

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



## **The Preservation of Masculinity: Private Honour in Conduct Manuals, Funeral Sermons and Child-Rearing**

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On 20 April, 1597, Robert Sidney wrote a letter to his wife, Barbara, expressing his excitement and joy about her upcoming visit to his abode in Flushing in the Netherlands. In the epistle, he details exactly the measures and steps she needs to take before and during her voyage, including the names of the captains and crew, and whether it be preferable for her to travel on one of the Queen's ships, or the Lord Admiral's. However, these minutiae do not take up the majority of the letter. That space is devoted to Robert's stern directive to Barbara regarding the presence of her three eldest children on the trip. The reasons he does not desire them to accompany their mother are manifold: they are of the age when they should leave their father's house, prominent families wish to foster them, the air in Flushing is dangerous to them and their education is stifled by their remaining in the family home. Robert would go on to bring up this subject in subsequent letters, in particular focusing on the need to separate his third eldest child from Barbara, a child who happens to be his firstborn son and heir.

This anecdote is meant to give us a glimpse into the life of Robert Sidney, and to illuminate some of the concerns that lurk between the lines of his text. The story above may not primarily appear to be related to Robert's perception of himself, and his honour. However, as we examine some of the discourse on masculinity in the period, we will see how prevalent the notion of honour is throughout these letters to Barbara. In particular, this article will focus on how Robert's private honour is directly related to social constructions of manhood. To do this, I will first demonstrate how private honour and masculinity were understood during the Renaissance, and how notions of private and public virtues get conflated in the discourse on masculinity towards the end of the sixteenth century.

My main primary sources for this article are the letters Robert Sidney wrote to his wife Barbara Gamage while he was appointed governor of the cautionary town of Flushing.<sup>1</sup> During his tenure as the Queen's Governor, Sidney wrote faithfully to his wife, and a large majority of his letters are still extant as part of the D'Isle collection. However, there are no surviving letters from his wife Barbara to him, which creates an unfortunate cavity in the record. Nonetheless, Robert's personal letters are very revealing of his private thoughts and feelings, and will be instrumental in our understanding of what constitutes private masculine honour.

Before we can understand private masculine honour as it is manifested in Robert Sidney's letters, we need to understand how privacy was perceived in Renaissance England. To that aim, we should study the influence of religious and social attitudes about manhood in regard to the private sphere.

In writing about the relationship between private and public spheres, Michael McKeon notes that the separation of the two domains arose due to the decline of the English monarchy.<sup>2</sup> As the absolute monarchy came to be questioned, the government came to be associated with the public sphere, as opposed to private 'domesticity' of the household. However, McKeon maintains that the public and private realms should be considered to be points on a continuum, rather than opposites.<sup>3</sup> Erica Longfellow also contends that the two spheres were not mutually exclusive when it came to the family, household, and religion; she objects to characterizations of the private as 'simply the negative of public'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Domestic Politics and Family Absence: The Correspondence (1588-1612) of Robert Sidney, First Earl of Leicester, and Barbara Gamage Sidney, Countess of Leicester*, ed. by Margaret Hannay, Noel Killamon and Michael Brennan (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005). All subsequent references are to this edition.

<sup>2</sup> Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005). See also his formulation of his argument in response to a series of essays using his book in 'What Was an Early Modern Public, and How Was It Made?' *History Compass* 10.9 (2012), 714–30.

<sup>3</sup> Martine van Elk, *Early Modern Women's Writing* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 1-2. In her book, van Elk leans heavily on Michael McKeon's definition of privacy in the Renaissance. This description of this conception of a new public sphere is important to van Elk's scholarship, as it potentially provided a space for women writers to make their voices heard.

<sup>4</sup> Erica Longfellow, 'Public, Private, and the Household in Early Seventeenth-Century England', *The Journal of British Studies* 45.2 (2006), 313-34 (p. 315). The work of McKeon, van Elk and Longfellow focuses on a later period of English history than my own research, and it pays little attention to the public nature of late Tudor court life. Van Elk notes that there is plenty of evidence to show 'that the public sphere relied on much earlier, more complex forms of historical change' than earlier scholarship (such as Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*) acknowledges (p. 7). While van Elk is concerned with the conception of the public sphere, I am concerned with that of the private.

While I agree that public and private were not mutually exclusive in the English Renaissance, I am interested in the ways cultural markets of identity were deployed differently in the two realms. Just as there existed a version of dress, art, behaviour in public amongst the Elizabethan noblemen, there existed an alternate performance of status, gender and disposition in 'private'. The notion of private had to have existed – it has been made clear in architecture, as well as conduct manuals and letters.

To begin with, let us consider the relationship of privacy to physical space. In referring to early modern architecture, it is important to note that van Elk does mention the highly debated matter of the 'closet'. Lena Orlin argues that the way this space had been defined (that is, as private chamber that specifically functioned as study or prayer room) did not take into consideration its relative publicness.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, studies such as Richard Rambuss's argue that the closet served as a space for private and religious discourse. Rambuss also uses evidence from reformers' texts to reinforce the idea of the closet as an intimate space, meant only for certain audiences.<sup>6</sup>

I argue that there was no simple notion of a private space – as we can see, the very notion of the closet is heavily debated. But the ideas of privacy, the need for self-reflection and solitude existed, and were demonstrated earlier than is mentioned by Van elk, Longfellow or Mckeen. Privacy in early modern England is not a location so much as a state of being – amongst those that one has to put on a private performance for, even if it is just a performance for the self. It functions alongside the public sphere and, as we will see, there are many objects and artefacts that exist in both realms.

