes he has to do (positive face) but also his will to do it (negative face), while Virginia indicates her unhappiness with what they agree has to happen (negative face) but submits to his authority (saving his positive face) and then submits to death out of her own will and in a moment of her choosing, as her last wish directing her father's hand (her negative face). Tragically for Virginius, he falls victim to hubris and they both pay for this mistake with their lives, Virginia with death and Virginius with exile. Virtue, then, is the centre of gravity of the narrative, and while the social context of interactions between vices and virtues, and the social and moral relativity of adhering to rigid rules of conduct problematize the narrative, the association of virtue with a woman remains not only a successful narrative device, but also a recognizable trope; it is perhaps due to this recognisability that the problematic nature of the tale becomes apparent to its readers.

The acknowledgment of virtuousness as a defining quality of a (proper and desirable) woman persisted throughout the Middle Ages and into the early modern period. And as Chaucer's example indicates that even prescriptive literary renderings of female conduct were problematized and contextualized by their resonance within social interactions, so did early modern authors, in various contexts, problematize female virtuousness, often irrespectively of whether a given text belonged to the genre of instruction manuals or represented a (female) response to such manuals. As an example, Ester Sowernam's *Ester hath hang'd Haman* (1617) was written as a retort to another text, Joseph

Swetnam's *The Arraignment of lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant Women* (1615).[30] Swetnam's pamphlet, controversial and divisive even at the time of its publication, was not a study of female conduct, but a fairly straightforward 'woman-hater' text that, while participating in the 'battle of the sexes' genre well-known also before the Reformation,[31] set a new standard for non-relativized discourse on women focused on mostly derogatory and fairly one-sided accounts of female vices. Sowenham's text was written as a defence of women and has the form of a trial of Swetnam (in its latter parts) as a false accuser of women. It would seem, then, that the relationship between the two texts is plainly discursive: Swetnam's text attacks the positive face of a generalized 'woman', while Sowernam's text defends and attempts to save it through attacking Swetnam's positive face ('I found the discourse as far off from performing what the Title promised, as I found it scandalous and blasphemous: for where the Author pretended to write against lewd, idle, and vnconstant women, hee doth most impudently rage and rayle generally against all the whole sexe of women'),[32] thus reinforcing the female negative face (independence). However, while this is true, another mechanism also takes place in Ester's text. Although as she herself proclaims, her work was written to

> in the first part of it plainely and resolutely deliuer the worthinesse and worth of women; both in respect of their Creation, as in the worke of Redemption. Next doe I shew in examples out of both the Testaments: what blessed and happy choyse hath beene made of women, as gratious instruments to deriue Gods blessings and benefits to mankinde. In my second part I doe deliuer of what estimate women haue been valued in all ancient and moderne times, which I prooue by authorities, customes, and daily experiences. Lastly, I doe answer all materiall obiections which haue or can be alleged against our Sexe: in which

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[30] There were multiple other texts written by women (or presented as written by women, but printed as anonymous works), e.g. *Swetnam, the Woman-hater, Arraigned by Women. A new Comedie* (1620).

[31] For comparison see, for instance, Alexis' Guillaume's *He [sic] begynneth an interlocucyon, with an argument, betwyxt man and woman & whiche of them could proue to be most excellent* (originally a fifteenth-century text, printed in 1525); William Walter's 1520 *The spectacle of louers here after foloweth a lytell contrauers dyalogue bytwene loue and councell, with many goodly argumentes of good women and bad*; or Richard Ferrers' *The worth of women* (1622) and many more.

[32] Ester Sowernam, *Ester hath hang'd Haman: or An ansvvere to a lewd pamphlet, entituled, The arraignment of women With the arraignment of lewd, idle, froward, and vnconstant men, and husbands. Diuided into two parts. The first proueth the dignity and worthinesse of women, out of diuine testimonies. The second shewing the estimation of the foeminine sexe, in ancient and pagan times; all which is acknowledged by men themselues in their daily actions. VVritten by Ester Sowernam, neither maide, wife nor widdowe, yet really all, and therefore experienced to defend all*, 1617, STC (2nd ed.) / 22974; EEBO. The Epistle Dedicatory, page unnumbered [1].

also I doe arraigne such kind of men, which correspond the humour and disposition of the Author (*Ester*, Epistle Dedicatory, page unnumbered [1]).

her defence of women is not as complete as could be reasonably expected from such an introduction. In fact, through operating with positive and negative face acts Sowernam, in the end, reinforces and perpetuates a range of ideas about female virtuousness (and female vices). While she proposes that she will defend 'the whole sexe of women', the same that Swetnam offended, she in fact draws a clear distinction between women worthy of being defended, i.e. virtuous women, and those that are justly condemned, i.e. sinful women.

Already in her introduction she reveals that her evidence to the defence of women is centred on examples of virtue and God's grace towards women, indicating that her argument relies not so much on the inherent worthiness of women in general, but on the presence of those who live up to the ideals of female virtuousness. In the concluding lines of the dedication she encourages her female readers to 'expresse in their course of life and actions, that they are the same Creatures which they were designed to be by their Creator, and by their redeemer: And to parallel those women, whose vertuous examples are collected [here]' (*Ester*, Epistle Dedicatory, page unnumbered [2]); in other words, Sowernam ascertains that women should aspire to virtuousness (as traditionally defined in religious discourse) and model their behaviours on paragons of virtue (such as the Virgin Mary). She thus perpetuates the existing notions of model female behaviour and the association of virtuousness with (true) womanhood, and maintains her own positive face (of being accepted as a defender of women by women, but also of being on the side of tradition and proper order in the eyes of others who adhere and promote these rules of conduct) while also creating the opportunity for her female audience to maintain the positive face of women by imitating the virtuous behaviours exemplified in the text. At the same time, though, she challenges the positive face of her audience by cautioning her female readers to remember that if they stray from the path of virtuousness they will become excluded not only from general social acceptance, but also from her own favour, even though she is the defender of women: '[l]astly, I write for the shame and confusion of such as degenerate from woman-hoode, and disappoint the ends of Creation, and Redemption... You are women; in Creation, noble; in Redemption, gracious; in vse most blessed; be not forgetfull of your selues, not vnthankefull to that Author from whom you receiue all' (*Ester*, Epistle Dedicatory, page unnumbered [2]). Female readers, then, are given a clear choice: to abide by the rules of virtuousness and live up to the ideals of female virtue, and be accepted, or to forsake these rules and be excluded and resented, not only in the eyes of

society and other women, but also God himself. Sowernam, then, perpetuates rather than challenges the ideals of female virtue.

Additionally, she also seems to contradict her self-appointed role as defender of women by criticizing a different, younger, female author of a text on the defence of women. Ester thus sets herself and her text not only in opposition to Swetnam's but also to one by 'a Ministers daughter' called the 'Maidens Booke'. Sowernam criticizes the latter text by attacking the author, a woman like herself: 'I did obserue, that whereas the Maide doth many times excuse her tendernesse of years, I found it to be true in the slenderness of her answer' (*Ester*, page unnumbered [1]). Sowernam accuses the 'Maide' of delivering only a partial defence of women, claiming she 'rather charge and condemne women', and points out that the youth of the 'Maide' reflects poorly on the quality of her writing. By doing so, Sowernam reinforces the stereotype of the foolishness of an inexperienced young girl and, inadvertently, writes herself into the literary trope of 'conflict' between younger and older women.[33] It seems, then, that saving the positive face of women for Sowernam requires an assertion of her own position at the intersection of positive and negative face as an independent authority on the subject both in contrast to male writers (Swetnam) and other female writers ('Maide'). Therefore, through her attempts to perform her own positive face and to offer an opportunity for other women to save (or maintain) their positive face, Sowernam not only does not contest the existence of sinful women who defy the proper rules of female conduct and virtuousness, but in fact agrees with Swetnam and other writers who condemn these qualities in women. Her purpose, then, is not to write a praise of women, but to draw a line between women who deserve rebuke and punishment, sinful women who oppose the rules of propriety in female behaviour (who, apparently, Swetnam is justified in criticizing), and those who deserve praise and stand as models for other women, that is virtuous women who live in accordance with the virtues designated for women in society (who Swetnam hurt with his text, and who the 'Maide' likewise offended).

Interestingly, early modern defences of women, focused particularly on the perfect nature of the creation of women by God, as well as their natural virtousness were, on the whole, more often penned by male than female authors who, like William Austin in

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[33] This motif was present in a number of literary texts, from the medieval *Romans de Partenay*, or *William of Palerne*, to Shakespeare's *King Lear*, and many others, including a number of folk tales; in all a degree of conflict between either young wives and old(er) mothers-in-law, or sisters, indicates the presence of a trope of a generational disagreement between women, often over authority within a circle or group of women. See also Margaret Schlauch, *Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens* (New York: New York University Press, 1927).

his *Haec Homo: wherein the excellency of the creation of woman is described* (1638), or Edward Raban in the Prologue to his *The glorie of man consisting in the excellencie and perfection of woman* (1638), would agree that '[s]ome Men are so vncharitable ... as to thinke *All Women bad*: and others so credulous, as they belieue, *They are all good*. But, surelie, although everie man speaketh, as hee findeth; yet there is *Reason*, to direct our *Opinion*, without experience of the whole Sexe: Which, in a strict Examination, maketh more for *The Honour of Women*, than most men, as yet, haue acknowledged' (*The glorie of man*, page unnumbered [7]).[34] Women writers, on the other hand, tended to praise women deemed worthy of praise, but did not refrain from chastising those they thought deserving of scorn or criticism; they focused on reinforcing the figure of a naturally virtuous woman and were often very critical of female failings. As Aemilia Lanyer pointed out, women writers seemed to forget 'they are women themselves, and in danger to be condemned by the words of their own mouths, fall into so great an error, as to speak unadvisedly against the rest of their sex'.[35] Female virtuousness, then, as can be surmised from this cursory look at a handful of texts, was a complex and problematic subject. Particular virtues, such as piety, meekness, and humility were no less problematic.

Piety was the highest female virtue both before and after the Reformation but, just as other virtues, its practical performance made it a virtue mostly, if not primarily, of social rather than religious importance. While, of course, connected directly to religion, piety was understood generally as observance, worship, devoutness, and it mattered less which kind of Christianity (after the Reformation in particular) a woman was pious about; it was her willingness and conscientiousness in giving visible evidence of her devotion to religion and religious values that mattered more. Pious women, so women as citizens aware of their social and religious duties of observance and, by extension, of preserving the family's resources, and performing their duties as mothers and wives were central to such an understanding of piety. This is particularly visible in the late Middle Ages, when 'general' piety understood as a religious virtue came to stand for an important social virtue. Particularly in regard to women, being pious in pre-Reformation England no longer meant simply attending services and a life in line with the liturgical

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[34] Edward Raban, *The glorie of man consisting in the excellencie and perfection of woman. Gathered out of Holie Scriptures, and most renowned wryters; as well ancient, as moderne; ecclesiaticall, as morall. Wherevnto is annexed The duetie of husbands*, 1638, STC (2nd ed.)/ 20596, EEBO. Compare also to multiple other, similar texts, e.g. John Goldborn's 1674 *A Friendly Apology In the behalf of the Womens Excellency. Together with some Examples of Women-Worthies. As also the Character of a Vertuous and Accomplished Woman: wherein Ladies of Pleasure are taxed and admonished*.

