

"LOVE'S FRIEND AND STRANGER TO VIRGINITIE":  
THE POLITICS OF THE VIRGINAL BODY  
IN BEN JONSON'S *HYMENAEI* AND THOMAS  
CAMPION'S *THE LORD HAY'S MASQUE*

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It has become commonplace in studies of the Renaissance masque to cite the famous definition of this genre's purpose and function which prefaces Ben Jonson's *Hymenaei*, a definition which speaks of the "sense" or material aspect of the masque as that which "or doth or should always lay hold on more removed mysteries" at the same time that it also "sound[s] to present occasions."<sup>1</sup> However, as the critics Stephen Orgel, Jonathan Goldberg, and Leah Marcus among others have warned, there is an important distinction between taking Jonson's formulation seriously and allowing it to serve as the neoplatonic critical paradigm within which we define the relationship between a masque's occasion and its "more removed mysteries." Indeed, many critics have recently demonstrated a desire to problematize this relationship, indicating that it is crucial to recognize not only the interested nature of Jonson's definition but also our own tendency to treat the masque occasion as an interpretive master-key rather than as a nexus of discourses and ideologies which itself needs unravelling. While such critical interest has resulted in the examination of how particular masque occasions are informed and shaped by a variety of discourses (such as neoplatonism, James's political project of Anglo-Scottish union, the internal politics of the period's aristocratic families, and so on), the more broadly cultural contexts of these occasions remain largely unexplored.<sup>2</sup> Since only a book-length study could hope to delineate in any comprehensive way all of the cultural assumptions and discourses which helped fashion such occasions and the dialectic between a specific masque occasion and its performance, this paper will confine its attention to one facet of this complex and contradictory nexus: how early modern constructions of the body and sexuality inform, complicate and occasionally undermine both *Hymenaei*'s and *The Lord Hay's Masque*'s gestures towards various types of ideal unity between king and country, husband and wife, subject and monarch. Although James's persistent figuring of monar-

chical power in familial terms and his emphasis on individual aristocratic marriages as a means of cementing political ties, especially between England and Scotland, lend themselves particularly well to embodiment in these two wedding masques, the problematic and fissured construction of the female virginal body and its desires in early modern England creates serious problems for these two poets' differing attempts to use marriage and the wedding night as apt symbols of James's drive for Anglo-Scottish union.

*Hymenaei's* obsession with the fact of marital defloration is perhaps its most unusual feature, and has attracted some critical attention since this emphasis seems to belie rather than illuminate the central fact of the marriage between Frances Howard and Robert Devereux, third Earl of Essex: due to the extreme youth of the participants (13 and 15 years of age, respectively) its physical consummation was to be delayed for three years. However, while David Lindley accounts for Jonson's insistence on the lawful defloration of the wedding night as an embarrassing miscalculation which distorts "the reality of the young couple" in favour of the poet's aesthetic and political goals as well as his desire to demonstrate his classical "scholarship," clearly Jonson is also motivated by Frances Howard's anomalous social and cultural position as virginal wife.<sup>3</sup> He attempts to elide this suspension, the long delay between marital vow and physical consummation, precisely by insisting upon the immediate causal link of marriage ceremony and marital defloration, by using the generically conventional references to defloration which occur in all Renaissance wedding masques and making them the central focus of the action and verse. From the masque's outset, Reason emphasizes the natural conclusion of the marriage rites in the sexual activity of the wedding night, noting that the major symbols presented (the altar and the fire and water) all refer to the physical union of the couple in marital intercourse. Although the couple are separate at the altar of Juno, "this happy night" they will be made "one," the altar being "but a sign / Of one more soft and more divine, / The genial bed, where Hymen keeps / The solemn orgies, void of sleeps" (*H*, 145, 147–50). The fire and water, in turn, refer in a physiologically-accurate way to what early modern science believed each partner contributed to conception: "Like are the fire and water set, / That, even as moisture mixed with heat / Helps every natural birth to life, / So, for their race, join man and wife" (*H*, 157–60).<sup>4</sup> Besides describing the couple as "two noble maids" who are about to be "sacrificed" to "that blessed state / Which all good minds should celebrate" (*H*, 94, 95, 96–97),

several of the masque's songs likewise emphasize the coming physical consummation, with those present being constantly reminded that the wedding night is being wasted away in frivolous dancing.<sup>5</sup> Reason urges the young couple towards the bridal chamber, stating that "the bright Idalian star [Venus] / That lighteth lovers to their war / Complains that you her influence lose / While thus the night-sports you abuse" (*H*, 319–22). The last song before the concluding epithalamion likewise bemoans the fact that everyone gathered is doing the "rites much wrong / In seeking to prolong / These outward pleasures" (*H*, 350–52), especially when the hidden secrets of the virginal body remain to be discovered in the marriage bed's lawful sexuality: "The night hath other treasures / Than these, though long concealed, / Ere day to be revealed" (*H*, 353–55). Among the "treasures" referred to is the jewel of the virginal body—the unbroken hymen. Reason reinforces this reference through her subsequent description of the final dance of Hymen and "the sacrificers" as an "inner ring" (*H*, 368, 367), one of the most common epithets for the hymen in both contemporary medical texts, such as Helkiah Crooke's 1615 *Microcosmographia: a description of the body of man* and popular drama, such as Gratiano's reference to Nerissa's ring at the conclusion of *The Merchant of Venice*. These are only a few examples of the masque's emphasis on the imminent defloration of the bride in lawful, marital intercourse.

