

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



## **The Politics of Love: *The Broken Heart* in the Caroline Context.**

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Critical attention to John Ford's *The Broken Heart* has tended to minimise the relevance of a Caroline context of production. Indeed, Verna Ann Foster and Stephen Foster go so far as to argue that it is “not a topical play” (307), and read it as a form of harking back to Elizabeth's reign and in praise of the peaceful succession of the Stuart King to the Tudor, English throne. Lisa Hopkins, too, in “Spartan Boys: John Ford and Philip Sidney” has read the play in a literary context, arguing that the Spartan setting becomes a means to comment on the lost Arcadias of Elizabeth's reign under the Stuart monarchy (229).<sup>1</sup> Both of these approaches offer a comment on the early Stuarts, but neither is specifically concerned with Charles I. In this essay, I would like to reposition the play within a Caroline context, as engaging with issues of law and prerogative under debate in the late 1620s and 1630s.<sup>2</sup> Through a politicised reading of its representations of love and death, and dramatic rendering of literary tropes of courtly love on stage, I will argue that Ford employs ideas of neo-Platonism and the Caroline court's chaste self-representation in an image of monarchy within marriage to advocate temperate monarchy, bound by the reason of law.

The sufferings of the Petrarchan lover are well known. In this sonnet, Petrarch's speaker explores the metaphor of the physical wounds inflicted by love:

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I would like to express my thanks to the peer reviewers of this essay, whose comments have brought about significant improvements to its argument.

<sup>1</sup> The play has also been read as commenting on Sidney's relationship with Penelope Rich. See Foster and Foster for a discussion and refutation of this reading (308-11).

<sup>2</sup> Although lacking hard evidence, scholars believe that *The Broken Heart* was probably written in 1629 (Gurr, *passim*). Whilst this date is by no means certain, it allows a Caroline context for a play which, I will argue, engages overtly with Caroline court culture and politics, particularly neo-Platonic ideals and the increasing emphasis on the reason of law in opposition to wilful prerogative.

Blest be the day, and blest the month, the year,  
 The spring, the hour, the very moment blest,  
 The lovely scene, the spot, where first oppressed  
 I sunk, of two bright eyes the prisoner:  
 And blest the first soft pang, to me most dear,  
 Which thrilled my heart, when Love became its guest;  
 And blest the bow, the shafts which pierced my breast,  
 And even the wounds, which bosomed thence I bear.  
 Blest too the strains which, poured through glade and grove,  
 Have made the woodlands echo with her name;  
 The sighs, the tears, the languishment, the love:  
 And blest those sonnets, sources of my fame;  
 And blest that thought - Oh! never to remove!  
 Which turns to her alone, from her alone which came.

(Petrarch LXI)

For this speaker, love is indistinguishable from “the sighs, the tears, the languishment” (l. 11) after the wounds made by “shafts which pierced [his] breast”, and such suffering is considered “blessed”. Sidney’s *Astrophil*, too, feels such wounds, stating:

Some lovers speak when they their Muses entertain  
 Of hopes begot by fear, of wot not what desires:  
 Of force of heav’nly beams, infusing hellish pain:  
 Of living deaths, dear wounds, fair storms, and freezing fires.

(Sonnet 6 ll.1-4)

Such piercing shafts of Cupid’s bow, pain, fire and the blessed oppression which accompanies the glance from the mistress are, by the early seventeenth century, common in literary expressions of love. But whilst in poetry the disdain of a Petrarchan mistress could cause the sonnet’s speaker to die a metaphorical death of sighs and tears, the stage requires more action, and John Ford’s play *The Broken Heart* employs and makes literal such Petrarchan tropes, to devastating effect.

Lisa Hopkins has said that “*The Broken Heart* is a bleak and uncompromising play” (*Political Theatre* 79). Before the play begins, there had been protracted dispute between royal counsellors Crotolon and Thrasus. The good King Amyclas brought them together and arranged a political and love match between Crotolon’s son Orgilus and Thrasus’ daughter Penthea. At Thrasus’ death, his son Ithocles, remembering former

differences and seeking to advance his own position, forced Penthea into a loveless marriage with the older, richer, and insanely jealous Bassanes. To help prevent Penthea suffering too much from Bassanes' jealousy, Orgilus pretends to leave Sparta, but actually remains near the court in disguise. Ithocles returns from war a hero, and falls in love with the princess Calantha. She returns Ithocles' affection, and gains her dying father's permission to marry him. Penthea, pining for Orgilus and regretting the loss of her chastity and honour through her enforced marriage, starves herself to death. Orgilus takes his revenge on Ithocles, stabbing him to death after trapping him in a chair next to the dead body of Penthea. At the wedding of Euphrania and Prophilus, Calantha is told of the death of her father, Penthea and her betrothed Ithocles. Orgilus, proudly admitting to the murder of Ithocles, is sentenced to death and chooses to slit his own wrists, which he does on stage (helped by Bassanes). Calantha, now Queen, having made sure the country will be governed well by Nearchus (a potential rival to Ithocles), marries the dead body of Ithocles, kisses him and dies of a broken heart.