[35] Aemilia Lanyer, 'To the Virtuous Reader' from *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* in *Early Modern Women's Writing. An Anthology, 1560-1700*, ed. by Paul Salzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 46.

calendar: the performance of piety correlated with social class and status, indicated literacy, refinement (e.g. through the possession of devotional books, personal religious paraphernalia such as books of hours, richly crafted rosaries, or relics)[36] and, perhaps most importantly, became an important aspect of family life. In other words, being pious for a woman was related to how she performed her position in her community, her independence (e.g. in bequeaths or charity donations), status, and class, and was a part of upbringing, a foundation for relationships inside and outside of the family, and a paradigm for her behaviours, aspirations, and agency.

In the opening verses of *How The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter* (early 15th century) the daughter is instructed that observance of the rules of religion and service to God will make her married life better: '[d]oughter, and thou wylle be a wyfe, / Wysely to wyrch in all thi lyfe, / Serve God and kepe thy chyrche, /And myche the better thou schall wyrche' (*How The Good Wife Taught Her Daughter*, ll. 5-8).[37] Serving God and 'keeping church', then, while of course related to standard performances of piety, are key to a successful married life: the sphere of influence of piety thus extends beyond church walls and reaches out into the household; it shapes the behaviours of the young wife and allows her to translate her devoutness into marital bliss, through her own accord (as her conduct will be seemly and evoke a similar response in others, including her husband), as well as through helping out her own luck (being pious and godly creates a better chance to be wedded to someone who is pious and godly himself). *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* (ca. 1372), which contains numerous exemplary stories written for the instruction of maidens, gives an example of such good fortune, speaking of a devout girl whose piety was rewarded with happiness in marriage:

> [s]he vsyd fro her youthe to serue god/ and to goo to the chirche/as for to saye her matyns and houres deuoutely/and here alle the masses fastyng/And therfore it happed that god rewarded and gafe to her a knyght ryche and puyssaunt/And she lyued with hym well and honestly/ and in good and grete pees. And thenne it happed that theyr fader whiche was a wyse man wente for to see his two doughters/And fonde with tholder grete honours and grete rychesse/and was

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[36] For more on female spiritual agency and influence through ownership of religious and devotional texts and paraphernalia, see e.g. Mary C. Erler, *Women, Reading, and Piety in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[37] George Shuffelton (ed.), *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, TEAMS Middle English Text Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/shuffelton-codex-ashmole-61-how-the-good-wife-taught-her-daughter

receyued there moche honourably/... And by this ensample it is good to serue god & here all the masses (*The Book*, page unnumbered [10]).[38]

In other words, piety and devoutness carried irresistible benefits: a godly maiden could bet on attracting a good and respectable husband, a godly wife was praiseworthy, respectable, and happy in marriage, and godliness itself was a safe bet for salvation, securing peace and wellbeing in the household (the small commonwealth). The idea of the house as a miniature state, well-established by the late Middle Ages, made female piety particularly relevant to the prosperity of a given household, and thus, by extension, to social policies of the state. Since the household was the centre of everyday life, tranquillity determined by godliness was a blessing that not only brought comfort and ease, but was also a countermeasure for such social vices as adultery or violence. In other words, a godly household guaranteed that those who lived in it were obedient, conscientious, and law-abiding citizens. Female piety ensured that the family would produce good future citizens and responsible future parents, and would thus contribute to the wellbeing of the neighbourhood, community, and the state. It was therefore in the interest of religious authorities to cultivate female devoutness in order to maintain obedience to the rules of religion on an individual and family level, but it was also in the interest of the state because female piety reinforced the social policies of maintaining order and conformity. As Barbara Hanawalt writes, '[i]n the partnership of marriage, the wife was seen to have the moral force of persuasion to do honest business'.[39] Indeed, the persuasiveness of female speech was only reinforced by her piety and devoutness, which gave the woman more authority to make judgements and suggestions of a moral nature to her husband, children, and subordinates, particularly because virtue (and so also devoutness) was often equated with wisdom in pre-Reformation texts.[40]

In Chaucer's *Second Nun's Tale* the power of such speech is clearly visible. The main heroine, Cecilie, is the epitome of virtue,

> [w]antynge of blyndnesse, for hir grete light
> Of sapience and hire thewes cleere…
> She nevere cessed, as I written fynde,

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[38] Geoffroy de La Tour Landry, *Here begynneth the booke which the knyght of the toure made and speketh of many fayre ensamples and thensygnementys and techyng of his doughters*, trans. by William Caxton, 1484 [1372], STC (2nd ed.)/15296, EEBO.

[39] Barbara Hanawalt, *The Wealth of Wives. Women, Law, and Economy in Late Medieval London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 120.

[40] See, for instance, Chaucer's *Physician's Tale*, ll. 49-54.

Of hir preyere and God to love and drede (*CT*, 263, ll. 99-100, 125-126).

On her wedding night she tells her Roman husband, Valerian, that she has an angel watching over her, and that the angel will smite Valerian if he hurts Cecilie or forces her to have intercourse with him, but also that if he lives with her in purity they will both be blessed. Valerian asks to see the angel, fearing that his wife might be simply speaking of a secret lover, and Cecilie explains to him that in order to see the angel he has to

> 'trowe on Crist, and yow baptize.
> Gooth forth to Via Apia', quod shee…
> 'And to the povre folks that ther dewelle
> Sey hem right thus, as that I shall yow telle.
> Telle hem that I, Cecile, yow to hem sente
> To shewen yow goode Urban the olde,
> For secree nedes and for good entente' (*CT*, 264, ll. 171-8).

Valerian does as she tells him, and becomes an ardent Christian. The merit for his conversion is exclusively hers: 'thilke spouse that she took but now / Ful lyk a fiers leoun, she sendeth here, / As meke as evere was any lomb' (*CT*, 265, ll. 197-9). Cecilie, then, through her piety persuades her husband to convert and become pious himself, turning with the power of her virtue, and her words, a fierce lion into a meek lamb. Afterwards, the couple convert also Valerian's brother, Tiburce, and again the merit is Cecile's: '[t]he mayde hath brought thise men to blisse above / The world hath wist what it is worth, certeyn / Devocioun of chastitee to love' (*CT*, 266, ll. 281-3). Later in the story Cecile also manages to convert Maximus the prefect's officer, executioners under his charge, as well as many others. Finally, Cecile is brought to the prefect who wants to interrogate the woman who converted so many people to Christianity by virtue of her piety and the power of her words, and is faced with the full force of both the former and the latter. When he demands of her to tell him of which faith she is and what her beliefs are, she replies

> '[y]e han bigonne youre questioun folily',
> Quod she, 'that wolden two answeres conclude
> In o demande; ye axed lewedly.'
> Almache answerde unto that similitude,
> 'Of whennes comyth thyn answering so rude?'
> 'Of whennes?', quod she, whan that she was freyned,
> 'Of conscience and of good feith unfeyned' (*CT*, 268, ll. 428-34).

She thus not only ascertains her superiority over him intellectually and morally, but also leads the conversation in contempt of his positive face, openly attacking it. Her piety, in other words, gave her the power to bring others to devoutness, and to chastise those that did not follow her in it.

Similar stories of female martyrs that abounded in pre-Reformation England provided narratives of exemplary piety and its power to influence others, and served as directives for female empowerment: piety placed a woman at the centre of influence in her community, by virtue of authority over other women (related to social status), and by virtue of respect she gained from men in that community. A woman renowned for her piety, then, benefited the community and the state because she took care of the moral and religious upbringing of children as well as the conduct of other women in her charge, but at the same time the woman benefited as an individual because through the authority of her piousness her word had meaning, and power over others. Many women understood the potential that stemmed from piousness and put what they learnt from stories such as the one above, as well as writings and observations of such female writers as Christine de Pizan, into practice. Some understood the empowering nature of piety as an individually-enriching quality, granting them a level of spiritual agency and a connectedness to a wider community of women. Christine de Pizan, Marguerite Porete, Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, or Catherine of Sienna, framing their writings into religious and pious discourse, could write about female experiences, female spirituality, the role of women in the world, God, love, or poetry, and narrate the female experiences of the world to other women, and society as a whole.[41] Other women actively sought to turn the respectability won through piousness into personal advantages and aims. Margaret Paston, for example, in her letters to her sons applied pious discourse as a tool of persuasion, measuring the use of blessings in salutations for personal purposes. Writing to one of her sons, for instance, she first reminded her son that as his mother she deserves his respect by bestowing her own blessing on him just after a blessing from God, when she said she was sending 'Goddys blyssyng and myn', which in turn made it possible for her to pass on to the true purpose of her letter, which was to 'call vp-on your brothere and telle hym that I send hym Goddes blyssyng and myn'. In a different letter to the same son, she wrote 'I require you and more-ouer charge you vp-on my blissyng, and as ye wull haue my good will that...', implying that her blessing for him depends on his performance of a certain task she wishes him to undertake. Elsewhere, using similar wording, she dissuades him from doing something she deems wrong when she writes 'I charge ʒow vpon my blyssyng þat ʒe do not, nere cause non othere to do, þat wuld offend God and ʒowr conschens; fore and ʒe do, ore

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[41] Patricia Crawford, *Women and Religion in England 1500-1720* (Oxon: Routledge, 1993), p. 74.

cause fore to be do, God wul take vengawns'. She also uses piety discursively when she chastises her second son for not responding to her letters, and not fulfilling her wishes, by writing 'I thynke ȝe sette butte lytyl be myn blyssyng, and yf ye dede ye wulde a desyyrdyt in yowyr wrytyng to me'. In other words, her self-placement as pious and godly allowed her to self-appoint herself the authority to persuade her one son to get in touch with her other son for her, indirectly but firmly conveying that she was dissatisfied with the other son's lack of reply, or to elicit from her first son particular actions by insisting that her blessings for him were conditional on whether he complied with her requests.[42]

Other women used their status as exemplary pious members of a given community to reinforce their influence over others, for instance by acts of charity bestowed on other, carefully selected women. Such women

> not only constructed their own individual pious identity through their charitable actions, but were also linked in the collective memory of the parish to other like-minded pious women. Here godly women demonstrate their political agency within the public forum of the parish, while remaining exemplary role models within the private ... household. Their charitable actions reflect the political agency religion offered women.[43]

Yet other women exercised the authority piousness granted them to highlight their position in their community through bequests, of devotional books, clothing, or donations, singling out those whom they deemed worthy of receiving such gifts, from their network of 'devout society'.[44] All such behaviours were part of the performativity of piousness, and had implications for the social value and understanding of female piety as well as for standards of female conduct. As being pious was beneficial both communally and individually to women, many made sure that being pious remained the desirable standard for female behaviour: if devoutness provided a channel for agency and empowerment, then it would not be relinquished lightly. This meant that it was often women themselves who contributed to the formulations of standards of pious female behaviour and reinforced them, by extension also enforcing these standards on

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[42] For a full linguistic analysis of the Paston letters see Wood, 'Structures and expectations', *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 10.2 (2009), 187-214. All quotations from Paston's letters above adapted from Wood, 201-2.

