CHAPTER 8

Chastity, Speech, and the Girl Masquer

Deanne Williams

Milton's *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634) is a domestic event, "very much a family affair," as Stephen Orgel puts it, staged by a teacher to showcase his students' abilities and accomplishments for the benefit of their parents.[1] The fifteen-year-old Alice Egerton plays the leading role of the Lady, delivering substantial philosophical speeches in her debate with her would-be seducer, Comus, and performing musically challenging songs composed by her music teacher, Henry Lawes. Milton's *Masque* has been long recognized as a key, early example of women's performance, a private, domestic production that anticipates the arrival of the Restoration actress on the public stage a generation later.[2] The *Masque* mounts a strenuous defense of chastity, and its relentless focus on the subject has prompted scholars to turn to events such as the Castlehaven Scandal, which involved rape and sodomy, to explain the masque's preoccupation as a kind of ritualized housecleaning and an attempt to restore the family's reputation.[3] Others situate the *Masque* within Milton's evolving Puritan and Protestant consciousness: its preoccupation with chastity reflecting the author's political and spiritual struggle with this highly theatricalized genre, a pastime of aristocrats and royalty, and with his larger ideological and philosophical concerns about articulating an emerging Protestant ethics or "episteme."[4]

In this chapter, I locate Milton's *Masque*, otherwise known as *Comus*, within a tradition of girls' performance in England that goes back to the Middle Ages. From medieval religious drama through Tudor civic pageantry and Elizabeth and Jacobean courtly and private entertainments, girls participated in dramatic performances in ways that constantly turned to and engaged with the question of chastity. Situated within this tradition, the *Masque*'s thematic obsession with chastity looks neither novel nor anomalous; rather, it makes a contribution to a discussion raised by the presence of the performing girl. This issue was dramatized and explored in

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the different dramatic performances in which girls participated, long before Henrietta Maria used the court masque to enshrine her own neo-Platonic cult of Caroline chastity.[5] The history of girl performers on early English stages suggests, as well, that Milton's *Masque* is not the first and not even a particularly early example of girls' dramatic speech. Current scholarly discussions of women's participation in court masques have sought to locate the earliest examples of women speaking and singing onstage.[6] As I demonstrate here, girls can be found in most forms of early modern performance that took place outside the public stage, which officially barred female performers, while their frequent participation as speakers complicates any attempt to locate a watershed moment of female first-ness. *Comus*, then, may be understood not so much as a new beginning, but instead as the culmination of a longstanding tradition of girls' performance that came to an end with the Civil Wars, and returned after the Restoration in a profoundly altered form.

It is well known that the Egerton children were active participants in masques: Alice Egerton and her sister Katherine appeared, two years before the *Masque*, in Aurelian Townshend's *Tempe Restored* (1632), and her brothers, John and Thomas, appeared as torchbearers in Thomas Carew's *Coelum Brittanicum* (1634).[7] Certainly, Lady Alice's virtuoso performance of dramatic speech and song in Milton's *Masque* constitutes a breakthrough in terms of the substance and complexity of her speeches and the vocal skill required by her songs, not to mention the work is a major poetic landmark for Milton at an early stage in his career. But it also serves as a codification of and reflection upon the longstanding tradition of the performing girl. Girls, which I define here as female children, including unmarried teenagers, not only provide significant early examples of female dramatic speech, but they also constitute their own, distinctive performance tradition.[8] More than a watershed moment in the history of women's performance or, as Blaine Greteman has recently argued, a figure for childhood, navigating "the uneasy transition from childhood to adult responsibility as the locus of tremendous creative and spiritual power," Milton's Lady embodies the tradition of the girl masquer.[9]

The history of the girl performer begins with the singers and actresses of the ancient world: the *partheneia* of Ancient Greece, for example, were sacred wedding songs sung by maiden performers, while the *hetairae* were a class of highly educated courtesans.[10] This dichotomy between sexual purity and sexual license extends to the Middle Ages, where, on the one hand, the dramatic writings of the learned tenth-century abbess,

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Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim, depict the "laudable chastity of Christian virgins," while, on the other, Herrad of Landsburg, abbess of Hohenburg Abbey, complains about the "shameless wenches" that disrupted the decorum of liturgical drama in her twelfth-century *Hortus Deliciarum*.[11] In the religious drama of medieval France, girls performed parts identified with chastity and virginity, such as the Virgin Mary, whose story in the Middle Ages included her precocious instruction of the Temple Elders and who is often represented with a book in her hand, either with her mother, Saint Anne, or at the Annunciation. Another popular part for girls was St. Catherine of Alexandria, a virgin martyr also known for her learning, who was tortured on a wheel.[12] Young girls were specifically sought after for particular roles: Philippe de Mézières's "Presentation of Mary in the Temple" at Avignon in 1372 called for a "young and beautiful girl (*virgo*) about three or four years old" to play the young Virgin Mary, and required two other pretty little girls dressed in white as her attendants to show their innocence.[13] A significantly expanded version of the play later required fifteen little girls. Some girls became known for their acting skills: in Metz, France, in 1468, the teenaged daughter of a glazier performed the meaty role of St. Catherine, speaking "so spiritedly and piteously that she prompted many people to weep."[14] Her performance secured an advantageous marriage.

In England, as John Marshall asserts, girls were also not "excluded from the pleasures of medieval theatre."[15] The Digby Candlemas play *The Killing of the Children* included *virgins* – "as many as a man will" – who sang and danced, holding "tapers in ther hands."[16] The manuscript for this play also contains the now-canonical and deeply girl-oriented *Play of Mary Magdalene*, which focuses on the young woman's temptation, sin, and eventual redemption and sainthood.[17] And although we have no evidence of the N-Town Plays' actual performance, they record a substantial girl's part in the play "The Girlhood of the Virgin Mary," which dwells on her prodigious learning and entrance into the Temple.[18] There is also ample evidence of plays about virgin martyrs, including St. Catherine of Alexandria (London, 1393 and Coventry, 1491); St. Clara, founder of the monastic order of St. Clare (Lincoln, 1447–8 and 1455–6); St. Feliciana and St. Sabina (Shrewsbury, 1516); and St. Christina (Kent, 1522).[19] The Drapers Company records a payment to "Gleyns daughter for thassumpcion & Child(es) eldest daughter for Saynt Ursula and the vj virgens" for the London Lord Mayor's Pageant in 1523, and it is possible that these plays required even more girls to play angels carrying the Virgin up to heaven, and the 11,000 virgin handmaidens of St. Ursula.[20]

