

Hymeneal Instruction

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Repressions that have failed will of course have more claim
on our interest than those that may have been successful.

—Sigmund Freud, "Repression," 1915

Let no lamenting cryes, nor dolefull teares,
Be heard all night within nor yet without:
Ne let false whispers, breeding hidden feares,
Breake gentle sleepe with misconceived dout. . . .

—Edmund Spenser, *Epithalamion*, 1595¹

This essay hypothesizes the existence of a discourse of "hymeneal instruction" as a significant although little noticed strand in the web of early modern writings that attempted to educate men and women for the institution of patriarchal marriage. This discourse, itself composed of numerous textual strands, was overtly aimed at male readers but was highly aware of and sometimes directly addressed to female readers as well. The discourse contributed obliquely to the large ideological project that Norbert Elias perhaps ironically termed "the civilizing process."² Written in many vernacular languages as well as in Latin, the texts comprising the archive of hymeneal instruction often resemble, and even overlap with, the courtesy literature that Elias examines in his well-known study, which explores ways in which masculine behavior in various mainly Northern European sites was modified in response to a number of factors including changing ideologies of femininity. Elias is sometimes interested in defining masculinity in relation to a historically shifting conception of female will seen as a social problem—and as a social force. Although the historian Laura Gowing has criticized Elias for offering a "narrative of civilization that takes the male body as universal, as does much of the courtesy literature which prescribed refinements of hygiene, manners, and gesture," Gowing's generalization doesn't quite do justice either to Elias's argu-

ment or to the discourse of hymeneal instruction.³ I follow that line in Elias's argument—a line extended and nuanced in more recent scholarship such as Alexandra Shepherd's *The Meanings of Manhood*—which approaches masculinity as a set of discourses and (only partially recoverable) behaviors that must be analyzed in relation to other socially defined identities including femininity, life-stage, and status.⁴

There has been valuable analytical work done recently on medical debates about the hymen across early modern Europe; scholars such as Marie Loughlin, Valerie Traub, and Elizabeth Bellamy have explored various facets of the hymen's peculiar mode of insistent if ambiguous existence in the early modern English cultural imagination.⁵ Nonetheless, neither in these scholars' work nor elsewhere (so far as I know) in the growing set of studies devoted to the gendered and humoral body in early modern England has there been sustained attention to the hymen as focus for an instructional discourse on what constitutes proper masculine and feminine behavior at the threshold of the marital relation.⁶ One reason for this lacuna may be that a specifically educational discourse on the hymen appears most extensively in highly allegorized texts that we would now classify as literary.

The texts I identify as comprising an archive of hymeneal instruction prescribe, proscribe, and question the behavior of historical and fictional bridegrooms and brides. The archive points to a deep cultural fascination with an invisible yet fetishized part of the female body that, like the more visible clitoris, was the subject of a strenuous medical debate that had profound implications for theological and political notions of hierarchy within and beyond the institution of marriage.⁷ Unlike the clitoris, however, the hymen engages directly with problems of evidence in the border territory between theological, scientific, political, and literary domains. Christian faith according to St. Paul is the "evidence of things not seen" (King James Version, Heb. 11:1); the same resonant phrase could apply to the hymen. It plays a central role in a long-duration set of textual traditions that contribute to, even as some of them attempt to critique, the quasi-religious phenomenon that Virginia Woolf calls "the fetish of chastity."⁸

The absence of either medical or theological certainty on even the existence of the hymen as a material phenomenon arguably enabled the speculative license characteristic of the literature of hymeneal instruction; this literature dramatizes different possible meanings of the hymen, as a word, as a concept, and as an element in the rituals and legitimation of a much debated social institution.⁹ The literature of hymeneal instruction articulates a variety of fears about consummating the heterosexual marital relationship and offers guidance about ways to navigate the new coupling.

Among the texts printed in English concerning hymeneal instruction, one notable set exposes and seeks to manage concerns surrounding Queen Elizabeth's position as the always-potential bride.¹⁰ Indeed some texts of hymeneal instruction imply or directly construct Elizabeth as a reader while also representing her in "mirrours more than one," as Spenser puts at the beginning of his "Legend of Britomartis, or Of Chastitie."¹¹ The queen's imagined body was a magnet for the discourse of hymeneal instruction, which repeatedly defines her as a pedagogical subject in need of education (usually by male tutors/writers) in the duties and supposed pleasures of marriage. In many texts in the archive identified here, and in ways productive of complex rhetorical and logical incongruities, she is cast both as a virginal pupil and as a political superior, a desired patron who helped to construct herself as a Petrarchan master-mistress of never-to-be-satisfied passion.

The discourses of hymeneal instruction place value on delaying consummation (thus stressing courtship rather than force) without untying the ideological knot of psychological and social problems lurking in the transition, for two separate persons, into the alleged unity of marriage. In this respect, these discourses are part of a much larger textual field in both Latin and vernacular languages aimed at fashioning male and female subjects for the "discipline" of marriage. This larger field includes medical writings, legal commentaries on rape and on the evidentiary status of virginity tests for women and impotence tests in cases of divorce and annulment; theological writings on proper husbandly and wifely behavior; and conduct-book literature, particularly those chapters advising men on how to govern their wives.¹² The discourse of hymeneal instruction as I am provisionally defining it here has two distinguishing features: advice to an imagined husband on the advantages of "gentle" behavior during the liminal night of marriage; and a thematic concern with limits, including the limits of male potency and, a related concern, the limits of what makes a "gentleman" in an era of competing views of what constitutes that social condition.¹³ The concern with limits is often yoked to the articulation of epistemological doubts about marriage and defloration on the part of both female and male subjects.

The borders of this archive are necessarily porous; at certain points, the discourse of hymeneal instruction bleeds into a genre that we might call (borrowing the title of an anonymously authored early seventeenth-century poem) "advice to [female] virgins."¹⁴ In the discourse of hymeneal instruction, bridegrooms star—but they always do so in relation to and sometimes in competition with brides presumed but not certainly known to be sexually pure.

Writers who undertook to give hymeneal instruction to their readers in English include Edmund Spenser, William Shakespeare, John Fletcher, Ben Jonson,

Lady Mary Wroth, and John Milton; many others could be added to the list, and there may well be manuscript as well as printed materials in the archive I am positing here as an area for further research. Obsessed with the difficult subject of marital sex and, more particularly, with the threshold rites (and incipient "rights") of the wedding night, the discourse of hymeneal instruction considers the possibility that brides and grooms might have different, even competing, desires and needs.¹⁵ This notion, which undermined the legal concept of the wife as a being "covered" by and "one" with the husband, posed problems for theories of domestic order and for the larger political polity that the patriarchal household was held to mirror. Signs of disorder, among them bloody "napkins," dreams of snakes, and punning substitutions of "holes" for "wholes," abound in works of hymeneal instruction, which typically display a profound interest in questions of timing, in censorship or repression, and in the relation between truth (or truth claims) and what Spenser calls "misconceived dou[bl]t."

* * *

Long associated both with marital processions leading to the door to a marital house and with the husband's entrance into his bride's virginal body, the word "hymen" is also a key term in the modern critical project known as deconstruction. The hymen fascinates Jacques Derrida because it confounds binary oppositions between inside and outside, between visible and invisible, between signifier and referent, and between a noun and a "proper" noun or name.¹⁶ "[H]ymen," as a signifier, is already laden with cultural and epistemological complexities when it first comes into modern European vernaculars during the Renaissance—usually, as is the case in English, in a written form indistinguishable (that is, seemingly untranslated) from the Greek. In Shakespeare's printed corpus, the word appears only in a capitalized form, evidently as a proper name denoting a torch-bearing pagan god presiding over marriages (for instance, the four couplings that conclude *As You Like It*); sometimes joined by Juno, the goddess of marriage, Hymen in Elizabethan literature typically ushers new husbands and wives across a threshold into a contained (but only semi-"private") space that bears structural and symbolic resemblances both to figurations of the nation state as a castle or well-ordered house and to figurations of the English nation as an island "moated" or "walled" by the sea and protected from invasion as (in theory) the queen's virginal body was.¹⁷

As a quasi-divine figure who lent his names to marriage processions, songs, and cries (*hymen, hymenaie*), Hymen comes to signal a general marriage "bond" or (or a "band" of celebrants) in usages first recorded between 1590 and 1608; in a text from 1613, the word denotes "songs sung at marriages."

The *OED* finds "hymen" first being used to denote an anatomical "part" of a virginal female body—the part supposedly ruptured, creating a bloody sign—in 1615, in a massive medical treatise by Helkiah Crooke that records early modern doctors and anatomists from various parts of Europe both affirming and denying the existence of a hymeneal "membrane" while also attesting to its enormous cultural importance.¹⁸ But the *OED*'s date of 1615 cannot be taken as the starting point for English writers' knowledge of the anatomical valence of the god Hymen's name; Ben Jonson, for instance, in his masque of 1606, *Hymenaei*, wittily has the character Reason call on Hymen the god to "Come" and "make an inner ring, / And let the sacrificers sing; / Checere vp the faint, and trembling Bride, / That quakes to touch her Bridegroom's side."¹⁹ In Jonson's lines, Hymen as the god is moving toward hymen as a trope—a circular "inner" part for the mysterious whole of virginity, that w/whole beckons to men to "come" toward a time and place of sacralized destruction about which "sacrificers sing." As a name in an English play infused with learned allusions to Roman rituals, "Hymen" in Jonson's lexicon clearly has a semantic range that overlaps with that of the older English word "maidenhead."