[43] Dolly MacKinnon, '"Charity is worth it when it looks that good": Rural Women and Bequests of Clothing in Early Modern England' in *Women, Identities and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Stephanie Tarbin and Susan Broomhall (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 79-94 (pp. 79-80).

[44] Erler, p. 68.

other women. Those that did not comply (i.e. were not pious, or were not pious enough) were excluded from the community, either straightforwardly as outcasts (for instance, prostitutes), or indirectly, by being excluded from acts of charity, bequests, or other local performances of status based on piousness (seating in church, social calls, etc). Piousness, in other words, to pre-Reformation women was an important element of the general female positive face, and it was women themselves who ensured that it stayed that way, as part of the general female negative face: the 'prescription' of piety and its various communal and social benefits indicated in conduct works as an integral feature of womanhood and a desirable quality in any respectable woman (positive face) was reinforced by women themselves as a strategy of acquiring agency and personal influence over the community, and family (negative face). Similar mechanisms concerning female piety can be observed also in the early modern period.

It is sometimes posited that among the changes Protestant writers made to the late medieval ideals of female piety was that they 'domesticated' it, transforming the largely metaphoric relationship of 'grace as the eager bride and the church as the devoted wife' into one fitting into the newly preferred context for piousness, which was marriage and family life.[45] Yet even a cursory look at pre-Reformation texts, for instance in the examples above, indicates that this 'domestication' is not an accomplishment of the Protestants or Renaissance humanism, but a phenomenon of an established, late medieval, origin. Female piety did, indeed, find welcome space in Protestant households,[46] but the pre-Reformation households were equally welcoming. In other words, as female piety was of immense social importance and communal benefit to pre-Reformation society, so it was for early modern Protestant households, and state. And as in late medieval England, so early modern women found ways of making piousness their own virtue by choice. The difference between the two periods thus lies in degree, not kind. Because the Protestants strove to build a godly commonwealth to the glory of God, and because they focused their social policy on society's core, the household, they placed all their bets for the success of their mission on godliness, conformity, and ideals of good citizenship, the dissemination of which was the duty of women. As Richard Brathwaite wrote,

> '[a] president of piety shee expresseth her selfe in her family, which she so instructs by her owne life, as vertue becomes the object of their love .... Her

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[45] Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Protestant New England. The emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 3.
[46] Ibid.

owne remisnesse (if any such be) she reproves by so much more than others, as she knows her owne life to bee more exemplary than others'.[47]

Women, then, were responsible for the piety of the family (albeit men had also important roles to play in the religious education of their households) and were themselves a living example of virtue and devoutness in Protestant 'little commonwealths'. Protestant instructive writings for women thus continued to use the vocabulary of virtue to promote ideals of female behaviour and piousness in a social context, but focus on the household as the moral centre of the state was not a Protestant innovation; it was, however, a central concept to Protestant state building, and the choice, or rather perhaps tendency, to focus on piety and devotion of women as a pivotal aspect of this process was highly practical. While instructions on social conduct could be, and sometimes indeed were, phrased in an exclusively secular idiom, it was religious discourse of instruction that proved most highly persuasive. Chastisement of vice and propagation of virtue, voiced equally often from pulpits, by texts, or simply by word of mouth, wove a network of familiar, understandable, and easily relatable references between social life and morality. The language of instruction on proper social conduct, then, was at its most persuasive when it was religious, and since, starting from around the fourteenth century, the body of church goers was composed predominantly of women (preachers in Reformed congregations noted, as did Cotton Mather in his 1692 *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, that there were more women than men participating in services),[48] religious discourse was the most successful framework of instructing women about their roles in society. Thus, women were appointed guardians of values which, as they were persuaded, remained in accordance with the will of God and were, through that, encouraged to try to attain these ideals.

The promotion of piety among women was for Protestants primarily prescriptive in nature: as the importance of the household to the wellbeing of the commonwealth increased, so did the need to ensure that women lived up to ideals of piety which were central to that wellbeing. This need was reinforced by a stereotypical perception of women as unruly which, in turn, relied on the late medieval and early modern

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[47] Richard Brathwaite, *The English gentleman, and The English gentlevvoman both in one volume couched, and in one modell portrayed: to the living glory of their sexe, the lasting story of their worth : being presented to present times for ornaments, commended to posterity for presidents: with a ladies love-lectvre and svpplement lately annexed, and entituled The tvrtles triumph*, 1641, Wing/ B4262, EEBO, p. 398.

[48] Linda K. Kerber, *Toward An Intellectual History of Women* (The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 121.

understanding of good governance and exemplary social conduct.[49] To many, women, as Eve proved in Eden, were more prone to humours and more willing to disobey rules, and were thus considered necessarily more in need of guidance, as well as of a separate set of rules of conduct which addressed their emotional needs and social reality. In other words, the interpretation of male and female character, mentality, and biology produced different social guidelines, and referred to very different aspects of social life and roles; piety was a virtue of both men and women, but was considered more important for women because it restricted their 'natural' unruliness, and provided a framework for female influence on the life of their families and communities as educators and guardians of morality. In *An Inquiry concerning Virtue, or Merit*, Anthony Ashley Cooper stated: '[r]eligion and virtue appear in many respects so nearly related, that they are generally presum'd inseparable Companions'.[50] For Richard Allestree, piety likewise was 'the salt which seasons all Sacrifices, yea, the Altar which sanctifies the Gift; no good (how splendid soever in the sight of men) being acceptable to God, till it be thus consecrated and have this seal of the Sanctuary upon it'.[51] In order to persuade women that piety was their natural state many texts wove the image of female piety as one that binds good character, virtue, and proper social conduct with obedience and conformity. In other words, piety was the first and foremost set of rules of conduct that propagated virtue and good governance. One strategy of establishing piousness as a paradigm for female behaviour was to turn exemplary piety from an unattainable goal to second nature: womenwere considered predisposed to being religious much more than men:

> God's laws, which are the rule of piety have this common with men's, that they are inforc'd upon us by the proposals both of punishments and rewards, by that means engaging two or more of our most sensible passions, fear and love; and the female sex being eminent for the pungency of both these, they are consequently the better prepar'd for the impressions of religion… For Devotion is a tender Plant, that will scarce root in stiff or rocky ground, but requires a supple gentle soil; and therefore the feminine softness and plyableness is very apt and proper for it (*Ladies Calling*, 88-9, 110).

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[49] Shannon McSheffrey, *Marriage, Sex, and Civic Culture in Late Medieval London* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), pp. 137-164.

[50] Anthony Ashely Cooper, *An inquiry concerning virtue in two discourses, viz., I. of virtue and the belief of a deity, II. of the obligations to virtue*, 1699, Wing / S2892, EEBO.

[51] Richard Allestree, *The ladies calling in two parts/ by the author of The whole duty of man, The causes of the decay of Christian piety, and The gentlemans calling*, 1673, Wing/ A1141, EEBO.

And let me tell you, that most of you, have more time to employ in the service of your souls, than the other sex is owner of.[52]

While religiosity was by no means exclusively a female domain, as both in late medieval and seventeenth century England (and New England) men were, for instance, responsible for religious education in their households, women possessed a certain freedom and prowess in religious expression, and could chastise others for lack of devoutness, demand specific displays of piety from others, and pass judgements on the morality of others from the pedestal of their own piety,[53] particularly within communities of women. Pious women had the power to include or exclude other women on the basis of their godliness or its lack.[54] The distinction of household roles, then, illustrates early modern approaches to male and female piety very well: men's was an acquired one, through the reading of catechism, teaching the tenets of religion, and reading the Bible to their children, and expecting appropriate observance of ritual and worship of everyone (including servants) in their charge; women's piety, on the other hand, was natural, ingrained, as much intuitive as acquired, and extended naturally towards others in the household through exemplary conduct of the woman.

The tendency to formulate the prescriptive nature of Protestant ideals on female piety, however, was not distributed along gender lines: both male and female writers wished to positively reinforce and at times, also enforce, female piousness as the ultimate female virtue equally enthusiastically, and relied on very similar presuppositions in doing so. Ester Sowernam, for instance, explained to her female readers that piety was their natural, ingrained, and venerable state: 'I will conclude for women that they haue beene chosen both to set out Gods glory, and for the benefit of all mankinde, in more glorious and gratious imployments then men haue beene'.[55] Thus, while texts by male writers such as Cooper, Allestree or Mather might indicate that men wished to somehow subdue women, or force them into the role of a devout mother and wife, in truth as many female as male writers underscored the importance of female piety, and at times it was the female writers that made allusions to female unruliness more clearly. Sowernam, being the self-appointed defender of virtuous women against slanderous accusations of universal female corruption, nonetheless wrote that Eve's daughters 'are

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[52] Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion. A Facsimile Reproduction with an Introduction by Pattie Cowell* (Delmar, NY: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1978).

[53] Susan Broomhall, 'Introduction', in *Women, Identities, and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Susan Broomhall and Stephanie Tarbin (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), p. 4.

[54] Ibid; Laura Gowing, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012), p. 28.

[55] Sowernam, p. 14.

good Virgins, if they meet with good Tutors'.[56] According to Sowernam women needed guides to realize their ingrained potential for virtue, and these guides needed to be men[57] who were responsible for maintaining the gentleness and virtue of women; if they failed, it was 'a shame he hath no more gouernment ouer the weaker vessell',[58] although she also granted that because women are naturally virtuous, all evil that they commit is due to the influence of a bad (male) teacher: '[a] woman in the temperature of her body is tender, soft, and beautifull, so doth her disposition in minde corresponde accordingly; she is milde yeelding, and vertuous; what disposition accidentally happeneth vnto her, is by the contagion of a froward husband'.[59] In other words, then, Sowernam to a degree denied agency to female action (as their sins were the fault of bad male supervision), and not only freely admitted the veracity of the claim for a natural female virtuousness and piousness, but treated it herself as an undisputable given on which much of her argumentation on the respectability and venerability of womanhood relied. At the same time, she reinforced this supposition and enforced a standard for female behaviour in which there was no room for vice, because those transgressions

> which women doe commit, those are made grieuous and shamefull, and not without iust cause: for where God hath put hatred betwixt the woman and the serpent, it is a foule shame in a woman to carry fauour with the deuill, to stayne her womanhoode with any of his damnable qualities, that she will shake hands where God hath planted hate.[60]

Aemilia Lanyer went even further in warning women not to give in to vice by highlighting that any and all transgression committed by a woman gives credence to 'woman-haters', doing harm to all womankind. She wrote that all criticism directed at women should be used 'to our own benefits, as spurs to virtue, making us fly all occasions that may colour their unjust speeches to pass current' because women should let virtue be their 'guide, for she alone / Can lead you right that you can never fall'.[61]

Indeed, many women in early modern England did use piousness to their own advantage. In addition to regulations of authority within female communities directly related to similar pre-Reformation behaviours (charity, donations, bequests as tools for

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[56] Ibid, page unnumbered [2].