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Fusing the traditions of religious drama with civic pageantry, Catherine of Aragon was greeted, upon her arrival in London in 1501, by "a faire yong lady w^t a whele in hir hand, in liknes of Seint Kathryn, w^t right many virgins on eu(e)ry side of her; and . . . another lady in likenes of Seint Ursula, w^t her great multitude of virgyns right goodly dressed and arrayed"[21] And Anne Boleyn's coronation featured numerous maidens, including the Virgin Mary, and the daughters of St. Anne: all images of learned and virtuous girlhood intended to symbolize (with painful retrospective irony) the pregnant Anne's chaste and fruitful union with Henry.[22]

The opportunities for girls to play saints, virgin martyrs, and the Virgin Mary evaporated with the suppression of religious drama during the Reformation. During the early Tudor period, girls' parts shifted from saints and virgins to classical nymphs and naiads, pastoral shepherdesses, and personifications of classical virtues. Thus, in the 1556 Norwich Mayor's Pageant, "fower younge maydes Richelie apparelled" delivered substantial speeches as the four cardinal virtues, Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude, emphasizing their power and centrality to good government. As Prudence puts it, "all things work by my advice."[23] Listed among the "children in the pageant," four nymphs, "gorgeously appareled," delivered speeches in George Peele's 1585 London Lord Mayor's Pageant. The River Thames, a "sweete and dainty nymph," asserts both her beauty and her utility: "with silver glide my pleasant streames do runne, / where leaping fishes play betwixt the shores / This gracious good hath God and kinde begun, / for Londons use with help of sailes and ores."[24] These speaking parts for young girls in Tudor civic pageants, along with their counterparts in medieval religious drama, challenge the impression that there were centuries of silence before some transformative "first" time took place for female dramatic speech in England. They suggest, instead, that girls and young women were speaking dramatically, or quasi-dramatically, long before the admission of professional women singers to the court masque or the advent of the professional female actress in the Restoration period.

Parts for girls, as saints and virgins, and nymphs and goddesses, in medieval and early modern religious drama and civic pageantry also consistently use the girl performer to represent virginal virtue. Two key examples of girls' performance from the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, the 1592 *Entertainment for Queen Elizabeth at Bisham* and Robert White's 1618 masque, *Cupid's Banishment*, tackle the theme of chastity directly: not so much constructing it as a religious or symbolic value in relationship to devotional or civic performance, but instead addressing it as a theme worthy

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of exploration on its own terms, and affiliating it closely with the virtues of humanist education. Scholarship on these texts has set out their relationship to the traditions of women's performance: Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson assert that the *Bisham Entertainment* is "the first occasion on which English noblewomen took speaking roles in a quasi-dramatic entertainment," and Alexandra F. Johnston advocates for the recognition of Lady Russell as its author.[25] *Cupid's Banishment* has similarly been hailed for transforming the court masque by including "both female speech and song;" Clare McManus explains how *Cupid's Banishment* broke new ground for the court masque and describes it as an "all round assault on the constraints of female silence" that plague the Jacobean traditions of female masquing, while, for Sophie Tomlinson, the masque serves as a "vehicle of advocacy for women."[26] Scholarship has not, however, emphasized the fact that both the *Bisham Entertainment* and *Cupid's Banishment* were performed by girls: Elizabeth and Anne Russell were aged eighteen and sixteen, and *Cupid's Banishment* was performed by schoolgirls. Even as they contribute to an evolving acceptance of adult women as performers, these masques also participate in a longstanding tradition of girls' performance.

In the 1592 *Entertainment for Queen Elizabeth*, Elizabeth and Anne Russell, aged eighteen and sixteen, respectively, played the virgin shepherdesses, Isabella and Sybilla.[27] Written and "devised" by their mother, Lady Elizabeth Russell, the entertainment depicts the girls, represented as "keeping sheep, and sowing in their samplers," fending off the advances of Pan, "an eie-sore for chast nymphs" (Sig. A. ii. v), Isabella and Sybilla regard Pan with suspicion, as he professes love, and offers humble gifts such as chestnuts, and they dismiss him as a rube: "fitter to draw in a Harvest wayne, then talk of love to chaste Virgins" (Sig. A. iii. r). Anticipating the narrative trajectory of Milton's *Comus*, Pan signals his eventual submission to the shepherdesses by breaking his pipe, "which Apollo could never make me doe" (Sig. A. iiii. r) and leading them to their mother, representing the mother-goddess Ceres, flanked by nymphs, who welcomes them with a speech and a song.

The *Entertainment* hinges on the tension between unruly male desire, which is personified by Pan and the reformed "Wild Man" who introduces the scene, and the chaste shepherdesses, who rebuff Pan sharply: "as he hath two shapes," they sniff, referring to his status as half-human and half-goat, "so hath he two harts, the one of a man wherewith his tongue is tipped, dissembling; the other of a beast wherewith his thoughts are poisoned, lust" (Sig. A. iii. r). Men are constructed, throughout, as devious

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and sexually promiscuous – "Men must have as manie loves, as they have hartstrings, and studie to make an Alphabet of mistresses, from A to Y" – while women are represented as virtuous and honest – "weomens tongues are made of the same flesh that their harts are, and speake as they thinke."

In his efforts to court the shepherdesses, Pan calls attention to their potential as poets, demanding, "How doe you burne time, & drowne beauty, in pricking of clouts, when you should bee penning of Sonnets?" (Sig. A. ii. v). Here, the *Entertainment* sets up sonneteering as a dubious courtly pastime, in contrast to the wholesome needlepoint of the virginal shepherdess, which symbolizes the kind of single-sex solidarity in which Elizabeth liked to see herself reflected. The primary skill by which Renaissance women identified and expressed themselves, needlepoint is the major occupation of Elizabeth's maids of honor: calling attention to her daughters' proficiency in needlepoint thus forms part of Lady Russell's crafty plan to secure for them a place in Elizabeth's court.[28] The girls' embroidery also forms, in effect, a masque-within-a-masque. Depicting "the honor of Virgins who become Goddesses, for their chastity" (Sig. A. iii. r) as well as "the follies of the Gods, who become beasts, for their passions," these embroidered images reinforce the ideals of the pastoral and of classical virginity attached to Elizabeth's court, as well as the opposition between male and female spheres.[29]

But Pan's question about penning sonnets also alludes to the girls' famously literary family. Their grandfather Anthony Cooke had been a tutor of Edward VI, and he was known for his devotion to the classical education of his five daughters.[30] Cooke's epitaph reads "Quinque sciunt natae conjugere Graeca Latinis, / Insignes Claris moribus atque piis." [Five daughters know how to put together Greek with Latin / Famous for their excellent virtue and piety]. Lady Russell composed verses in Greek and Latin, and she translated John Ponet's *Diallacticon Viri Boni Et Literati, de Veritate*, an account of the Eucharist written by a bishop exiled by Mary I.[31] Her first husband was Sir Thomas Hoby, the first translator of Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* into English. Henry Lok's sonnet, "To The Honourable Gentlewomen, Mistress Elizabeth and Anne Russels" praised their learning: "While beautie shineth in the modest face/ And learning in your mindes with vertue rare" (Sig. Y. iv. R).[32] In this context, then, Pan's question constitutes a cheeky reminder of the fact that the girls and their mother, their royal audience, and any number of other court ladies were, in fact, fully capable of penning sonnets. And Lady Russell, as Ceres, highlights her authorial role toward the end of the entertainment: "everyone doth read my story" (Sig. A. iv. r).