*Hymenaei's* constant emphasis upon the sexual joys of the wedding night is, then, part of the dramatist's attempt to elide the strangely liminal space in which Frances Howard's body and status remain, to elide the fact that she is both virginal daughter and chaste wife, and yet, as a result, no longer truly fulfills either of these two roles or discursive spaces. It is only by placing these constant references to virginal desire and the absolute necessity of marital consummation within contemporary medical and anatomical discourses, however, that we can perceive how thoroughly this elision depends upon popular assumptions about female physiology and psychology. Jonson employs these conventional notions concerning the virginal body and the lawful desires which surround and inform it to assure the gathered assembly not only that this physical union, when virginal daughter will finally and irrevocably become chaste wife, will indeed take place, but so will all the other symbolic and actual unions which depend upon it. As I have argued elsewhere, contemporary medical and anatomy texts construct the virginal woman's physiology and anatomy in ways which support the hegemony of Protestant mar-

riage, with virginal desire being that which produces and confirms lawful heterosexual intercourse as comprising a woman's naturally- and divinely-ordained goal.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, since the virginal body is naturally- and divinely-oriented towards marital intercourse, when frustrated of this goal, it is likely to become infected with a pathological and uncontrollable need for said intercourse. Many of the period's most popular and frequently reprinted medical texts (such as *Aristotles master-piece*) depict the virginal body as subject to specific physical and mental ailments when prevented from fulfilling this natural destiny. Chlorosis (also known as "green-sickness" as well as the "virgin's disease") and womb-fury (a rising of the womb caused by the retention and corruption of female seed in a virgin's system, seed expelled only by the act of intercourse) are two of the illnesses to which this body was thought subject and for which marriage was a common prescription.<sup>7</sup> Sudell, Riverius, Culpeper and a host of other physicians offer this advice, recommending that parents "prudently and timely provide marriage" for their virginal daughters, "much of the Cure of this disease lying in Carnal Copulation, as experience hath and doth teach every day."<sup>8</sup> Early modern culture constructs the virginal body, then, as firmly oriented towards the fulfillment of sexual intercourse and this fulfillment means that marriage is not only a woman's primary moral and religious duty, but one which is dictated by the physiological structures of her body. In terms of this context, *Hymenaei* is a masque which concentrates on defusing the problems surrounding the circumstances of its production, the threatening suspension of Howard between the roles of virgin and wife, by emphasizing the natural orientation of virginal desire towards the sexual consummation of Protestant marriage.

Jonson's use of the virgin's cultural construction as a body naturally-oriented towards marriage and its lawful sexual consummation in an attempt to eradicate (at least discursively) the continued and threatening liminality of France Howard's married-virginal body raises the spectre of an accompanying and much more disturbing cultural fiction—that female desire is inherently uncontrollable, and therefore that frustrated virgins may be tempted to "sate their desire in unlawful Love."<sup>9</sup> Such illicit desire is invariably depicted in contemporary medical accounts as the result of a physical ailment which robs a woman of her reason. Riverius describes, for example, the major symptom of womb-fury as "a sort of Madness arising from a vehement and unbridled desire of Carnal Imbracement, which desire dethrones the Rational Faculty so far, that the Patient utters wanton

and lascivious Speeches in all places, and companies, and having cast off all Modesty, madly seeks after Carnal Copulation, and invites men to have to do with her in that way."<sup>10</sup> Such descriptions, of course, also support the construction of virginal desire as naturally-directed towards and only towards marital intercourse, since a woman is immediately diagnosed as mentally unbalanced if her desires stray from these bounds, or if they are corrupted by her lack of marital opportunity. Although less frequent, medical references to masturbation and autoeroticism also indicate both the uneasiness concerning virginal desire and the way such desire is carefully constructed to support the hegemony of Protestant marriage. As Audrey Eccles notes, when intercourse was not a practicable means to cure womb-fury, "to bring down the uterus and discharge the seed," some physicians "recommended that a midwife should dip her fingers in aromatic oils 'and then put them into the mouth of the matrice, rubbing it, long and easilie, that through that provoking, the grosse and clammy humour may be avoided out.'"<sup>11</sup> In instructing the midwife to put her fingers "into the mouth of the matrice," however, Philip Barrough is almost certainly referring to vaginal rather than clitoral masturbation, even though (according to Laqueur and others) the primary role of the clitoris in female sexual pleasure was common knowledge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His advice, then, attempts to contain female desire within a phallogentric sexual economy, since the fingers of his imagined midwife constitute a simulacrum of the penis and their actions a conscious imitation of heterosexual intercourse. As Eccles goes on to note, however, such treatments, even though they medicalize female masturbation and autoeroticism in uncompromisingly patriarchal terms, were not universally accepted: "Not unnaturally there was some doubt whether this course of action was quite unexceptionable, morally speaking, a scruple which Culpeper considered foolish Popish superstition. But Ferrand, writing in 1640, complained that 'some Physitians . . . although they are Christians . . . doe notwithstanding prescribe for the cure of this disease, Lust, and Fornication.'"<sup>12</sup> Apparently, cures which fail to prescribe the release of marital intercourse are almost universally condemned, although womb-fury's etiology makes various types of autoeroticism a logical remedy.