[57] In contrast to, for instance, the *Physician's Tale* which reminds its female audience that it is other women that are responsible for tutoring maidens in virtue.

[58] Sowernam, p. 43.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Ibid, p. 25.

[61] Lanyer in Salzman, pp. 46 and 26.

inclusion and exclusion), Protestant women continued also other agency-establishing strategies inherited from their late medieval ancestresses. Not only the female ownership of devotional books and texts significantly increased in the early modern period, also the number of religious and devotional books and texts written by women was on the rise. Apart from conduct texts, women increasingly often wrote prayers, compiled prayer books and psalm books, as well as treatises on devotion. Writers such as Elizabeth Tyrwhit and her *Morning and Evening Prayer* (1574), Mary Sidney and her poetic psalms (1599) co-authored with her brother Philip, and self-proclaimed prophetesses like Anna Trapnell (*Anna Trapnel's Report and Plea*, 1654) were all very strong voices in the devotional life of early modern England, indicating that female piety was not only widely recognized as important to the overall shape and form of state religion (exemplified most influentially by Elizabeth I), but that women increasingly narrated their religious experiences as a way of proclaiming to others their adherence to the idea of piety as a natural and empowering state for every individual woman.[62] One of the most empowering manifestations of female agency in using piety to their advantage was the continuation of the late medieval conviction of a special relationship between women and God, a symbolic wedding to Christ and the crowning of female virtues: the *sponsa Christi* motif. Initially a Biblical motif interpreted as a metaphor for the Christian Church as the Bride of Christ, and thus potentially extended also onto men, the idea of *sponsa Christi* gradually acquired the narrowed-down meaning of the relationship between God and women specifically:

> [f]or male religious, the identity *sponsa* functioned as a provisional persona, a role entered into imaginatively in the course of prayer. But female religious – precisely because they were female – could participate in another signifying system, this one social and historical ... female religious could become literally ... married to Christ.[63]

By the fourteenth century, many female writers and mystics, such as Margery Kempe in her *Book*, used explicitly erotic imagery to describe this union,[64] highlighting the added

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[62] For more on the place of women in the devotional landscape of early modern England see, for instance, Elizabeth Clarke, 'Women in church and in devotional spaces' in *Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. by Laura Lunger Knoppers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 110-24.

[63] Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 28. See also chapter 1, 'Compassion and the Making of a True *Sponsa Christi*' throughout.

[64] Generally, mystical experiences tended to be described as bodily sensations, as in Richard Rolle's *Fire of Love*, though writers in the latter half of the fourteenth century largely moved away from this trend; see

dimension of physicality and intimacy between men and women to underscore the intensity of the relationship between the groom (Christ) and the woman (bride).

Erica Longfellow observes that the motif of the mystical marriage was one of the strongest bridges between late medieval and early modern England, both along and aside the lines of the Catholic-Protestant division.[65] Many women, such as Anne Hutchinson, or Anne Bradstreet, found (relative) spiritual freedom in claiming to have a special union with God, used the vocabulary of devotional elation to attain a degree of independence in their lives, and to write and publish. Narratives of mystical relations with Christ such as conversion narratives, poetry, or even captivity narratives, such as that of Mary Rowlandson, were many women's means of expression, and to their audiences a chance to have their experiences, and a whole set of models for religious expression, narrated *to* them.[66] And as many early modern women adapted the *sponsa Christi* motif as a paradigm for their spiritual sensations, so many writers suggested that indeed, because piousness was the natural female state so the female status as the bride of Christ was most natural, and thus most crucial to maintain. Cotton Mather stated that a virtuous woman: 'retires into her closet every day, that she may there have a visit from the eternal Bridegroom of her Soul… Reader, as an ambassador for Christ, I do in the stead of Christ beseech you, that you would be married unto the Lord Redeemer' (*Ornaments,* 28, 78). This, of course, aided social policy on the female submissive role in marriage: Paul's rule that women who marry were to think of pleasing their husbands[67] was reinforced by the motif of Christ as spouse – pleasing God and pleasing the husband became the same thing. As Ester Sowernam reminded her readers, a woman 'is commanded to obey her husband; the cause is, the more to encrease her glorie. Obedience is better then Sacrifice: for nothing is more acceptable before God then to obey: women are much bound to God',[68] by which she implied that obedience to the husband was, in fact, obedience to God (or Christ), and was thus an admirable trait in any woman wishing to call herself virtuous. Thus, again, Sowernam used the apparent prescription of obedience stemming from piety for the sake of peace in the household to assert female independence, but by doing so she simultaneously reinforced

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Barry Windeatt, *The English Mystics of the Middle Ages* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 8-11.

[65] Erica Longfellow, *Women and Religious Writing in Early Modern England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 13-15.

[66] For more on the development of the *sponsa Christi* motif in the Middle Ages and the early modern period see, for instance, Rabia Gregory, *Marrying Jesus in Medieval and Early Modern Northern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

[67] Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2001), p. 23.

[68] Sowernam, p. 10.

this prescription, outlining to her female readers that, indeed, being obedient to their husbands is their moral and religious, as well as social duty.

The performativity and discursiveness of the definition of piety as a virtue is clear from the above quotations: it is prescribed by appealing to women's positive face (the want of being appreciated), weaving the image of a pious woman as socially desirable, competent, exemplary, and superior. These claims are guarded from becoming face threatening acts for women because being pious is presented as a female strength and specialty, something they are better at than men. It becomes a desirable and beneficial trait for women themselves and because of that, many women indeed aspired to be considered exceptionally pious and devout, making it, in turn, a female choice to be pious, and an act of protecting the female negative face, of independence in action, and a consciously inhabited social role: the perceived judgement and expectations of society met with the need to be accepted and to perform the self 'independently'. Maintaining this constructed female positive face, and responding to the prescribers' attempt to protect the female positive (acceptability) and negative face (women are given the possibility to *choose* to be pious), women, as exemplified by Sowernam, allowed the prescribers to keep their own positive face, not as imposers and oppressors, but as guides and leaders. At the same time, they also maintained the general female negative face: it was the female natural state to be virtuous, and this assertion at once constructed an important aspect of female identity and a sense of female community to which only the virtuous belonged. Women, then, self-governed both themselves and each other by using female virtuousness to their benefit. However, it was not as Lanyer indicated, only to excel all the more in virtue and piety, but also to ascertain agency over their actions, exert authority over other women, and to pass judgements on them on the basis of whether they belonged to this independently constructed community of ideal women or not. In other words, piety allowed women to keep both their positive and negative face, and additionally created a self-regulatory axis for female communities, where women could prescribe specific performances of virtue to other women. Moreover, piety also provided a framework for other female virtues (and vices) which were defined in religious terms (temperance, devoutness, pride, anger, etc.), which were inseparably tied to women's social roles as helper, mother, educator, carer, wife, etc. Through piety, devout and obedient daughters, wives, and mothers found their place, as well as a language and a set of cultural norms which served as tools to express their identity acquired through these roles, and were given tools of validation, inclusion and exclusion.[69]

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[69] See, for instance, Susan Broomhall, 'Gendering the culture of honour at the Fifteenth-Century Burgundian Court' in *Women, Identities and Communities in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Stephanie

Founded on piety, the primary virtues of women were meekness, obedience, and submissiveness, often considered together as the female-specific interpretation of the Christian virtue of humility. While in itself humility was considered neither particularly male nor female, female humility was clearly distinguishable from general humility, because it connected to two aspects of being a woman: to behaviour, and to appearance. As a behaviour (or practice) meekness and obedience in a woman was more admirable than in a man because it proved that the woman was free from the sin of pride, to which women were generally considered naturally more prone, and that she understood her role as wife which was to be, among other things, supportive and obedient towards the husband, although both spouses tended to be interested in the 'social stability and their family's respectability and prosperity'[70]. In short, meek behaviour and obedience, much like piety, guaranteed respect. *The Good Wife*, for instance, persuades its readers:

> When thou arte in the chyrch, my chyld,
> Loke that thou be bothe meke and myld....
> Be of gode beryng and of gode tonge.
> In thi god beryng begynnes thi worschype.

This implies that respect (worshype) is gained through 'good', i.e. meek, behaviour, and that this good behaviour, while extended towards everyone, should be practiced particularly towards the husband, to ensure the marriage is happy: '[w]hat man that thee doth wedde with rynge… / Loke thou mekly ansuer hym'.[71] *The Book of the Knight of the Tower* very similarly states that: 'by good reason humylyte ought to come fyrste to the woman / For euer she ought to shewe her self meke and humble toward her lord... no better vertue maye be in a woman/than the vertue of humylyte'.[72] In Chaucer's *Clark's Tale*, Griselde embodies the absolute ideal of wifely obedience: she follows her husband's every wish, even when it means losing her children, status that she won with marriage, happiness, and wealth because Griselde represents exemplary obedience,

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Tarbin and Susan Broomhall (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 181-193; Judith M. Richards, 'Public Identity and Public Memory: Case Studies of Two Tudor Women' in Tarbin and Broomhall (eds.), pp. 195-209; and Sybil Jack, 'In Praise of Queens: The Public Presentation of the Virtuous Consort in Seventeenth-Century Britain' in Tarbin and Broomhall (eds.), pp. 211-24, for more on female manipulations of existing conduct norms in correlation to social class to their own advantage, and on negotiations of power and authority in male-female, and all-female groups and communities.

[70] Katherine L. French, 'Genders and Material Culture' in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Judith M. Bennett, Ruth Mazo Karras (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 197-213 (p. 209).

[71] *The Good Wife*, ll. 20-37.

[72] *The Book of the Knights of the Tower*, 54, 70, 71.

humility, and perseverance. These qualities, in the end, win her immense respectability with her husband's subjects, but also provide evidence of ultimate virtuous humility in the face of trials God sends upon people. Griselde, as a peasant girl who married a noble, had to win respectability due to a noble born woman through hardship and trial, although:

> This storie is seyd nat for that wyves shoulde
> Folwen Grisilde as in humylitee,
> For if they were inportable, though they wolde,
> But for that every wight, in his degree,
> Sholde be constant in adversitee.[73]

In other words, female wifely obedience stands for Christian obedience and humility to God, an ideal people should aspire to; Griselda is, for Chaucer, the female Job[74]. Humility and meekness, then, while being a woman's (and wife's) duty are also sure paths to respectability, which in turn satisfied many women's personal, self-fulfillment aims – respectability was the crown jewel of many wives' dreams: '[w]omen were divided – by class, age, marriage, and respectability. Some had relatively more power than others, some were more able to make their own choices. Respectability was important to all women'.[75] Female respectability was thus directly linked to humility and meek and 'proper' behaviour (although, as Ester Sowernam points out, male respectability also relied on being married to a decent woman: 'they are never called honest men, till they be married: for that is the portion which they get by their wives').[76] At the same time, respectability in behaviour was inseparably connected to other aspects of conduct, including chastity, and modesty, both related to appearance. Female humility, then, was predominantly performative, that is, external – it relied on conduct as well as appropriate 'presentation', as much as on the social and economic status of the woman and her family.