So, "bleak and uncompromising" it is. And, as in conventional love poetry, love and death are inextricably intertwined. The most obvious combination is in the marriage dance at which the deaths are announced to Calantha. Rather than stop the dance at the painful news, Calantha shows no reaction and continues to move forward, saying:

How dull this music sounds! Strike up more sprightly;  
Our footings are not active like our heart  
Which treads the nimbler measure. (5.2.17-19)

It could be argued that in Calantha allowing the dance to continue despite the violence and death, the play comments on the Stuart court's masquing culture. In court masques, the chaos of the antimasque is resolved or dismissed in the masque, usually centred on the virtues of the King or Queen, and this restoration of order is then followed by orderly courtly dancing, showing the unity of the monarch and courtiers. The messengers are surprised by Calantha's ability to carry on dancing through these tragedies, saying "Is't possible?" and "I am thunderstruck" (5.2.13, 19). Whilst on one level this may be admiration for her Spartan stoicism, it could also be seen as critical of the Caroline court's attempts to mask disorder in the state through the orderly veneer of the masque form. However, such a reading assumes that Calantha is truly unaffected by the reported tragedies, and this would be ungenerous, if not completely untrue, as the speeding up of her heart may be seen as an inward physical reaction to her beloved's murder. In outwardly continuing the dance at a more sprightly pace, Calantha attempts to subsume death in her subjects' marriage, preferring the stability of the mutually

desiring love of Euphrania and Prophilus over her own distress.<sup>3</sup> But for the Queen, love and death align inseparably in her own marriage. Addressing Ithocles' corpse, she states:

Thus I new marry him whose wife I am;  
Death shall not separate us. Oh my lords,  
I but deceived your eyes with antic gesture,  
When one news straight came huddling on another,  
Of death, and death, and death. Still I danced forward;  
But it struck home, and here, and in an instant. (5.3.66-71)

Her "antic gesture" is not only the covering of sadness with liveliness, but in the use of the term "antic" may also be an indication of the madness also traditionally associated with love. Whilst it seemed during the dance that the Queen subsumed death in love, the subsuming of love in "death, and death, and death" is the forward step of the dance of the play. Finally, we hear her heartstrings breaking, as Calantha embraces love and death together, saying, "One kiss on these cold lips; my last. [*Kisses Ithocles' corpse*] Crack, crack!" (5.3.77).

Symbolically too, the play combines love and death in the image of Penthea's veil, which she draws over her face as she dies, and which is then lifted off by Orgilus to reveal her face to Ithocles. As Richard Madelaine argues, Penthea's "drawing down of the veil is ... a Spartan exit from the world, making use of the traditional conceit of death's dark veil and alluding to mourning costume", but also:

since Hymen carries a veil as well as a torch, Orgilus's raising of Penthea's veil ... has a bitterly-ironic hymeneal association connected with his vacating a chair at her side to act the part of her avenger: the beauty of his promised bride has been withered by a barren marriage to another as a result of her brother's ambition. (36)

Orgilus is only able to raise his bride's veil in death, thus paralleling the marriage of Ithocles and Calantha. Both on stage images of marriage in death highlight the metaphorical death in marriage that really kills Penthea. Such concern with the

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<sup>3</sup> In his essay "Insubstantial Pageants: *The Tempest* and Masquing Culture", James Knowles notes that in masques before 1611, the disorderly elements of the anti-masque tend to be converted and absorbed into the masque rather than banished or dispersed as they are in later masques (see especially 111-12). It is possible that Calantha then can be seen to be absorbing the disorder of these deaths into the order of the marriage dance.

intertwining of love, marriage and death pervades the plot and subplots of the play at all levels.

Juliet McMaster has noted a structural pattern in Ford's plays in which love, lust and sham love (those who are in love with the idea of being in love) form the central mode of love in the main, secondary and tertiary plot respectively. She acknowledges, however, that *The Broken Heart* works slightly differently from most of Ford's plays in this respect (164), but does not offer a detailed exploration of the ways in which ideas of love and lust are employed in the text. Indeed, in arguing that "control and self-denial are triumphant" in the play (165), her reading almost expunges the depth of destruction and death caused by extremes of contained and uncontained desire.<sup>4</sup> Whereas such containment of emotion has been read as exemplifying the trials of stoic living in the Spartan setting (Wymer 109-10), in what follows, I will argue that through a comparison between chaste, true love and the power of desire, the devastating action of the play provides an exploration of the political debates over (rational) law and (wilful) prerogative in Caroline England. "Drama ... of love and passion," as Kevin Sharpe argues, "was not a retreat from the moral and political questions central to Renaissance England: it was a searching and incisive examination of them" (*Criticism* 62). Indeed, images of love were central to the politicised (self-)representations of the Caroline court, and Ford's play, I will argue, negotiates between literary, courtly and court-based discourses of love and authority to make its own political arguments.

Orgilus and Penthea, whose interrupted nuptials begin the tragic motion of the play, speak to and of each other in terms associated with courtly love, particularly the Petrarchan tradition. For example, Orgilus laments that, "physic yet hath never found / A remedy" for the "wounds" of love (1.3.40-41), and he describes their love as "holy and chaste" (1.1.30). However, as he moves to take his formerly betrothed love into his arms, she threatens:

Unworthy man,  
If ever henceforth thou appear in language,  
Message, or letter to betray my frailty,  
I'll call thy former protestations lust. (2.3.112-115)

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<sup>4</sup> Verna Ann Foster and Stephen Foster also present the view that the "sublimation of private self in public duty" is presented as an "ideal" in the play (323). I find this reading deeply problematic given the drawn out madness and death it causes to Penthea, the heart-break of Calantha and violent deaths of Ithocles and Orgilus brought about through this kind of internal conflict.