The contradictory construction of virginal desire as that which is naturally directed towards marital intercourse and as that which constantly threatens to exceed this lawful goal, as well as the resultant attempts to code unsanctioned desire as physical disease and mental



disorder, give added significance to *Hymenaei's* antimasque. Here, Jonson controls any intimations of a possible connection between illicit and virginal desire by composing an antimasque of the unruly humours and affections, thereby drawing a firm line between virginal desire and rampaging, indiscriminate, boundless lust. The humours and affections are portrayed by men and are clearly male not just because of the conventional exigencies of the masque's dramatic production but in order to eradicate any suggestion that illicit desire is a possibility for the newly-married couple, especially for the liminal-virginal body. Hymen calls upon Reason to "save, save the virgins" from (appropriately enough) the drawn swords of the threatening humours and affections (*H*, 105). In contrast to their phallic, aggressive and irrational lust, Reason becomes the voice of the newly-married couple's lawful desires. She later sings a hymn of praise to Juno and Hymen, noting that without them all desire would be illicit and all social order would turn to anarchy; without the god of virginity and the goddess of marriage, there would be no primogeniture or patrilinearity: "Without [their] presence Venus can do nought, / Save what with shame is bought; / No father can himself a parent show, / Nor any house with prosp'rous issue grow" (*H*, 300–4).

The distinction between the unreasoning lusts of the humours and affections and the rational desire of the newly-married couple is further emphasized by Jonson's portrayal of each partner's differing reaction to the imminent sexual initiation of the wedding night. In calling on Hymen to "Cheer up the faint and trembling bride / That quakes to touch her bridegroom's side" (*H*, 369–70), Reason presents us with the traditionally passive virgin; Hymen in turn describes the equally traditional figure of the "longing bridegroom" (323). Of course, the representation of the bride as timid and frightened of the approaching sexual consummation is yet another way of controlling and delimiting the virginal desire which early modern culture presents as evidence of patriarchal marriage's naturally- and divinely-ordained character. Through their conventional reactions to the coming wedding night and their control over the irrational affections and humours, the young couple's marital desire serves as an example of how humorally-balanced bodies can also include rational and ardent sexual desire.

Just as Jonson forestalls any possibility that the transitional-virginal body may take the path of illicit desire by locating and eradicating the danger of such unsanctioned lust in the male figures of the humours and affections, so the barriers also identify and reject

the other possibility for the young, unmarried upper-class English-woman: perpetual virginity. In fact, the cultural importance of "the most honored state of man and wife" (*H*, 641) is demonstrated in Truth's suggestion that she and Opinion debate the value of marriage versus that of perpetual virginity precisely in order to determine which of them actually is truth: "she that best / Defends her side, be Truth by all confessed" (*H*, 643–44). Of course, marriage and Truth are victorious, the arguments put forth claiming that lawful sex and legitimate reproduction are completely natural: "The virgin were a strange and stubborn thing / Would longer stay a virgin than to bring / Herself fit use and profit in a make" (*H*, 733–35). In addition, Truth states that any woman who remains a virgin is willful and proud. In contrast, Opinion's claims concerning the benefits of "untouched virginity" (*H*, 685) are clearly erroneous, particularly when we consider the fate of the unmarried Renaissance woman; she definitely did not enjoy the paradise of freedom which Opinion says is hers in comparison with the "prescribe[d]" (*H*, 701) lot of the wife: "[Virgins] have all things perfect, spin their own free fate, / Depend on no proud second, are their own / Center and circle, now and always one" (*H*, 718–20). Milton's reaction to the concept of perpetual virginity is surely closer to the period's cultural reality, as he demonstrates how this bodily state was inextricably connected with both Roman Catholicism and infertility. Convents, he writes, were "convenient storage for their [Catholics'] withered daughters."<sup>13</sup> In making Truth and by extension marriage and union clearly victorious in this debate, Jonson again attempts to defuse the political, religious and cultural implications of Frances Howard's continued liminality: neither perpetual virginity nor unsanctioned sexuality are possibilities for her potential body. Yet the masque's very need to distinguish so actively between Frances Howard's virginity as an exigency of her early marriage and the culturally-disturbing spectres of perpetual and/or pathological virginity also reveals a thinly-veiled fear of a woman's virgin state.