Indeed, apparel was an important facet of female humility. Late medieval conceptualizations of pride included vanity in apparel and in outward appearance. By

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[73] Chaucer, 152, ll. 1142-5

[74] See e.g. Ann Astell, "Job's Wife, Walter's Wife, and the Wife of Bath", *Old Testament Women in Western Literature*, ed. Raymond-Jean Frontain (Conway: UCA Press, 1991); or Priscilla Martin, *Chaucer's Women: Nuns, Wives and Amazons* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1990).

[75] Susan Dwyer Amussen, 'Elizabeth I and Alice Balstone: Gender, Class, and the Exceptional Woman in Early Modern England' in *Attending to Women in Early Modern England*, ed. by Betty S. Travitsky and Adele F. Seeff (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1994), pp. 219-40 (p. 234).

[76] Sowernam, p. 24.

the early modern period vanity in apparel was seen as a predicament particularly threatening for women – fashion trends in the early modern period focused on female clothing rather than male, made it more innovative, more aimed at attracting attention, and thus a source of increasing concern for moralists. This provideda contrast to the late medieval period in which male clothing was more flamboyant and revealing, making moralists like John Mirk condemn pointed shoes or short vests worn by men more so than any specific item of female fashion. Male clothing worn by Protestants changed under the influence of the Reformation and became much less flamboyant and more sombre,[77] although Ester Sowernam had a thing or two to say about male approaches to attire, in an attempt to defend female interest in fine clothing, and divert attention from it, by attacking the male positive face. On men who complain 'of beautie, and say, *That womens dressings and attire are prouocations to wantonnesse, and baites to allure men*' she writes that 'it is a common signe to know a leacher, by complaining vpon the cause and occasion of his surfeit'.[78] She then adds, mocking men who tend to dress extravagantly themselves, '[w]omen make difference betwixt colours and conditions, betwixt a faire shew, and a foule substance: It shewes a leuitie in man to furnish himselfe more with trim colours, then manlike qualities: besides that, how can we lone at whom we laugh?'[79] The majority of early modern moralist remarks on clothing, however, focused on female attire and condemnation of female vanity, counterbalanced by the praise of meekness and modesty, by convincing women that humility was the best female ornament. Cotton Mather was particularly concerned with female humility in appearance. In his generation of New Englanders he observed alarming spiritual laxity and many signs of moral downfall: worldliness, self-serving, self-indulgence, and vanity. Because he believed women were naturally predisposed to godliness, and had the strength of character to implement piety into everyday life much more easily than men, he proposed of a virtuous woman that

> 'twas none of her manner to seek a match for herself, by putting her self into a flanting dress, knowing that such a dress would make a wise man afraid of her (…). And those virgins which were so sacred among the ancient Romans; as to be made the sanctuaries of greatest reverence, did not more deserve all respect and honour, than the virgins which thus manifest the fear of God.[80]

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[77] Stanford M. Lyman, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Society and Evil* (Oxford: General Hall, 1989), pp. 144-8.

[78] Sowernam, p. 37.

[79] Ibid, p. 38. Richard Brathwaite, in his *English Gentleman* (1631) likewise criticized the general tendency of the early modern youth to yield to 'outlandish' fashions, chastising both men and women for their respective clothing-related choices.

[80] Mather, p. 85.

In other words, humility and vigilance against vanity were manifestations of piety, Christian integrity, and made the woman worthy of praise, but carried also social meaning: they were a sign of good governance, a message the woman fulfilled her roles as a wife and mother, knew how to manage the family's funds and resources, and was frugal and sensible. Women who did not flaunt their status and influence through apparel were women who were accepted, both by men and other women, as respectable. Women themselves encouraged each other to remain meek and humble, as meek and humble women fitted more easily into the community, of women and men alike.[81]

This is not to say, of course, that humility was not praised in men as well,[82] but male humility typically served as a means of achieving a pre-defined aim[83] (or as a feature of a profession, such as clergyman or monk), whereas for women humility had more to do with their social status rather than profession, as an inseparable part of their self-performance. Respectability, after all, was enjoined perfomatively, and not (at least not exclusively) due to entitlement. As Richard Brathwaite phrased it, a woman can be compared to a snail 'because she still carries her house about her, as is the property of a good House-keeper .... They are such mirrors of modesty, patternes of piety, as they would not for a world transgresse the bounds of': a woman's conduct is inseparably tied to her household and her family, her behaviour and apparel reflect on the respectability of her husband, children, and parents, and ideal wives make sure never to forget that everything they say or do carries with it implications for her family.[84] It was perhaps due to this social gravity of female humility that many conduct writers recommended it, much like piety, as a natural and naturally desirable state every woman should aspire to. As Richard Allestree pointed out, meekness is 'not only recommended to all as a Christian virtue, but particularly enjoin'd to Women as a peculiar accomplishment of their sex',[85] the 'particular accomplishment' here implying that it was advisable, and respectable, for women to be meek. In other words, then, the female positive face is constructed through meekness and humility, and because of how Chaucer, Allestree or Brathwaite phrased it (as an accomplishment, ideal, and epitome of Christian exemplary

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[81] Jennifer Ward, *Women in England in the Middle Ages* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), p. 8.

[82] See, for instance, Jacqueline Murray (ed.), *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinites: Men in the Medieval West* (New York: Routledge, 2011); Derek G. Neal, *The Masculine Self in Late Medieval England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Ruth Mazo Karras, *From Boys to Men: Formations of Masculinity in Late Medieval Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Susan Broomhall and Jacqueline Van Gent (eds.), *Governing Masculinities in the Early Modern Period: Regulating Selves and Others* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[83] Jill Mann, *Feminizing Chaucer*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2002), pp. 76-8, 86-8, and 104.

[84] Braithwaite, p. 298.

[85] Allestree, pp. 32-3.

behaviour realized by a woman), in combination with the added bonus of respectability that stemmed from it, meekness and humility became highly desirable to women themselves, and were an element of the performed female negative face.

As Ester Snowerham observed, 'nothing is more acceptable before God than to obey',[86] suggesting that female humility was a divinely granted gift, and that it was every woman's conscious choice to fulfil this great privilege of being chosen for this exceptional gift of humility, one which carried the honour of being placed above the Serpent and his offspring: 'what greater honour could be done vnto her then to heare from the voyce of God these words ... that her seed should breake the Serpents head?'.[87] Other female writers (such as An Collinson), also used the *topos* of humility as one of agency. According to Jennifer Clerement[88] 'for many women a humble position could prove enabling as well as restricting – sometimes enabling, in fact, *because* it was restricting', so that 'by the 1650s the humility topos was such a feature of women's writing across the religious and political spectrum that it may ... be regarded as a feminized convention'.[89] In other words, women not only embraced humility as a virtue, but also turned it into a feature of agency, of their negative face. Catherine, Countess of Northumberland, wrote in a letter drawing her husband's attention to the family's financial affairs that '[f]or mine own part being a woman, I can no more but pray for your good success and speed, seeing the matter is too weighty for me... being not able to travail therein myself':[90] she used meekness to persuade her husband not only that the matter was urgent, but also that it was important and, perhaps, that her own understanding of it was correct. In other words she, like many other women, managed to actively pursue her agenda, financial or otherwise, through persuading her husband, or father, or other male relative or acquaintance, to act. In the words of Mary Throckmorton 'I have answered this letter as a woman, very submissively, if that will serve, for I perceive they cannot endure to be told their faults':[91] the use of humility as the language of agency allowed women to perform their role as aids and partners to

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[86] Sowernam, p. 10.

[87] Ibid.

[88] Jennifer Clerement, *Reading Humility in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015), pp. 80-2.

[89] Bronwen Price, 'Women's Poetry 1550-1700: "Not Unfit to be Read"' in *A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing*, ed. by Anita Pacheco (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), pp. 282-302 (p. 283). See also Patricia Pender, *Early Modern Women's Writing and the Rhetoric of Modesty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), chapters 3 and 4 for more on how women used humility rhetorically as a language of agency.

[90] Kenneth Charlton, *Women, Religion, and Education in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 53

[91] Ibid.

their husbands and other roles that demanded active participation or decision making, such as guardians, entrepreneurs, or household managers.[92]

Thus, again, the female positive and negative face are both kept through the way praise is phrased: women are encouraged to take the effort of becoming exemplary in humility out of their own accord (negative face) and are persuaded that the more humble they are, the more respected, appreciated, and accomplished as a 'social' woman they will be (positive face). The virtue of meekness was, perhaps, the most difficult social virtue to propagate and implement, because whoever wrote that women should be meek and passive threatened the female negative face, and thus their own self-constructed positive face. But, these threats were avoided by politeness strategies performed so that 'there is more than one unambiguously attainable intention so that the actor cannot be held to have committed himself to one particular intent'.[93] In other words, there was something or someone else to be held accountable for any possible threats stemming from the formulation of a threatening statement, and there were many ways to interpret it so that no prescriber could be held responsible for posing that threat. The prescription of humility in female social behaviour was presented as non-threatening to the female negative face because it was 'universal' and 'divinely supported', with plenty of evidence for the many social, religious, and interpersonal benefits of meekness and one that women were naturally predisposed to, *ergo* it was natural and divinely sanctioned that women be meek, and not any kind of an imposition. In other words, performative humility addressed the female positive and negative face, with the threat to female independence (negative face) addressed by the propagation of humility as desirable, as every woman's right and privilege, and the threat to the female positive face (being scorned for the lack of humility) was appeased by tying it to respectability; women who were not respectable (for instance prostitutes and criminals) were so below the world of other women that their presence was detached from reflecting on women as a whole, and attached to the general realm of society's dregs.

III. Vices

Female vices are almost always discussed in direct contrast to the virtues, and are often, in conduct writings as well as moralist texts, secondary to virtues; virtues are, likewise,

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[92] As well as for other, numerous purposes. See, e.g. Pender, *Early Modern Women's Writing*, pp. 88-92 for a discussion of how Katherine Parr managed to participate in the religious dialogue of the early Reformation while using the discourse of female humility and modesty to appease the anger of Henry VIII with such 'womanish meddling'.