Jeff Weintraub has argued that the problem with the words public and private is that they have been and are being used with different meanings.<sup>7</sup> He notes that two distinct clusters of images are associated with these terms, the one describing 'What is hidden or withdrawn versus what is open, revealed, or accessible' and the other 'What is individual, or pertains only to an individual, versus what is collective, or affects the interests of a collectivity of individuals'.<sup>8</sup> Scholars such as Lena Orlin and Stephen Greenblatt adhere

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<sup>5</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Gertrude's Closet', *Shakespeare Jahrbuch* 134, (1998), 44–67.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 103.

<sup>7</sup> Jeff Weintraub, 'The Theory and Politics of the Public/Private Distinction', in *Public and Private in Thought and Practice: Perspectives on a Grand Dichotomy*, ed. by Jeff Weintraub and Krishan Kumar (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 1–42.

<sup>8</sup> The nuances of the two definitions of private are particularly important to the research of van Elk and Longfellow because Weintraub's two definitions were often conflated when it comes to early modern women's writing. As van Elk notes, 'contributions to collective thought, whether or not they were produced

closer to first of Weintraub's definitions, which associates privacy with a physical space, as opposed to an intended audience. This definition of privacy loses its performative aspect, and the expression functions more as means of describing an interior, secret, geographic space.

Orlin's argument is grounded in the cultural history of the house: its structures, prescribed activities, prevailing aspirations, and persistent conflicts.<sup>9</sup> Like Orlin, Stephen Greenblatt also identifies the private sphere with the household, though his examples (particularly centred around Thomas More) indicate a little more of the performative nature of privacy. Greenblatt's focus is on the conjunction of privacy and solitude; he argues that within a privately-owned property, a man needed to have a 'private' space where he could 'sequester himself from worldly company'.<sup>10</sup> Of More, he writes: 'His whole identity depended upon the existence of a private retreat; his silences were filled with unexpressed judgments, inner thoughts'.<sup>11</sup> This aspect of solitude that leads to self-reflection is instrumental to self-fashioning, as according to Greenblatt: 'More's insight in *Utopia* [is] that there is an essential relationship between private property and private selves'.<sup>12</sup>

I want to propose a new definition of the private sphere – one that is not as contingent on location as Orlin's or Greenblatt's definition, and that is more relative to company than to solitude. Privacy could very well exist within a household, but it is not exclusive to it. Similarly, privacy does not solely refer to location, but instead might suggest select company. Early modern literature, particularly domestic plays, demonstrate that a number of social activities that are considered private do not necessitate solitude – conversations, correspondence, intrigues, and others.

My research focuses on the relationship of privacy to masculinity. Discourses such as conduct manuals, funeral sermons, and domestic correspondence suggest that early modern privacy falls between Weintraub's two definitions; what is hidden or withdrawn does not necessarily preclude the sharing of a private artefact with close acquaintances or family. It is through a close-reading of these texts, that we will find a version of masculinity that seems more feminine than that exhibited by the ideal courtier. Yet, as

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inside the private realm, were nonetheless treated as if they brought women themselves out in the open for public display' (p. 4).

<sup>9</sup> Lena Orlin, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 45.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 46.

this paper will demonstrate, an effeminate masculine identity is not viewed as a fault. In the appropriate circumstances, it is an ideal.

We can trace the appearance of this new, 'effeminate' male identity by examining the masculine virtues detailed in funeral sermons. In Renaissance England, the majority of published funeral sermons included a section in which the preacher spoke of the praiseworthy behaviour and godly death of the person at whose funeral he was speaking. These sermons can, therefore, contribute to our understanding of contemporary attitudes towards what aspect of masculinity was deemed significant enough to warrant mention.<sup>13</sup>

Let us take for example the sermon preached at the funeral of Walter Devereux, 1st Earl of Essex, who died in 1576.<sup>14</sup> In his honour, the Reverend Richard Davies delivered a sermon that lavished praise by extolling a number of virtues – paying particular attention to those that were considered 'masculine' by Renaissance social standards. By this, I mean that Davies highlighted Devereux's martial prowess, going so far as to say that Devereux 'was by nature a sonne of Mars, and by practising feates of warre and exercise aforehand, he had made himself in manner a perfect warriour'.<sup>15</sup> Keeping in mind the hyperbole that characterized the genre of funeral sermons, this text still gives us an insight into the idealized depiction of the wide variety of masculine virtues that were thought to comprise a good nobleman.

Davies depicted Devereux as having been worthy and honourable from the time he was born, 'euen from his mothers wombe', having received these qualities as gifts from God. He was lauded for traits as diverse as self-restraint, erudition, godliness, and especially martial prowess. Davies' praise of militaristic masculine virtues is concurrent with his description of Devereux's self-control, restraint and temperance, qualities he considers to be 'the fountayne of nobilitie... [and]... the mother of all other vertues'.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> For the portrayal of ideal femininity in funeral sermons see Eric J. Carlson, 'Funeral Sermons as Sources: The Example of Female Piety in Pre-1640 Sermons', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 32.4 (2000), 567-97, and Patricia Phillipy, 'The Mat(t)er of Death: The Defense of Eve and the Female *Ars Moriendi*', in *Debating Gender in Early Modern England, 1500-1700*, ed. by Cristina Malcomson and Mihoko Suzuki (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), pp. 141-60.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Davies, *A Funeral Sermon Preached [...] at the buriall of the Right Honovrable VValter Earle of Essex and Ewe, Earle Marshall of Ireland...* (1577), EEBO: TCP; [accessed August 12, 2018] <[quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A19935.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A19935.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext)>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

An interesting addition to this sermon is a dedicatory epistle signed 'E. W.', attributed to Edward Waterhouse, a servant of the Devereux family. This letter was addressed to Walter's young son Robert Devereux, and it urged the young man to follow his father in Christian virtue, state service, and martial prowess. Waterhouse beseeches Robert to exceed the achievements of his father, just as Walter surpassed those of his own father.

