



# Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama (New Cultural Studies)

*Theodora A. Jankowski*

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The unmarried "care for the things of the Lord," said St. Paul in his first letter to the Corinthians, while married men and women "care for the things of the world." The doctrine that virginity for both men and women is superior to marriage remained strong in Augustine, who believed that consecrated virgins were "a greater blessing" than the married. Even the current edition of the New Catholic Encyclopedia privileges the state of virginity because "it has as its object a superior good."

In *Pure Resistance* Theodora A. Jankowski surveys the history of virginity in Christian thought from ancient times though the Renaissance, contrasting the Catholic tradition on this issue with Protestant doctrine as it developed in early modern England. With the Reformation, theologians argued that marriage was the ideal, even that vowed virginity was unnatural. If the multiple sexual, erotic, economic, and communal arrangements of Catholic Europe offered possibilities for destabilizing the categories male/female, married/virgin, chaste/unchaste, she contends, Protestant thought rigidified these binary oppositions.

Exploring resistance to the patriarchal sexual economy, Jankowski considers representations of female virgins in English stage plays from 1590 to about 1670. In these dramatic texts she finds characters who range from collaborators with patriarchy to women who utterly repudiate marriage, opting instead for a life completely outside the heterosexual gender paradigm-and who thus, like Isabella in *Measure for Measure* or Moll Cutpurse in Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl*, become "queer virgins."

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