That they both hold their relationship as one higher than that motivated by lust is clearly evident. Even when discussing the strength of their love before her marriage, Orgilus is very careful to couch his love in terms of a *contained* passion:

Time can never  
On the white table of unguilty faith  
Write counterfeit dishonour. Turn those eyes,  
The arrows of pure love, upon that fire  
Which once rose to a flame, perfumed with vows  
As sweetly scented as the incense smoking  
The holiest altars; virgin tears (like  
On Vesta's odours) sprinkled dew to feed 'em  
And to increase their fervour. (2.3.25-33)

Like Petrarchan sonnets which contain desire through expressing service to a courtly distant mistress, Orgilus adopts the vocabulary of passionate love – flames, fire, fervour – but expresses it in chaste terms. Orgilus and Penthea's "pure love" was not guilty, and to emphasise this he also uses the idea of whiteness and faith. The flames of their love are not fed by desire, but sprinkled with "virgin tears" near a holy Vestal altar. In ancient Rome, the vestal virgins were priestesses of Vesta, and kept the fire of the Roman hearth burning, symbolic of Roman stability (Wildfang 1).<sup>5</sup> The allusion to vestal virgins in relation to Penthea is somewhat ironic, since Vesta's priestesses were granted freedoms such as owning their own property and deciding their own futures (Wildfang 1), and thus were not subject to the same patriarchal authority as other women, as the ritual of *captio* by which girls were taken from their families to become Vestal Virgins "removed a Vestal candidate from the *potestas* of her family" (Wildfang 52). Penthea's forcible removal from this Vestal position in her unwilling marriage to Bassanes metaphorically leaves the Vestal fire unattended, and signals instability in the Spartan State. This association of Penthea with the Vestal also has elements of foreboding, as the penalty for Vestal Virgins breaking their vow of chastity was death, through burial alive.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Orgilus' description of their love in these terms foreshadows Penthea's fate as we are told early in the play that she is "buried in a bride-bed" (2.2.38). Her death through starvation also ties her to the vow-breaking Vestal, choosing to impose upon herself part of the penalty that Rome would impose on Vesta's unchaste priestesses.

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<sup>5</sup> I am grateful to Professor Alison Findlay for her question at the 'Love and Death in the Renaissance' Northern Renaissance Seminar raising the potential significance of the vestal virgins.

<sup>6</sup> See Wildfang (57-61) for a discussion of the reasons and rituals for this.

In the Caroline courtly context, Orgilus' idealised emphasis on mutual and not necessarily physical love makes reference to the cult of neo-Platonic love popular at Henrietta Maria's court. Heterosexual neo-Platonism raises the female beloved above notions of physical desire, making her into an object of quasi-religious devotion. As Lesel Dawson explains:

[Heterosexual neo-Platonism] effected a change in the traditional gender hierarchy, in that it both granted the beloved a new metaphysical and theological significance and enabled her to occupy a dominant position in her relationship with a male suitor. Importantly, the emphasis within Neoplatonic philosophy upon the need to avoid sexual intercourse meant that women were able to extend the time of their courtship, the liminal period during which they exercised control over their suitors. (paragraph 2)

Unlike the neo-Platonic divine-woman, however, and more in accordance with the Petrarchan tradition, Orgilus' beloved is completely unattainable (due to her forced marriage to Bassanes). This shifting context between the courtly and the literary introduces the element of suffering connected with disappointed love into the developing plot and brings about the possibility of staging the metaphorical wounds of the unrequited lover. Having murdered Ithocles as the cause of his lost love, Orgilus is subject to a death sentence and chooses to cut open the veins in his own arms rather than be executed by "common hand" (5.2.86). In this he asks assistance from Bassanes; thus, on stage, Orgilus literally and symbolically bleeds to death through wounds inflicted by disappointed love. This disappointment, unlike that caused by the disdainful mistress, however, is caused by the ambitious and unrestrained desires of others.

Indeed, desire – in contrast with mutual and chaste love – is presented as predominantly negative in the play. These different sides of the coin (courtly love and desire) are carefully juxtaposed through Orgilus' interjections aside during Prophilus' declaration of love for Euphrania:

Prophilus:     Bright Euphrania  
Should I repeat old vows, or study new,  
For purchase of belief to my desires –

Orgilus [*aside*]: Desires?

Prophilus:             My service, my integrity –

Orgilus[*aside*]:That's better.

Prophilus: I should but repeat a lesson  
Oft conned without a prompter – but thine eyes.  
My love is honourable –

Orgilus [*aside*]: So was mine. (1.3.52-58)

Whilst the audience can hear Orgilus questioning the intentions of Prophilus' "desires", since it is an aside, Euphrania and Prophilus cannot. Nevertheless, through the broken, shared line of Orgilus's question "Desires?" and the continuation of Prophilus' speech, Prophilus is seen to revise "desire" to "service" and "integrity", which are much more courtly terms. It also appears that Euphrania too gives her lover some sort of visual check as he breaks off at "but thine eyes" to assure her his love (and presumably his intentions) are honourable. In this interchange, then, the audience is led to reject desire. Indeed, throughout the play, desire is criticised as an inferior mode of love in comparison with more chaste, contained mutual love. So, whilst Catherine Belsey argues that in *The Broken Heart* the bodies, "visible on stage, drained of being, constitute emblems of the immobilising power of a romantic love which is at once unalterable and unable to be fulfilled" (209), I will argue that it is not romantic love that paralyses or kills the characters, but the exercise of unchecked power, illustrated in the surrender to desire and will.