It may prove useful in our understanding of Robert Sidney's letters to view these sermons as partially instructive to future generations of males succeeding the deceased father-figure. As we will see further in our discussion, the traditions of masculinity being passed down through generations of noblemen is a pressing concern in Robert's letters to his wife.

In another example, Thomas Churchyard's posthumous tribute to Sir Francis Knollys celebrates the deceased's courtly and martial prowess in poetic form.<sup>17</sup> Churchyard's sermon contains the similar rhetoric of effluent praise to the deceased, with the same two-pronged recounting of virtues both on and off the battlefield. Churchyard extols Knollys' chastity (of mind and body), his 'True hart', and his saintly virtues, while at the same time commending him for standing 'upright, feares neither foile nor fall', and making 'proud enimies blush'.<sup>18</sup>

Upon reading these funeral sermons, it seems as though there is a two-sided version of the ideal man. On one hand, his militaristic virtues are highlighted to reflect the cultural significance of warriors with militaristic state: virtues such as strength, fortitude and valour. This intrinsic connection between masculinity and a man's prowess on the battlefield is by no means unique to the Renaissance. Indeed, this association has existed in all societies that place emphasis on war, most notably catalogued in literature originating from the Roman Empire. Michael Stewart notes that in many cultures that rose to prominence primarily through military aggression, images of the soldier's life and the ideal manly life were often the same.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Thomas Churchyard, *A Sad and Solemne funeral of the right and honourable Sir Francis Knowles* [1596], EEBO: TCP, [accessed August 12, 2018] [name.umd.umich.edu/A18763.0001.001](http://name.umd.umich.edu/A18763.0001.001). The exact lines from the verse read: 'Chaest life wins lawd, clean thoghts throw clouds doth mount / True hart gains friends, and makes proud enimies blush'.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. The full quote is: 'Who stands vpright, feares neither foile nor fall... Liues like a saint, and gains immortall praies'.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Stewart, *The Soldier's Life: Roman Masculinity and the Manliness of War*, (Leeds: Kismet Press, 2014), p. 2.

However, Davies' depiction of Devereux does not paint him solely as a soldier. Qualities such as self-restraint and temperance are also used to illustrate the notion that Devereux was blessed with virtues both martial and domestic; he exemplified the ideal of masculinity in both the public and private sphere. Similarly, Churchyard paints his subject with a blend of virtues – chastity, trueheartedness, and humility alongside courage, fortitude and pride.

The difference between private and public masculine honour then appears to be more than just a matter of location; the very virtues that embody masculine honour are different across the two spheres. Private honour seems to require virtues that are more closely associated with the feminine – virtues such as humility, modesty, temperance and self-restraint – whereas, on the other hand, public masculine honour reflects those virtues reminiscent of the soldier – confidence, courage and strength.

Private honour, for the most part, is contained in the domestic sphere, a location that was historically identified with the feminine. It is then perhaps not too much of a stretch to see how these feminine virtues have come to be transferred to the cultural consciousness of masculinity in the private sphere. I would then propose that the key difference between private and public masculine honour is in the cultural gendering of the virtues each type of honour embodies.

Culturally, at this point in Renaissance England, virtues like modesty, temperance and humility were no longer solely associated with femininity,<sup>20</sup> but they had no place amongst the masculine military virtues that were so commonplace in the public representation of men in literature and art. While a virtue such as humility may be associated with a small aspect of masculinity, we also need to consider where this virtue is deployed. These rather 'feminine' virtues are not expected on the battlefield. However, these values of private honour slowly creep into aspects of courtly conduct, challenging the traditional martial representation of masculinity.

Jennifer Vaught's book, *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature*, highlights this gradual shift of values from a warrior culture to a culture that encourages virtue through feeling and intellectual enhancement, the self-fashioning of the courtier as well the man of sensibility. Using Book VI of *The Faerie Queene* as her primary source, Vaught points out that the location where men tend to 'express intense affect' is within the private sphere – glades, hermitages, or intimate circles of dancing ladies on Mount

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<sup>20</sup> See Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book II, which is named after the virtue of Temperance, with Sir Guyon being the knight that embodies it.

Acidale.<sup>21</sup> Rather than emasculating, these sojourns away from the public space are described as recuperative and/or instructive. Feminine virtues like temperance, chastity and humility do not undermine the Knights' masculinity because Spencer places the emphasis on 'virtue', as opposed to 'feminine'. Thus, the criteria for courtly behaviour require an androgynous appropriation of gendered virtues in order for the Knights to '[balance] the masculine and feminine dimensions'.<sup>22</sup>

In Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*, we see both an appropriation of feminine virtues, as well as an inversion of the classic belief of the superiority of reason over emotion. As Vaught points out, 'the interlacing of masculinity with emotional expressiveness and privacy thereby functions as a source of strength and renewal'.<sup>23</sup> Drawing on this, we can find evidence for when these traditionally accepted feminine virtues were incorporated into other discourses of masculinity. Another place where we can see this twofold description of manly virtues is within the conduct manuals that pervaded the discourse of the period. Also called courtesy books, they covered topics from religion and ethics to social awareness and social conduct, and were aimed at different audiences during the Renaissance. Some versions aimed at a small aristocratic readership, and some towards a larger gentry and middling class audience.<sup>24</sup> Like the funeral sermons seen above, conduct manuals (particularly those printed at the end of the sixteenth century) portray ideal masculinity as a blend of both traditionally masculine and feminine virtues.