While Jonson carefully delimits the possibilities for the liminal-virginal body, however, skilfully negotiating the fissures and contradictions in its socio-medical construction, his attempt to make this marriage symbolize larger political and philosophical unions remains compromised by the unwitting challenge Howard's body poses to the hegemony of Protestant, patriarchal marriage, and to the various unions which are predicated upon its always-imminent defloration. As many critics note, Jonson's masque aims at using this marriage as an

image of the relationship between a king and his people, an image which James himself employed throughout his reign in his many speeches and political works, particularly in the context of his attempts to accomplish the legal, religious, and constitutional union of England and Scotland.<sup>14</sup> *Hymenaei* is framed by references which make this union between Howard and Essex an image of James's envisioned union between himself and his two nations. At the beginning of the masque, the marital bond between James and his wife, Anne, is made the pattern of all such bonds, with James and "his empress" as they who "have proved the strict embrace / Of Union with chaste kisses, / And seen it flow so in [their] happy race" (*H*, 82, 85–87). Indeed, Hymen sees his own power to unify as part of the greater power of the specifically married and fatherly James, "the king, and priest of peace" who is accompanied by "his empress, she / That sits so crownèd with her own increase" (*H*, 81, 82–83). According to Jonson, they are best suited to perform the role of "propitious aides" (*H*, 92) to the Howard-Essex union because they "know how well it [union] binds / The fighting seeds of things, / Wins natures, sexes, minds, / And every discord in true music brings" (*H*, 88–91). The political significance of *Hymenaei*'s positive representation of marriage and its dismissive representation of perpetual virginity is evident even before the masque's conclusion, where Reason calls all the masquers to depart in pairs before James, praying that as they depart "linked hand in hand" (*H*, 382), their union will be a type of James's hoped-for union of the two kingdoms: "so heart in heart / May all those bodies still remain / Whom he, with so much sacred pain, / No less hath bound within his realms / Than they are with the ocean's streams" (*H*, 382–86). During the barriers, Truth responds to Opinion's most powerful argument in favour of perpetual virginity (that it is an image of the solitary integrity of "god," "the world," and "the king" [*H*, 722, 722, 724]) by asking: "And where is marriage more declared than there? / Is there a band more strict than that doth tie / The soul and body in such unity? / Subjects to sovereigns" (*H*, 726–29)? Evidently, the dramatist has a great deal invested in the coherence and stability of the masque's central image of marriage and consummation. While James's representation as the father and husband of his kingdom helps Jonson disguise the problematics of Frances Howard's virginal-wifely body, however, we also recognize that this body and its always-imminent sexual defloration comprise a particularly unstable site upon which to build an edifice of political, religious and philosophical union.



In contrast, Thomas Campion's *The Lord Hay's Masque*, performed for the marriage of Honora Denny and Lord James Hay on 6 January 1607, seems to contain a far less problematic representation of the virginal body, since both participants were legally of age to consummate the marriage on their wedding night; unlike Frances Howard, Honora Denny's virginity is soon to be dissolved in the activity of the wedding night completing her transformation from virginal daughter to chaste wife.<sup>15</sup> This transformation and the union which it proclaims again symbolize James's hoped-for union between England and Scotland: Hay's status as one of James's "chief [Scottish] favourites" made his marriage an even more explicit and "suitable emblem of the union between England and Scotland."<sup>16</sup> As a result, one expects a masque in which the "present occasions" should "sound" less problematically to the "more removed myster[y]" of James's creation of a unified people and nation. The simple fact that Denny and Hay will indeed retire to the bridal chamber at the conclusion of the wedding festivities forestalls the difficulties which the liminal-virginal body introduces into the figuring of James's power to unify his kingdoms in Jonson's *Hymenaei*. Indeed, Campion's representation of marriage, the wedding night, and marital reproduction function much more smoothly as part of James's project of ideologizing the family, and of making both the family and marital reproduction simultaneously mirrors of the state's authority and that upon which such authority rests.<sup>17</sup>

The masque's only two Latin dedicatory poems, the first, "*Ad Invictissimum, Serenissimumque Iacobum Magnae Britanniae Regem*," addressed to James himself and the last, "*Epigramma*," to the Lord and Lady Hay, are linked by more than their language, as the first celebrates James's ability—as both the father and husband of England and Scotland—to join mystically not only his nations but his individual subjects: "You alone, James, can do this; easily you bring divided lands into one and make them eternally one in name and in fact. To both the children and the brides, you have become father and husband: truly a husband out of union and a father out of love."<sup>18</sup> The second likewise celebrates the joining of England and Scotland through the joining of Denny and Hay, but celebrates this union specifically in terms of the radical change in the lineage of Denny and Hay's families which will result: "The hope is that the new bride will bring forth an Anglo-Scottish heir; the one he begets later will be British: thus a new posterity, born from the two kingdoms, will make the noble ancestors on both sides famous" (*L*, 210). In imagining that