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Even as the *Entertainment* calls attention to gendered modes of Elizabethan cultural production, valorizing needlework and demarcating a feminine sphere distinct from unruly masculinity, its learned references couch it firmly within the classical humanist tradition. The Wild Man describes himself as honoring Sylvanus, the protector of forests who appears in the works of Horace, Ovid, and Virgil. He also refers to "passionate Echo," who identifies the entertainment's royal audience when he repeats the final word of the Wild Man's question, "who passed that way, what he or shee," designated with the capital letter: "Shee." Beloved by Jove and in love with Narcissus, Echo appears in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and in Milton's *Masque* the Lady sings an "Echo Song," a popular musical form in the Renaissance. With references to Baucis and Philemon, and Apollo, the *Entertainment* reflects an easy familiarity with classical material, signaling its performers' participation in the literary material of classical humanism. The *Entertainment at Bisham* also shares the humanist predilection for epigrammatic wisdom:

PAN: For oft I have hearde, that two Pigeons may bee caught with one beane. . . .
ISAB: And all fools with one faire worde

Couching the shepherdesses' containment of the brutality of the Wild Man and the erotic subversions of Pan in the moral terms related to the cultivation of virtue favored by humanism, the *Entertainment* gives a female face, and voice, to humanism's satirical approach to human folly.

The *Entertainment*'s atmosphere of chaste learning extends, of course, to its royal audience: Sybilla's praise for "the Queene of this Island" recalls Queen Elizabeth's reputation for learning: "in whom wit hath bred learning, but not without labour; labour brought forth wisedome, but not without wonder" (Sig. A. iii. v). As the shepherdesses show their sampler to Pan, he inquires about certain details in their depiction of men's foibles:

PAN. But what be these?
SYB. Mens tongues, wrought all with double stitch, but not one true.
PAN. What these?
SYB. Roses, Eglentine, harts-ease, wrought with Queenes stitch, and all right.
(Sig. A. iii. r)

As a girl, Elizabeth herself embroidered the cover of her English translation of Marguerite de Navarre's *Miroir de l'ame pêcheresse*, a gift for her stepmother, Katherine Parr, with precisely these stitches. Evoking the textile and textual accomplishments of the young Elizabeth, Lady Russell dramatizes the attitudes to learning and forms of knowledge considered

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appropriate for girls. Setting up Bisham as a space of pastoral retreat from the performative pressures of the court where Elizabeth can relax in the company of other women as she pursues textual and textile skills acquired as a girl, Lady Russell's *Bisham Entertainment* celebrates a famously chaste queen while, at the same time, reinforcing the chastity of the girl performer.

The ambitious and creative Lady Russell had a history with girl masquers. She was close to the Elizabethan diplomat Henry Unton: her nephew, Edward Hoby, married Henry's sister Cecily and described his relationship with Lady Russell "as respective as of my own mother."[33] Unton's 1587 memorial portrait, described here by Roy Strong, includes girls dancing in a masque:

> The glittering procession is headed by Diana, Goddess of the moon and the chase, wearing a crescent moon in her headdress and clasping a bow and arrow . . . Behind her walks a train of six maidens in pairs carrying bows and garlands, their heads crowned with flowers, wearing grey-green robes and white skirts patterned with red flowers. (104–5)

Elizabeth's shepherdesses chatter wittily and sew, but Diana's maidens here paint their picture of chastity through physical action: from their stately and controlled movements, we can just about gauge the beat of the music played by the broken consort (Figure 8.1a). The girl masquers contribute to the portrait's emphasis on Henry Unton's bonds with women. Unton's wife, Dorothy Wroughton, appears prominently in the wedding scene, seated at the head of the table. And the infant Henry is depicted nursing: Strong observes how Lady Anne Seymour's sheer size dominates the portrait.[34] As a girl, Unton's mother, Lady Anne Seymour, Countess of Warwick, had, together with her younger sisters, composed the influential *Hecatodistichon*.[35] This sequence of 104 distiches, or couplets, about Marguerite de Navarre was published in Paris by their tutor, Nicolas Denisot. It moved Ronsard, Du Bellay, and other French poets to produce their own memorial verses about this iconic author.

Married at thirteen, Lady Elizabeth Russell's daughter-in-law Lucy danced in many of the great Jonsonian masques through her twenties and early thirties (Figure 8.2).[36] As Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, she was one of the great literary patrons of her age. Michael Drayton dedicated his *Matilda* (1594) to her in the year of her marriage, and he went on to dedicate many more works to her, including *Endimion and Phoebe* (1595), *Mortimeriados* (1596), and *Englands Heroicall Epistles* (1597), all while she was still a teenager (if a married one). John Florio praised the eighteen-year-old Lucy's ability in languages, specifically Italian, French,