These books cover a wide range of topics, especially in regards to masculinity.<sup>25</sup> However, what we may find useful is the growing concern over the emasculation of men. This is a fear that manifests in these manuals in a variety of ways, ranging from cuckolding to female gossip tarnishing masculine reputations. For example, in his conduct manual, *The English Gentleman* (1630), Richard Braithwaite draws on humoural

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<sup>21</sup> Jennifer C. Vaught, "'To sing like birds i' th' cage": Lyrical, Private Expressions of Emotion in Book VI of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*' in *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), pp. 136-7.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid, p. 137.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Gina Hausknecht, "'So Many Shipwracke for Want of Better Knowledge": The Imaginary Husband in Stuart Marriage Advice', *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 64.1 (2001), 81-106 (p. 83). Hausknecht depicts a change in narrative of marriage discourse working concurrently with the shift of perception about the image and constitution of a husband in seventeenth century. She presents late sixteenth-century marriage literature dominated by didactic conduct books and sermon literature, often aimed at a relatively small, literate, elite audience.

<sup>25</sup> For a more in depth study about the progression of masculinity across Renaissance conduct literature see Veronika Szekeres, *Conduct Books in the Renaissance: From the Perfect Courtier to the English Gentleman*, (Saarbrücken: Edizioni Accademiche Italiane, 2017).



medical theory to present his fear that young men who are lust-filled are in danger of giving into 'feminine passion' and are therefore in need of productive distraction.<sup>26</sup> His solution to this is to advise his male readers to marry quickly so that they may be 'employed' in both the private and public spheres of their lives. This evocation about conduct in both spheres of a man's life echoes the way both domestic and martial virtues are praised in funeral sermons for noblemen.

The importance of the distinction between masculine behaviour in the two spheres is clearly demonstrated by Braithwaite's subtitle, which includes the phrase, 'How to demeane or accommodate himselfe in the manage of publike or private affaires'. In Braithwaite's text, the role a man is expected to adopt in the different spheres of his life is made very plain: 'The Vocation of a Gentleman... is either publike or private. Publike, when imployed in affaires of State, either at home or abroad... Private when in domestike busnesse he is detained, as in ordering his household...'<sup>27</sup> Braithwaite's fairly straightforward explanation of public and private employment suggests the importance of the status of householder, or head of household. This quote also suggests that there was a preoccupation with the perception of masculinity within the private sphere.

This fear of 'feminine passion' that needs to be mitigated with masculine reason is contradicted by the extolling of feminine virtues in men in the private sphere. When conduct manuals approach the subject of masculine behaviour within the private sphere (such as a husband's behaviour to his wife, or a father's to his children), the values that men are extorted to develop are the same as feminine virtues described in the funeral sermons above. This contradiction is never noted by the authors of these manuals because they do not gender the virtues they attribute to men and women, despite the social and cultural valence of these terms.

Most notably, the virtue of humility is evoked across conduct manuals for men from the latter part of the sixteenth century. In *The English Gentleman*, Braithwaite states that 'there is no *Ornament* which may adde more beauty or true lustre to a *Gentleman*, than to be humbly minded; being as low in conceit, as he is high in place'.<sup>28</sup> He makes the connection between humility and godliness by saying that '*Humilitie* is said to purchase

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<sup>26</sup> Richard Braithwaite, *The English Gentleman* [1630], EEBO: TCP [accessed August 12, 2018], p. 27. [name.umd.umich.edu/A16657.0001.001](http://name.umd.umich.edu/A16657.0001.001).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 136.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

Gods favour; for by that one vertue wee become to have a resemblance of him, whose glory it was to disesteeme all glory to fashion us like unto himselfe'.<sup>29</sup>

Alongside humility, Braithwaite insists that this virtue should be accompanied by the similar qualities of meekness and compassion. In his language, Braithwaite seeks to elevate these qualities by forming comparisons between the gentlemen who possess them, and higher, masculine figures of authority, such as God (in the case of humility). Compassion is a virtue that would be considered alien to the militaristic code of masculinity, but in this text, it is a quality that appears in 'the renownedst and most glorious Princes'.<sup>30</sup> Meekness is also a quality better attributed to the ideal woman as opposed to a gentlemen, yet for Braithwaite it is 'a qualitie so inherent, or more properly individuate to a *Gentleman*, as his affabilitie will expresse him, were there no other meanes to know him'.<sup>31</sup>

What is important to note here is the context of which Braithwaite is advocating these feminine virtues. The majority of Braithwaite's manual is written with the objective of instructing men on how to behave during the courtship process and during marriage. While some of his discussions on humility and modesty are relevant to a gentleman's behaviour at court, Braithwaite also notes the importance of martial values, like strength and valour, in the public representation of masculine honour. Therefore, it would be fair to say that the majority of Braithwaite's advice on gentlemen adopting feminine virtues is relegated to a man's behaviour in the private sphere – that is, only displayed to those who are part of his inner circle. As the century turns, we see more and more of these virtues being incorporated into courtly behaviour, with purely militaristic values not providing sufficient dimension to the ideal gentleman.<sup>32</sup> We can especially see this change occurring in William Cecil, Baron Burghley's writing to his son, *The counsell of a father to his sonne, in ten seuerall precepts left as a legacy at his death*.<sup>33</sup> In his text, Burghley

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 62.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 61.