[93] Brown and Levinson, *Politeness*, p. 69.

always mentioned in discussions of female vices, as remedies, contraries, and, for more stark contrast, to deter from the vice under consideration. There were very few texts that discussed female vices as their main topic (apart from some gender-debate texts which, like Swetnam's work, were written to defame women) – the majority of texts devoted to women preferred to focus on socially constructive praise of virtue rather than a detailed castigation of vice, and it is therefore a predominant feature of works on female character that vices are expounded upon in much less detail than virtues, and that vices are always discussed in comparison to a more elaborately described counter-virtue. Female vices are, of course, inseparably connected to the concept of sin, the seven deadly sins, and the history of the vices throughout late antiquity, the Middle Ages, and the early modern period, including both the strictly theological, and the more practical, social progression, connectedness, and implications of this history. As in the case of virtues, though, female vices are likewise more productively discussed as social issues phrased in religious vocabulary rather than as doctrinal considerations only. A classic understanding of female vices connected them to the Fall and Eve's blame in exposing the world to the power of sin, which introduced a paradigm for all female vices: they stemmed from 'female character' embodied by Eve, and typically included curiosity, the ability to lead others astray, unruliness, worldliness. Other female vices were connected to female character outside of the example of Eve in Eden, and had a more social view of female character that developed in more strict connection to the seven deadly sins – lust(fullness), the aforementioned vanity (pride), unruliness (unruly speech, anger, jealousy, drunkenness), and materialism (covetousness).

The following discussion focuses on unruly speech, anger, and lust although, as Ester Sowernam emphasized, all vices were deplorable in women, and much more so than in men because women were naturally created virtuous, and destined for greatness:

> In no one thing, men doe acknowledge a more excellent perfection in women then in the estimate of the offences which a woman doth commit: the worthinesse of the person doth make the sinne more markeable. What an hatefull thing is it to see a woman ouercome with drinke ... it is abhorred in women, and therefore they auoyd it... [T]hose which women doe commit, those are made grieuous and shamefull, and not without iust cause: for where God hath put hatred betwixt the woman and the serpent, it is a foule shame in a woman to carry fauour with the deuill, to stayne her womanhoode with any of his damnable qualities, that she will shake hands where God hath planted hate.[94]

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[94] Sowernam, pp. 24-5.

Sowernam's remarks make references to Swetnam's accusations of women as inherently sinful, but although she does (in the excerpt omitted in the above quotation) point out that the same vices despised in women, drunkenness and lustfulness, are merely considered a trifle in men, thus implying a double behaviour standard for what 'good fellowship' is regarding men and women, she nevertheless, in order to defend women and turn Swetnam's slander into a compliment of a sort, reinforce the deplorability of sinful women (as she does in other places in her work). Similar remarks about female drunkenness, as well as other 'sins of the tavern'[95] (gambling, wasting money in taverns, swearing) can be found, for instance, in Richard Allestree's *Ladies' Calling* or Cotton Mather's *Ornaments*. Allestree remarks that

> [d]rinking [is] a vice detestable in all, but prodigious in Women, who put a double violence upon their nature, the one in the intemperance the other in the immodesty ... nothing humane being so much beast as a drunken Woman... If we dive farther into it's *[sic]* inferences and adherences, the affirmation is yet more irrefragable. She who is first a prostitute to Wine will soon be to Lust also; she has dismissed her Guards, discarded all her suggestions of Reason, as well as Grace, and is at the mercy of any, or every assailant.[96]

Mather shares this opinion, adding also dancing as a fault connected to the female vice of immodesty, to which drunkenness, excess in dress, focus on beauty and other signs of over-appreciation of carnality and carnal pleasures are counted. He reminds virtuous women to be vigilant against those who 'would seduce [them] from the fear of God ... They ... creep into Houses and lead captive Silly Women, laden with Sins, away with diverse Lusts'.[97]

The virtues of piety and humility, in many ways, defined the understanding of female vices: all that was counter to meekness, devoutness, temperance, respectability, and virtue was, by definition, a vice. Thus, from the directive to be meek and semblant in company, the opposite stemmed as a deplorable vice. Giggling, loudness, or gossip, for instance, were considered improper because they exposed both the woman and her family to shame, public ridicule, invited malicious counter-gossip, criticism, as well as, potentially, other misbehaviours:

> Change not thi countenans with grete laughter,

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[95] The female body as prone to sin was often presented in association with vices of the tavern as 'þe welle of synne' (*The Book of Vices and Virtues*, 53, l. 28).

[96] Allestree, p. 15.

[97] Mather, p. 61.

And wyse of maneres loke thou be gode.

Ne for no tayle change thi mode,

Ne fare not as thou a gyglot were,

Ne laughe thou not lowd, be thou therof sore.

Luke thou also gape not to wyde,

For anything that may betyde.

Suete of speche loke that thow be. [98]

From these unseemly behaviours unruly speech, giggling, and loudeness were considered particularly shameful to women. John Mirk in one of his early fifteenth-century sermons also observed that '[f]or a mayden ys lytyll worþe þat con nothyng suffyre of persecucyon ne of deses, but scho playne; and ys a claterer, a ianguler, a flyter, a curser, a swerer, and a skold of hur mowþe. This defendyth not maydenhode, but rayþer castyth hit downe'.[99] Silence, on the other hand, was a humble woman's virtue: it did not attract unwanted attention, indicated self-control and a well-mannered temperament. While in itself it was not necessarily a universal social virtue – the rule of silence belonged in monasteries rather than public space – temperance in speech, the ability to withhold speech when it was unwelcome, was a sign of personal excellence, and good judgement. Thus, Mirk also wrote that '[w]herfor a mayden most be of lytyll wordys, and loke þat scho speke by honeste and worschyp to hur person; for hyt ys an old Englysch sawe: "A mayde schuld be seen, but not herd"'.[100] In the early modern period many writers agreed, sometimes verbatim: Cotton Mather also described loud behaviour as unworthy of a virtuous woman: 'such is her Modesty, that she chooses to be seen rather than heard'.[101] *The Ladies Calling* stated in a similar tone that '[a] Woman's tongue should indeed be like the imaginary Musick of the Spheres, sweet and charming, but not to be heard at a distance'.[102] Richard Braithwaite wrote that

Words spoken in season, are like apples of gold with pictures of silver: So opportunately are their words delivered, so seasonably uttered, with such unaffected eloquence expressed, wheresoever this sweet and well-tempered discretion is seated. Whereas others there be, whose indiscretion makes discovery of an Ocean of words, but a drop of reason. The speake much, but

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[98] *The Good Wife*, ll. 46-54.

[99] Theodore Erbe (ed.), Mirk's *Festial: A Collection of Homilies by Johannes Mirkus (John Mirk). Edited from Bodl. MS. Eccl.Top. 4, with Variant Readings from Other MSS*. Early English Text Society (London: Kegan Paul, 1905), pp. 229-30.

[100] Ibid.

[101] Mather, p. 97.

[102] Allestree, p. 7.

expresse little. ... Silence in a woman is moving rhetoricke, winning most, when in words it wooeth least .... More shall we see fall into sinne by speech then silence.[103]

Temperance in speech, then, was perhaps one of the most significant ways of presenting one's gentility and good manners which, translated into social respect and elevation of rank, signified status, good manners and pedigree, and had impact on social reputation:

> al gentyl wymmen and noble maydens of good lygnage/ought to be softe/humble/Rype/stedfast of estate and of manere/of lytel speche to answere curtoisly and not to be ouer wyld to sprynge ne le pene cast her syght ouer lyghtely.[104]

The 'rypeness' of speech signified that all uttered thoughts were, ideally, well thought-through as such female contributions were, clearly, in demand.

On the other hand, Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale* exemplifies what comes to pass from intemperate evil speech.[105] The pure maiden Constance is to be wedded to a Sultan, who promised to convert to Christianity and to convert his whole country with him. But, the Sultan's mother, a 'welle of vices' and a 'cursed crone' (*CT*, 92, 93; ll. 323, 432) wanted to rule herself, did not want to convert to Christianity, and despised the idea of having a younger, Christian queen as her sovereign. She devised a plan to kill the Sultan and all his converted courtiers at a feast he was giving to celebrate his marriage to Constance, and through her persuasive speech, and a 'feigned' (i.e. 'heathen') piousness drew men that were to commit the slaughter to sin. She was a

> roote of iniquite!
> Virago, thou Semyrame the secounde!
> O serpent under femynynytee,
> Lik to the serpent depe in helle ybounde!

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[103] Braithwaite, pp. 298-9, 319-20. As Christina Luckyj argued, speech and silence were rhetorical and cultural devices used by both sexes, and the prescription of silence cannot be considered straightforwardly as tool of oppression against women: '[i]f speech bears traces not of personal agency but of institutional constraint, are the men who can speak freer than the women who keep silent?'. See '*A Moving Rhetoricke': Gender and Silence in Early Modern England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 5.

[104] *The Book of the Tower*, p. 15.

[105] This provides interesting contrast to the praise of virtuous speech in, for instance, *The Second Nun's Tale*.

> O feyned woman, al that may confounde
> Vertu and innocence, thurgh thy malice
> Is bred in thee, as nest of every vice! (*CT*, 92, ll. 358-364).

She is likened to Satan, the Serpent, who also lead others to sin through speech, a manipulation of words, and a skillful confusion of vice with virtue, because when the Devil wishes to beguile and tempt others into sin, he makes his 'instrument ... of wommen' (*CT*, 92, l. 370-371). According to the tale, though, the Sultaness is a 'feyned woman', a fake woman, a pretender: it seems that, according to the story, 'true' women are not conniving but virtuous in speech, honest, and truthful, and the words they speak are wise and well-timed. Evil speech, then, the source of all sin (which is an interesting take on a classic theological debate about which sin is the root of all evil), while originally committed by the Serpent to burden Eve with original sin, is allegorically the sin of women: manipulation of speech, it seems, is the female domain, and inevitably leads to sin, unhappiness, and shame.

Even though this seems to be a very clear imposition on the female negative face – after all, unimpeded and autonomous expression in speech is the very definition of negative face – it was, again, not at all an exclusively male tendency to promote silence and temperance in speech, and to chastise evil speech. Women also castigated each other for intemperate or unwelcome speech: Elizabeth Jocelin's 1624 *The Mother's Legacy*, for instance, advises its female readers to 'remember thou art a maid and as such ought thy modesty to be that thou shouldest scarce speak but when thou answereth'.[106] Other female writers, such as Priscilla Cotton and Mary Cole in their *To the Priests and People of England* (1655), attempted to extend the 'rule of silence', or at least the scope of its gendered range, to encompass also male speech, making it a universal virtue (in their case, with a religious agenda in mind): 'what good doth all your preaching and hearing do you? Break your sleep, rent your brains, and as it were, speak out your lungs, and alas who is bettered by it!'[107] Ester Sowernam in her defence of her reprimand of Swetnam points out that '[t]he difference betwixt a railing scold, and and an honest accuses, is this, the first rageth vpon passionate furie, without bringing cause or proofe; the other bringeth direct proofe for what she alleageth'.[108] She manages to evade a potential accusation of simply being 'a rayling scold', but she also admits that the stereotype of that railing scold is founded on real female behaviour.[109] In other words,

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[106] Elizabeth Jocelin, *The mothers legacie, to her vnborne childe. By Elizabeth Iocelin*, 1624, STC/ 558:12, EEBO, p. 469.