Denny and Hay's son will himself beget "British" rather than either English or Scottish heirs, Campion not only produces an effective image of personal and bi-national unity, but also participates in James's reconfiguring of familial and marital relationships as analogies for state power. Just as James's body is mystified in its relations with his two nations, enabling James to be both father and husband without (Campion is at pains to note) the least impropriety, so the bodies and bloods of Denny and Hay undergo similar mystification, as the tensions between their families and between English and Scottish are eradicated by the expectation of an "Anglo-Scottish heir," one who will himself implicitly engender and give birth to an entire nation—Great Britain.

Campion's masque clearly participates in James's project to unify England and Scotland through "mystif[ying] and politiciz[ing] the body," especially the body of the king and the nation.<sup>19</sup> Yet this masque not only reproduces James's ideological fashioning of the state in terms of familial relations, but also demonstrates how, despite Campion's best efforts, this fashioning results in a series of potentially disruptive and incongruous erotic couplings. The masque's additional dedicatory poems as well as its presentation of virginity and chastity both complicate and ameliorate these relationships. In Campion's Latin dedication, James is not only in danger of metaphorically practicing polygamy, something the king himself acknowledges is a result of his political self-fashioning in his *Speech of 1603*, but also incest:<sup>20</sup> "I wonder (O King) whether you are the father of England and united Scotland, or a husband, or neither, or both at once. For one man to marry two wives at once—that we believe, by your own prohibition, to be impiety. And for the parent to violate his daughter in marital embraces—who does not consider that a crime?" (L, 208). Campion's expansion of the erotic incongruities of James's familial rhetoric of state power aims, of course, at emphasizing the king's mystical ability to transcend precisely the sexually-monstrous possibilities of his relationship with his two nations: "But you, by divine succession, marry both; yet they are one wife, one conjugal love. O wonderful marriage, which can join two and one! You alone, James, can do this; easily you bring divided lands into one and make them eternally one in name and in fact" (L, 208). However, even Campion's joyful conclusion, that James's mystical power as sovereign enables him to characterize his nations in a holy way both as "children and . . . brides" (L, 208), cannot prevent this dedication

from intensifying the erotic and sexual incongruities resulting from James's familial and patriarchal rhetoric of state power.

The tensions produced by this rhetoric and by the image of the Anglo-Scottish union as residing in the confused relationship between James and his nations are partially defused by shifting the masque's symbolic onus onto the marriage between Denny and Hay; they become the masque's privileged emblem of Anglo-Scottish union. In the masque, James is figured as the sun-god, Phoebus Apollo, one who aids in the union of the young couple. However, in relying upon the marriage of Denny and Hay, and specifically upon the image of Denny's marital defloration to support the masque's edifice of political union, Campion faces some of the same difficulties as does Jonson. While Denny's body is not characterized by the dangerously-liminal virginity of her aristocratic cousin, it contains other fissures and contradictions. Specifically, Campion wrestles with the idealization of perpetual virginity in a period of growing nostalgia for Elizabeth I and at the same time attempts, like Jonson, to elide perpetual virginity in favour of the more ideologically-amenable concepts of transitional virginity and married chastity.<sup>21</sup>

*The Lord Hay's Masque* contains a politically-charged opposition between "the chaste goddess Diana [given one of her synonyms, Cynthia, in Campion's work]" (representing Elizabeth) and "the god Phoebus" (representing James); Campion, in having Cynthia/Diana imprison the knights of Phoebus for their attempts to seduce members of her virgin train, suggests that "the chastity of Diana tempers the Phoebean fires of lust," thereby reassuring the suspicious English that the new influx of Scottish lords does not necessarily mean "an insidious take-over," that the specifically English virtues of the previous reign will temper not only James's liberality to his Scottish favourites but even their own sexual and political ambitions.<sup>22</sup> The choice of the goddess Cynthia as one of the masque's central figures and the subsequent emphasis on Elizabeth's virtues of chastity and temperance may indeed constitute a veiled exhortation to James to embrace such virtues; at the same time, however, Cynthia/Elizabeth's perpetual virginity is evoked for a more specific reason. In doing so, Campion presents James as absorbing within his own sexualized version of politics and state power that of his famous predecessor. That is, Campion skilfully brings perpetual virginity within the sphere of James's erotic politics, thereby emphasizing both the political and the moral necessity of marriage as well as the pervasive influence of

the particular configuration of state power which James has adopted. Thus, utilizing references to Elizabeth I and her virginity, Campion does not simply participate in a growing nostalgia for the reign of the Virgin Queen; he also presents James (through the actions of Phoebus Apollo) as rewriting the definition and boundaries of virginity, from that which represents and legitimates exceptional female power to that which serves James's vision of the patriarchal state.