<sup>32</sup> A point of interest might lie in the reasons behind the gradual shift in perceptions of masculinity during this time. A significant change in the social and cultural construct was the presence of a woman on the throne. The existence of a female monarch would have meant that the entire country might be perceived as the part of the 'domestic sphere', resulting in the permeation of private masculine conduct into the English court. Additionally, as queen, Elizabeth demanded her courtiers exhibit both martial and courtly prowess, propagating a code of conduct that was more androgynous than traditionally masculine.

<sup>33</sup> Baron William Cecil Burghley, *The counsell of a father to his sonne, in ten seuerall precepts left as a legacy at his death* [1611], EEBO: TCP [accessed August 12, 2018]. name.umd.umich.edu/A18317.0001.001. The full quotation reads: 'Towards thy superiours be humble yet generous, with thy equals familiar, yet respectiue, towards inferiours shew much humility and some

advises his son to be humble in both private and public – by stating that he should show humility to both his superiors and inferiors.

When writing about the origins of courtesy, Vaught notes that in the Proem to Book VI, the courtly virtues are said to stem from within a secluded space associated with a feminine body and mind.<sup>34</sup> In the poem, the Garden of Adonis (whose description is reminiscent of a womb) is said to be a fertile ground where ‘the sacred nursery’ of courtesy contains ‘heavenly seedes’ that are derived ‘of bounty soueraine’ and with ‘labour nurst’ (VI.iii.7-8). The use of the word ‘nursery’ would not have been an accident, and indeed the language evoked by the Garden’s description does bring to mind particular feminine characteristics such as fertility and maternal care. Additionally, in early modern architecture the nursery within a household was frequently occupied by women and children.<sup>35</sup> Spenser further underlines the space as both domestic and feminine by noting that this ‘siluer boure’ is ‘hidden ... / From view of men, and wicked worlds disdaine’ (3-4). The vales and virtues that form a part of the mode of courtesy are within the private sphere because they lie ‘deepe within the mynd, / And not in outward shows’ (v.8-9). It is when these feminine virtues of courtesy are taken outside of the domestic sphere that we begin to see ‘the fashioning of ideal, androgynous identities’.<sup>36</sup>

*The English Gentleman* is not the only conduct manual that advocates for the masculine appropriation of these feminine virtues. Roger Ascham’s *The Schoolmaster* calls for an encouragement of the values of modesty and humility while raising young gentlemen. In this text, Ascham goes so far as to say that the promotion of these feminine qualities in the youth will make for better warriors when they are grown. He gives the example of the upbringing of the young men of Athens, and points out that it is a ‘great shame’ that the Christian men of England do not follow the same:

It was som shame to a yong man, to be seene in the open market: and if for businesse, he passed throughe it, he did it, with a meruelous modestie, and bashefull facion. To eate, or drinke in a Tauerne, was not onelie a shame, but also punishable, in a yong man.<sup>37</sup>

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familiarity, as to bow thy body, stretch forth thy hand, vncover thy head, and such like popular complements’.

<sup>34</sup> Vaught, p. 138.

<sup>35</sup> See *OED* ‘nursery’, La.: ‘a room or area of a house set aside for babies and you children, especially for those in the care of a nursemaid; a child’s bedroom or playroom.... 1 .b.: ‘a room reserved for women’.

<sup>36</sup> Vaught, 138.

<sup>37</sup> Roger Ascham, *The Schoolmaster* [1570], Project Gutenberg [accessed August 12, 2018], p. 17. [www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1844/pg1844-images.html](http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/1844/pg1844-images.html).

Ascham goes on further to say that ‘*Athens*, by this discipline and good ordering of yougthe, did breede vp... so manie notable Capitaines in warre, for worthinesse, wisdome and learning’.<sup>38</sup> What is fascinating about Ascham’s text is that he seems to advocate for young men to be contained in the private sphere, as opposed to being allowed to wander public spaces like ‘the open market’. Additionally, if it is necessary for a young man to be in the private sphere, he occupies the space with humility and modesty, particularly in the traditionally masculine-gendered world of ‘business’. In Ascham’s text these feminine virtues are not confined to the private sphere, but they are pertinent to social group that is not yet ready to enter the public sphere. Thus, these are virtues that young men need to carry from a domestic setting to a social one, in order to successfully navigate it.

While the virtues mentioned in conduct manuals were traditionally demarcated as feminine, they were also associated with Christian values – and those of Christ as well. The correlation with Christ and the feminine was a common trope in the West since the Middle Ages. *La Cité des Dames* (1405), written by Christine de Pizan and published in English in 1521, was an allegorical work about a city that glorified feminine virtue.<sup>39</sup> The feminine qualities mentioned in this book are the same as those in the English courtesy books we have seen – piety, humility, constancy, and obedience. However, while de Pizan clearly labels these traits as the attributes of a godly woman, she also deliberately spells out their importance to a good Christian.<sup>40</sup> Writers in the Renaissance also connected Christ to the feminine. John Donne often used the feminine pronoun when referring to Christ in his sermons, such as when he preached at Whitehall on April 2, 1620: ‘Christ is presented there in the person of wisdom; and there it is said, length of daies, that is Eternity, is in her right hand, and in her left hand Riches, and Glory’.<sup>41</sup> The mutability of Christian values between masculine and feminine is a consistent theme in Donne’s work, leading scholars such as Virginia Ramey Mollenkott to determine that Donne saw the characteristics of Christ as androgynous, rather than masculine.<sup>42</sup> Under the reign of male monarchs, these peaceful virtues may have been perceived as too effeminate, despite their correlation to Christ. As such, the ideal representation of manhood veered closer to the

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 17.