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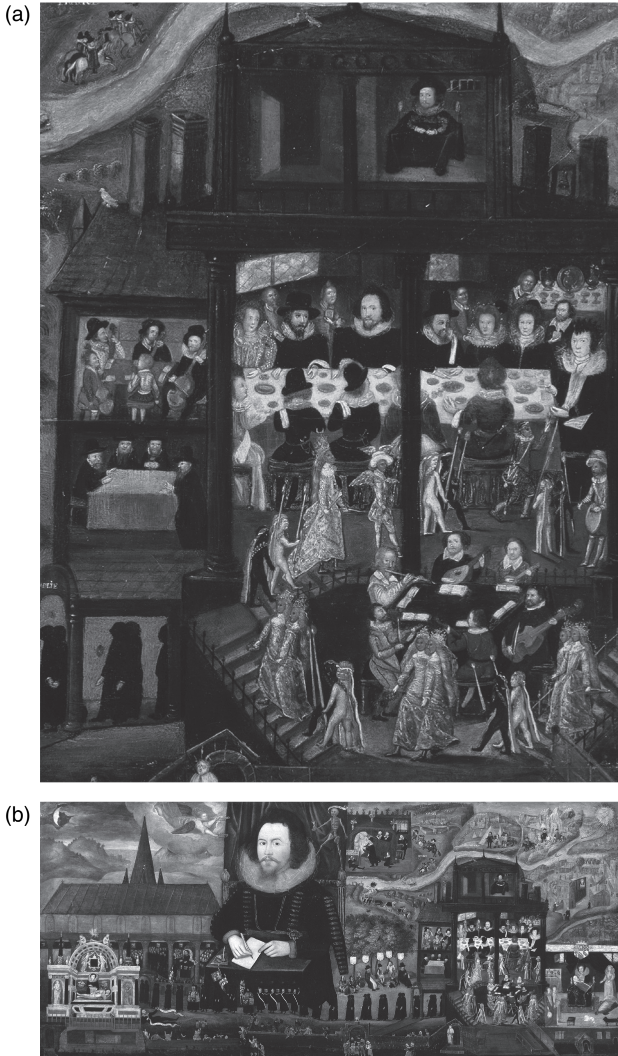

Figure 8.1 Henry Unton Portrait, circa 1596. © National Portrait Gallery, London. (a) is a detail of (b).

and Spanish, when he dedicated his English-Italian dictionary *A Worlde of Wordes* (1598) to her. Calling her "LUCY the bright," Ben Jonson dedicated *Cynthia's Revels* (1600) to her when she was just twenty. Samuel Daniel dedicated his *Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (1604) to Lucy, in gratitude for recommending him to Anne of Denmark: she appeared in this masque as the virgin goddess Vesta.

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Figure 8.2 John de Critz, Lucy Harington, Countess of Bedford. 1606. Private Collection. The Marquess of Tavistock and the Trustees of the Bedford Estate.

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A close confidante of Queen Anne, Lucy Russell was the driving force behind Robert White's *Cupid's Banishment* (1617), an entertainment for Queen Anne performed by students at one of the first English girls' schools, the Ladies Hall at Deptford. In his dedication, Robert White, who was probably the master of Ladies Hall, thanks Lucy for her "honorable furtherance and noble encouragement" and describes the masque as "the fruits which your honour first sowed."[37] *Cupid's Banishment* has earned an important place in the history of women's performance, as scholars emphasize its status as an "innovation," breaking from the "norm of female silence," and producing an "unprecedented moment of female speech."[38] Yet it also contributes to this ongoing tradition of girls' performance, and calls attention to the distinctive character and contributions of its girl masquers. Played by professional boy actors, the goddesses Diana and Hymen and a figure called "Occasion" attempt to banish Cupid and other "disturbers" such as Bacchus. But it is the nymphs and dryads, performed by the schoolgirls, that win the day by placing Actaeon's head on Cupid. They then chase him away and subdue all the Bacchanalians, including drunken fiddlers and tinkers, before they ultimately do honor to their queen, Anne. One "Anne Watkins," one of the Deptford schoolgirls, delivers a little speech as the goddess Fortuna, promising to "create / some unexpected joy to crown thy hours" (Figure 8.3). As nymphs, eight other schoolgirls sing a song, and two more, both named after Queen Anne, present the queen with their needlework at the end of the masque.[39]

Like the *Bisham Entertainment, Cupid's Banishment* reflects the priorities of girls' education: whereas the *Bisham Entertainment* is the product of generations of privately-educated women, *Cupid's Banishment* takes place within an institutional context. The Deptford Ladies Hall was one of the first girls' schools to emerge in the seventeenth century among what Peter Clark calls the "smart private academies in the metropolitan suburbs," and it was, in Enid Welsford's words, "a kind of finishing school for aristocratic girls."[40] It was located close to Anne's favorite royal palace in Greenwich, which is where the masque was performed and where the Queen was in the process of building her own palace, The Queen's House, designed by Inigo Jones. The masquers were daughters of members of Jacobean élite such as Sir Thomas Chalenor, Prince Henry's tutor; Sir James Sandilands, a Scottish lord; and David Watkins, Controller of the Works at Windsor Castle. In *Women in the Renaissance Stage*, McManus very rightly describes the masque as "pivotally positioned between the home-based education of the daughters of the Tudor elite in high humanistic learning and the later dame schools which educated the daughters of the citizenry in the dance,

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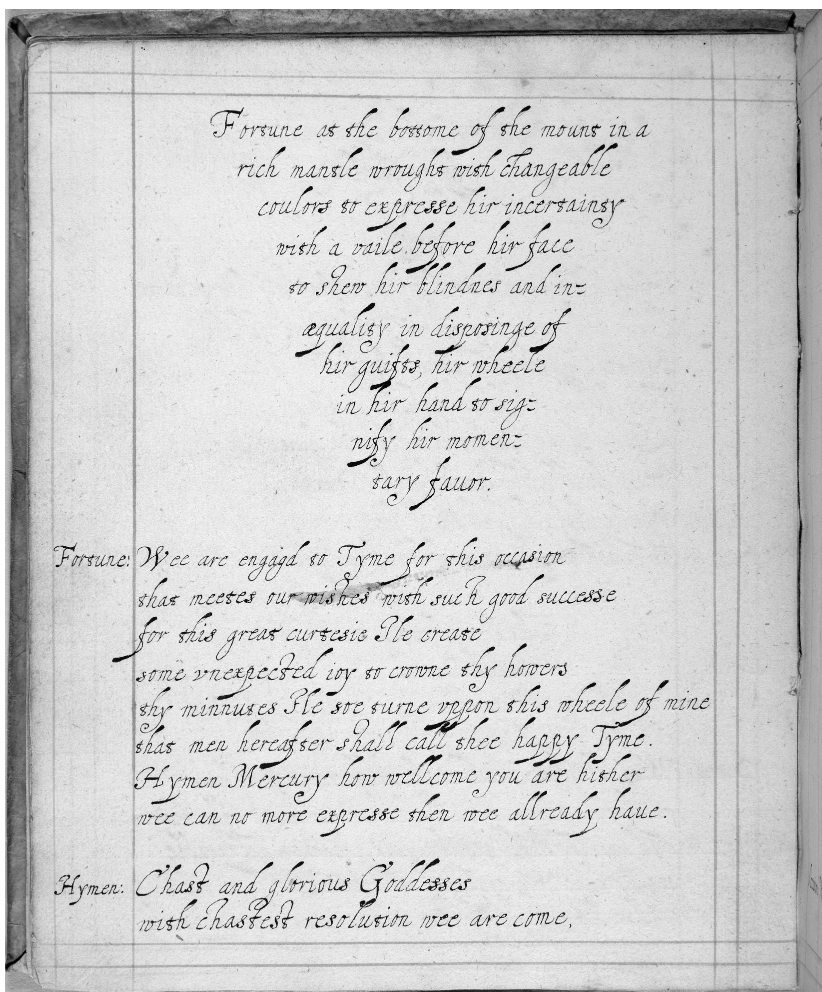

Fortune at the bottome of the mount in a
rich mantle wrought with changeable
coulors to expresse hir incertainty
with a vaile before hir face
to shew hir blindnes and in=
æquality in disposinge of
hir guifts, hir wheele
in hir hand to sig=
nify hir momen=
tary fauor.