*The Lord Hay's Masque* begins this rewriting of virginity by praising the institution of marriage, linking it with the fertility of spring as Flora's offering of flowers becomes "the ceremonious ornament / Of maiden mariage, Beautie figuring, / And blooming youth" (L, 216). Zephyrus quickly takes up Flora's subsequent statement that just as her flowers are eternal, so the joys of the wedding night will last throughout the couple's marriage, early emphasizing the distinction between Denny's virginity and that of Cynthia/Elizabeth: "For ever endles may this nights joy prove, / So eccoes Zephyrus the friend of love" (L, 216); he concludes with this "Bridall prophecie," that "Faithful and fruitfull shall these Bedmates prove, / Blest in their fortunes, honoured in their love" (L, 216). This first song, in its allusions to the "Roses white, and Roses red" which "must still be mingled" refers to the union of this young couple, since "Red and white roses are the conventional attributes of Venus, goddess of love and marriage, and therefore 'with Bridalls well agree.'" The union of these flowers "alludes [as well] to the union of the houses of York and Lancaster, a union "which was seen and used as a precedent and preparation for James's greater project" of Anglo-Scottish union.<sup>23</sup> From the beginning of the masque, then, virginity is defined as transitional, as a state to be passed through on the way to personal, sexual, and political union.

However, the "mariage song" which the Silvans then offer at Flora's request demonstrates how ineradicably problematic and fractured is even the most conservative virginal body in the early modern wedding masque, and how difficult it is to produce unequivocal images of Jacobean union with such a body at its centre. This song, "in forme of a Dialogue," debates again the benefits of perpetual virginity versus those of married life, where the Tenor offers an argument similar to that of Jonson's Opinion, that "A maide is free, a wife is tyed" (L, 217), whereas the Cantor and Bass affirm that "None such true freendes, none so sweet a life, / As that betweene the man and wife" (L, 217). However, that the Cantor initially begins the dialogue-song by asking "Who is happier of the two, / A maide, or

wife?" indicates that here, as in *Hymenaei*, the potentiality of the virginal body contains as much threat as expectation. Indeed, the song introduces the next major action of the masque, the anger of Cynthia, "The Moone and Queene of Virginitie" (L, 217) according to Campion's marginal glosses, at the theft of the bride from amongst her virgin train, Night's account of her transformation of Phoebus's knights into trees, and finally Cynthia's pacification and the release of the charmed men. The central action of the masque, then, defines perpetual virginity as a powerful threat to the attainment of personal and political union. Night's complaint that the bride has been stolen from Cynthia's train is met with Zephyrus's assertion that the goddess "doth of too much store complain" (L, 218); indeed, if it were up to Zephyrus, Cynthia's dangerous virginal power would be severely curbed: "If all her Nymphes would aske advise of me, / There should be fewer virgins then there be. / Nature ordaind not Men to live alone; / Where there are two, a Woman should be one" (L, 218).

This threat is immediately defused through the intervention of James I in the person of Phoebus, as Hesperus descends to proclaim that Cynthia is now content that "her Nymph is made a Bride, / Since the faire match was by that Phoebus grac't" (L, 219); James's power alone can complete the rewriting of perpetual virginity as that culturally-useful notion, transitional virginity; his power alone can lead Cynthia/Elizabeth to a willing and peaceful support of transitional virginity and marriage. Part of this defusing of the threat which Cynthia and her championing of virginity pose to marital union and the political unions it figures forth is achieved by pointing to the disruption which perpetual virginity introduces into this masque of union. This intervention, then, symbolizes the victory of James's vision of state power over that of his predecessor. In many ways, the release of the knights from their arboreal transformation is a means of eradicating that "inconvenient signifier" of Elizabeth's perpetual virginity and replacing it with the more ideologically-amenable virtue of chastity, a virtue which does not suggest the preclusion of marriage and the exercise of marital sexuality.<sup>24</sup> Upon their release, Night instructs the knights of Phoebus in the amends which they must make to Cynthia: "First, ere you any more worke undertake, / About her tree solemne procession make, / Dian's tree, the tree of Chastitie." There they must offer up the "greene leaved robes, wherein disguisde [they] made / Stelths to her Nymphes through the thicke forrests shade." Each are then described as bowing low and offering their "false robe[s]" at the foot of "the tree