<sup>39</sup> Christine de Pizan, *The Book of the City of Ladies and Other Writings*, ed. by Rebecca Kingston and Sophie Bourgault (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2018), pp. 21-221.

<sup>40</sup> Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. xv.

<sup>41</sup> *The Works of John Donne*, ed. by Henry Alford, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1839), p. 512.

<sup>42</sup> Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, ‘John Donne and the Limitations of Androgyny’, *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 80.1 (1981), 22-38 (p. 33).

militaristic aspects of the Old Testament, as opposed to the meeker behaviours encouraged by Christ. As the English Renaissance transitioned into the Elizabethan era, these Christian values were prioritized for men over the more martial qualities, particularly in the private sphere.

Having formed a contextual basis for some of the strictures governing masculinity during this time, we can now analyse Robert Sidney's letters to see how these are adhered to, and if there is any tension between theory and practice. I want to reflect on the tensions between the private and public image of himself Robert Sidney attempted to cultivate, and his success in doing so (or lack thereof). We can negotiate these tensions by studying discussion between Robert Sidney and his wife in their correspondence over domestic and familial matters that straddle the line between public and private (as so many matters did during the Renaissance).

In analysing Robert's letters to Barbara, we can form an idea of the version of masculinity he wanted to emulate. One example of this is during an exchange where Barbara clearly accuses him of extravagance when he borrows 1000 pounds from the Earl of Essex to outfit himself for his embassy to the King of France (Letters 22-24), an accusation we can infer from his defensive reply to her. Robert defends this as a necessary business expense – and perhaps it was, since he won the friendship of the King – but when we look at accounts of his expenses we can see why Barbara might well have questioned his spending all that borrowed money on twelve new court suits, a magnificent cloak lined with sable, and the livery for his pages and footmen. To Robert it was a reasonable expense, for his father, Henry Sidney, appreciated the need for display and, as Governor of both Ireland and Wales, lived in a magnificent style. Henry had taught his son to emulate this display, telling him during his European travels that he would give him 'such a suit of apparel, as shall beseem your father's son to wear, in any court in Germany'.<sup>43</sup>

The need to dress the part of the successful courtier was noted in a number of courtesy books (particularly Thomas Hoby's translation of Castiglione's *The Courtier*, which was first published in 1561). *The Courtier* was a text that would have had a great influence on Henry Sidney, as the two men had a close relationship. Indeed, while translating *The*

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<sup>43</sup> *Elegant Epistles, Or, A Copious Collection of Familiar and Amusing Letters: Selected for the Improvement of Young Persons, and for General Entertainment, from Cicero, Pliny, Sydney ...* [1790], HathiTrust Digital Library [accessed August 12, 2018], p. 216. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=nyp.33433087375543&view=1up&seq=6>

*Courtier*, Hoby wrote and sent an Italian grammar guide to Henry Sidney for his personal use.<sup>44</sup> The English version of Castiglione's text has this to say about clothing:

....he ought to determine with himselfe what he willappeere to be, and in suche sorte as he desireth to bee esteamed so to apparaile himselfe, and make his garmentes helpe him to be counted suche a one, even of them that heare hym not speake, nor see him doe anye maner thyng.<sup>45</sup>

As per Hoby's translation, in order to be seen as a gentleman of means, a man must spend the necessary capital in order to comport himself in magnificence. The aim of this strategy is not to show humility or modesty, but to display wealth and class. However, as we have seen in the later courtesy books, the purely masculine military honour culture embraced by Henry Sidney's generation was gradually replaced by the masculine ideal of the obedient courtier; such extravagance came to be seen as imprudence. We can particularly see this in the culture of modesty and humility advocated in William Cecil's counsel to his son and in Roger Ascham's *The Schoolmaster*.

As Vaught writes in her chapter about private expressions of emotion in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, 'the prominence of the literary image of the ideal chivalric warrior was fading and becoming part of the antique past in the minds of many Elizabethans'.<sup>46</sup> She points out that during Elizabeth's reign, a large number of men from the nobility were pursuing professions at court rather than on the battlefield. This is why, in such literature as Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* or Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, the focus is more on rhetorical aptitude of the male leads, with emphasis placed more on their 'emotional expressions' than their the 'militaristic feats of chivalric prowess'.<sup>47</sup> Vaught maintains that it is important for the ideal Elizabethan courtier to present a well-rounded image – one of courtesy as well as martial ability. This is why Spenser places within the private sphere of courtesy many different types of men with various public duties, including chivalric knights, courtiers, statesmen and poets.

Robert's clinging to his father's expectation of masculine honour probably played a part in his somewhat ill-favour with the Queen, which ultimately led him to a post that kept him away from the Court, his family and England. His desire to return to his rightful

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Burke, *The Fortunes of the Courtier: The European Reception of Castiglione's Cortegiano* (University Park: Penn State Press, 1996), p. 56.

<sup>45</sup> Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier* [1561], trans. by Sir Thomas Hoby, Luminarium, [accessed August 12, 2018]. [www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/courtier/courtier2.html](http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/courtier/courtier2.html).

<sup>46</sup> Vaught, p. 138.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, p. 138.

place, in both the Queen's estimation, as well as his own estate, is a common theme across his letters. In Letter 126, he states that he hoped to return to England, but his plans were subverted by the machinations of his enemies at court.<sup>48</sup> In another letter, he writes, 'All my desires in England have had cross success and I see every day more and more the malice of mine enemies towards me'. (Letter 130).