That this contrast between mutual romantic love and power is a significant theme of the play is established from the first scene, where Orgilus explains his reasons for departure to his father. Speaking of his love for Penthea, he says:

A freedom of converse, an interchange  
Of holy and chaste love, so fixed our souls  
In a firm growth of union, that no time  
Can eat into the pledge. We had enjoyed  
The sweets our vows expected, had not cruelty  
Prevented all those triumphs we prepared for,  
By Thrasus his untimely death. (1.1.29-35)

G. F. Sensabaugh argues that this kind of mutuality of loving souls, along with the divinity of beautiful women, is an essential tenet of neo-Platonism (217-19) as



exemplified in Caroline drama.<sup>7</sup> It is, perhaps, this sense of mutuality that separates neo-Platonic love from the Petrarchan courtly love convention which also holds the love object as divine and sovereign, though unattainable. Orgilus continues his explanation with a description of how their love was disrupted after Thrasus' death:

From this time sprouted up that poisonous stalk  
Of aconite, whose ripened fruit hath ravished  
All health, all comfort of a happy life.  
For Ithocles, her brother, proud of youth,  
And prouder in his power, nourished closely  
The memory of former discontents.  
To glory in revenge, by cunning partly,  
Partly by threats, 'a woos at once and forces  
His virtuous sister to admit a marriage  
With Bassanes, a nobleman, in honour  
And riches, I confess, beyond my fortunes. (1.1.36-46)

Against his claim of an everlasting, mutual “holy and chaste” love that “no time” could destroy, the consummation of which is not couched in terms of the satisfaction of desire but as “sweets” and “triumphs” expected from their vows, Orgilus contrasts Ithocles' proud “power”, which conflates wooing with force (“a woos at once and forces / His virtuous sister”), and describes Bassanes' marriage with Penthea *and* Ithocles' actions in arranging it as “ravishment”, a violent sexual attack, which here takes not just innocence but “All health, all comfort of a happy life”. The desires of the patriarch force Penthea into an untenable position. Orgilus' final comment on Bassanes' proportionate wealth gives an indication of the social purpose of the rearranged marriage: to advance Ithocles' position through a high level marriage of his sister. Nancy Gutierrez, in her essay on the trafficking of women in the play, argues that, “in [Penthea's] enforced marriage to Bassanes is concentrated the drama's principal conflict – that between individual desire and a larger social necessity” (68). However, I would argue that her marriage to Bassanes is not a necessity, in the way that her marriage to Orgilus as part of the peace making process might have been. Ithocles has distinguished himself in war without the influence of Bassanes; rather, the marriage is a consequence of Ithocles' desire for familial and personal advancement. The play is not so concerned with the

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<sup>7</sup> Sensabaugh constructs his understanding of neo-Platonism from its presentation in Caroline drama. Other tenets include: ‘Fate guides all Lovers’; ‘Beauty and Goodness are One and the Same’; ‘Beautiful Women are Saints to be Worshipped’, and ‘Love is All-Important and All-Powerful’ (210).

domestic exercise of patriarchal authority in the marriage market, but with its *arbitrary* exercise.

Whilst Ithocles does not actually ravish his sister as the image implies (although Bassanes does, in his jealousy, later raise the possibility of an incestuous relationship between them), the metaphorical emphasis on Ithocles' desires being completely unrestrained by law or morality contrasts starkly with the adulation of chastity not only in the Petrarchan and neo-Platonic readings but also with the image of chastity that Charles I was actively seeking to present of his own court. As Kevin Sharpe argues:

After the bawdy decadence of James I's reign, Charles sought to establish a well-regulated court as a shrine of virtue and decorum. Perusing the orders, we are struck by the repeated emphases on the moral *gravitas* expected of courtiers and the solemnity and ceremonial of court life. Any servant found "so vicious and unmannerly that he be unfit to live in virtuous and civil company" was to be banished. ("Image of Virtue" 236)

This morality at court was an extension of the image of chaste love Charles portrayed in his marriage with Henrietta-Maria, celebrated in Thomas Carew's masque of 1634, *Coelum Britannicum*, in which the classical gods decide to reform the heavens and their own behaviour after the example of Charles and his wife. Charles's orderly domestic arrangements, which also encompassed his court, were to be an example to the country (Sharpe, "Image of Virtue" 258). In the masque, the figure of Homonoia (Concord) goes beyond this idea of setting an example, asserting that the love of the royal couple is representative of the unity of the monarch and his subjects: "And as their own pure souls entwined, / So are their subjects' hearts combined" (ll.1032-3). Indeed, Malcolm Smuts argues that virtuous love was a fundamental political image:

If the family is the basic political form, as Aristotle had argued, love must therefore be humanity's most fundamental political instinct. For all these reasons love became an apt metaphor for the sentient desires and emotional forces activating social and political life, whilst virtuous love, represented above all by royal monogamy, stood for a well-ordered polity. (38)

