"THEY WOULD NOT FOR A WORLD TRANSGRESSE THE BOUNDS OF CIVILITY": THE 'OTHERNESS' OF EARLY MODERN FEMALE VICES AND VIRTUES REASSESSED

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Abstract

This article explores the definitions of female vices and virtues in the context of pre- and post-Reformation communities in England, and applies the notions of face and theories on the performativity of social roles to argue two main points. Firstly, it is argued that the definitions of female vices and virtues in a social context were the effect of a dynamic negotiating process between the authors of instructive texts and the female audience. Secondly, it is posited that there are significant similarities between late medieval and post-Reformation ideas on female vices and virtues. Examples from a variety of texts, including conduct manuals, religious works, as well as female-authored letters and guidance books for women are examined in regard to how they allow both the female audience and the authors of these texts to maintain their positive and negative face (of being accepted and of remaining independent), and how they aid the construction and performance of female social roles, as well as vices and virtues, in theory and in practice.

Keywords

early modern England, women, vices, virtues, discourse

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REFBACKS

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One Item She Always Takes from Hotel Rooms,” 19 Dec. 2018 How did this girl—who is not only of color, but didn’t go to the same schools or universities as the royals, who wasn’t even raised in the U.K., and so has all these points of difference and otherness—get to this place? — Afua Hirsch, Time, “W