As we can see from the excerpts of these two letters, Robert is anxious about his political and social potency being wrested away from him, which does not allow him to be fully engaged with his socially conferred position of power. This lack of control calls into question his masculine agency, and as a result of which, he becomes motivated to exert his masculinity in a sphere over which he might be able to wield his dominance. In the same letter in which he explains about his continued absence from court, he writes, 'But I trust God will not suffer it to be long so: in the meantime I will look to mine own estate' (Letter 130).

Having proven unable to demonstrate his masculine prowess to the court's approval, Robert seeks control over his own estate, attempting to inhabit his socially approved space within the private sphere. One manner in which he attempts to show his masculine authority over those in his estate is to govern the education and raising of his heir. Despite being barred from Elizabeth's court, in part due to the somewhat antiquated notions of masculinity that have been passed down to Robert from his father, Robert is determined to pass down this masculine guidance to his own son. This agenda recalls the funeral sermons seen above (such as Waterhouse's letter to Robert Devereux) – the legacy of the father needs to be a constant reminder to his son, imposing a highly idealised version of masculinity for the son to adopt.

In correspondence to Barbara that concerned the raising of their son, William Sidney, we can perceive that Robert saw himself as an extension of his father, and he also saw his son as an extension of himself. There is a conscious desire to imitate, and continue, and extend the formalities, traditions and mannerisms of masculinity that were prevalent during Henry Sidney's time. We have already observed this phenomenon amongst the men of the nobility when examining the letter Waterhouse dedicated to Devereux's son and heir upon the death of his father. The letter prompts the new Earl to live such a life that he imitates his father exactly, in order to ultimately surpass him and carve his own place amongst society.

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<sup>48</sup> *Domestic Politics*. The full quotation reads as follows: 'the hope I had to have gotten ere this into England. But herein I well perceive the practice of those, which like not my company at the Court; and I trust, if all things fall out well, that they shall have done me no hurt in it'. (Letter 126).

In his letters to Barbara, there is a point in their exchange that particularly deals with Robert's frustration over his inability to demonstrate to his son the same 'masculine' values and virtues his own father showed him. Looking closer that this moment in the correspondence between husband and wife shows us the friction created over disputes about raising the Sidney heir. Robert's anxiety over the emasculation of his son, which would by extension be seen as effeminacy of himself, is evident in the letters to his wife.

In *Poetry and Paternity in Renaissance England*, Tom MacFaul states that the traditional 'sacredness' of a father-son hierarchal line was constantly tarnished by the presence of female 'interruptions' – such as mothers, wives and daughters. Though they were seen as necessary for the continuation of a family line, these feminine disturbances were continual causes of barely repressed anxieties in a number of ways. To quote: 'Wives and mothers were regarded as either unreliable or effeminizing... loved as they often were, women were reckoned to be fundamentally inferior, especially in their intellects'.<sup>49</sup>

Robert's relationship with his wife via his correspondence aptly displays this tension between affection and lack of regard. He did not share news of his work with her, only household and family matters. His wife was not to be occupied with the work that he did in the public sphere. As a sounding board, she is only there to hear and help him in the private sphere.

Robert Sidney uses a more affectionate and informal style in writing to his wife than in his business or political correspondence. There are none of the literary allusions, classical references, or clever word play. Nor does he display the knowledge of classical and modern languages so evident in his political Commonplace Books. He rarely discusses the details of his work in Flushing; sometimes he mentions to her that he has sent 'news', or political reports, to his sister, or to his daughter Lady Mary Wroth, but he normally writes to Barbara in a simple, plain style, focusing primarily on family and personal matters, including occasional court gossip.

We see in the letters to his wife that Robert is worried about his son's close proximity to women (William was aged seven at the time of this letter was written), and the lack of male role models in William's life. It is important to note that Robert himself is far away from his household, resulting in a lack of control over his son's upbringing that causes him visible anxiety:

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<sup>49</sup> Tom MacFaul, *Poetry and Paternity in Renaissance England: Sidney, Spenser, Shakespeare, Donne and Jonson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 20.



For the boy... I pray you disuse him from lying with his maid. For it is not good for him, and I will have him taken from it. I know that those things are nothing pleasing to you: But you must remember, I have part in them, as well as you, and therefore must have care of them. I know also, that a better, and more careful mother there is not, than you are; and indeed, I do not fear anything so much as your too much fondness. (Letter 126)

In the passage above, it is apparent that Robert recognizes Barbara's 'over-fondness' of their son as the chief hindrance to cultivating William's masculinity. There appears to be a deep-rooted anxiety over the 'interference' of the feminine presence of the household. This may be due to the tendency to regard the Renaissance household and the private sphere as the feminine domain. We clearly see this in Robert's assertion that he has as much a 'part in them' as Barbara does. With these words, he is attempting to reinstate himself in his usurped position of power by reminding his wife of the biological authority granted to him as the father of their children.