That term, in late medieval usages, was often synonymous with "maidenhood" and could denote a general state of virginity, a state or condition that could be inhabited by a man (albeit usually a saintly one) as well as by a maiden; in a text from 1300, for instance, St. John the Evangelist is described as having "lived in maiden-hede" (*OED* 1). By the sixteenth century, however, some literate male writers were stressing the "head" part of "maidenhead" in a way that insists on its status both as a physical object belonging specifically to women's genital area, and also, paradoxically, as a phenomenon strangely similar to another, more visible part of both male and female bodies: the head, the seat of reason and, in theo-political terms, the symbol of the king's or husband's rule over his subjects including his wifely help meet. In *Romeo and Juliet* (ca. 1592), Capulet's servant Sampson, whose name reminds us of a biblical figure who lost his rational control (and his head-hair) to a wicked woman, boasts that he will "show himself a tyrant" and, having "fought with the men," will be "civil with the maids—I will cut off their heads." "The heads of the maids?" asks Sampson's companion Gregory, and Sampson replies—comically underscoring the difficulty of dissociating literal and figurative meanings of "heads" in this verbal world—"Ay, the heads of the maids or their maidenheads. Take it in what sense thou wilt."²⁰ In a later play, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*—usually thought to have been composed by Shakespeare and Fletcher ca. 1613–14, and first published in 1634—maidenheads, like texts and theatrical performances, belong to a domain in which distinctions between heads and maidenheads, and "his" and "hers," are highly unstable. The boundary between literal and figu-

rative senses is breeched, moreover, in ways that challenge notions of time as linear and of the maidenhead as something "natural" like a flower, something that lives for a brief time before it is definitively undone:

New plays and maidenheads are near akin,
 Much followed both, for both much money gi'en,
 If they stand sound and well; and a good play—
 Whose modest scenes blush on his marriage day
 And shake to lose his honour—is like her
 That after holy tie and first night's stir
 Yet still is modesty, and still retains
 More of the maid to sight than husband's pains (Prologue, 1–8)

As this passage suggests, the maid may still look like a maid even after the defloration supposedly occurs; interestingly, the play is personified as a male who loses "his" honor. The ambiguous genitive phrase "husband's pains" allows us to imagine both the husband's difficulties in penetrating the bride and her pains during the "first night's stir," which is now past and seems to have left no visible trace.

The hymen or maidenhead cannot be readily seen by lay persons or by the investigating eyes of midwives or male physicians; its empirical existence, whether as "seal" or as some kind of tight "folded" thing, has been doubted by many historical female subjects, by many medical authorities past and present, and also by many writers who dramatize the possibilities for faking lost signs of virginity. Re-floration, this might be called, and the idea has a disturbingly long and multicultural (and materially consequential) life: a Russian writer noted in 1993 that clinics in her country have "recently started to provide a fairly simple operation" known as the "restoration of virginity."²¹ Among the early modern writers interested in re-floration effects are Spenser (as we shall see) and Thomas Middleton; the latter's character Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling* devises an ingenious way of passing the wedding night's virginity test after she has lost her maidenhead, "under duress, to the aptly named DeFlores."²² Even authorities who seem to believe firmly in the hymen's material existence have intermittently acknowledged that its absence or presence is almost as hard to prove—to doubters and unbelievers—as is the existence of God.

Doubts surround the term "hymen" in English texts whether it signifies the name of a foreign god or a "thin membrane"—the kind of membrane the Greeks saw in bat wings (hymen pteros) or in shattered pottery (hymen ostrachos). Literate early modern readers could find the word "hymen" in ancient texts denoting not (as we might assume) a membranous "barrier" to the va-

gina but rather a particular type of tissue that surrounds many different bones and organs. In his *History of Animals*, Aristotle claims that "there are likewise membranes (hymen) in all animals with blood. The membrane is like a tight, fine skin, but it is of a different sort: it does not stretch or tear. Each of the bones and each of the visceral organs is surrounded by its hymen, in small animals as large, but in the small ones the hymens are not visible because they are extremely thin and fine."²³ Aristotle, and after him Galen, discuss many membranes, visible and invisible, but neither ever mentions a hymen functioning as some kind of barrier to the woman's womb, though both theorists have quite a lot to say about female anatomy.

We must therefore exercise considerable skepticism in approaching the concept of a "histological" virgin and in making generalizations about what people in different past (or present) cultures thought or think about the concept of virginity, which is complexly marked, for post-Reformation anglophone readers, by medieval and later Christians' fascination with the figure of the Virgin Mary,²⁴ and which continues in our own time to be a key notion in conservative Christian discourses educating the young about marriage: in *Why the Hymen?*, for instance, published in 1997, the author states in that "[t]he hymen is a part of God's divine plan. He planned for a man to come unto his wife and establish a blood covenant."²⁵ Contrast that authoritative teleological view with the equally authoritative-sounding one printed in multiple editions of *Gray's Anatomy*; that textbook first tells its readers that "they hymen has no established function."²⁶ Given the lack of consensus in our own culture on the intertwined issues of what a hymen is and what it is for, it seems important to respect the partial and linguistically hybrid nature of the textual evidence on the topic of hymens in early modern culture; it is premature, at the least, to generalize about the hymen in (or out of) early modern English culture as one recent critic does when she asserts that "there is no positive evidence of the existence of a membrane that signified the closure or the untouched female body before the mid-seventeenth century, and none of the classical medical authors ever mention it."²⁷

What would "positive evidence" be, however, then or now? Marie Loughlin remarks on the "continued inculcation in Western culture" of a "myth" of the hymen as a seal—a myth dismissed as "nonsense" by some modern U.S. doctors such as Ethel Sloane in her often reprinted medical book for laywomen (*Biology of Women*).²⁸ And what do we make of the fact that ancient writers do "mention" the hymen in ways that have led classicists to debate what structures of belief the textual signs may imply? Classicists indeed disagree about whether Greek notions of the virgin (*parthenos*) included a concept of a physical "maidenhead" at all. In an essay entitled "Maidenhood without Maid-

enhead" that was published in an important volume historicizing and expanding our knowledge of ancient writings on what we would now call sexuality. Giulia Sissa argues that "earlier Greek anatomy imagines defloration as the extension of a preexisting, but protected fissure, rather than removal of a closing device." Anne Hanson, however, writing in the same provocatively entitled volume (*Before Sexuality*), disagrees with Sissa about Greek beliefs on female anatomy (which beliefs of course were not necessarily homogeneous); Hanson presents evidence for a belief held both by medical practitioners and by "ordinary" people that the uterus was (like) a jug or vessel sealed at one end by a hymeneal "stopper."²⁰

Since the *Hippocratic Corpus*—a collection of anonymously written medical treatises from the last decades of the fifth century and the first decades of the fourth century B.C.E.—never mentions a hymeneal membrane in connection with descriptions of the female reproductive "parts," both Sissa and Hanson must speculate from an evidentiary gap, or silence. Both scholars, moreover, end up relying, albeit for different argumentative ends, on an enigmatic passage—also in Greek, though written in Rome—decrying an "erroneous" belief in the hymen's existence. This passage, written by a man named Soranus who lived in Rome toward the end of the first century B.C.E., goes as follows:

The belief that there exists a slight membrane that occurs in the vagina and constitutes a transverse barrier, and that it is this that is torn either in painful deflorations or when the menstrual blood rushes out too quickly, and that this same membrane when it persists and thickens is the cause of the sickness called *atresia* [nonperforation]—all of these beliefs are erroneous.²¹

Empirical examination, according to Soranus, reveals no certain evidence of any membrane occurring naturally in every girl who has not yet been penetrated by a man: "In the first place," writes Soranus, "this hymen is not revealed by dissection; in the second, there would have to be something in virgins to resist the probe. In fact, in every instance the probe goes right to the bottom."²² Soranus here anticipates the views of early modern physicians such as Ambroise Paré (1509?–90) and Andreas Laurentius (1558–1609). Paré argued in the first part of his *Deux Livres de Chirurgie* that "vulgar" opinion erred in holding that all virgins should have "la dicte hymen, qui est la porte virginalle."²³ In another treatise of 1573, *Des Monstres et Prodiges*, Paré argues that the fiction of the hymen is not only medically but juridically dangerous because "too credulous Judges [might be] soon brought to commit an error" in cases based on alleged evidence about this membrane.²⁴ It has, indeed, a status not unlike that of a pagan god appearing in a text produced in Reformation England: both the hymen and Hymen are ambiguously true and false, and hence highly subject to interpretive misuses.

For centuries, the hymen has been alleged to give "proof" of a virgin's existence; from the early modern period to the present, however, the proof is riddled by doubt. The hymen may have been destroyed by the digital searches of those charged with finding it; or it may have been lost "innocently," and in a way the female subject has forgotten; and/or it may never have existed (as an object available to "ocular proof") at all. Both as a common noun and as a proper name, [H]ymen has generated epistemological uncertainty across time and space—uncertainty often married uneasily to claims to certainty. As Nina Philadelphoff-Puren puts it in a thoughtful critique of several modern legal cases in which "the hymen functions to provide unambiguous knowledge about the sexual status of a woman," the hymen has been repeatedly misrecognized as a self-evident and "material" phenomenon. In this critic's view, and in mine, the hymen always "requires expert interpretation" to come into social existence. Like the condition of virginity to which the hymen points, it is arguably produced rather than revealed by shifting concatenations of "testimony, anatomical illustration and description, medical commentary, legal concepts of probability, rules of evidence, diagnostic techniques, codes of common-sense and [last but not least] literary narratives."²⁴

For an early modern illustration of this point, I return to Helkiah Crooke's encyclopedic narrative, the *Microkosmographia*. Although he begins his chapter titled "The Membrane called Hymen and the Markes of Virginitie" by implying the existence of a medical consensus about the hymen, he immediately calls the consensus into doubt: "It hath been an old question," he writes, "and continueth to this day, whether there be any certain markes or notes of virginity in women and what they are. Almost all Physicians thinke that there is a certaine Membrane sometimes in the middest of the necke of the wombe, sometime immediately after the Passage of the water, placed overthwart which they call Hymen. This membrane they say is perforated in the middest to give way to their courses [menstrual flow], and is broken or torn in their first accompanying with Men."²⁵ Though the phrasing allows for at least some medical authorities to condemn the girl who menstruates before marriage, the agent of that first "perforation" is left ambiguous; the hymen, it appears, is a mysterious entity that can be "first" "perforated" or "torn" more than once. Compounding the attentive reader's perplexity, Crooke then cites three representative authorities, the first of whom (Fallopian) "yields" to the idea (exemplified by Jewish custom as recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures) that a girl's "true virginity" can be proved to have existed by the blood displayed after her hymen is broken; a second authority (Columbus) claims to have "seen" a hymen; and a third (Laurentius) searched "curiously" but fruitlessly for the hymens of "maydens" ranging in age (at death!) from premature infants to

seven-year-olds; the third authority, because he "could never find it," deemed the hymen "a meere fable."³⁶