Fortune: Wee are engag'd to Tyme for this occasion
that meetes our wishes with such good successe
for this great curtesie Ile create
some vnexpected ioy to crowne thy howers
thy minnutes Ile soe turne vppon this wheele of mine
that men hereafter shall call thee happy Tyme.
Hymen Mercury how wellcome you are hither
wee can no more expresse then wee allready haue.

Hymen: Chast and glorious Goddesses
with chastest resolution wee are come,

Figure 8.3 Robert White, *Cupid's Banishment*. Pierpont Morgan MS MA 1296. Purchased by Pierpont Morgan before 1913.

needlework, and etiquette" (184). And, as C. E. McGee points out, *Cupid's Banishment* is a much more elaborate production than the typical school revels: involving professional actors and musicians, it was a higher class of event.[41]

The masque is also unusual, as Welsford points out, in that the masquers are "revealed at the beginning of the proceedings, and remained in full view

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of the audience until the end of the masque" (197). This may indicate the kind of impulse for inclusiveness found in school performances today, which are orchestrated to maximize a child's time onstage, in costume, to the great enjoyment of their parents. The manuscript of *Cupid's Banishment* also lists the names of the girl masquers, with "Mistress Anne Watkins acted Fortune" at the very top of the list, demonstrating the priority that the masque gives its girl speaker.[42] Earlier masques record the presence of girl participants, but they do not name them. For example, Samuel Daniel's *Tethys' Festival* (1610), in which the thirteen-year-old Elizabeth Stuart danced as the "nymph of Thames," does not record the names of the eight other girls who danced with the ten-year-old Charles, Duke of York, for posterity, although John Finnett, Master of the Ceremonies of *Tethys' Festival*, mentions that they were all "daughters of earls or Barons."[43]

Foregrounding its girl performers, *Cupid's Banishment* enshrines what we may think of as a masque of girlhood. Occasion describes the Ladies Hall as "An Academy / Where modesty doth only sway [ie. rule, manage] as governess" and the masque consistently reinforces the chastity of the girls and their school. The opening dispute between Occasion and Cupid anticipates the debates between the Lady and Comus by setting up a distinction between Cupid's expectation that the "lovely nymphs" will provide a "jubilee," serving as "the centre of delight" in "some amorous scene," and Occasion's insistence that "no wanton subject or immodest strain can enter in." The masque asserts the chaste modesty of its students: "this is no time nor place for Cupid's wiles" and a stage direction carefully glosses their performance: "showing that . . . their revels did wholly tend to Chastity, being a sport the goddess and her nymphs did use in bowers and retired places without any prejudice to virginity or scandal to any entire [ie. sincere] vow" (84).

At Bisham, the theme of chastity serves to forge homosocial bonds with Elizabeth through the exclusion of Pan, with all his embarrassing vulgarities. At Greenwich, the homosocial context of the school defends the female masquer against Cupid's more threatening "lust and rape and foul incestuous acts" (84). In a fit of pique, Cupid presents the chaos of the Bacchanalian anti-masque in the terms of female performance, "Ye coy dames, I'll make you rave like beldames, tear your hair, and curse your coyness!"(86). A dance of dryads, with "many pretty figures" (87), ultimately shuts down this "rude disorder" (86), as Diana puts it; they celebrate their triumph with a song. As part of the masque's vindication of the girl masquer, and of girlhood itself, the girl playing Fortune becomes

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one of the stars of the show: "Fortune," as Occasion asserts, "is the subject of our scene." Great care is taken to describe and gloss her costume, "a rich mantle wrought with changeable colours to express her incertainty, with a veil before her face to shew her blindness and inequality in disposing of her gifts; her wheel in her hand, to signify her momentary favour" (85). And at the end of the masque, Fortune (in a different costume, also lovingly described) leads a dance of twelve nymphs, who "descend from the Mount attired all in white tinsie to show their defiance to Cupid" (88). Fortune, of course, contains both good and bad. Within the dichotomous structure of the masque, Fortune could embody unchaste performances as equally as chaste ones. But by affiliating Fortune with the chaste masquing of Ladies Hall, White places the capricious powers that govern reputation as well as fate in the hands of the girl masquer.

As with the *Bisham Entertainment*, needlepoint provides a kind of shield or defense against potential charges of immodesty, as well as a key to the girls' membership within an elite royal circle. Needlepoint is a very safely and sharply gendered part of a girl's education: more than dancing or Latin, it carves out a separate sphere for girlhood. On the one hand, we may regard needlepoint as a pursuit which does not overtly challenge or infringe upon any masculine priorities and works at a subtle level to neutralize the potential sexual and social threat of the girl speaker. On the other, it forges and celebrates female bonds and communities, as well as provides a site for creative and even subversive self-expression. Together, then, these masques not only illustrate what Susan Frye calls "intersections of women's verbal and visual textualities," but also recall their origins among the lessons and learning of girlhood.[44] The concluding presentation of needlework to Queen Anne in *Cupid's Banishment* also highlights the personal delight the Queen would experience watching the performances of the little girls with whom she had a close personal connection. In this final masque at the court of Queen Anne, the affective enjoyment of the performing girl shifts the focus of the court masque away from the awestruck reverence for royal authority in order to recreate the masque as a site in which girlhood is nurtured and can flourish.