of Chastitie" (L, 224). The instantiation of the virtue of chastity and the discursive eradication of perpetual virginity continue in the song to which the procession is set, where "with spotles mindes now mount [they] to the tree / Of single chastitie." While the knights acknowledge that, as Cynthia's tree, this water which feeds "the sober branches" still leaves them "fruitlesse," (another reminder of perpetual virginity's physical and spiritual sterility), yet this tree's transformation from symbol of perpetual virginity to that of transitional virginity and married chastity is testified to by the way the water of temperance produces "comely leaves" which "beautifie the tree" (L, 225); that is, it produces ironically enough the very "greene leaved robes" which have allowed the Knights to penetrate Cynthia's virgin forest and tempt the members of her "virgin train." Symbolically, chastity itself produces the means by which its destruction is invited. Campion emphasizes virginity's transformation from a perpetual to a transitional state through the final song, where Hesperus reminds the gathered company that the time of the wedding night fast approaches and that he "must now make way / To Hymens rights, much wrong'd by [his] delay" (L, 225). Indeed, the final songs emphasize again the newly-married couple's mutual desire for the setting of Hesperus, the western star, since it signals the coming of night and the withdrawal to the marriage chamber; as the Chorus notes: "Hesperus, since you all starres excell / In Bridall kindnes, kindly farewell, farewell" (L, 226).

Clearly, both Ben Jonson's *Hymenaei* and Thomas Campion's *The Lord Hay's Masque* demonstrate the continuing political significance of the virginal body after the death of Elizabeth. The different problems which the virginal body poses for Jonson's as opposed to Campion's masque, however, emerge not just from the period's conflicting notions about this body's physiological, physical and erotic meanings, but from the necessity of reconfiguring this symbol of Elizabethan political power as one which will serve James's patriarchal and familial version of the early modern state. While Campion in particular succeeds in his rewriting of the virginal body in the name of the Stuart state, the anxieties and uncertainties which haunt *Hymenaei* perhaps speak more forcefully to James's own preoccupation with the wedding nights of his favourites. Lawrence Stone views James's tendency to visit a favourite young couple the morning after their wedding as springing from the desire "to extract the last salacious details of the events of the night," yet the preceding discussion suggests that his questions perhaps are less the result of

licentiousness than of anxiety.<sup>25</sup> His examinations of the Earl of Nottingham and his son-in-law, the Prince Palatine, in particular, concentrate on interrogating the moment of defloration, that moment when the virgin daughter becomes the chaste wife, when James's configuration of the patriarchal state and his various political projects are materialized in the virginal blood of the marriage bed.

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#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Jonson, *Hymenaei*, in *Ben Jonson: Selected Masques*, ed. Stephen Orgel (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1970), line 48; hereafter all references to this masque are cited parenthetically in the text by line and abbreviated *H*.

<sup>2</sup> Studies which address the problematics of masque occasion include Leah Marcus, "Present Occasions and the Shaping of Ben Jonson's Masques," *ELH* 45 (1978): 201–25, and "Masquing Occasions and Masque Structure," *Research Opportunities in Renaissance Drama* 24 (1981): 7–16; David Lindley, "Embarrassing Ben: The Masques for Frances Howard," *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1986): 343–59, and *The Trials of Frances Howard: Fact and Fiction at the Court of King James* (London: Routledge, 1993); David Norbrook, "'The Masque of Truth': Court Entertainments and International Protestant Politics in the Early Stuart Period," *The Seventeenth Century* 2 (1986): 81–110; Martin Butler, "Politics and the Masque: *Salmacida Spolia*," in *Literature and the English Civil War*, ed. T. Healy and J. Sawday (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1990), 59–74, and Martin Butler and David Lindley, "Restoring Astraea: Jonson's Masque for the Fall of Somerset," *ELH* 61 (1994): 807–27.

<sup>3</sup> Lindley, *The Trials of Frances Howard*, 23.

<sup>4</sup> On the relationship between Renaissance humoral theory and conception/reproduction, see Hilda Smith, "Gynecology and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England," in *Liberating Women's History: Theoretical and Critical Essays*, ed. B. A. Carroll (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1976), 97–114; and Audrey Eccles, *Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 26–42. For a concise summary of the Aristotelian and Galenic theories upon which Renaissance notions of female physiology rested, see Nancy Tuana, *The Less Noble Sex: Scientific, Religious, and Philosophical Conceptions of Woman's Nature* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1993), 18–34. For a more wide-ranging discussion of female physiology in Roman, Greek and early Christian texts, see Aline Rouselle, *Porneia: On Desire and the Body in Antiquity*, trans. Felicia Pheasant (Cambridge, UK: Blackwell, 1993), esp. 24–46 and 63–77.

<sup>5</sup> This reproach is a common feature of wedding masques and can be observed in Jonson's *The Haddington Masque*, Beaumont's *Inner Temple and Gray's Inn Masque*, Campion's *The Lords' Masque* and *The Somerset Masque*.

<sup>6</sup> See my *Hymeneutics: Interpreting Virginity on the Early Modern Stage* (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, forthcoming).