Such order in and through love is abundantly productive in *Coelum Britannicum*, as the masquers assert that from the King and Queen's 'chaste bed' (l.1056) a 'fruitful race shall flow / Endless succession' (ll.1060-1). The chaste marriage of Charles and Henrietta Maria is presented in the united form of "Carlomaria" (l.248), "a romantic conceit of two souls existing in complete accord [which] has obvious neo-Platonic

connotations” (Britland 48). Such mutuality is shown in Orgilus and Penthea’s early relationship and in Euphrania and Prophilus’ developing love. It is, however, conspicuously absent in the barren, forced marriage of Bassanes and Penthea. Ford’s play, therefore, contends that such a chaste, virtuous and unifying image as “Carlomaria”, like the tenets of neo-Platonism, is not compatible with the unrestrained desires of absolute, arbitrary rule.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, such arbitrary force leads only to barrenness and death, not love, fruitfulness and strong succession. As Nearchus asserts when discussing his tactics for courting Calantha in competition with Ithocles:

affections injured

By tyranny, or rigour of compulsion,  
Like tempest-threatened trees unfirmly rooted,  
Ne’er spring to timely growth. (4.2.205-8)

Just as forced affections never come to fruition, tyranny or absolutism does not allow the monarch or the country to flourish as they should. Such a reasoned perspective confirms for the audience that, as Calantha later disposes, Nearchus should be the next ruler of Sparta, and his rule will return the violent and death-ravaged court (and state) to order.

It is not merely patriarchal power, then, with which this play is concerned. It is, rather, interested in the arbitrary exercise of monarchical power. Whilst the use of the domestic sphere to examine the political is not uncommon in early modern drama (Sanders 26), it is made explicit for us in *The Broken Heart* in the vocabulary Ford employs. Bassanes, for example, refers to himself explicitly as “monarch / Of ... a chaste wife” (4.2.29-30). Such an image of domestic, marital monarchy is not uncommon, and Ford’s use of this image again in *Perkin Warbeck* (entered into the Stationers’ Register in February 1634) offers a constructive comparison. At his betrothal to Katherine Gordon, somewhat conventionally, Perkin states, “Acknowledge me but sovereign of this kingdom, / Your heart, fair princess, and the hand of providence / Shall crown you queen of me and my

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<sup>8</sup> It is particularly interesting for the subsequent argument of this essay that Carew’s masque uses in this image of chastity a reference to law, claiming that as Jupiter is not only commanding chastity and marital fidelity, but maintaining this himself, “there is no doubt of an universal obedience, where the Lawgiver himself in his own person observes his decrees so punctually” (ll. 243-245). This is praise of an idealised Caroline court, offering this advice: a King who expects his subjects to be obedient to law should set a good example by obeying it. However, as Kevin Sharpe argues, *Coelum Britannicum* also takes aim at arbitrary absolutism through the character of Momus, whose blunt realism highlights the discrepancies between such absolutist behaviour and the idealised image of chastity and virtue propounded by the King and Queen in the masque (*Criticism* 237-38).

best fortunes” (2.3.81-83). Courtship places Katherine in a position of sovereignty. More interestingly, after their marriage, when the eponymous protagonist has been publicly denounced as a fraudulent claimant to the English throne, Perkin exclaims:

We reign in our affections, blessed woman!

...

Even when I fell, I stood enthroned a monarch

Of one chaste wife’s troth, pure and uncorrupted. ( 5.3.120, 125-6)

*Perkin Warbeck* is concerned with legitimate authority in its dramatisation of Perkin’s claim to the English throne. Here, whilst Warbeck’s position as monarch of the country can be questioned, his monarchy in love remains undisputed. What is particularly noteworthy is that Warbeck shares his monarchy with his wife, saying “we reign”, keeping her in the position of the sovereign lady of courtly love – and of their courtship when he makes her “queen of me” – beyond their marriage. This may in part be due to the fact that Katherine’s marriage to Perkin, in stark contrast with Penthea, was one of mutual affection made through her own free choice.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, their “equal pledge of troths” (2.3.88) is presented in contrast with Katherine’s first suitor, Daliell, whom her father describes thus: “This gallant – / This, this, this lord, this servant, Kate, of yours / Desires to be your master” (1.2.65-7). Katherine acknowledges Daliell’s friendship and courtliness, but does not accept his proposal. A successful marriage, in the productive model of “Carlomaria”, cannot be maintained without mutuality. In the same way, developing the image of marital monarchy, the constructive union of monarch and subjects cannot be created and maintained without virtuous, mutual love.<sup>10</sup>

In *The Broken Heart*, the marital monarchy emerges more subtly, too. When revealing his part in the murder of Ithocles, Orgilus states that his reasons for revenge “Are just and known; quit [Ithocles] of these, and then / Never lived gentleman of greater merit / Hope, or habiliment to steer a kingdom” (5.2.45-8). Were it not for the crimes of which he has been accused, Orgilus comments, Ithocles would have made a very good king. So, what are his crimes? The terms used when accusations are made against him are particularly telling. Penthea complains, “O, my wracked honour, ruined by those tyrants, / A cruel brother, and a desperate dotage” (4.2.144-5). What is most emphasised

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<sup>9</sup> See Corinne Abate’s “Katherine Gordon and the Art of Marriage Brokering in *Perkin Warbeck*” for a careful discussion of the reworking of power in the marriage market and the trafficking in women in this play.