Long-durational doubts about the nature of both virginity and marriage surround the hymen both as a "thin membrane" and as the name of a non-Christian deity. Among the several thresholds the god Hymen crosses in different textual traditions is the generic one between tragedy and comedy. According to the ninth-century Byzantine writer Photius, who transmitted in his *Bibliotheca* an important discussion of the term hymen from the *Chrestomathy* of an earlier writer named Proklos, there are at least three etymological interpretations of "hymen" and its related forms (*hymenaios*, *hymenaeus*, and *hymenaeus*).³⁷ Photius writes that

Proklos says that the hymenaie was sung at weddings to give expression to the longing and the search for Hymenaios, the son of Terpsikhore who is said to have disappeared on his wedding day. Others say that it is to honor Hymenaios of Athens, because (as he says) he once pursued a gang of thieves and took back some Attic girls that they had stolen. My own opinion [remember, it is Proklos speaking] is the following: hymenaie is an exclamation that looks forward to a life of happiness, and the marriage party joins in this way in the prayers of the couple, that they may find in marriage both companionship and tenderness. The prayer is in the Aeolic dialect and so when they say to the couple *hymenaie*, it is as if they were wishing them a life together [*hymenaiein*] blessed with concord [*homonoiein*], and that they remain inseparable.³⁸

This passage sets "hymen" in a rich web of potentially multilingual puns (including on the English and French word "hymn," a pun that fascinates Derrida). The passage also highlights two strikingly different versions of the life of the god Hymen. Taken together, these contrasting versions of the mortal/god's story epitomize marriage as a site of conflict or debate. Is marriage an occasion for joy and hope? Or is it (as it was obviously for many women fearing death in childbirth) a threshold-event occasion laden with trauma, an event that might inspire dread and lamentation in the heart of the prospective bride and that might cause anxiety too in the heart of the approaching husband? Hymen's stories encompass both attitudinal extremes and thus help construct marriage as a source for "misconceived dou[b]t," as Spenser put it, and of course also for educational discussion; historically, such discussion often proliferates when doubts are legion but need to be repressed or at the least, prudently censored. And the discussion may well emerge albeit obliquely in discursive sites such as the domain of "poetry" that Sidney and other early modern writers attempted to define and legitimate as a domain of useful (that is, educational) fiction.³⁹

According to one of the legends mentioned by Proklos and elaborated in a fragment of a threnos by Pindar, Hymenaios was the son of Terpsikhore, the

muse of music, and he disappeared or died on his wedding day.⁴⁰ Other sources report that he was believed to have been resurrected by Aesklepios. Both of these details arguably contributed to an allegorization to which Giulia Sissa calls attention, the allegorization of the boy Hymen as a figure for the bride's deflowering through orgasm: s/he dies into life. In his well-known commentary on the *Aeneid*, Servius relates further details about this Hymen's death without suggesting that the commentator believes all that he hears or reads: "Some say that he was a young man who was crushed under the walls of his house on his wedding day. Hence, his name is mentioned at weddings by way of expiation."⁴¹

Another tradition noted by Photius depicts Hymenaios of Athens as a very handsome youth who disguised himself as a girl among others in order to be near his beloved.⁴² This story, elaborated in a part of the sixteenth-century *Mythographi vaticani* which transmits Servius's commentary on another passage from the *Aeneid* (4.99), Hymenaios was (in Giulia Sissa's paraphrase) "condemned to love in silence the daughter of a very aristocratic family." With "no hope of marriage, since he was of humble origin, he finally managed to reveal his virility and courage and to achieve his desire." When "pirates carried off th[e] troop of noble Athenian virgins, Hymenaios was among them and so, *tamquam puella raptus est*, he was abducted as if he were a girl. As soon as the thieves had fallen asleep after carrying their booty off into the wilderness, the young man leaped up and killed them. Before returning their treasure to the prominent families of the town," he insisted that he would "trade the girls [only] for the hand of his beloved." The exchange was accepted and Hymenaios had his wish: "he received in marriage the virgin he desired. And since this union was a blessed one, the Athenians preferred to have the name of Hymenaios present in all of their weddings."⁴³

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Although it is difficult to know exactly what Elizabethan and Jacobean writers inherited or inferred from ancient and near-contemporary foreign sources on the subject of Hymen the god, "hymen" as (a part of?) the songs or cries accompanying a marriage procession, and "hymen" denoting a "thin membrane" belonging to bats or, more specifically, to human females, some early modern writers evidently found in the hymen an intriguing sign for a knot of concerns pertaining to men's behavior as they approach the "estate" of marriage and the body of the bride. How—and when, and for how long—should men restrain their desires, for sexual pleasure, for power, and for epistemological certainty, among others? Early modern addresses to this set of questions inevitably engage with fantasies about women's as well as men's anticipations of the marriage night. The discourses of hymeneal in-

struction, aimed at both male and female readers, are studded with contradictions in ways that make such discourses resemble the paradoxical "virgin knot" that Shakespeare's heroine Marina (in *Pericles*) insists that she will keep "untied"—with the goddess Diana's aid—even if "fires be hot, knives sharp, or waters deep."⁴⁴ One might have thought that a Shakespearean virgin would want to keep her virgin knot "tied" rather than "untied," but the logic of the imagery signifying virgin "containment," and hence virginity's "not-containment" as well, is full of surprising twists and turns across cultures and even within the corpus of a single writer. Though Shakespeare's Marina imagines her inviolate purity as a knot, Othello, that tormented bridegroom, imagines his new wife's adulterous intercourse with another man as a disgusting "knotting" of "foul toads" in a cistern that was once a pure fountain.⁴⁵ Knots and their widely varying meanings often dramatize historically inflected differences between masculine and feminine perspectives on virginity and on sexuality more generally, insofar as these gendered perspectives can be inferred from surviving textual evidence.⁴⁶

Many though not all of the texts in my hypothesized archive of hymeneal instruction are by writers historically identified as men—and so are many of the modern commentaries on such texts. This makes for subtle but significant problems in constituting and navigating our evidentiary field, problems I want to acknowledge and briefly illustrate through a textual example already mentioned, Jonson's masque *Hymenaei, or The Solemnities of Masque and Barriers at a Marriage*. In the published text of this masque, Jonson mentions in one of his many scholarly notes that the Roman "Herculean knot" was part of the costume of the bride;⁴⁷ throughout the masque, written to celebrate the politically momentous marriage of the thirteen-year-old Frances Howard, daughter of the Earl of Suffolk, with the fifteen-year-old Robert Devereux, third earl of Essex, on January 5, 1606, Jonson depicts marriage as an institution that controls "shameful" sexuality in order to preserve "secure paternity and maintenance of family blood lines."⁴⁸ As David Lindley remarks in his enlightening analysis of this masque in its complex historical context, the published text "concludes with a long 'Epithalamion,' closely modeled on classical prescription, which is largely intent on persuading the bride, assumed to be modest and frightened, to admit her husband to her bed and body" (21): The Jonsonian narrator enjoins the "soft virgin" to "Shrink not," for "you will love / Anon what you so fear to prove." He continues:

This is no killing war
To which you pressèd are,
But fair and gentle strife
Which lovers call their life (ll. 455–58, p. 225)

Ironically, however, and much to Jonson's chagrin, these lines like all of the poem after the opening stanza were cut (i.e., censored) in the 1606 performance, perhaps because everyone present knew that the young couple was not going to bed together that night.

Modern editions often neglect to give such contextualizing information, and it is easy for readers today to make unwarranted assumptions about what the wedding night meant in a past culture. It seems particularly important to consider the possibility that the wedding night held different meanings for readers and writers of different genders and social ranks during an era when it was customary, as David Lindley explains, for upper-class participants in early marriages to be separated for some time after the marriage and for the consummation to be postponed (Lindley, 22). In fact, Frances Howard later exerted her own erotic will by claiming that her (first) marriage was never consummated at all; in 1613, she sued for its "annulment on the grounds of her husband's impotence" (Lindley, 1). There is, thus, a fascinating gap between Ben Jonson's eager imagining of the wedding night and what we can infer from the historical record about the doomed marriage between Frances Howard and Robert Devereux.

That gap is partly created by Jonson's gender-inflected interpretation of the event, an interpretation that includes a conventionally masculinist acknowledgment of the bride's "erroneous" image of the marriage night as a fearful and killing war—into which she has been pressed into service against her will. But the gap is also partly created by a learned modern critic's representation of the masque's "statement" about the wedding night. In an article which David Lindley calls "seminal," and which was published in 1945, D. J. Gordon shows how meticulously Jonson adapted the pagan, Roman marriage ceremony to an idealization of "union" conceived as honoring the Christian God and his earthly representative, King James, the agent of the blessed "union" of England and Scotland.⁴⁹ Gordon, however, intriguingly slips from scholarly objectivity when he adopts the bridegroom's perspective in a sentence describing the masque's closing: "the dancers are reminded that night is falling: the impatiently awaited night of the bridal bed" (119). Jonson himself, however, as we have seen, obliquely acknowledges at least the existence of a different female perspective on the bridal night; he does so not only in the stanza quoted above but also when he describes the bride as a "prize" brought by a god, Hymen, who "lately" "did . . . rap" [rape] the girl from her "mother's lap" (463–64, p. 226).

Jonson's marriage masque illustrates one of the ways in which the discourse of hymeneal instruction works to illuminate the secret trials of the "night of the bridal bed." Potentially a scene of dread and frequently a scene of debate, that night as Jonson intimates may well look like a war or a rape—despite or

because of the fact that bridegrooms are repeatedly enjoined to be "gentle." Jonson's masque also illustrates my argument that discourses of hymeneal instruction typically dramatize uncertainty about the meaning of marriage. The lore that early modern writers inherited, partially and from multiple sources, about Hymen and hymens provided rich opportunities for thinking about cultural relativity and about the "hidden feares" of both brides and bridegrooms as they approached the marital threshold.