<sup>7</sup> For chlorosis, see Johannes Lange, "Epistola XXI: de morbo virgineo," in *Classic Descriptions of Disease*, ed. Ralph H. Major (Springfield, IL: Charles Thomas, 1932), 487–89.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Sudell, *Mulierum amicus* (London: J. Hancock, 1666), 10. For other examples of this extremely common diagnosis for womb-fury, chlorosis and other hysterical diseases, see Nicholas Culpeper, *A directory for midwives* (London: Peter Cole, 1656); John Johnston, *Idea of practical physick*, trans. Nicholas Culpeper and W. R. (London: Peter Cole, 1657); N. Fontanus, *The womans doctour, an exact and distinct explanation of all such diseases as are peculiar and distinct to that sex* (London: John Blague and Samuel Howes, 1652); Lazarus Riverius, *The practice of physick* (London: John Streater, 1668); and J. Pechey, *A generall treatise of the diseases of maids, big-bellied women, child-bed women, and widows* (London: Henry Bonwick, 1696). For modern examinations of these diseases in their seventeenth-century contexts, see in addition to Eccles and Smith, *The Rt. Hon. Lord Brain*, "The concept of hysteria in the time of William Harvey," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 56 (1963): 317–24; Robert P. Hudson, "The Biography of Disease: Lessons from Chlorosis," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 51 (1977): 448–63; and Mark S. Micale *Approaching Hysteria: Disease and Its Interpretations* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1995).

<sup>9</sup> *Aristotles master-piece, Or, the Secrets of Generation displayed in all the parts thereof* (London: J. How, 1684), 34.

<sup>10</sup> Riverius, *The practice of physick*, 417.

<sup>11</sup> Philip Barrough, *The methode of physicke* (London, 1583), cited in Eccles., 79.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Eccles., 79.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in Antonia Fraser, *The Weaker Vessel: Woman's Lot in Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Methuen, 1985), 161.

<sup>14</sup> On this particular treatment of *Hymenaei*, see in addition to Lindley, "Embarassing," and "Trials," D. J. Gordon, "Hymenaei: Ben Jonson's Masque of Union," in *The Renaissance Imagination*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1975), 157–84, and Jonathan Goldberg, "Fatherly Authority: The Politics of Stuart Family Images," in *Rewriting the Renaissance: The Discourses of Sexual Difference in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Margaret W. Ferguson, Maureen Quilligan, and Nancy J. Vickers (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1986), 29–30.

<sup>15</sup> On the conventional distinction made between the legal age at which one could be married and the socially-acceptable age at which one could consummate a marriage, see Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967), 652–60; D'Orsay W. Pearson, "Renaissance Adolescent Marriage: Another Look at Hymen," *Cithara* 23.1 (1983): 17–27, and Ann Jennalie Cook, *Making a Match: Courtship in Shakespeare and his Society* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1991), 17–38.

<sup>16</sup> David Lindley, "Who Paid for Campion's 'Lord Hay's Masque'?", *Notes and Queries* 224 (1979), 144.

<sup>17</sup> Goldberg, 3–32.

<sup>18</sup> Campion, *The Lord Hay's Masque*, in *The Works of Thomas Campion*, ed. Walter R. Davis (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), 208. All translations of the dedicatory poems are Walter R. Davis's. Hereafter cited parenthetically in the text by page and abbreviated *L*.

<sup>19</sup> Goldberg, 4.

<sup>20</sup> See James's use of patriarchal and erotic metaphors in the *Speech of 1603*, where he argues for the Anglo-Scottish Union partly on the basis that keeping the nations separate results in a morally- and spiritually-perverse relationship between king and nation: "I am the Husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawfull Wife; I am

the Head, and it is my Body . . . I hope therefore no man will be so unreasonable as to thinke that I that am a Christian King under the Gospel, should be a Polygamist and husband to two wives; that I being the Head, should have a divided and monstrous Body" (*The Political Works of James I*, ed. Charles Howard McIlwain [New York: Russell & Russell, 1965], 272).

<sup>21</sup> On the growing nostalgia for the figure of Elizabeth I during the reign of her successor, see David Lindley, *Thomas Campion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 183–90; Gordon McMullan, *The Politics of Unease in the Plays of John Fletcher* (Amherst: Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 185–86, 192–96, and Martin Butler and David Lindley, "Restoring Astraea," 819–25. However, Theodora A. Jankowski's *Women in Power in the Early Modern Drama* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1992), 189–206, points out that this nostalgia is frequently qualified by the period's general fear of female sovereignty.

<sup>22</sup> Lindley, *Thomas Campion*, 185, 189, and 182–83.

<sup>23</sup> Lindley, *Thomas Campion*, 180.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce Boehrer, "'Carelesse Modestie': Chastity as Politics in Book 3 of *The Faerie Queene*," *English Literary History* 55 (1988), 557.

<sup>25</sup> Stone, 652.