<sup>10</sup> See Malcolm Smuts’ essay, “Force, love and authority in Caroline political culture” for a discussion of the various ways in which the Lipsian idea of virtue as love (between a King and his subjects) can be seen in political discourses in the period.

here is not specifically the changed marriage, but his cruel tyranny. To add to the significance of such a description, Penthea's "monarch" husband's dotage, too, is not exempt from this accusation. Ithocles comes to understand the cruelty of his actions when suffering in his love for the seemingly unattainable princess, Calantha. The poetic justice of the situation is made clear in Penthea's wish that the heavens visit unrequited love on her brother for wronging her, saying, "let some wild fires / Scorch, not consume [his heart]; may the heat be cherished / With desires infinite, but hopes impossible" (3.2.47-9). In a cruel echo of Sidney's Atrophil quoted at the beginning of this essay, the sufferings enjoyed, and I use the word advisedly, by the speakers of sonnets are to be inflicted as punishment on Ithocles, whose courtly mistress is both literal (a princess) and poetically conventional. Since it was his desire (for advancement) that destroyed her love, Penthea asks that his desire also becomes his destruction. Not only this, but Ithocles recognises his cruelty in governmental terms, saying to his sister, "Put me to any penance for my tyranny, / And I will call thee merciful" (3.2.63-4). At the same time as he acknowledges his own abuse of power, Ithocles' language raises Penthea to a position of spiritual authority.

Ithocles' contrition is due to his own love for Calantha which he thinks can never be fulfilled because of her status. In this he shows restraint, knowing he should not reach above his own station, curtailing the ambition he showed in re-arranging Penthea's marriage. But whilst Calantha does become Ithocles' romantic mistress *and* remains his Princess, Penthea has fallen in status in her marriage:

Bassanes:       ... What thinks my Penthea  
Of the delightful island we command?  
Rule me as thou canst wish.

Penthea:               I am no mistress.  
Whither you please, I must attend; all ways  
Are alike pleasant to me. (2.1.105-9)

Although Bassanes appears to offer Penthea the powerful position of the neo-Platonic beloved, the mutual monarchy continuously occupied by Katherine Gordon in *Perkin Warbeck*, the audience has already seen him closing off the windows of their home so that Penthea is not left open to temptation. Her response, "I am no mistress" is the truer statement, and highlights the loss of the mutual, chaste, romantic love between Orgilus and Penthea. This is made all the more evident by Bassanes' return to the courtly forms when he realises his own jealous irrationality, saying, "No breach of reason dares make war with her / Whose looks are sovereignty, whose breath is balm" (3.2.163-4).

Bassanes' position as "monarch" in their household is emphasised in Penthea's assertion that she *must* attend wherever he wishes. The line break at "all ways", too, allows a double reading, suggesting that she "must attend *all ways*" (and always), and that all different ways are the same to her. Although she chooses to describe this as "pleasant", we may as easily understand "unpleasant"; wherever she is, she will be unhappy because of her lost love and forced marriage.

It seems, then, that monarchical will must be obeyed, and, indeed, throughout the play, will becomes conflated with law. In Act 2, Crotolon states, "Kings may command; their wills / Are laws not to be questioned" (2.2.29-30), and Orgilus in his disguise as a student, and go-between for Prophilus and Euphrania, says "Your will shall be a law, sir" (2.3.16). However, in its repeated assertion of this claim, the play also questions and finally undermines the idea. In the last Act, Calantha begins her reign sentencing Orgilus, "the forfeit of whose allegiance to *our laws*", says Bassanes, "doth covet / Rigour of justice" (5.2.50-51, my emphasis). However, as Calantha in the final scene expresses concerns over her ability to govern, Nearchus asserts, "Royal lady, / Your law is in your will" (5.3.15-16). It is, significantly, this potential wilfulness that is Calantha's main concern regarding her government of Sparta:

Now tell me, you whose loyalties pays tribute  
To us your lawful sovereign, how unskilful  
Your duties or obedience is to render  
Subjection to the sceptre of a virgin,  
Who have been ever fortunate in princes  
Of masculine and stirring composition.  
A woman has enough to govern wisely  
Her own demeanours, passions, and divisions.  
A nation, warlike and inured to practice  
Of policy and labour, cannot brook  
A feminate authority. (5.3.2-12)

If monarchs are unable to govern their own emotions and passions successfully, they are not fit to govern a country. Calantha suggests that as a woman she is more inclined to submit to the rule of her passions than to rule them herself, and it is possible that in Penthea's self-imposed starvation because of her conflicting emotions, and in Calantha's marrying Ithocles' corpse and dying of a broken heart, the play suggests this

is true.<sup>11</sup> However, it is not only female characters who are guilty of such irrationality. Ithocles uses a similar argument to Bassanes:

When you shall show good proof that manly wisdom,  
Not overswayed by passion or opinion,  
Knows how to lead your judgement, then this lady,  
Your wife, my sister, shall return in safety  
Home, to be guided by you. But till first  
I can out of clear evidence approve it,  
She shall be my care. (3.2.182-8)

Bassanes' unfounded jealousy is so irrational that Ithocles considers his behaviour to be less than manly; moreover, such irrationality costs Bassanes the company and control of his wife. In a warning to monarchs in the political sphere, the monarch of the domestic sphere actually loses his kingdom through his tyrannical actions and unmanly passions which overwhelm his reason. His wife is not deemed safe under his guidance; a country is not safe under arbitrary rule.