If we define bridegrooms as a cultural category including not only men represented as about to be married (as in epithalamia) but also men represented as suited by birth (or in some cases, by education or achievement) to enter into the patriarchal husband's estate, with all the privileges and paradoxes that estate entailed, we see that discourses of hymeneal instruction dramatize and in various ways interpret women's fears about crossing a threshold from one state of repression known as virginity to another known as marriage. In so doing, these texts also grapple with men's fears about sexual performance and the exercise of authority. "Hymen hath brought the bride to bed," says the Chorus in Shakespeare's *Pericles* (3.9); but what did the husband—and the wife—find in that place? And how were they imagined as properly behaving there? Through the discourses of hymeneal instruction, as I've suggested, early modern English writers explore the idea that deferring carnal knowledge is a wise course of action for the new husband, whose propensity toward violence as a means toward fulfilling his desires is frequently presumed to exist and to require an educational regime construed as one of checking or limiting masculine "nature"—but doing so without rendering him effeminate or impotent. The "limit case" for this (impossible) pedagogical enterprise may well be Christ as Milton depicts him in book 6 of *Paradise Lost*: a hero of patient waiting and self-control who, in a moment of victory figured as a sexual triumph over male rivals, exercises supernatural powers over an "instrument" of power borrowed from the wildly potent classical god Jove. Milton's Christ, however, unlike Jove deploying his meteorological and sexual thunder bolts, holds back: "Yet half his strength he put not forth, but check'd / His Thunder in mid Volley."⁵⁰

Christ, the deity who died unmarried and apparently without sexual experience, but whose body is described in a thirteenth-century "Letter on Virginity" (Hali Meidhad) as having a hymen or maidenhead, was figured for centuries as the ideal husband of Catholic virgins.⁵¹ Christ has an ability ordinary Christian men decidedly lack: an ability to deal gracefully with paradoxes of power and powerlessness, of knowing and unknowing, of owning and not owning. Evidently, the majority of husbands didn't grow into their challenging role naturally, as Henry Smith dryly suggests in his *Preparative to Marriage* of 1591.

The English Protestant husband, according to Smith, "may not say as husbands are wont to say, that which is thine is mine, and that which [is] mine is mine."⁵²

If in the conduct book literature about marriage and the Renaissance medical literature about hymens, there appear to be no texts giving explicit instructions to early modern men about what to do on their wedding night, there are some hints about behavior and attitudes in legal records as well as in those texts that, as I've hypothesized, offer hymeneal instruction through what we might now call "literary" allegorical means, although such means appeared also in theological, political, and many other kinds of discourses produced by writers seeking to avoid censorship. To consider just briefly two examples of textual evidence on hymens, let me mention a letter to Anne Turner from 1613, in which the aforementioned Lady Frances Howard mentions the "sufferings" she had avoided by not lying with her husband on her wedding night;⁵³ there is also a fascinating passage in the records of the infamous trial of Mervin Lord Audley earl of Castlehaven in 1631 (records not published until 1699), where Castlehaven's daughter, the young Lady Audley, is reported as saying that the earl's servant Skipwith "used oil to enter my body first, for I was then but twelve years of age."⁵⁴ Both of these texts, like others that touch on the question of what happens—or does not happen—on the wedding night, testify to an enduring cultural concern with those identity-threatening moments when men cross the liminal threshold of a girl/woman's body. How do cultural authorities distinguish between illicit and licit crossings? The authors and compilers of texts offering hymeneal instruction circle around that question without answering it as they inquire into the ways in which historical and fictional men refrained—or failed to refrain—from violence in their affective and sexual dealings with women and especially with wives, new or not so new.

Why do so many early modern texts advise men of all social ranks, but especially men who already occupy or who aspire to the condition of a gentleman (or better), to exercise self-discipline in approaching their brides? One answer is that this particular ideological line, sketched in advice literature and extended, often in grotesque and dreamlike ways in literary works, serves both to explore and to (re)mystify the social and psychological problems of setting limits on the patriarchal husband's behavior as he grapples with the paradoxes of acting as a "king" (but not a tyrant) in his own household and also, somehow, as a coruler with a wife constructed problematically as a "near-equal" who must be at once honored and governed. Smith, in the marriage sermon cited above, dramatizes the problem when he first describes the husband and wife as "partners, like two oares in a boat," but then shifts metaphors to describe the wife as an "under-officer" in the husband's "Commonweale," a "deputie."⁵⁵ The husband is and is not a "separate" agent in a marital relation; his right-

ful authority depends, paradoxically, on his not exercising his power except in extreme or "limit" cases. In William Whately's *Bride Bush* (1617), in a chapter titled "The Parts and Ends of a Man's Authority," we read that husbands should not beat their wives except "after patient forbearance, after much waiting for amendment without blows, and so applied that a man seeks not to ease his own stomach"; "blows," in other words, are allowed "with these limitations," and thus "may well stand with the dearest kindnesses of matrimony."⁵⁶

The fascination with limits I have proposed as a key feature of the literature of hymeneal instruction appears also, of course, in the considerably better-known English print archive on wife beating. As most of my readers will know, many Protestant writers advised husbands who would be good Christians and "gentlemen" to refrain from the (clearly common) practice of wife beating. And yet, as Frances Dolan has observed, "Wife beating had an ambiguous status . . . because of the wife's double position as a joint governor [of the household], and thus the corrector of children and servants, and as a subordinate (and thus subject to her husband's correction)."⁵⁷ In one famous Shakespearean play, the new husband who is shown refraining from wife beating, but not from abusing her verbally while beating other subordinates, is also shown refraining, indefinitely, from consummating a marriage that occurs (is indeed forced on the bride) in act 3. Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew*, like *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Twelfth Night*, creates an important theatrical space/time of deferred marital consummation and uses that space/time to explore issues of sexual and gender politics. Shakespeare's *Shrew* play, which is usually approached as a text about the education or taming of a wife, Katherina, is equally interesting, I think, when approached as a play about the educational ambitions, and perhaps the failures, of husbands. Though Petruccio seems at the end to have succeeded in bending his wife's will to his—a victory underlined in his hearty imperative, "Come Kate, we'll to bed" (5.2.139)—many in his audience, including, as Shakespeare indicates, Katherina's increasingly insubordinate sister Bianca, might have judged the play's ending a draw in the battle between wifely and husbandly wills and an invitation to further reflections on the husband's need for sexual and social education.⁵⁸

The texts of hymeneal instruction that I've adduced here contain an interpretively challenging "cross-hatching," as Deborah Harkness has called it, of gender-marked fears.⁵⁹ The challenges arise in part because among the most prolific contributors to this archive are writers like Spenser and Shakespeare, who are widely credited with some ability to cross-dress or sympathetically to ventriloquize women's sexual and social anxieties. Generalizations about "gendered perspectives"—especially on a topic such as textual representations of husbands' ways of dealing with the (imagined) fears of brides—are of course

hard to make persuasively for many reasons; one has to do with the ways in which questions of social status impinge on any effort to identify a specifically masculine point of view; another reason has to do with writerly self-censorship on any topic as fraught as a virgin's fears of defloration and marriage was in an early modern England that was ruled for nearly a half century by a conspicuously virgin queen, and was then ruled for over twenty years by James, the son of Elizabeth's rival, Mary Queen of Scots. Throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras, and beyond, the image of a virgin queen whose mother had been executed for alleged adulteries remained politically and theologically charged.⁶⁰ The virgin queen, who was herself criticized (by writers such as Sidney) for her tendency to delay in fiscal and military matters, is an "absent presence" (in Sidney's words for his Petrarchan lady Stella) in many texts representing and apparently recommending a deferral of consummation.⁶¹ In such texts, some characters (and not only those "female" ones played by boys in Shakespeare's transvestite theater)⁶² are shown fearing penetration and/or the bloody loss of a maidenhead while male characters fear a delay that might signal not only an admirable gentlemanly restraint but also a shameful impotence. Both sets of gendered fears may blend into each other in the domain of printed signs which trace the stories of cross-dressed characters.

One particularly rich example of such a blending occurs at the end of book 3 of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, a famous and much discussed episode where Spenser's virgin heroine Britomart rescues another virgin, Amoret, who is separated from her lover (and, we think, prospective husband) Scudamour. She is imprisoned by a wicked Petrarchan magician, Busirane. The bridegroom is figured as both too weak and too impatiently violent to save his bride,⁶³ so Britomart—the martial maid who is herself a prospective bride—plays his part during a three-day trial of her patience, courage, and interpretive powers that culminates in her freeing Amoret from an amazing scene of torture. The bride's fears of defloration are graphically dramatized by her "wounded" breast, "despoiled quite" of its "dew honour" because it is no longer intact (3.12.20); indeed Amoret's "wide wound" on her "naked" breast seems a sign displaced upward from the vagina. That wound symbolizing defloration also seems to signify a nightmare version of a childbirth (and prolapse) scene where a part of the woman's body is cruelly extracted and put next to her: in this case, Amoret's "trembling heart" is drawn from the "wide orifice" of her breast and "layd" in a "siluer basin." I don't have space to do justice to Spenser's House of Busirane episode as an instance of "hymeneal instruction" aimed both at "fashioning a gentleman" and (obliquely) at educating women and especially the queen about the joys of marriage; but I do want to call attention to the stanza in which Spenser counters a woman's "negative" vision of the man's penis (as a

wounding sword) with a figuration of what a blissful wedding night might feel like—especially, perhaps, if the “bridegroom” were female rather than male:

The cruell steele, which thirld her dying hart
Fell softly forth, as of his owne accord,
And the wyde wound, which lately did disport
Her bleeding brest, and riuen bowels gor'd
Was closed vp, as it had not bene bor'd,
And euery part to safety full sound,
As she were never hurt, was soone restor'd:
Tho when she felt her selfe to be vnbound,
And perfect hole, prostrate she fell vnto the ground. (3.12.38)

Jonathan Goldberg has discussed this passage, with its epistemologically challenging pun on “perfect hole,” as suggesting initially that Britomart symbolically restores Amoret’s lost virginity and thus alleviates her fears of marriage: “the closing of the wound,” Goldberg writes, “means that there is no reason to fear: integrity, chastity, can be maintained even in a union with another.”⁶⁴

Goldberg’s initial interpretation, which suggests a happy and ideologically conservative (hetero-normative) end to book 3, is immediately challenged by Goldberg himself and by the narrative of book 4, where Spenser recasts Busirane as a character who interrupts rather than prevents Amoret’s and Scudamour’s marriage; Busirane abducts the bride between the moment when she gives her vows and the climactic (and narratively hidden) moment when she ostensibly gives up her virginity to a husband who, already at the beginning of book 3, looked, in his propensity for violent lust, quite like Busirane. Read together, both books 3 and 4 blur the distinction between “good” bridegroom and “bad” lover who threatens the legitimacy of the marital relation. If we think about Busirane as Amoret’s abductor who steals her body after her marriage vows but before her wedding night, then, as Goldberg remarks, “the full ambiguity of [Amoret’s later] being rendered ‘perfect hole’ . . . comes into play. . . . [A]lthough the wound remains as a token of integrity, of individual castitas, it is also revised and would seem to signify as well the inevitability of subjection and impairment” (Goldberg, *Endless Work*, 78–79).