[107] Excerpted in Salzman (ed.), *Early Modern Women's Writing*, p. 145.

[108] Sowernam, p. 47.

[109] Ibid.

Sowernam uses the distinction between herself and a scold successfully because all her readers will recognise that the vice of 'raginng upon passionate furie', evil, unruly, intemperate and irrational speech is a commonly recognized female vice. She thus reinforces the imagery and conceptualization of this vice, and reinforces the socially proper standard, which is to speak only with evidence, forethought, and purpose.

Likewise, frequent lawsuits for libel and slander in both the late medieval and early modern period, most often brought to court by women against other women (five times more frequently than suits by and against men)[110] rendered the advice of moderation in speech a valuable and prudent one, and indicated that it was women themselves that contributed to the social recognisability of unruly speech as a predominantly female predicament.[111] As Anthony Fletcher observed, 'cases between and against women served a wide range of personal objectives in tight-knit local communities' creating a 'code that worked as a direct source of gender prescription'.[112] Laura Gowing's findings further suggest that many women made use of court proceedings against other women to settle other scores than just straightforwardly defending their honour (in slander cases), and regulated relationships between each other and established hierarchies through a very conscious use of the power of language (and court action).[113] Collectively, then, women reacted to slander as a threat that the stereotype of the female-ingrained vice of immoderation in speech would be universally confirmed, and thus an act threatening their positive face: women as a social group would be burdened by the label of quarrelsome and slanderous (and would thus not be accepted or appreciated). Individual women who carried their cases to court likewise felt that their reputation, positive face, was threatened by the accusations. Cases presented by women against women were, therefore, concerned with reputation of both individual women and the collective social group of women, and in both cases were aimed at defending the female positive face, and to prevent a violation of the constructed social role of advisor or guide: a woman considered quarrelsome or talkative would not be admitted to council or asked for opinion, and that reputation could potentially extend to other women in a given community thus distorting or even obliterating the role of woman as

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[110] Laura Gowing, 'Language, power, and the law: women's slander litigation in early modern London' in *Women, Crime, and the Courts in early modern England*, ed. by Jennifer Kermode and Garthine Walker (London: UCL Press, 1994), pp. 26-47 (p. 36).

[111] Both before and after the Reformation, although there was an increase in defamation cases brought up by women against other women in the sixteenth century; see Karen Jones, *Gender and Petty Crime in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2006), p. 142.

[112] Anthony Fletcher, *Gender, Sex, and Subordination in England, 1500-1800* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 102.

[113] Gowing, 'Language, Power, and the Law', throughout.

advisor or guide; this was a sacrifice of social and personal influence very few women were ready to relinquish. At the same time, women used the label of scold, or slanderess consciously against each other, reinforcing the stereotype of unruly female speech, particularly when it benefited their personal agendas.

The vice of unruliness extended also onto other behaviours. Anger was particularly considered to be a deplorable female vice, in direct opposition to the decorum of female conduct. In itself one of the seven deadly sins, anger (wrath) in religious thought could be redeemed if it was just: '[ȝ]if þou be wrothe wyth an-oþeres synne ...; þannne doste þou no synne';[114] '[t]he first an exhortation or commaundement wherin iust and holy anger is inioyned or commended vnto vs in the first words *(Bee Angrie)*, the second a prohibition or dehortation from vniust, and corrupt anger in the next words *(But sinne not)*'.[115] However, most texts on conduct disregarded such distinctions (which date back as early as St. Bernard of Clairvaux) and focused, instead, on the social ramifications of anger which, apart from when it was mild and allowed passion to 'awaken' reason (as Downame suggests in his text), was largely considered shameful and potentially dangerous: anger led to sins such as violence or murder, discord and misrule.[116] The politics of female behaviour made women's relationship to the vice of anger a complex one: on the one hand, female anger was universally counted as the worst of all kinds of wrath – it belittled women's status as a group, shamed the social class a given woman belonged to, and gave evidence that women were slaves to their emotions. A woman who gave in to spurs of anger proved herself as lacking self-control and thus in need of external supervision; likewise, a woman who caused anger in others (particularly her husband) was considered a sower of discord, a scold, and was often made unwelcome in polite company. On the other hand, because women were considered naturally meek, they were to be predisposed to quell anger in others. Keeping calm was a sign of good character and composure, then, and thus of good governance and respectability, making women natural peace-bringers in their families, expected to incite others to do good. It is perhaps for this reason that female anger was considered such a deplorable vice. The *Good Wife* instructs its readers:

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[114] Arthur Brandeis (ed.), *Jacob's Well, And English Treatuse on the Cleansing of Man's Conscience. Edited from the Unique Ms. About 1440 A.D. in Salisbury Cathedral*. Early English Text Society (London: Kegan Paul, 1800), p. 98, ll. 25-9.

[115] John Downame, *Spiritual physicke to cure the diseases of the soule, arising from superfluitie of choller, prescribed out of Gods word Wherein the chollericke man may see the dangerousnesse of this disease of the soule vniust anger, the preseruatiues to keepe him from the infection thereof, and also fit medicines to restore him to health beeing alreadie subiect to this raging passion. Profitable for all to vse, seeing all are patients in this desease of impatiencie*, 1616, STC (2nd ed.)/ 7142, EEBO, p. 7.

[116] For more on anger in the Middle Ages see, for instance, Barbara Rosenwein (ed.), *Anger's Past: The Social Issues of an Emotion in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

What man that thee doth wedde with rynge,

Loke thou hym love aboven all thinge...

That he be wroth and angery be

Loke thou mekly ansuer hym,

And meve hym nother lyth ne lymme,

And that schall sclake hym of hys mode.[117]

In other words, women kept their positive face by being peaceful and remaining calm, and allowed others to keep their positive face by giving in to female mitigation.

Female anger was often conceptualized with the use of Aristotle's theory of elements, where women were considered naturally moist and cold and men hot and dry, giving each sex a predisposition for certain 'humours'; discourse of anger as the capital sin of wrath had much less application in discussions of female anger. Aristotle's theory was known and accepted in the Middle Ages, though not often referred to in texts on conduct, whereas in the early modern period it was in wide use as a 'natural' explanation of character traits, and an early modern rendering of psychology. From the *Ladies Calling* we learn that:

> nature hath befriended women with a more cool and temperature constitution, put less of fire and consequently of choler, in their compositions, so that their heats of that kind are adventitious and preternatural, rais'd often by fancy or pride, and so both look more unhandsomely, and have less of pretence to veil and cover them. Besides, women have a native feebleness, unable to back and assert their angers with any creative force, which may admonish them, 'twas never intended they should loose to that passion which nature seems, by that very inability, to have interdicted them. But when they do it, they render themselves at once despis'd and abhor'd; nothing being more ridiculously hateful than impotent rage.[118]

Cotton Mather, likewise, sees a virtuous woman as one who 'puts away all bitterness, anger, clamour and evil-speaking… a peaceable one'.[119] Both Mather and Allestree, as their late medieval predecessors, believed that anger was damnable not only because it was a sin, but because it was an abhorrent social vice. It caused women to act against

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[117] *The Good Wife*, ll. 33-44.

[118] Allestree, p. 48.

[119] Mather, p. 92.

their character, and caused discord within families and neighbourhoods. Richard Brathwaite underscored this when he wrote '[w]hat a furious and inconsiderate thing is *Woman*, when Passion distempers her?... [n]o fury to be compared to the anger of a woman; which is aggravated or attempered according to the qualitie of the wrong wherewith she holds herself injured'.[120] Women were universally expected 'to get on with their neighbours and keep the peace';[121] as Brathwaite pointed out,

> Her household she makes her *Common-weale*; wherein not any from the highest to the lowest of her *feminine government*, but knows their peculiar office and employment: to which they addresse themselves (so highly they honour her they serve) with more *love* than *feare*.[122]

In other words, angry women themselves were guilty of threatening their positive face. An angry woman offended the neighbours, the husband, or the rest of the family, provoked criminal activity (vengeance, theft, murder), and provoked other women to anger, reinforcing the stereotype of the angry woman. Angry women personified small acts of rebellion within the small commonwealth of the family, and as acts of sedition were treated as treason and punished in order to assert the state's authority over its citizens, so angry women were frowned upon as enactors of misrule within the basic unit of the commonwealth, and were thus likewise subject to punishment.

Another female vice which stemmed from the theory of humours was lust: women were to be naturally prone to the sins of the flesh. There were many medieval and early modern texts exploring the sensuality of women as the cause of their (or others') downfall, such as John Wilmot's *The Farce of Sodom* (1670)*, William Wycherley's *The Country Wife* (1675), the late medieval Digby *Mary Magdalene* (ca. 1470) or the *Ludus Coventriae* cycle's *The Woman Taken in Adultery*, all of which highlighted the long-held conviction that submission to lust makes a person lose their humanity.[123] One of the classic objectifications of lust was the female body itself: '[f]or sche haþ no membre on hire body þat nys a grynne of þe deuel' (*The Book of Vices and Virtues*, p. 44, ll. 6-7). The conviction that the female body was inclined to lust, and provoked lust in others, posed similar problems for Protestants – illustrated for instance by the Protestant Mary Rowlandson who '(em)bodies, literally and figuratively, that which all Protestant

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[120] Braithwaite, pp. 289 and 436.

[121] Ward, *Women in England in the Middle Ages*, 8.

[122] Braithwaite, p. 398.

[123] Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks, 'The Boundaries in Early Modern Womanhood in the Early Modern Imaginary', in *Challenging Orthodoxies: The Social and Cultural Worlds of Early Modern Women*, ed. by Sigrun Haude and Melinda S. Zook. (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 13-32 (pp. 22-4).

men and women are taught to despise, the "sins" of the flesh'.[124] The suspicious and harsh Protestant approach to the body is a part of a larger trend of the 'early modern attitude of severity toward the flesh':[125] the policy of preachers and other moralists of condemning carnality, a strategy of the Protestants in particular as a clear continuity of the late medieval *contemptus mundi*, reinforced the condemnation of the social ramifications of lust. Moreover, socially, adultery, fornication, and other illicit sexual behaviours threw relationships within communities off balance: between husband and wife, their families and neighbours, and so on. Lustfulness outraged neighbours as a bad example to other men and women, and offended their sense of propriety. Illicit sexual behaviour also threatened the community's property balance: illegitimate children laying claims to family fortunes and money spent on mistresses and/or prostitutes made lust a problematic sin both socially and morally. The late medieval *Incestuous Daughter* is a version of a popular sermonic *exemplum* on the dire consequences of illicit desire. The titular daughter, when her father informs her he wants to end their relationship and devote himself to penance, angrily throws all the sins she committed to his face:

> 'A!' sche seyd, 'thou wyked man!
> Haste thou here abowte gon?
> Evyll it schall thee lyke.
> Thow hast me made my moder sle,
> And my chylder all thre,
> And wold me thus beswyke' (*Incestuous Daughter*, ll. 121-126[126]).