So, then, is the first occasion on which English women took speaking roles the schoolgirl Anne Watkins in *Cupid's Banishment*? The teenaged Russell sisters in the Bisham Entertainment? Or that Norwich Pageant, way back in the reign of Mary I, when the girls played cardinal virtues? All of these potential firsts, drawn from a variety of dramatic contexts, underscore the ongoing presence and acceptance of girl performers on English stages. These examples also suggest that there is still more evidence of girl

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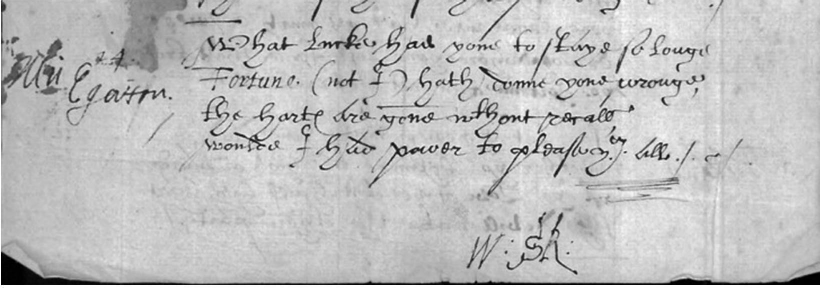

Figure 8.4 John Marston, *Entertainment at Ashby*. EL 34 B9. Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

masquers to be uncovered and examined. Here, for example, is a little speech delivered by one "Mrs [Mistress] Egarton," probably one of the elder sisters of Alice Egerton, perhaps Elizabeth or Mary, aged four or five. Mistress Egerton's mother was possibly Frances, the second daughter of the Dowager Countess and wife of Sir John Egerton. This is the last of a set of fourteen speeches delivered by women that are recorded in a loose sheet folded in with the Huntington Library manuscript of Marston's 1607 *Entertainment at Ashby*, also known as the *Entertainment of the Dowager-Countess of Derby.* The entertainment celebrated the visit of Alice, Dowager Countess of Derby and grandmother of Alice Egerton, to Castle Ashby, the home of her daughter, Lady Huntingdon.[45] But the verses record, as James Knowles suggests, a gift-giving ceremony to celebrate the betrothal of Alice's eldest daughter, Anne Stanley.[46] They give the last word to "Mistress Egerton" (Figure 8.4).

> What lucke have yowe to staye so longe
> Fortune (not I) hath donne yowe wronge
> The harts are gone without recalle
> Would I had power to please you alle

Appearing to comment on Anne's relatively late betrothal (she was twenty-six), this little speech adds a Jacobean chapter to the predominantly Caroline masquing history of the Egerton children.[47] It transforms what could be a rude comment about an aging bride into a message of congratulations for remaining a chaste girl for so long.

Alice Egerton, too, married late. One of the outcomes of educating girls, as contemporary educators, sociologists, and political activists agree, is the delay of marital and familial responsibilities, offering girls an opportunity to understand their potential and define themselves, first, in terms of

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a career. In the early modern period, the girl masquer is closely linked with both private learning and the evolving institutional structures for girls' education. Chastity figures, here, less as an anatomical condition or a devotional vow than as a state of individual strength, as the Lady tells Comus, "thou canst not touch the freedom of my mind" (665). Looking back to the girlhood of the Virgin Mary and the lives of the virgin martyrs as they were performed on medieval stages, as well as to the Elizabethan shepherdesses and Jacobean nymphs and naiads that I have discussed here, it is only fitting that Milton's Lady is rescued by Sabrina, "a gentle nymph" (824) that the Egerton family, along with Milton's readers, would have recognized as the court masque's way of dramatizing and of preserving the Lady's "serious doctrine of virginity" (787).

Notes

1. Stephen Orgel, "The Case for Comus," *Representations* 81 (2003): 31–45 (33).
2. Clare McManus writes, "Alice Egerton broke new ground as the first noblewoman to sing within a public entertainment (masque or drama) and one of the first to speak within a masque." *Women on the Renaissance Stage: Anna of Denmark and Female Masquing in the Stuart Court 1590–1619* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002): 185. For Sophie Tomlinson, Comus "departs from custom" in order to "radically revise[s] the ideals of chastity and eloquence." *Women on Stage in Stuart Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005): 50.
3. See Barbara Breasted, "*Comus* and the Castlehaven Scandal," *Milton Studies III* (1971): 201–24; and Leah S. Marcus, "Milton's *Comus*: Judicial Reform at Ludlow and the Problem of Sexual Assault," *Criticism* 25 (1983): 293–327.
4. See Maryann Cale McGuire, *Milton's Puritan Masque* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1983); Leah Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); A. S. P. Woodhouse, "The Argument of Milton's *Comus*," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 11 (1941): 46–71 and "*Comus* Once More," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 19 (1949): 218–23; and Barbara K. Lewalski, "Milton's *Comus* and the Politics of Masquing," *The Politics of the Stuart Court Masque*, ed. David Bevington and Peter Holbrook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998): 296–320. On the Protestant "episteme," see Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, "Waiting for Hymen: Literary History as 'Symptom' in Spenser and Milton," *English Literary History* 64 (1997): 391–414; and Douglas Trevor's "Milton and Female Perspiration," (Chapter 9) in this collection.
5. Karen Britland, *Drama at the Courts of Queen Henrietta Maria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); and Lucy Munro, *Archaic Style in English Literature 1590–1674* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 168–203.

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6. On women and the early modern stage, see *Women and Culture at the Courts of the Stuart Queens*, ed. Clare McManus (London: Palgrave, 2003); Marta Straznicky, *Privacy, Playreading, and Women's Closet Drama 1550–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); *Women Players in England 1500–1600: Beyond the All-Male Stage*, ed. Pamela Allen Brown and Peter Parolin (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005); Karen Britland, *Drama at the Courts of Queen Henrietta Maria*; Sophie Tomlinson, *Women on Stage;* Alison Findlay, *Playing Spaces in Early Women's Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). See also two recent special issues on the subject of women and performance: "Access and Contestation: Women's Performance in Early Modern England, Italy, France and Spain," ed. Helen Ostovich and Erin E. Kelly, *Early Theatre* 15 (2012); and "Renaissance Women's Performance and the Dramatic Canon: Theatre History, Evidence, and Narratives," ed. Clare McManus and Lucy Munro, *Shakespeare Bulletin* 33 (2015).
7. On the Egerton children's experience as masquers, see Cedric Brown, *John Milton's Aristocratic Entertainments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985): 13, 25; Orgel, "The Case for Comus": 32; and Karen Britland, *Drama at the Courts of Queen Henrietta Maria:* 96–7.
8. For definitions of girlhood, see Deanne Williams, *Shakespeare and the Performance of Girlhood* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014); and Jennifer Higginbotham, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Sisters: Gender, Transgression, Adolescence* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2013).
9. Blaine Greteman, *The Poetics and Politics of Youth in Milton's England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013): 96.
10. Eva Stehle, *Performance and Gender in Ancient Greece: Nondramatic Poetry in Its Setting* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); John H. Starks, Jr., "Actresses in the Roman World," *University of North Carolina dissertation* (2004); and Evelyn Fertyl, *Von Musen, Miminnen und leichten Mädchen. Die Schauspielerin in der römischen Antike* [Of Muses, Mime Actresses and Prostitutes. The Actress in the Roman Theatre] (Vienna: Braumüller, 2005).
11. Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim, *Opera Omnia*, ed. Walter Berschin, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Munich: K. G. Sauer Verlag, 2001); E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1903): 98. On female performers in the Middle Ages, see Kim M. Phillips, *Medieval Maidens: Young Women and Gender in England 1270–1540* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 2003).
12. Lynette R. Muir, "Women on the Medieval Stage: The Evidence from France," *Medieval English Theatre* 7 (1985): 107–19; and Meg Twycross, "Transvestism in the Mystery Plays," *Medieval English Theatre* 5 (1983): 123–80.
13. Philippe de Mézières, *Philippe de Mézières's Campaign for the Feast of Mary's Presentation*, ed. William Emmett Coleman (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981): 85; and, for discussion, Susan Udry, "'Putting on the Girls':