Spenser’s multiple and dissonant perspectives on the endlessly deferred but repeatedly symbolized consummation of Amoret’s and Scudamour’s marriage—and of the greater and equally deferred union between Britomart and Artegall too—provides a rich extended example of a male writer attempting both to figure and ideologically to manage a field of considerable cultural disagreement. The field contains numerous oblique and arguably authorially cen-

sored meditations—admiring and angry—on the presence and also the cultural memory of the virgin described by Ben Jonson in his *Conversations with Drummond* (written after Elizabeth’s death) as having “had a membrane on her, which made her uncapable of man, though for her delight she tried many.”⁶⁵ That statement cuts at the queen’s memory—and at the very idea of her agency—as Busirane’s “cruell steele” cut the breast of Amoret, one of Spenser’s many ambiguous images of his queen.⁶⁶ Spenser, like Shakespeare, Jonson, and many of Elizabeth’s men of letters, returned again and again to the problem of the royal virgin and the related problem of a stymied succession.⁶⁷ An exemplary formulation of that latter problem occurs in John Harrington’s tract on the succession, a text written, as the author portentously says, in the forty-third year of Elizabeth’s reign: “In mind she hath ever had an aversion and (as many think) in body some indisposition to the act of marriage.”⁶⁸

What is the relation between a mental aversion and a bodily indisposition to marriage or to the heterosexual congress supposedly licensed in and by the married state? That is clearly a question no student of Queen Elizabeth’s life and writings can answer, though Carole Levin, Mary Beth Rose, and many others have done a great deal to illuminate it. It is a question that arguably lies on the horizon of many early modern texts that dramatize what are ostensibly female fears of defloration and that seem to offer prospective gentlemen husbands, like Spenser’s Scudamour, advice on how to handle such fears. The advice in many cases includes a powerful fantasy of a “via media” between force and persuasion in which persuasion “works” so that a return to force is rendered unnecessary—or seemingly so, which means that the return to force is deferred or repressed.⁶⁹

This via media is brilliantly encapsulated in the enigmatic message Britomart reads above the “lockt door” of the “inner chamber” where Amoret is imprisoned. The message is “Be bold, be bold, be not too bold” (3.11.54). Interpreting it—waiting to enter but eventually doing so and thus rescuing Britomart for her lover/husband, Britomart seems to act both as a restrained (chaste) substitute bridegroom—more gentle and intelligent than Scudamour is portrayed as being—and as a kind of mediator between uncertain marital partners—and between contradictory views of the marriage relation itself. Those contradictions are encapsulated in the two different endings of Spenser’s book 3; in the ending published in 1590, Amoret and Scudamour are united in an apparently blissful sexual union (a “melting”) that nonetheless has ominous undertones: the pair are described as “senceless stocks” and as “despoil[ing] each other of “loues bitter fruit” (FQ 3, 1590, 44, 45). There is, moreover, a striking allusion to Ovid’s disturbing story of Salmacis and Hermaphroditus (*Met.* 4, 373–79)—a story of asymmetrical power and of a loss of identity for both the man, drawn into

a heterosexual union against his will, and for the woman, whose name disappears from the multilingual traditions describing certain male-female figures and unions as "hermaphroditic." Why Spenser canceled the original ending of his *Legend of Chastity* is the subject of much critical speculation; one reason arguably lies in his view of marriage itself as a dangerous institution—dangerous to husbands and even more so to wives of historical and fictional men with homicidal tendencies—Henry VIII, for instance, or Bluebeard. That folktale villain lurks in the enigmatic message Britomart finds on the door to Busirane's inner chamber. The apparently contradictory messages about being bold but not too bold echo, as Dorothy Stephens and others have observed, Bluebeard's warning to his new bride to curb her desires to look in a closet, a secret space containing the corpses of his past wives: "Be bold, be bold, be not too bold, lest that thy heart's blood should run cold."¹¹

A message to restrain the desire to penetrate secret spaces—by seeing, knowing, or doing—is at the heart of Spenser's discourse of hymeneal instruction as it ambiguously addresses both male and female readers—and also readers imagined as partaking in qualities of both genders, as both the historical Queen Elizabeth and the fictional Britomart are described as doing. The pedagogical scenario Spenser's text limns interpolates many possible subjects and subject positions; if men with the potential to murder are figured in the bridegroom who receives (and gives) hymeneal instruction, so are women who may have the ability to rule, to write, and to read. Such female subjects wield considerable power according to early modern advocates of an apparently new, improved version of the marriage story—a civilized story such as Erasmus offers in his familiar colloquy "Courtship." That text, first published in 1523 and often used to teach schoolboys Latin in Renaissance English grammar schools, brings me back to Norbert Elias and some of the large questions about the history of ideologies of masculinity—and of femininity—that Elias's work raises without satisfactorily answering. (But what would satisfaction entail, in this case? I certainly don't imagine that I'm offering it to you!) Elias discusses Erasmus's "Courtship" colloquy in a chapter on changing relations between the sexes in the first volume of *The Civilizing Process*—a chapter sandwiched between "On Behavior in the Bedroom" and "On Changes in Aggressiveness." The colloquy tells the story of a suitor named Pamphilus who accuses his beloved, named Maria, of "slaying him—and men in general—by not sufficiently returning his interest and agreeing to marry him."¹² After telling her that it is permissible and right to conceive children, he asks her "to imagine how fine it will be when he as king and she as queen rule over their children and servants." Finally, Maria gives way and agrees to become his wife. But, as Elias writes, "she preserves the honor of her maidenhood. She keeps it for him, she says. She even refuses

him a kiss. But when he does not desist from asking for one, she laughingly tells him that as she has, in his own words, drawn his soul half out of his body, so that he is almost dead; she is afraid that with a kiss she might draw his soul completely out of his body and kill him" (Elias, 140; Thompson trans., 80).

Elias cites this exchange to illustrate his argument that Erasmus's writing on manners and behavior represents a "very considerable shift in the direction of the kind of restraint of instinctual urges which the nineteenth century was to justify in the form of morality" (140). What Elias only implies—but it's a point that Barbara Correll makes brilliantly in an essay entitled "Malleable Material, Models of Power: Woman in Erasmus's 'Marriage Group' and Civility in Boys"¹³—is that Erasmus's dialogue dramatizes and attempts ideologically to resolve a crisis in heterosexual power relations, a crisis that raises the spectre of male impotence as well as of a Lysistrata-like exercise of a woman's power to withhold sex and thus to defer the marriage contract that will ensure—at least in theory—the wife's subordination to the husband and her "entrance into the symbolic contract (motherhood)" (Correll, 247). In Erasmus's dialogue, the suitor's desire ultimately prevails because Maria (as Correll says) follows the circular pattern of the ideal woman: "she is smart enough to pose danger, [yet] smart enough to contain it" (for the virgin, timing is everything); after many sexual double entendres in which she shows that she has "the upper hand," she tells her prospective husband that "you have tractable material. See that you form and fashion me."¹⁴ The question that the dialogue poses for me—and perhaps also posed for Latin-learning boys of the Renaissance as well as for some privileged girls like the group represented by Shakespeare's initially "tractable," but later disobedient (Latin-reading) character Bianca in *The Taming of the Shrew*—is what happens if (or when) the female virgin's timing doesn't match the husband's? What happens if she continues indefinitely to refuse to cede to the man's desires to marry, mold, and deflower her, even (or especially) when those desires are expressed in a gentlemanly way?

The question leads to an aporia, a conceptual limit or barrier that texts in the educational archive I've been sketching here offer up for inspection but do not cross. The answer, logically, would lead to the prospect of the bridegroom as rapist. The discourses of hymeneal instruction might therefore be conceptually located in an area of theoretical and historical inquiry somewhere between the arguments of Norbert Elias, on changes in ideologies of masculinity—and femininity—during the early modern era, and those of Laura Gowing and other historians and literary scholars concerned with the early modern history of rape. I mentioned at the beginning of this essay my sense that Gowing doesn't quite do justice to Elias when she cites him as a prime example of her view that "the history of disciplinary regulation has taken little account of gender."¹⁵

Though this generalization has considerable critical force, it oversimplifies Elias's narrative and the discourses of hymeneal instruction too, a body of texts that shows male behavior being modified—at least in theory—in response to female fears and to a historically inflected awareness of female will as a social force to be reckoned with in public as well as (ostensibly) private spaces such as the bedroom voyeuristically imagined in every epithalamion. Gowing uses Elias polemically to construct her own argument that “Women's bodies were subject to quite different disciplinary campaigns” than men's—campaigns that imply a different periodization than the one Elias, Weber, and even Marx adumbrate. Gowing, indeed, like Joan Kelly Gadol, is basically arguing that women did not have a Renaissance, even the kind of alteration in disciplinary regimes hypothesized by Elias for the male subject. For Gowing, “the project of enclosing and controlling the female body was central to gender ideologies from at least the middle ages” onward, with both medieval and early modern theories “dwell[ing] insistently on the natural grotesqueness of the female body” (7). And yet, there is a point where Gowing and Elias agree that some kind of significant change was occurring in the early modern era, in a gray area between courtship and rape where the historian of legal records finds “questions of will, consent, and agency” coming to the fore in a new way (Gowing, 90). This is so, Gowing suggests, because the law on rape in England was undergoing an uneven and complex transition (one that is by no means complete today in various parts of the world!) from defining the crime of rape primarily as one against property, allied with abduction and elopement—consent irrelevant, to defining it as sexual crime which had to involve penetration and for which questions about the victim's sexuality, morality, and resistance—or lack of it—were crucial to any proof that the crime had actually occurred.⁷⁵ Gowing, like Garthine Walker and Miranda Chaytor (the latter in an article wonderfully entitled “Husband[ry]: Narratives of Rape in the 17th Century”), reminds us that crimes of rape were often retroactively erased from the record when the man agreed or was forced to marry the woman he had violated.⁷⁶

I want to suggest, in conclusion, that Gowing's and Elias's research provides a frame for reconsidering the cultural site refracted in and perhaps partly created by the literature of hymeneal instruction, an archive in which female virgins often usurp the male husband or tutor's authority (at least temporarily, as Bianca does in *The Taming of the Shrew* and Maria does in Erasmus's courtship colloquy). The outcome of the lesson, for both male and female subjects, is still undecided. Perhaps that is because the antinomies of the marital relation impede a solution, as does the logic of the hymen itself—a strange body part absent altogether from an important modern volume called *The Body in Parts* and from Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England*.⁷⁷ The

absent presence of the hymen provides, in any case, a useful entrée to thinking about modalities of repression, psychic and social, in the early modern era and in our own time as well.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Frances Dolan, David Simpson, Genevieve Pearson, Mary Beth Rose, Karen L. Nelson, and Amy E. Leonard for helping me with this essay. The Freud quotation is from *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1957), 14:153. The Spenser quotation is from *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*, ed. William A. Oram et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), *Epithalamion*, stanza 19, 334–37.