The masculinity of the male children of the household is then 'tainted' by the close proximity of feminine characteristics. MacFaul states that 'To be a man in most pre-feminist societies is to identify with the paternal line; the classic misogynistic trope attacking the proverbial mutability of women surely reflects male anxiety about women's ability to interfere with this straightforward line, on the one hand by introducing the radical uncertainty of paternity, and on the other by altering a man's sons – both in carrying and in nurturing them – so that the son is not an identical copy of the father'.<sup>50</sup>

We can see evidence of this in Sir Walter Raleigh's 'Instructions to His Sonne and Posterity': 'Wives were ordayned to continue the generation of men, to transferre them, and diminish them, eyther in countenance, or abilitie'.<sup>51</sup> Women are necessary, but regarded as apt to translate men into diminished forms. Raleigh's text speaks to women's 'diminishing' men as a result of 'contaminating' the masculine seed through the process of pregnancy. However, we can further apply this analogy of 'contamination' to the relationship between a mother (and nurse) and a young boy. Indeed, in his correspondence to Barbara, Robert is adamant that his wife only take charge of their daughters, leaving the rearing of their sons to him. In another letter, he claims, 'For I know better what

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh, *Instructions to His Sonne and to Posterity* (London: Benjamin Fisher, 1632), EEBO: TCP [accessed August 12, 2018]. name.umd.umich.edu/A10362.0001.001.

belongs to a man than you do' (Letter 127). His primary concern in this letter is about how his son's education is affected by withholding the tutelage from a man:

Indeed I will have him lie from his maid, for it is time, and now no more to be in the nursery among women. But then will I have the boy delivered to his [the schoolmaster's] charge only, and not to have him when he is to teach him to be troubled with the women. (Letter 127).

Robert's tone in this letter seems to indicate a fear that his son's constant association with women will result in immaturity and a low intellect, which can only be improved by taking the boy away from these negative influences. We see echoes of this same distrust of women, particularly the closeness between the boy and his nurse, in another letter to Barbara, Robert states that he wishes to separate William from the presence of his nurse because 'it is unwholesome for any child to lie with an old body' (Letter 130).

We can see from these letters that Robert does not believe that women can pass down the necessary feminine virtues of modesty, humility and temperance to his son without emasculating them. Indeed, it is rare for a man to be instructed on courtesy by a woman, though this happens in some literary works, such as Book One of *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>52</sup> But we know from above that Robert eschews the somewhat androgynous mode of courtesy in favour of the more militaristic form of masculinity favoured by his father.

At the time of the correspondence about the education of his son, Robert's preoccupation with his son's masculinity is largely a reflection of Sidney's private honour, rather than the public perception of his own masculinity. William Sidney was mostly relegated to the private sphere of the Sidney household – he was not yet of an age to go to school, and was not a primary example of Robert's public masculinity. William's apparent femininity was abhorrent to Robert because it was an affront to how he perceived himself, as distinct from the feminizing aspects of his household.

Robert resists valorising feminine virtues by trying to distance his son from the domestic sphere. He persists in following the example set by his father, and persists in maintaining an aspect of masculinity in both the private and public sphere that eschews feminine

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<sup>52</sup> In Book I of *The Faerie Queene*, Redcrosse is aided in his recovery by Caelia's daughters: Fidelia instructs him in discipline and the gospel; Sperenza comforts him, so that his sins do not again lead to despair, and Charissa 'Gan him instruct, in every good behest [behavior] / Of love, and righteousness, and well to donne'. (I.x.33). It is noteworthy to point out, however, that Redcrosse's instruction comes from both male and female agents. He is also tended to by seven charitable men, and taken up to a high hill by Contemplation, a wise old hermit.

virtues. Unlike what Roger Ascham advises in *The Schoolmaster*, Robert is determined to remove his son from the domestic sphere, believing it to be an improper place for William's education. This demonstrates his lack of understanding of the cultural shift in the perception of masculinity, as well as a failure to see the significance placed on feminine virtues within the Elizabethan court.

Robert is denied the culturally assumed power and agency that his gender and rank afford him by the Queen and her Court, and he is further supplanted from his physical position as head of the estate by his wife. These two coinciding events invert the natural hierarchy of masculinity, and could potentially skew William Sidney's worldview on the natural order of authority. In order to restore the traditional, martial standard of masculinity, Robert needs to assert his dominance over his wife and children, particularly as he is barred from doing so at Court.

What we see in this correspondence from Robert to his wife, is anxiety about the feminine influence on his son, and more importantly, the lack of masculine influence and input from himself. This echoes the same impotence he must have felt at being away from royal court in England, and unable to display and prove his masculinity to the Queen. We can draw parallels between the lack of agency Robert must feel, both in the domestic and public spheres, and at the hands of two women of power – Queen Elizabeth and his own wife, Barbara Gamage. In letters to his wife regarding his concern over his lack of presence at the English court, as well as the raising of his heir, we can draw the conclusion that he worries about the feminine corruption of masculine image – both his own and his son's – by these two women who do not traditionally represent social constructions of masculine power.

Most of the tension that occurs within these selected letters arises from Robert's desire to merge the past notions of masculinity with the contemporaneous codes of conduct (particularly as he did not seem as adept at winning the favour of the court with the same apparent ease as his elder brother). Without his private defence of his image and honour to Barbara (reflected in his frustration at being absent from both the English court, and his estate), we would know of his struggle of maintaining his masculinity in the face of feminine authority, and protecting his legacy from the same.

What we see here is a version of masculine honour that is comprised of traditionally accepted feminine virtues. As I have demonstrated, this type of honour is mainly associated with the private sphere, with the more customary militaristic mode of manhood being displayed in public. However, at the turn of the sixteenth century, we begin to see some aspects of private honour colouring masculine codes of conduct in public as well,

though these are very few and very much overshadowed by martial prowess. Robert Sidney is a nobleman who is trying to find his footing amidst this shifting of masculine virtues. His letters to his wife demonstrate his attempt to assume his position in the natural hierarchy of society and culture, but he is unable to do so because he cannot balance the delicate distinction between private and public honour. As a result, he is denied the cultural and biological authority afforded to him (by being an English nobleman) by powerful women in both the private and public sphere. There is a tension between Robert's emulation of the masculine virtues passed down by his father, and the newer, more androgynous version of masculinity favoured by Elizabeth's court.