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Mary's Girlhood and the Performance of Monarchical Authority in Philippe de Mézières *Dramatic Office for the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*," *European Medieval Drama* 8 (2004): 1–17.

14. Clifford Davidson, "Women and the Medieval Stage," *Women's Studies* 11 (1984): 99–113 (107). For discussion, see Jody Enders, *Death by Drama and Other Medieval Urban Legends* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); and Meg Twycross, "Transvestism in the Mystery Plays": 134. For the French account, see Louis Petit de Julleville, *Les Mystères*, vol. 2 (Paris: Hachette, 1880): 32.
15. John Marshall, "'Her virgynes, as many as a man wylle': Dance and Provenance in Three Late Medieval Plays: *Wisdom, The Killing of the Children, The Conversion of St Paul*," *Leeds Studies in English* 25 (1994): 111–48 (131).
16. Adolphus William Ward, *A History of English Dramatic Literature to the Death of Queen Anne*, vol. 1. (New York: Octagon, 1966): 92–3.
17. "*The Play of Mary Magdalene* from the Digby Manuscript," *Medieval Drama*, ed. David Bevington (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1975): 687–753. Theresa Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints: Theater, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).
18. *The Mary Play from the N-Town Manuscript*, ed. Peter Meredith (London: Longman, 1987). See J. A. Tasioulas, "Between Doctrine and Domesticity: The Portrayal of Mary in the N-Town Plays," *Medieval Women in Their Communities*, ed. Diane Watt (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997): 222–45; and Katie Normington, *Gender in Medieval* Drama (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004): 39–44.
19. See Catherine B. C. Thomas, "The Miracle Play at Dunstable," *Modern Language Notes* 32 (1917): 337–44; Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, vol. 2: 380; Clifford Davidson, "Women and the Medieval Stage," *Women's Studies* 11 (1984): 99–113 (104). See also Catherine Sanok, *Her Life Historical: Exemplarity and Female Saints' Lives in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007): 160–1.
20. *A Calendar of Dramatic Records in the Books of the Livery Companies of London*, ed. Jean Robertson and D. J. Gordon (Malone Society Collections 3, 1954): 14. See also Glynne Wickham, *Early English Stages 1300–1660* (London: Routledge, 1963), vol. 1: 272; and Twycross, "Transvestism in the Mystery Plays": 130.
21. Twycross, "Transvestism in the Mystery Plays": 131, Wickham, *Early English Stages*: 87.
22. "The Coronation of Anne Boleyn," *John Nichols's The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth: A New Edition of the Early Modern Sources*, ed. Elizabeth Goldring, Faith Eales, Elizabeth Clarke, and Jayne Elizabeth Archer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), vol. 5: Appendix 1; and Tracey Sowerby, "The Coronation of Anne Boleyn," *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama*, ed. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012): 386–401.

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23. Robert Withington, *English Pageantry: An Historical Outline*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1920): 17; Martin Wiggins and Catherine Richardson, *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue*, 5 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012–15), vol. 1: 303–4 (303); and *REED Norwich 1540–1642*, ed. David Galloway (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984): 31–42.

The text appears below:

I am a vertewe that **Prudence** highte
amonnge the goode hadde so in pryce
I maye nott be owghte off your seighte
All thinge woorke yow by mine advice
for wannte of me yf you doo varrye
in that attempte you shall miskarrye
by me you shall all things ffore see
and woorke therin the soundeste waie
Reffuse me not for I am shee
thatt will yow serue bothe nighte and daie
now speke the reste & shewe cawsse
whie yow too Receyve he not dennye
lustitia Too suche as vertew hathe Assigned
To sytte as Iudge in annye cawsse
allthoughe yt growe by the vnkinde
or els parhapps by doubtfull Lawes
withowte my lore yf they geue domme
thai ar vnwourthie off ther Roome
my name ys lustice I am shee
withe you to dwell I haue dessire
for this I know that yow ar hee
doo wisshe to woorke as I requyre
therfore I meane for good
and I at all assaies to serue yow styli
fortitudo Withe owte me well yow cannot be
and passe suche stormes as yow maie finde
for yow shall knowe that I am she
that Cleped ys the hardie mynde
to doo thos things that righte allowe
thoughe might gainsaie with frowninge browe
The stooburne eke that feare no Lawes
I will sobdewe to yowre beheste ther shall be none
but I will cawse to Lyre in order wythe the reste
Receiue me nowe I hvmmblie praye and I will sarue as I best maye
Temperantia Thoughe I be laste that make mye sute
wherby I seeme to be the woorste yett yf yow Lyke to gathar frute
flees and wases . . .