2. See Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994). Originally published in two volumes in 1939, the first volume was translated into English in 1968 as *The History of Manners*, while the second volume was translated in 1969 as *State Formation and Civilization* (later retitled *Power and Civility*). My citations later in this essay come from this translation. For Elias, the “civilizing” process involved new modalities of repressing the violent behavioral practices customary among aristocratic men in Northern European territories.

3. See Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch, and Power in Early Modern England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 7.

4. See Shepherd, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), and her essay in this volume, with further references. In her discussion of violence as “one of the main props of patriarchy in early modern England,” Shepherd like Gowing sees Norbert Elias as illustrating (indeed generating) a scholarly preoccupation with the extent of violence “rather than its gendered character,” 128.

5. For an enlightening analysis of early modern medical discourses on the hymen—considered as revealing significant contradictions between physiological theories of somatic signs of virginity and anatomical attempts empirically to “locate” single (or plural) hymeneal membranes—see Marie H. Loughlin, *Hymenotics: Interpreting Virginity on the Early Modern Stage* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1997), esp. chapters 1 & 2; see also Valeria Finucci, “The Virgin's Body and Early Modern Surgeons,” in this volume, and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, “Virginity Then and Now,” in *Medieval Virginites*, ed. Anke Bernau, Ruth Evans, and Sarah Salih (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 234–53. For recent discussions of the hymen in literary contexts see again Laughlin, whose study focuses on the drama of John Fletcher; and Elizabeth Bellamy, “Waiting for Hymen: Literary History as ‘Symptom’ in Spenser and Milton,” *English Literary History* 64, no. 2 (1997): 391–414. For further discussion of early modern debates on the hymen's mode of existence, see Corinne Harol, *Enlightened Virginity in Eighteenth-Century Literature*, ch. 2, “The Hymen and Its Discontents: Medical Discourses on Virginity” (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

59–84, and the succinct and helpful discussion in Katherine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), esp. 135 and n. 8. For an overview of mythological, anthropological, and psychoanalytic materials on the hymen, see Deanna Holtzman and Nancy Kulish, *Nevermore: The Hymen and the Loss of Virginity* (London: Jason Aronson, 1997).

6. In Eve Keller's excellent recent study *Generating Bodies and Gendered Selves: The Rhetoric of Reproduction in Early Modern England* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), for instance, there is only one page devoted to the hymen (88). Gail Kern Paster has a fascinating though brief discussion of early modern virginity tests focused on the maiden's way of pissing in the influential chapter on women as "leaky vessels" in *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 43–44, but scholars of humoral theories of the body including Paster, in her magisterial *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), have tended not to focus on the difficulties of reconciling the notion of the hymen as a "seal," a sign of an "intact" female body, with ideologies of female "leakiness," which are part of a larger phenomenon that Paster calls "the hydraulic model" (*Humoring the Body*, 135–36). Particularly worthy of further investigation are debates about virgin girls' menstruation. Commenting on medieval and modern ideas about the hymen, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne usefully notes that *Gray's Anatomy*, first published in 1858 and still influential, describes the hymen as a "fold"—a phenomenon with built-in drainage—and thus counters a long-standing myth (articulated by Plutarch among others) that credits men "with the initiation not only of sexuality and socialization of women but also of the onset of their menstrual cycle" through the "rupture" of the hymen (see Wogan-Browne, "Virginity Now and Then," 245).

7. See Katherine Park, "The Rediscovery of the Clitoris: French Medicine and the Tribade, 1570–1620," in Carla Mazzio and David Hillman, ed., *The Body in Parts: Fantasies of Corporeality in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 171–93; and the discussions of the clitoris in Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 45–47, 89–93, and *passim*.

8. See Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929; rpt. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1957), 51. For a discussion of this passage in conjunction with Freud's notion of fetishism, see Margaret W. Ferguson, "A Room Not Their Own," in *The Comparative Perspective on Literature: Approaches to Theory and Practice*, ed. Clayton Koelb and Susan Noakes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 97–98.

9. The critical literature on early modern English debates about marriage is large and various; analyses that have particularly influenced my treatment of the antinomies of marriage here include Mary Beth Rose, *The Expense of Spirit: Love and Sexuality in English Renaissance Drama* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: The Representation of Domestic Crime in England, 1550–1700* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); and Dolan's recent study *Marriage and Violence: Our Early Modern Legacy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

10. Much has been written on the subject of Queen Elizabeth and the vexed ques-

tions of her attitude toward marriage as well as her claimed status as "virgo intacta"; I am especially indebted to Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994); to Mary Beth Rose's chapter on Elizabeth's speeches in *Gender and Heroism in Early Modern English Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); to Elizabeth Bellamy's discussion of Elizabeth's chastity in "Waiting for Hymen" (cited above, n. 3); to Maureen Quilligan's discussion of Elizabeth's virginity in *Milton's Spenser: The Politics of Reading* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983) (see especially her definition of the queen's construction of her virginity as a "political act," 213); to Helen Hackett, *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Macmillan, 1995); to Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (London: Routledge, 1989); to Valerie Traub's chapter on "The Politics of Pleasure, or, Queering Queen Elizabeth," in *The Renaissance of Lesbianism*; to Susan Frye, *Elizabeth I: The Competition for Representation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and to Anne Somerset, *Elizabeth I* (London: G. Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1991).

11. All citations of Spenser's epic are from *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton (New York: Longman, 1977); this one is from the poem to book 3, stanza 5.

12. For bibliography on the medical discourses, see above, n. 5. For a useful overview of legal materials on virginity and marriage, see David Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard*, esp. chapter 1. See also David Cressy, "Virginity Test," *Local Population Studies Magazine* 3 (1969): 60–61.

13. A charge of impotence played a key role in Lady Frances Howard's notorious suit for divorce in 1613, discussed below; such a charge was also central to the much-debated case of Katherine of Aragon's first marriage, to Henry VIII's older brother Arthur. After his early death, Katherine claimed that he had failed to consummate their marriage; and the claim was crucial not only to her marriage to Henry but to his later case for divorcing her. See Garrett Mattingly, *Catherine of Aragon* (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1941), 269–70.

14. On examples of medieval and early modern "advice to virgins" texts, including the anonymous poem of that title written "By a Lady," see Kathleen Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslic, "Introduction: The Epistemology of Virginity," in *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 18–19. For an incisive orientation to the early modern English Protestant discourse about proper husbandly behavior, see Frances E. Dolan, introduction to William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew: Texts and Contexts* (New York: Bedford Books/St. Martin's Press, 1996), esp. 14–24; this edition includes selections from important examples of the "education for husbands" genre such as William Gouge's *Of Domestical Duties* (1634) and William Whately's *A Bride Bush* (1617, 1619, 1623).

15. I am indebted for this formulation to Mary Beth Rose.

16. See, for an example of one of Derrida's many meditations on the hymen, his essay on Mallarmé ("La Double Séance") in *La Dissémination* (1972). Explicating Mallarmé's idea that the *hymen* is "more than an anagram of hymn" (*hymne*), Derrida hypothesizes that both terms can be "traced to a root *u* that can be found in the Latin *suo, suere* (to sew) and in *hyphos* (tissue) (*Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson

[Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981], 213). Moving toward the idea that the hymen like the hymn is a "sort of textile" for Mallarmé, Derrida describes the hymen as "the confusion between the present and the nonpresent, along with all the indifferences it entails within the whole series of opposites (perception/nonperception, memory/image, memory/desire, etc.); the hymen "produces the effect of a medium (a medium as element enveloping both terms at once: a medium located between the two terms). It is an operation that *both* sows confusion *between* opposites *and* stands *between* the opposites 'at once.' What counts here is the between, the in-between-ness of the hymen. The hymen 'takes place' in the 'inter-' [French *entre*=between], in the spacing between desire and fulfillment, between perpetration and recollection" (212). Note that Derrida's explication bears traces of what might fairly be called a masculinist perspective on the hymen: no woman's desire involves "perpetration" vis-à-vis the (a) hymen, and Derrida's earlier phrases for Mallarmé's vision of shared orgasm—a "confusion or consummation of this hymen," a "supreme spasm," "the moment of dying laughing" (209), seem to me skewed, though not in any simple way, toward a phenomenology and rhetoric of desire that could fairly be designated more masculine than feminine.

17. See Susanne Scholz, *Body Narratives: Writing the Nation and Fashioning the Subject in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave, 2000), 90, on the fortress or castle as an image of the English nation; see also the famous speech by John of Gaunt in Shakespeare's *Richard II* (2.1.49–50) where the "demi-paradise" of England is seen as "moated" or "walled" by the encircling sea.

18. See Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man Together with the Controversies thereto Belonging* (London: William Jaggard, 1615; cited from the Huntington Library copy, STC 2nd ed. / 6062, esp. book 4, quest. 14; discussed further below.

19. All citations of *Hymenaei* are from Ben Jonson, ed. C. H. Herford Percy and Evelyn Simpson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), 7:209–41; this citation is lines 409–12, p. 224.

20. Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, 1.1.24–27; this and other passages attributed to Shakespeare are cited from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

21. Olga Starchenko, quoted in Olivia Ward, "For Women, the 'New' Russia Offers a Great Leap Backwards," *The Toronto Star*, February 14, 1993, cited and discussed in Laughlin, *Hymeneutics*, 193, n. 64. Recently, reflation (or "hymenoplasty") operations are becoming big business in many cosmopolitan centers including Paris. See for example Ed Alcock's article in *The New York Times*, June 11, 2008, "In Europe, Debate Over Islam and Virginity," www.nytimes.com/2008/06/11/world/europe/11v.

22. Quoted from Marjorie Garber's incisive essay on Middleton's *The Change-lings*, "The Insincerity of Women," in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 349.

23. *History of Animals* 3.13.519a 30 ff, cited from Giulia Sissa, "Maidenhood without Maidenhead: The Female Body in Ancient Greece," in *Before Sexuality: The Construction of the Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, ed. David M.

Halperin, John J. Winkler, and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 352. See also Sissa's *Greek Virginity*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

24. Ruth Evans begins a valuable essay "Virginites" with the question, "How do you know that someone is a virgin?" and then discusses a Nativity pageant in the N-Town collection of biblical drama in which the character Salomé, one of two midwives attending Mary when her son Jesus was born, doubts that the new mother is still a virgin and insists on "touching" Mary's body—a male actor's, in the play—to discover some kind of truth. The result of this early representation of a digital test of virginity is that Salomé's hand "turns 'ded and drye [withered] as claye [earth]." Cited and analyzed in Evans, "Virginites," *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Women's Writing*, ed. Carolyn Dinshaw and David Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 21. See also Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2000), for valuable orientation to the large literature on Mary as "intacta virgo"; Jane Cartwright, "Virginity and Chastity Tests in Medieval Welsh Prose," in *Medieval Virginites* (esp. 57–58); Coyne Kelly and Marina Leslie, eds., *Menacing Virgins: Representing Virginity in the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press and London: Associated University Presses, 1999); Theodora A. Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), esp. part 1.2, "The Roman Catholic Discourse"; and Kathryn Schwarz, "The Wrong Question: Thinking through Virginity," *differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 13, no. 2 (2002): 1–33, all with further bibliography.

25. Sheila Cooley, *Why The Hymen: A Great Sexual Mystery Revealed* (Tulsa, OK: Logos to Rhema Publishing, 1997), 55.

26. Cited from p. 1876 of the 1995 edition of *Gray's Anatomy* by Jocelyn Wogan-Brown, "Virginity Now and Then," in *Medieval Virginites*, 243. Diametrically opposed on the question of the hymen's function, the religious and the scientific texts printed in the 1990s share an anatomical view of the hymen as a "fold" of "mucous membrane"; only the scientific text, however, comments on how greatly hymeneal membrane may "vary" in "shape and area"—ranging (in a more philosophically perplexing way than the authors allow) from "absent" to a "complete imperforate hymen."

27. Susanne Scholz, *Body Narratives*, 81.

28. See Sloane, *Biology for Women* (New York: Wiley and Sons, 1985), 32–33, cited in Laughlin, *Hymeneutics*, 192, n. 64; see also Giulia Sissa, "Subtle Bodies: The Seal of Virginity," in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body*, ed. Michel Feher with Ramona Naddaff and Nadia Tazi, vol. 3 (New York: Urzone, 1989), 154, on the persistent difference between "the hymen of medical knowledge" (or, I'd say, knowledge-claims) and that of popular culture(s).

29. See Sissa, "Maidenhood without Maidenhead," here summarized by Anne Hanson, writing in the same volume in an article entitled "The Medical Writers' Woman," 324. Sissa maintains that the ancient Greeks conceived of loss of virginity both as a loss of spiritual integrity (rather than a histological "event") and as the opening of a preexisting wound; the Greek word for virgin, *parthenos*, was sometimes used to refer

to a girl who had been raped, and this, as Holtzman and Kulish remark, has "fed scholarly speculations about the lack of knowledge among the Greeks about the hymen" (*Nevermore*, 19).

30. *Mythographi Vaticani I et II. Instrumenta lexicologica Latina*, fasc. 41 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1987), 3.11.35–40; cited and discussed in Sissa, "Maidenhood without Maidenhead," 351.

31. From book 1, 16–17 of Johannes Ilberg's 1927 edition of the Greek text of the *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum*; the translation is by Sissa, "Maidenhood without Maidenhead," 355; for a modern English translation of the whole text, see Soranus' *Gynecology*, translated with an introduction by Owsei Temkin, with the assistance of Nicholson J. Eastman, Ludwig Edelstein, and Alan F. Guttmacher (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991). This passage is on p. 15.

32. Soranos goes on to give a third and fourth reason for his opinion: "if, when it bursts during defloration the membrane causes pain, there must necessarily have been pain before defloration, at the first menstrual flow, and then at the time of defloration there should no longer be any. Moreover, if this membrane by thickening were the cause of the condition called atresia, it should always be found in the same place. . . . The fact is that, in the case of women suffering from 'nonperforation,' the membrane that obstructs the canal is sometimes found at the level of the labia, where it is accessible, sometimes in the middle of the vagina, and sometimes in the middle of the orifice of the uterus" (*Gynaikēia* 1.17, quoted in Sissa, "Maidenhood," 356; see also Soranus, *Gynecology*, 15).

33. *Deux Livres de Chirurgie* (Paris, 1573, p. 216), cited and discussed in Susanne Scholz, *Body Narratives*, 181 n. 1.

34. Nina Philaselphoff-Puren, "Exhibiting the Hymen: The Blank Page Between Law and Literature," in *An Aesthetics of Law and Culture: Texts, Images, Screens*, Studies in Law, Politics and Society, vol. 34, 33–52; quotation from 37.

35. Helkiah Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia*, book 4, quest. 14, p. 255.

36. Crooke, *Mikrokosmographia*, 256. Crooke's citation of a range of opinions on the nature and existence of the hymen opens onto a large sphere of debate that stretches across centuries, languages, and various cultural divides between "scientific" and "nonscientific" opinion. Andreas Vesalius left us two accounts of his dissections of virgins, both undertaken "for the sake of the hymen" and neither leading to epistemological certainty; for an analysis of Vesalius's accounts, see Laughlin, 41–46 and Finucci, "The Virgin's Body and Early Modern Surgeons." Crooke, himself skeptical, joins a number of other medical investigators such as Severin Pineau, Johannes Vesling, and John Pechey in mentioning "caruncles" that seem to anchor a (hypothesized but not seen) hymeneal membrane to the walls of the vagina (Laughlin, 30 and 196 n. 83).

37. We know very little about this Proklos, except that he is not the philosopher Proclus Diadochus. Some scholars identify the author of the *Chrestomathy* with the grammarian Eutychius Proclus, who lived in the second century CE.

38. Cited in Sissa, "Maidenhood without Maidenhead: The Female body in Ancient Greece," 349, quoting Photios in A. Severyns, *Récherches sur les chrestomathie de Proclus, première partie: Le codex 239 de Photius* (Paris: Liège, 1938). For Photios as a transmitter of culture, see the brief mention in A. M. Woodward, "Greek History at

the Renaissance," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 63 (1943): 1–14, esp. p. 2. Woodward doesn't say, however, when parts or the whole of Photius's *Bibliotheca* were translated into Latin or Italian.

39. On the Renaissance effort to legitimate poetry as a cultural enterprise in competition with theology and history as discourses claiming authority, see Margaret Ferguson, *Trials of Desire: Renaissance Defenses of Poetry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

40. According to Wikipedia, which has a fuller entry on Hymen than do many print sources on ancient mythology (see <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hymenaios>), some ancient texts define Hymen as the son of Bacchus and Aphrodite; others make his father Apollo and his mother not Terpsichore but her sister muse, Calliope. Still other texts give him a mortal origin, as we have seen, and in one of these, recounted in fragments of the *Catalog of Women* associated with Hesiod, we learn that Magnes "had a son of remarkable beauty, Hymenaeus. And when Apollo saw the boy, he was seized with love for him, and wouldn't leave the house of Magnes." The story is also picked up in an account by Antonius Liberalis; see B. Sergent, *Homosexuality in Greek Myth* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), 109.

41. Servius, *In tria Virgilia Opera Expositio*, on *Aeneid* 1.651, cited and translated in Sissa, "Maidenhood," 350. Servius's *Commentary on the Aeneid of Virgil* is available online through the Perseus Project in Latin; go to <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/ptext?doc=Perseus>.

42. My account draws on Sissa's, in "Maidenhood without Maidenhead," 351–52; and also on Leonhardt Schmitz's article on Hymenaeus in *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology by Various Writers*, ed. William Smith, 3 vols. (London: John Murray, 1880).

43. Sissa, "Maidenhood," 351–52, citing *Mythographi vaticani* 3.11.

44. Shakespeare, *Pericles*, 4.2.146–47. This passage (Riverside ed., p. 1502) is discussed (with "untied" intriguingly misprinted as "united") in William C. Carroll's important essay "The Virgin Not: Language and Sexuality in Shakespeare," *Shakespeare Survey* 46 (1993): 116.

45. The fountain seems to be an image for Othello's sense of being blended with Desdemona; as Iago corrupts that fountain, Othello sees his wife's body and perhaps his own becoming a "cistern for foul toads / To knot and gender in" (*Othello*, 4.2. 59–62, Riverside ed., p. 1231).

46. The imagery of the knot is historically and cross-culturally complex. The famous "Herculean knot" (*nodus Hercules*) that denoted the bond of marriage effected by the legal marriage ceremony in ancient Rome, for instance, had to be untied by the bridegroom as part of that ceremony (he had to loosen—*solvere*—the bride's girdle fastened by the knot). In ancient Greece, the phrase "Herculean knot" denoted a "snaky complication on the rod or caduceus of Mercury, adopted by the Grecian brides as the fastening of their woolen girdles," which only the bridegroom was allowed to untie—not during a public ceremony, however, as in Rome, but rather in the "private" space where the couple retired for the night. As the husband untied the knot, "he invoked Juno to render his marriage as fecund as that of Hercules, whose numerous wives all had families, amongst them being the fifty daughters of Thestius, each of

whom conceived in one night." *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, E. Cobham Brewer (1894; 16th ed. rev. Adrian Room [London: Casell, 2000], "H"). See also St. Panayotakis, "The Knot and the Hymen: A Reconsideration of *nodus virginitatis* (*Hist. Apoll.* 1)," *Mnemosyne* 53, no. 5 (October 2000): 599–608.