She then embarks on a life of even greater debauchery and sin; she is only redeemed by true contrition and God's divine mercy. However, by earthly standards her sins were too great for her to be able to live with them, and she is thus killed by the very force of her contrition, dying suddenly (while listening to a sermon) of grief. The tale, then, while it advertises hope for even the most corrupted sinners, very clearly expresses also what sexual immorality inevitably (should) lead to: shame, grief, and death.

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[124] Steven Neuwirth, 'Her Master's Voice: Gender, Speech, and Gendered Speech in the Narrative of the Captivity of Mary White Rowlandson' in *Sex and Sexuality in Early America*, ed. by Merril D. Smith (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 55-86 (pp. 67, 64-6).

[125] Newhauser, *The Treatise on Vices and Virtues*, p. 198.

[126] *Incestuous Daughter* (ll. 121-6) in George Shuffelton (ed.), *Codex Ashmole 61: A Compilation of Popular Middle English Verse*, TEAMS Middle English Text Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2008), http://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/shuffelton-codex-ashmole-61-incestuous-daughter-introduction

However, while this severity towards lust in principle aided general state and church policies of maintaining morality and order in communities, it also served to maintain an interesting power relation between women themselves, who induced and maintained a clear binary opposition between decent, chaste women and indecent sexual 'offenders'. Margaret Cavendish's *Nature's Pictures* (1656) in the part devoted to the 'Matrimonial Agreement' tells the story of a wife who agreed to marry her husband only if he vowed absolute fidelity. In the course of their marriage, however, he strayed from the path of monogamy and, to the distaste of his wife, consorted even with her maid. For the purpose of this discussion, what is interesting in this story is not so much the suggestion that men inevitably hurt their wives, but rather the observation that the lack of chastity in *women*, particularly of lower status than the wife's, carries with it a number of other social ramifications apart from indecency. In Cavendish's story, as the wife becomes suspicious, she notices that 'the maid grew pert and bold towards her mistress' because she grew to 'despise her mistress and only admire herself'.[127] Lust, in other words, perverts the natural class order and power balance between women who negotiate their worth, and consequently, also respect they pay to other women, on the basis of sexual conduct. While the reader is to sympathize with the wife, then, it is also clear that the wife is dissatisfied with the conduct of her maid not so much because she seems to be too familiar with the master of the house, but because that familiarity threatens the status of the wife, as well as the 'proper' balance of power between the women of the household. In addition, Cavendish also reaffirms the praise of chastity when she concludes her story by remarking that, once the wife discovers the full scale of her husband's infidelity she too is drawn, out of revenge, to debauchery, and

> she began to find as much pleasure as her husband in variety and now begins to flatter him and to dissemble with him that she may play the whore more privately... So they play, like children, at bo-peep in adultery, and face it out with fair looks and smooth it over with sweet words and live with false hearts and die with large consciences.[128]

Much like in the *Incestuous Daughter*, only repentance brings them peace, and only in the hour of their deaths. For Cavendish, then, infidelity and lustfulness bring about only shame, sin, and unhappiness, and pervert the ideals of happiness and marital bliss.

Other women likewise stood on guard of sexual propriety of their female friends, neighbours, and family members. The number and type of lawsuits against illicit sexual

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[127] Excerpted in Salzman, *Early Modern Women's Writing*, pp. 241-5 (p. 245).
[128] Ibid.

activity, of wives suing their husbands' mistresses, or of women suing other women for slander related to their alleged sexual misbehaviour indicates that women participated in perpetuating the connection between women and lustfulness,[129] in social situations for the purpose of shaming, moralizing, and controlling other women: 'the word "whore" was an inherently sexual insult used primarily by women against women'.[130] After all, a woman ostracized by other women in her community, with whom she was to keep company, was made acutely aware that not being included in that company carried a whole set of unpleasant or dangerous consequences, from loneliness and being subject to ridicule, through the lack of support and help from neighbours (including in childbirth), to a threat of accusations of crimes such as infanticide or witchcraft. In other words, the positive face of women was threatened by allegations of sexual misconduct, but women also regulated sexual behaviours and, through that, each other's reputation and social standing through acts threatening the positive face of other women. While the prescriptive social discourse condemning lust made women feel like their social acceptability was threatened (with an implied strategy of saving this positive face by staying chaste), women threatened each other's positive face in order to make 'loose' women feel unaccepted, and threatened their negative face of independence and freedom of action. Dorothy Leigh's *The Mother's Blessing* (1616) convinces young female readers that chastity is essential, as 'especially above all other morall Vertues, let women be perswaded by this discourse, to imbrace chastity, without which we are meere beasts, and no women'.[131] Many other texts of this kind written by women, such as Elizabeth Grymeson's *Miscelanea, Meditations, Memoratiues* (1604) or Elizabeth's Richardson's *The Ladies Legacy* (1645), 'not written to win freedom from restrictions of society, but rather to reinforce the platitude of the ideal woman... reaffirmed the ideals of modesty, chastity, and piety'.[132] Women, then, reinforced the ideals of chastity proposed by conduct books in their own writing and behaviours towards one another, particularly in branding sexual impropriety, and helped to reinforce the association of lustfulness with the female body. By doing so, they attempted to maintain the general female positive face while also, much like with branding unruly speech, condemned illicit sexuality to negotiate power relationships between each other.

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[129] Ibid.

[130] Tim Reinke-Williams, *Women, Work, and Sociability in Early Modern London* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 3.

[131] Dorothy Leigh, *The mothers blessing. Or The godly counsaile of a gentle-woman not long since deceased, left behind her for her children containing many good exhortations, and godly admonitions, profitable for all parents to leaue as a legacy to their children, but especially for those, who by reason of their young yeeres stand most in need of instruction,* 1616, STC (2nd. ed.)/ 15402, EEBO, p. 43. .

[132] Marsha Urban, *Seventeenth Century Mother's Advice Books* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 39.

IV. Conclusion

Many female vices and virtues in the early modern period were a set of cultural constructs defined by social, discursive, and religious factors. The ultimate female virtue, piety, served a range of social purposes, was influenced by religion and religious ideals, and was negotiated in a complex discursive process: pious women were praised as exemplary Christians, exemplary wives, mothers, and neighbours, 'naturally' religious, and thus closer to God, the bearers of divine grace and peace. The virtue of piousness, religious in tone and meaning, tied women to religious moralistic discourse and the supervision of religious authorities, but also gave them a channel for agency: women could only rarely present cases in civil courts, but were free to do so in church courts which were responsible for matters relating to family, marriage, and morals.[133] Culturally, there was no dispute that women were both more receptive to spiritual ecstasy and more in need of spiritual guidance. Socially, the glorification of female piety formed a model for women's roles as wives and mothers, and for submissiveness and meekness, which served many social functions: assured peace and productivity in the household, allowed children to be exposed to ideals of morality and good citizenship, assured moral propriety in the public sphere, and helped to prevent crimes such as adultery, assault, or theft. The definitions of female vices, in turn, relied on the religious, cultural, and social functions of virtues. Not only were the vices contraries to the virtues religiously (e.g. anger to meekness, lust to humility, covetousness to modesty) – they also represented the effects of neglecting a virtue – lust, covetousness, and anger, resulting from impiety, led to crimes, misbehaviours, social disorder, and a collapse of morality necessary for communal harmony. Thus, the prescription of female vices and virtues relied on the women's expected social and moral roles in communities and at the same time reinforced the boundaries of these social roles.

In practice, these models relied on how successful the propagation of virtues and the decrying of vices was, and on how they fitted into female expectations about themselves, each other, and their place in society. In other words, though practice was rarely hindered by serious acts of defiance it was, to a degree, made possible because many women genuinely believed these models to be accurate, proper, and necessary. Female contributions to social life as entrepreneurs, property owners, litigants, guardians, role models, and actors in family, communal, and parish interactions which, in both late medieval and early modern England, became more and more prominent,

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[133] Gowing, 'Language, power, and the law', p. 36.

allowed women to be more active in attaining and protecting their social status, which was defined through the prescribed virtues, but also through female participation in how this prescription was implemented and performed. A woman who wished to become influential in her community put the social and cultural female virtues into use to her advantage, and actively struggled against those who could threaten that position, most fiercely (and successfully) if they were other women. In other words, the seemingly traditional and oppressive discourse on female vices and virtues served women as a source of empowerment. Litigation, social ostracism, moral condemnation, gossip, or controlling behaviour were female weapons against women considered threatening to the position, prestige, influence, or the sense of moral propriety of a woman, or women, within a given community. The use of these weapons perpetuated both the definitions of female virtues, as that which needs to be defended or that which distinguishes a respectable woman from an unrespectable one, and vices, when women acted against each other in ways aligned with the definition of a given vice, or by acting against those judged to be guilty of such a vice. Likewise, female participation in textual discourse on women allowed them to seek empowerment through trying to own the discourse (as did Aphra Behn with her contribution to the meaning of 'whore'), and thus allowed women who had the opportunity, to write themselves into this discourse and inhabit it.

In order for this complex relationship of prescription and practice to work both had to be performed in ways acceptable to the prescribers and addressees of the rules. This was achieved through a set of face-related acts, both in discourse defining vices and virtues, and in actions implementing these definitions to the performance of social roles. Texts quoted here share strategies that on the one hand assure the protection of the female positive and negative face, and on the other encourage and provoke women to protect the positive face of the prescribers, because the successful application of rules of female conduct to individual women's personal agendas depended on the respectability and general social acceptability of the rules that governed that conduct. Descriptions of piety, humility, or modesty construct them as desirable, reflective of true female nature, socially and spiritually beneficial, and as social and religious behaviours which generate respect, prestige, and happiness, and make women the enactors of peace and prosperity. This protects both the female positive face, persuading women that adhering to these models of virtues will make them accepted as members of society, and addresses the female negative face by presenting the attainment of these virtues as every woman's choice on the one hand, and as the natural female state on the other. Since women *are* naturally pious, meek, humble, or submissive, acting these virtues out is every woman's right, not obligation, and is thus a sign of their independence rather than an imposition. Likewise, descriptions of female vices, threats to the female positive and negative face, are guarded with strategies of saving this face: avoidance of vice wins acceptability, as

adherence to it results in social condemnation. These complex discursive definitions are received by an equally complex body of female influence: women keep their own positive face through the strategies offered by the prescribers (by being virtuous and avoiding vice), and by punishing those threatening it from within, by criticizing, suing, ridiculing, or slandering women seen as threatening to the positive face of 'the woman'. At the same time, they save the positive face of the prescribers by granting them what they want – compliance with their rules, and acceptability as their authors. The discourse on female vices and virtues shared by pre- and post-Reformation social dialogue is, therefore, reflective of similarities between the late medieval and early modern discursive techniques of negotiating complex social relationships and moral truths.