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24. Thames continues, "London rejoice and give thy God the praise: / For her whose highness lengths thy happy daies." George Peele, *The Device of the Pageant Borne before Woolstone Dixi* (London, 1585). See also Wiggins and Richardson, *British Drama*, vol. 2: 343–4; and Frederick William Fairholt, *Lord Mayors' Pageants: Being a Collection towards a History of These Annual Celebrations, Part One* (London: Percy Society, 1843): 24–6.
25. Peter Davidson and Jane Stevenson, "Elizabeth I's Reception at Bisham (1592): Elite Women as Writers and Devisers," *The Progresses, Pageants, and Entertainments of Queen Elizabeth I*, ed. Jayne Archer, Elizabeth Goldring, and Sarah Knight (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007): 207–26 (208). Alexandra F. Johnson, "The 'Lady of the farme': The Context of Lady Russell's Entertainment of Elizabeth at Bisham," *Early Theatre* 5 (2002): 71–85. Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich explicates the text's political message in terms of the culture of women's bonds and alliances surrounding Queen Elizabeth, in "Lady Russell, Elizabeth I, and Female Political Alliances through Performance," *ELR* (2009): 290–314.
26. McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage*: 185 and 88. See McManus's extensive discussion of the masque, "Staging the Female Voice: 4 May 1617": 182–201. See also Tomlinson, *Women on Stage*: 38.
27. It was printed as *Speeches Delivered to Her Maiestie This Last Progress* (London, 1592). See also Wiggins and Richardson, *British Drama*, vol. 3: 190–2.
28. On needlepoint in the Renaissance, see Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles. Women's Textualities in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010)
29. A year before, George Peele's *Descensus Astraeae* (1591), George Peele identified Queen Elizabeth with Astraea, the virgin goddess of Justice, "celestial sacred nymph," as well as a shepherdess, tending her flock. The end of the pageant features a girl: "a child, representing Nature, holding in her hand a distaff, and spinning a web, which passeth through the hand of Fortune, and was wheeled up by Time" (Fairholt, 28).
30. On Lady Russell's education, see Davidson and Stevenson, "Elizabeth I's Reception at Bisham."
31. *A Way of Reconciliation of a Good and Learned Man* (London, 1605).
32. Henry Lok, *Ecclesiastes, Otherwise Called the Preacher* (London, 1597).
33. Roy Strong, "The Ambassador: Sir Henry Unton and His Portrait," *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977): 85–110 (104).
34. Margaret Seymour is also the author of a letter to King Edward VI thanking him for a literary gift. See *Letters of Royal and Illustrious Ladies of Great Britain from the Commencement of the Twelfth Century to the Close of the Reign of Queen Mary*, ed. Mary Anne Everett Green (London, 1840), vol. 3: 199–200. See for the Latin original, *A Collection of Letters from the Original Manuscripts of Many Princes, Great Personages, and Statesmen*, ed. Leonard Howard (London, 1753): 276. A letter by the youngest sister Jane can be found in *Original Letters*

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Relative to the English Reformation, vol. 2, ed. and trans. Rev. Hastings Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1847): 2.

35. Brenda M. Hosington, "England's First Female-Authored Encomium: The Seymour Sisters' *Hecatodistichon* (1550) to Marguerite de Navarre. Text, Translation, Notes and Commentary," *Studies in Philology* 93 (1996): 117–63.
36. She danced as Aglaia, one of the Three Graces and the goddess of beauty and adornment, in *The Masque of Blackness* (1605); she danced as either Cinxia or Telia in *Hymenaei* (1606); as Splendour in *The Masque of Beauty* (1608); and in *The Masque of Queens* (1609) as Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons. Her sister Frances, who died young, also danced in *The Masque of Beauty*.
37. Robert White, *Cupid's Banishment: Renaissance Drama by Women: Texts and Documents*, ed. S. P. Cerasano and Marion Wynne-Davies (London and New York: Routledge, 1996): 76–89 (83).
38. Tomlinson, *Women on Stage*: 9 and 42; and McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage*: 185.
39. They were her goddaughters Anne Chalenor and Anne Sandilands: one piece depicts an acorn (A for Anne) and the other rosemary (R for Regina), symbolizing steadfastness and remembrance. For detailed discussion of the embroidery, see McManus, *Women on the Renaissance Stage*: 188–201.
40. Peter Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics, and Society in Kent 1500–1640* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester, 1977): 198. Enid Welsford, *The Court Masque* (New York: Russell, 1967 [1927]): 197.
41. "*Cupid's Banishment*: A Masque Presented to her Majesty by Young Gentlewomen of the Ladies Hall, Deptford, May 4, 1617," ed. C. E. McGee, *Renaissance Drama* 19 (1988): 226–64. Charles Coleman and George Lippet, members of the King's Music, played Hymen and Bacchus in the masque. See Andrew J. Sabol, *Four Hundred Songs and Dances from the Stuart Masque* (New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1982): 23. Robert Evans argues that Jonson satirizes it in *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1618). See *Jonson and the Contexts of His Time* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 1994): 96.
42. This convention changes with Caroline masques, such as *Tempe Restored* and *Coelum Brittanicum*, which list the names of child masquers. The manuscript can be found at Pierpont Morgan Library MS MA 1296.
43. "Eight little Ladies neere of his stature represented the Naydes, and were attired in light robes adorned with flowers, their haire hanging downe, and wauing with Garlands of water ornaments on their heads." E. K. Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923), vol. 3: 282–3. John Finnett also comments: "They performed their dance to the amazement of all the beholders, considering the tenderness of their years and the many intricate changes of the dance, which was so disposed, that which way soever the changes went the little Duke was still found to be in the midst of these little dancers." Quoted in Sir Ralph Winwood, *Memorials of the Affairs of State in the Reigns of Queen Elizabeth and King James I*, vol. 3 (London, 1725): 179.
44. Frye, *Pens and Needles*: 1.

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45. *The Poems of John Marston*, ed. Arnold Davenport (Liverpool: University of Liverpool Press, 1961): 192–207. For discussion, see Matthew Steggle, "John Marston's Entertainment at Ashby and the 1606 Fleet Conduit Eclogue," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 19 (2006): 249–55; Mary Erler,"'Chaste sports, juste prayses, & all softe delight': Harefield 1602 and Ashby 1607, Two Female Entertainments," *Elizabethan Theatre* 14 (1996): 1–25.
46. Huntington Library MS EL. 34. B9. See James D. Knowles, "Identifying the Speakers: 'The Entertainment at Ashby' (1607)," *Notes & Queries* 233 (1988): 489–90; and, with facsimile examples, James Knowles, "Marston, Skipwith and *The Entertainment at Ashby*," *English Manuscript Studies* 3 (1992): 137–92. I would like to thank Vanessa Wilkie, William A. Moffett Curator of Medieval and British Historical Manuscripts at the Huntington Library for her assistance with the manuscript of the Ashby entertainment.
47. Along with my examples above, Lady Penelope Egerton performed in Ben Jonson's *Chloridia* (1631), and Lady Mary Egerton performed in William Davenant's *The Temple of Love* (1634).

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