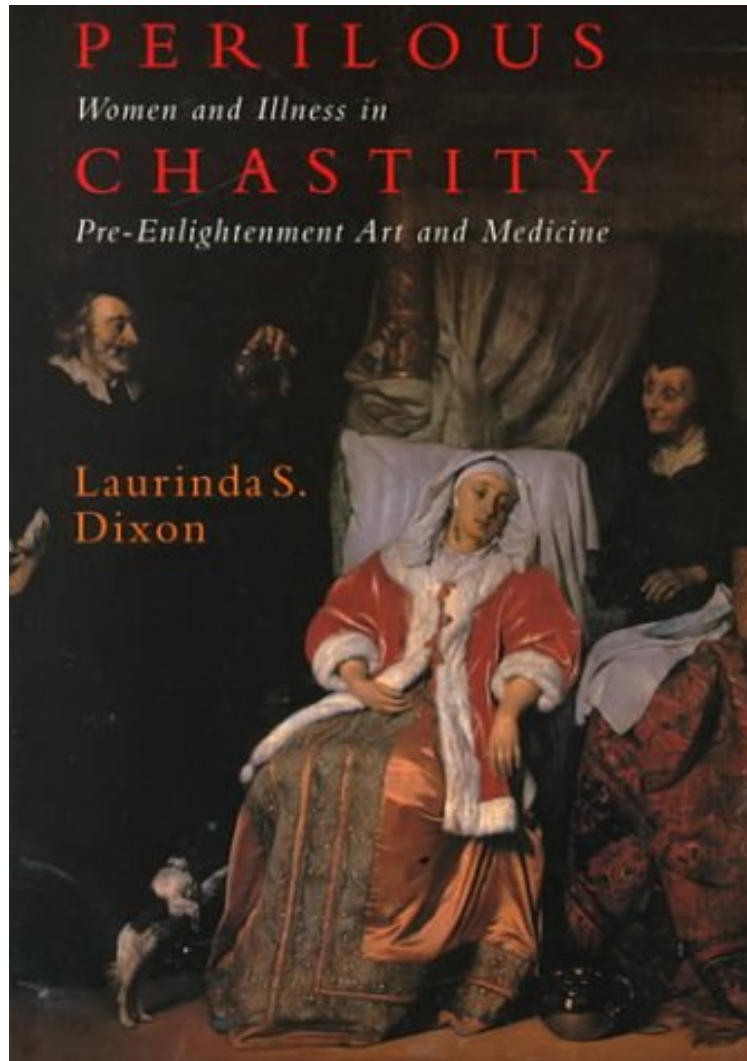


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## Perilous Chastity: Women and Illness in Pre-Enlightenment Art and Medicine

Laurinda S. Dixon

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"Wonderfully engaging, this unique study shows how art reveals a misogynistic medical establishment's attitudes toward women. Dixon traces the origins of 'hysteria,' richly illustrating her analysis with more than 100 paintings from

the 13th through the 18th centuries, focusing primarily on 17th-century Dutch works."--Publishers Weekly

From Publishers Weekly Until the late 17th century, the womb was regarded as discrete and animate. Hungry for male seed, if unsatisfied it wandered the body, causing illness and bodily distress. Known as hysteria or uterine furies, the idea of the denied womb had its origins in the Hippocratic belief in the dangers of sexual abstinence. Women were considered frail from birth, their anatomy predisposing them to weakness and instability. Their health?at times their very lives?could be endangered by virginity. Wonderfully engaging, this unique study shows how art reveals a misogynistic medical establishment's attitudes toward women. Dixon traces the origins of "hysteria," richly illustrating her analysis with more than 100 paintings from the 13th through the 18th centuries, focusing primarily on 17th-century Dutch works. The paintings are filled with metaphors for and erotic references to the denied womb. The lovesick maiden; the pale, languishing patient; the doctor's visit; the chamber pot in the maiden's sickroom; all reveal the ancient link between sex and illness. By examining these paintings as documents with references to the medical discourse of the time, Dixon looks at art in light of history and the strong influence of scientific dogma on our cultural heritage. Photos. Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Dixon presents her arguments clearly and forcefully, and her volume is well written, as well as a feast for the eyes. . . . Dixon's study is an important one for scholars in medical history, art history, and women's studies because of its ambitious attempts to mold medical theory about female bodies and artists' representations of women and girls into a comprehensive picture of women's lives." Ann Ellis Hanson, *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* "This impeccably researched work traces 'hysteria' . . . into the modern period. . . . Dixon's work will be of great interest to scholars in the fields of medical history, art history, and women's studies." Katherine Dauge-Roth, *Journal of the History of Medicine*