47. *Hymenaei*, ed. Percy and Simpson: the Herculean knot is mentioned on p. 211.

48. David Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James* (London: Routledge, 1993), 21.

49. See Gordon, "Hymenaei: Ben Jonson's Masque of Union," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institute* 8 (1945): 107–45.

50. *Paradise Lost* 6: 853–54, quoted from *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Odyssey Press, 1957), 343.

51. Several scholars of virginity discuss the ascription of a hymen to Christ in the *Hali Meodhad*; see the editors' introduction to *Medieval Virginitates*, p. 6 and, for further references, their n. 29.

52. Henry Smith, *A Preparative to Marriage* (London: R. Field for Thomas Man, 1591, STC 1693:051), 52.

53. See for the text of the letter David Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard*, 71.

54. Ann Audley, transcript of *The Trial and Condemnation of Mervin Lord Audley, Earl of Castle-Haven at Westminster, April the 5th, 1631*, reprinted in *English Women's Voices, 1540–1700*, ed. Charlotte E. Otten (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1991), 36.

55. Henry Smith, *A Preparative to Marriage*, 52.

56. William Whately, *A Bride Bush* (London: Felix Kyngston for Thomas Man, 1619, STC (2nd ed.) / 25297. This is an enlarged version of the first edition of 1617; there was a third edition in 1623. The quotation is from chapter 9, p. 109.

57. William Shakespeare, *The Taming of the Shrew: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Frances E. Dolan (Boston: Bedford Books, 1996), 219.

58. Such a reading is indeed comically proposed in John Fletcher's *The Tamer Tamed* of 1611.

59. Deborah Harkness, e-mail message to author, October 2007.

60. See on the persistence of the cultural memory of Elizabeth in Jacobean and indeed Caroline literature, Eggert, *Showing Like a Queen*.

61. The Elizabethan fascination with deferred consummation is clearly overdetermined; it would be interesting to think about the "delay plot" with reference not only to Elizabeth but also to her mother Anne Boleyn, who played a famous waiting game with her royal suitor but who did not of course delay consummation long enough to save her life.

62. Consider for example Oliver's story, in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, of how Orlando came to send a "bloody napkin" to Rosalind disguised as Ganymede (5.1.137 ff., p. 395 in *The Riverside Shakespeare*). Oliver explains that the napkin was stained when Orlando saw a hairy wretched man (who turns out to be Oliver, Orlando's wicked brother) sleeping on his back; about his neck a green and gilded snake had wreath'd itself / Who with her head nimbe in threats approach'd / The opening of his mouth" (4.3.108). The snake glides away only to be replaced by a lioness, with "udders all drawn dry," who like a nightmare version of the "stepmother" queen threatens the

sleeping man until the young hero gives battle to the beast, is wounded, and falls into the laint; the effect of the battle on the lioness, intriguingly, is left unspecified. *As You Like It* was neither performed nor published at the time it is thought to have been written—around 1601, when Essex was about to be punished for leading his famous rebellion against the queen.

63. Scudamour's inability to deal with his new husbandly role is allegorically dramatized by his being found unarmed, lying "all wallowed / on the grassy ground." (*The Faerie Queene* 3.11.5, cited from A. C. Hamilton's ed., 402). Unmanned as if he has had a premature ejaculation instead of the procreative intercourse required of a proper patriarchal husband, Scudamour needs Britomart, who combines male and female virtues, to rescue him from his impotent weakness (which Scudamour himself describes as his "languishing" [3.11.14]). His position unarmed on the ground recalls that of the Redcrosse Knight in *FQ* 1.7.7, "poured out in looseness on the grassy ground" Scudamour is also, however, described as "swelling" with rage and impatience, and his excessive lust is figured in the wall of fire that he cannot penetrate, though Britomart, the virgin, goes through the wall "untouched." On Scudamour, see Andrew Escobado, "The Sincerity of Rapture," forthcoming in a special issue of *Spenser Studies*.

64. Goldberg, *Endless Work: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 78; See also Elizabeth Bellamy who builds on Goldberg's interpretation to explore the question of "what is the truth of Amoret's 'perfect hole' that the episode has failed to represent?" ("Waiting for Hymen," 407). Bellamy suggests that the phrase denotes neither "a process of scarring nor of healing"; it may serve instead as "a vivid demonstration that the concept of married chastity is itself a kind of 'perfect hole.'" The logical extension of married chastity is monogamy within marriage—but before the married couple can accede to a monogamous state, the chaste virgin must allow her hymen to be penetrated. There must, in other words, be a hymeneal "hole" that will potentially be "perfect"-ly monogamous. Amoret's "riuen bowels gor'd" (3.12.28), her painfully disemboweled heart, become then a kind of metonymic displacement for the hymen that must be penetrated. The painful hydraulics of Amoret's "fleshly bleeding" blood and its vivid stains "That dyde in sanguine red her skin all snowy cleene" (3.12.20) therefore mime the flow of hymeneal blood (itself a miming of menstrual blood) and its staining of the wedding sheets." In a longer version of this essay, I will attempt a fuller reading of Britomart as a "substitute bridegroom" and engage more fully with recent critics who have reflected on Spenser's ambivalent treatment of Amoret's desires—including the possibility of her homoerotic desires—in books 3 and 4 of his epic. See especially Katherine Eggert, "Spenser's Ravishment: Rape and Rapture in *The Faerie Queene*," *Representations* 70 [Spring 2000]: 1–26; she argues that the "vibrating collapse" of Busyrane's house amounts to Britomart's giving Amoret a (non-phallically induced) orgasm (p. 14). See also Tracey Sedinger, "Women's Friendship and the Refusal of Lesbian Desire in *The Faerie Queene*," *Criticism* 42, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 91–114; Dorothy Stephens, "Into Other Arms: Amoret's Evasion," originally published in 1991, and included in *The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative: Conditional Pleasure from Spenser to Marvell* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 25–46; Susan Frye, "Of

Chastity and Violence: Elizabeth I and Edmund Spenser in the House of Busirane," *Signs: A Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 20, no. 1 (1994): 49-78; Lauren Silberman, *Transforming Desires: Erotic Knowledge in Books 3 and 4 of the "Faerie Queene"* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); and Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 58-59.

65. Jonson's remark is quoted from Somerset, *Elizabeth I*, 99.

66. I thank Fran Dolan for the idea that Jonson's remark constitutes a retrospective denial of the queen's agency as a woman who chose virginity over marriage. For a conspectus of negative views of the Queen, see *Dissing Elizabeth: Negative Representations of Gloriana*, ed. Julia Walker (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

67. For an enlightening analysis of Spenser's epic, and particularly its fifth book as a commentary on and attempted intervention into the "matter of the succession," see Andrew Majeske, *Equity in English Renaissance Literature: Thomas More and Edmund Spenser* (London: Routledge, 2006).

68. Harrington, *A Tract on the Succession to the Crown* (London: Roxburgh Club, 1880), cited in Somerset, *Elizabeth I*, 98-99.

69. This is not to say that authors historically gendered female do not contribute to this ideological construction; but some writers, such as Shakespeare in many of his romantic comedies, and Mary Wroth in her pastoral tragicomedy *Love's Victory* (ca. 1620?) and in her two-volume romance *Urania*, mount serious challenges to the very idea of marriage as a "happy ending." In her play, Wroth suggests that a delayed sacrificial "death," stage-managed by a virgin goddess, Silvesta, who never marries, allows another willful female heroine, Musella, to marry according to her own desires rather than according to those of her mother. The father is absent and the would-be husband, one "Rustic," is a buffoon apparently modeled on Wroth's historical husband, Robert, as the editors of the excellent modern edition of the play suggest; see *Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London: Routledge, 1996), 94. Wroth joins other writers in suggesting that delayed consummation is a critical ideological tool in efforts to preserve marriage as an even semi-desirable "end" for comedy or indeed for tragicomedy.

70. Stephens, *The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 31-32. Stephens reads the "be bold" message as a warning to Britomart *not* to attempt an erotic relation with Amoret, though in book 4, Stephens finds Britomart and Amoret engaging in "erotic dalliance" and "hard adventures" enabled by the canceled (and in Stephens's view heteronormative) ending of the 1590 poem (*The Limits of Eroticism in Post-Petrarchan Narrative*, 37). See also Andrew Escobedo's discussion of Spenser's echo of the Bluebeard story in "Daemon Lovers: Will, Personification, and Character," forthcoming in *Spenser Studies*.

71. Entitled *Proci et puellae* in the original Latin, Erasmus's text is translated in *The Colloquies*, trans. and ed. Craig Thompson (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 86-98. This passage cited in Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. Jephcott on p. 140, is on p. 88 of Thompson's translation of Erasmus. Pamphilus begins the dialogue by incorrectly deriving Maria's name (in Christian culture one with sacred overtones) from the classical god Mars; according to her suitor, Maria "slays men for sport, as Mars does" (88).

72. Barbara Correll, "Malleable Material. Models of Power: Woman in Erasmus's 'Marriage Group' and Civility in Boys," *ELH* 57, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 241-62.

73. Correll, 248, quoting *Colloquies*, trans. Thompson, 97.

74. Gowing, *Common Bodies*, 7.

75. *Ibid.*, 90. See for instance the transcript of the Castlehaven trial, where Lord High Steward defines rape as "an unlawful carnal knowledge, and abused of a woman by force against her will" (cited from *English Women's Voices*, ed. Charlotte F. Otten, 34).

76. See Garthine Walker, "Rereading Rape and Sexual Violence in Early Modern England," in *Gender & History* 10, no. 1 (1998): 1-25. In her abstract, Walker notes that "[r]ape narratives produced in legal contexts cannot provide evidence of repressed memory. But they can demonstrate how, from a position of weakness, women nevertheless attempted to negotiate their way through a web of cultural restrictions." Miranda Chaytor's article is in *Gender and History* 7, no. 3 (1995): 378-407.

77. See *The Body in Parts*, cited above, n. 7; for discussions of how Lawrence Stone's *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1977) has served as a "touchstone" for subsequent work on its title topics, see Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism*, 445, n. 68, and Rose, *The Expense of Spirit*, 2-3.