Considering the difference between "Beasts only capable of sense" and "men, endowed with reason and the use / Of reason", Bassanes asserts that men are "verier beasts than beasts" (4.2.18, 22-3, 28) because they do not *use* the reason with which they have been endowed:

And of those beasts  
The worse am I. I, who was made a monarch  
Of what a heart could wish for, a chaste wife,  
Endeavoured what in me lay to pull down  
That temple built for adoration only,  
And level't in the dust of causeless scandal. (4.2.28-33)

Bassanes once again makes his wife the ideal, the pure, almost divine, woman available for "adoration only", and acknowledges that in attributing to her irrational, unchaste desires he has brought about a "causeless scandal". In the image of bringing down his own temple, Bassanes alerts the audience to the idea that the monarch who behaves

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<sup>11</sup> Lisa Hopkins argues similarly that Calantha's broken heart may be evidence of her inability to govern her passions, adding that, "[b]y the time Ford writes, such a portrayal of the female ruler is virtually stereotypical" ("Spartan Boys" p.223). I would argue, however, that the rational control under debate here is not only applicable to female monarchs, but to monarchs of the public and domestic sphere more generally.

tyrannously towards subjects who are obedient risks bringing about the downfall of his own kingdom. Sadly for Bassanes and his wife, this realisation comes too late, as Penthea has already begun her spiral into madness and death.

Indeed, the play suggests that such irrational surrender to will or desire leads, ultimately, to madness; “Quiet / These vain unruly passions, which will render ye / Into a madness” (4.1.115-16), says Armostes to Ithocles. Bassanes’ tyrannous jealousy drives him to the brink of madness, and Lemophil describes his “admirable lunacy!” (3.2.137). As Bassanes bewails Penthea’s loss of her wits, Orgilus too comments, “Every antic rapture / Can roar as thine does” (4.2.103-4). Whilst it is possible he speaks of Penthea’s madness, I believe it is a comment on the exaggerated language Bassanes employs – “Fall on me, if there be a burning Etna, / And bury me in flames! Sweats hot as sulphur / Boil through my pores!” (4.2.95-7) – and the madness of his tyrannous dotage on his wife. His jealousy even leads him to entertain the possibility that Penthea is committing incest with her brother.<sup>12</sup> Given our knowledge of Penthea – she describes *herself* as a whore (3.2.70) since her faith to Orgilus was spoiled by her enforced marriage – this seems to the audience madness indeed. It does, however, remind the audience of Orgilus’ description of the way in which Penthea was torn from him, in Ithocles’ forced wooing which ravished his sister into marriage with Bassanes. Ithocles too, describes himself as a “Mad man!”, in having “wronged a maid so excellent” (3.2.118) in pursuing his own desires.

The madness of wilful authority figures is, however, used throughout Caroline drama as a foil against representations of the common law, which was understood to be developed through reason.<sup>13</sup> As Edward Coke argued in his *First Part of the Institutes of the Laws of England*, “reason is the life of the Law, nay the common Law it selfe is nothing else but reason” (97b). The reason of the common law derived in part from its long, customary usage, because ‘such prescription, or any prescription used, if it be against reason, this ought not, nor will not bee allowed before Judges, *Quia malus vsus abolendus est*’ [because evil will be destroyed by usage/custom] (Coke 141). Through the passage of time, Coke argues, those laws which were not good or useful would have been lost. More than this, the reason of the common law was based in its evolution from

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<sup>12</sup> This accusation also complements the description of Penthea as a fallen vestal virgin, as the crime of which unchaste vestals were accused was *incestum*. Wildfang notes that their crime need not have been incest in the modern meaning of inter-familial sexual activity, as it is derived from *in-castum* (unchaste), but that modern incest is derived from this idea of impurity (53).

<sup>13</sup> For example, Richard Brome’s *The Queenes Exchange*, *The Queen and Concubine*, and Ford’s *The Ladies Triall*. See Jessica Dyson *Staging Authority in Caroline England: Prerogative, law and Order in Drama 1625-1642* (Ashgate, 2013) for a detailed discussion of this idea.



the Law of Nature, “that soveraigne reason fixed in mans nature, which ministreth common principles of good and evill” (Finch 3-4). The use of the word ‘soveraigne’ is significant: if reason should be sovereign in ruling a man’s actions, it should also be sovereign over will in determining law. It is this idea that Bassanes acknowledges in his self-recriminations over his treatment of Penthea.

It is also reason that Orgilus uses to claim his formerly espoused wife, saying, “I would possess my wife; the equity / Of very reason bids me” (2.3.71-2). That equity is invoked as a function of reason (and therefore law) against the will of the monarch-patriarch highlights the failures of the monarch’s judgement, as in legal terms, providing equity was a prerogative of the King in order to ameliorate the harsh rigour of the law in particular cases; indeed, equitable enforcement would prevent its arbitrary application. Orgilus’ view of the law as more equitable than the King emphasises the arbitrary cruelty of Ithocles’ decision. Against the reason of chaste love, then, Ford places the tyranny of desire; the reasonable wishes of the subject are, through this, juxtaposed with the unreasonable, even mad, unconstrained prerogative authority of the patriarch-monarch. It might seem strange then, that Penthea too goes mad. It could be argued that this is also a consequence of will – she chooses not to eat or sleep.<sup>14</sup> However, I would argue that it is not her own surrender to desire or will that is shown in her madness, but the consequence of madness at the head of the body politic manifest in madness of the subjects. As Technicus, having deciphered Apollo’s oracle, comments, “When kingdoms reel (mark well my saw) / Their heads must needs be giddy” (4.1.126-7).

In the opening discussion between Orgilus and his father, *The Broken Heart* also gestures towards another of Coke’s arguments regarding the reason of common law: that it is not only one man’s reason, which could be faulty, but ‘an artificiall perfection of reason, gotten by long study, observation, and experience, and not of every mans naturall reason, for, *Nemo nascitur artifex* [No one is born an expert]’ (Coke 97b). Crotolon asks his son:

Athens? Pray why to Athens? You intend not  
To ...  
... become  
An Areopagite, and judge in causes  
Touching the commonwealth? For as I take it,  
The budding of your chin cannot prognosticate  
So grave an honour. (1.1.5-11)

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<sup>14</sup> Nancy Gutierrez makes a similar argument in “Trafficking in John Ford’s *The Broken Heart*” (78).

Crotolon observes that his son is too young and inexperienced to become a member of the highest judicial body in Athens, with responsibility for the whole commonwealth. Orgilus acknowledges that his father is correct in his argument, so in terms of plot, this discussion is unnecessary. Rather, it emphasises the importance of law, experience and careful judgement from the beginning of the play. As Act 5 opens, Bassanes asserts:

Athens, to Athens I have sent, the nursery  
Of Greece for learning, and the fount of knowledge.  
For here in Sparta there's not left amongst us  
One wise man to direct; we're all turned madcaps. (5.1.1-4)

The wisdom of the Athenian judiciary is thus set clearly against the wilful madness of the individual monarch-patriarchs in Sparta. In such legal politics, it is significant that at his death brought about by rashly taking the law into his own hands, Orgilus states, 'So falls the standards / Of my *prerogative* in being a creature' (5.2.150-1, my emphasis).

Towards the end of the play, Orgilus comments on the King's behaviour, thus:

Crotolon: The king hath spoke his mind.

Orgilus:                    His will he hath;  
But were it lawful to hold plea against  
The power of greatness, not the reason, haply  
Such undershrubs as subjects sometimes might  
Borrow of nature justice, to inform  
That licence sovereignty holds without check  
Over meek obedience. (3.4.1-6)

Whilst it is true that as the play progresses, there is an increased emphasis on will over law, Orgilus' emphasis here on "will", the "power of greatness", and the unchecked power of sovereignty seems an unfair assessment of this particular king. Amyclas is, by all accounts, a good king, and, unlike Ithocles, he says he will never force his daughter to marry anyone she does not choose. It is also a very odd statement to make if *The Broken Heart* is only about the problems of forced marriage or trafficking in women (Gutierrez 65-81), or the dangers of constraining oneself to act only as society demands (Hawkins 129-152). It does, however, seem less out of place if we consider the love plots as political in the way I have suggested. It is possible to debate with a reasonable monarch – indeed, Calantha later asks her subjects' advice in choosing a husband to

help her govern properly (5.3.12-15) – but with the exercise of power without reason the only option left to the subject is pleading.<sup>15</sup> The legal terminology of plea and justice here emphasises the necessity of upholding the law as a means to make the power of the king more equitable.

*The Broken Heart* is saved from being utterly devastating only by the mutually consenting, affectionate marriage of Euphrania and Prophilus which is supported by patriarchs and the monarch. They echo the original relationship between Orgilus and Penthea, indicated in the passage from Act 1, scene 3 I quoted earlier, where even Orgilus affirms their similarity in honourable love in saying, “so was mine” (1.3.58), and in their mutual love and parental consent. Euphrania, like Penthea, makes her promises on the fires of Vesta (1.1.98). Their relationship is also upheld at the end of the play as a model for others as Orgilus is careful to emphasise that he did not wish to undermine their marriage in his revenge against Ithocles (5.2.75-6). Prophilus and Euphrania also have the only positive “desires” in the play: “For to speak truth”, she says to him, “The law of my desires kept equal pace / With yours” (1.3.73-6). This desire, accompanied by law, serves to confirm the mutuality of their love, not to undermine the stability of their relationship, and such voiced desire is almost immediately contained and controlled as she asserts the truth of her “chaste vows” (1.3.89). If we read the love plots politically, as I have argued we should, the play seems to suggest that “a properly governed society will regulate passion without suppressing it” (Smuts 38). This kind of mutually desiring but simultaneously chaste love is concordant with the image Charles I sought to project of the court in his “fecund and physical as well as spiritual” (Sharpe, *Criticism* 68) marriage with Henrietta-Maria. In the mutually desiring marriage of Euphrania and Prophilus, the play suggests that desire contained, but not constrained, by law assures mutual happiness. If, as the dirge sung at Calantha’s death states, such “love only reigns in death” (5.3.93), rather than in life, then madness, suffering and death are the consequence. Throughout the play, in both the political actions and the love plot, reason in law, love and monarchy are advocated. In the Caroline context, forced obedience and the tyranny of patriarchal monarchy lacks the reason and equity of the law, and is incompatible with the tenets of neo-Platonism espoused by the Queen, and the chastity of the court promulgated by the King. A harmonious marriage of the chaste desires of the patriarch / monarch and of the subject is the only way to prevent the chaos in the State barely contained by Calantha’s marriage dance of death.

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<sup>15</sup> In his *The True Lawe of Free Monarchies*, James VI and I argued that even if a King acts against the laws of God, the only option open to his subjects is to fly from his fury “without resistance, but by sobes and teares to GOD” (sig. C5v).

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