



# A handbook of literary feminisms

Shari Benstock, Suzanne Ferriss, Susanne Woods.

# A HANDBOOK OF LITERARY FEMINISMS

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*For our students*

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## INTRODUCTION

This book emerged from the **feminist** work in literature over the past 40 years, a body of writing that includes contemporary literature written by women who consider themselves feminists and who address in their poetry, prose, and drama issues central to women's identity, creativity, and lived experiences. This statement, however, presumes that we know what "feminist" means and that the connection between the creative act of writing and the political stance of **feminism** is clear both to the writers and to their audiences. The link between feminism and literature is complex and sometimes elusive, and definitions of both terms have changed over time.

Women writers of the second half of the twentieth century were influenced by a consciously constructed feminism that shared its political roots with the civil rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. But what can we say about women writers who treated women's issues in earlier historical periods when neither the word "feminist" nor organized movements toward women's independence and political rights existed?

We assume that there is not a single definition of "feminism" that can encompass five centuries of women's literary history. In the late eighteenth century, for instance, Mary Wollstonecraft was among the first writers in English to advocate equal rights for women, including equal access to education and the professions. But could we not apply the term "feminism" retroactively to Aphra Behn, who in the seventeenth century defended her sex's ability in writing as equal to men's, including that of the "immortal" Shakespeare? The positions held by both of these women imply women's right to public lives and writing for publication as providing a means of effecting change in culture and society. Contemporary feminists recognize Behn and Wollstonecraft as two of our most important literary and political foremothers. But what about women, such as Hannah More, who published poems against slavery in the late eighteenth century but advocated limiting women's education in other works? Or George Eliot, herself a much published female author of the nineteenth century, who dismissed "silly novels" by lady novelists? For their independence of mind and willingness to speak it, these writers have been claimed by contemporary readers as equally significant contributors to the history of women's literature. Would we then eliminate them from a handbook of "literary feminisms"? Not at all.

One way of identifying a tradition of women's writing is to recognize the contributions of women writers of whatever historical period, whether or not they saw themselves as "feminists" or in their work self-consciously ex-

amined the issues of gender and sexuality, such as women's place in politics and society, access to education, and the right to vote. Another way would be to include only those women writers whose subject matter or literary style could be described as "feminist." Our approach has more in common with the first than the second.

We believe that there is no single tradition of literary feminism, nor is there a litmus test for including some women writers and eliminating others. This book is aimed at asking a broad range of questions about women's literary production without enforcing a divide between "good" feminists and "bad" feminists. Our approach is to ask instead what writing by women means and has meant over the centuries:

- Why do women write?
- What is the range of women writers' subject matter and themes?
- What genres have women chosen to write in and why?
- How are female characters presented in women's texts?
- What innovations in form and style have women contributed to literature?
- How have women's texts been received by readers?
- How have the processes of publication affected women's writing?
- How has the process of canonization shaped the literary history of women?
- How have women writers responded to literature written by women?
- How did women's literature affect history and culture, including feminism?

These questions mean that we would not castigate George Eliot for dismissing her literary sisters. We might, instead, appreciate that she was evaluating their literary production, which was her prerogative as a writer and could be viewed not as a dismissal of women, but rather as an attempt to improve the quality of women's writing.

Contemporary feminism and literary criticism and theory have opened the way to varieties of literary *feminisms*. For example, contemporary feminist critics have not shied away from redefining the work of Edith Wharton as feminist (despite the fact that she refused that label in her lifetime) and have enlarged the interpretation of her works beyond the "novel of manners." Indeed, she is given credit now for having reinvented the form.

A *Handbook of Literary Feminisms* examines two aspects of literary feminism: (1) the history of women's contributions to Anglo-American literature over the past 500 years, charting the social, cultural, and historical conditions that shaped women's work and (often) guaranteed that women's writing would be devalued by literary history or disregarded altogether, and (2) the emergence in the early 1960s of feminist criticism and theory in the academy. Seeking initially to rediscover lost women's texts and encourage

their acceptance into the canons of Anglo-American literature, feminist criticism developed critiques of Western patriarchy's power structures (including racism, colonialism, and capitalism), examining the philosophical, political, economic, and linguistic systems that supported these structures.

The literary history section begins with early women's writing in English, providing a broad historical sweep intended to offset the recent emphasis on women's writing from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. We believe that the writing from earlier periods and the perspectives offered by women authors is crucial to understanding the differences among historical periods, especially their social and religious mores, and provides us the opportunity to discuss literature in danger of loss from the literary canon. These texts offer some of the earliest examples of women's contributions to genres that previously had belonged to men, including devotional texts and philosophical treatises. Women revised these, as they did *belles lettres*, and made them their own. This writing, particularly from the earlier periods, can be difficult in ways that challenge contemporary readers, but to ignore or eliminate it altogether is to erase hundreds of years of women's work and effectively to erase the existence of the women themselves.

The large body of women's writing in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries presents a challenge of another sort. The enormous literary production of women in these periods has made it impossible to include every woman writer in all genres of women's literary contributions. We have tried to highlight works that are exemplary in their innovation in literary form and subject matter and their influence on changing cultural norms and values. The *novel* came to dominate all other *genres* during these two centuries, and women were the major practitioners of this form. But women also produced *poetry*, *drama*, *memoirs*, philosophical treatises, and political tracts, and our literary history reflects these aspects of women's literature and criticism.

Our divisions in the history section are organized into the traditional literary periods. We recognize that such boundaries are arbitrary and not without controversy, particularly from a feminist standpoint. But for ease of use we have retained these divisions, noting wherever possible how women's writing challenges not only the division of literature into such neat historical units but also the grouping of works according to literary movements, such as Romanticism and Modernism.

The history of women's literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is inseparable from the development of feminist literary criticism and theory that emerged as a separate form of literary analysis beginning in the 1960s and was influenced by the contemporary women's movement. We provide a brief summary of this development from the 1960s through the 1990s and discuss its relation to other important theories and schools of criticism. The final sections covering the most recent developments in feminist theory and criticism are organized conceptually rather than chronologically, emphasizing that feminist approaches to texts have incorporated theoretical investigations of sexuality, subjectivity, and ideology.

**A HANDBOOK HOW TO**

This handbook is intended for classroom use at the advanced high school, undergraduate, and graduate levels. It was created with the idea that instructors may want to supplement the handbook with primary texts and additional secondary materials. Organization of the handbook is intended to allow teachers and students maximum flexibility.

The volume is organized into four sections—a history of women's literature, an overview of feminist theory and criticism with particular attention to its applications, a glossary of key terms, and bibliographies of primary and secondary sources. These can be used in a variety of ways:

- The literary history section is arranged chronologically into six chapters: Early Modern Traditions (1500–1700), Eighteenth-Century Triumphs (1700–1780), Romantic Revolutions (1780–1832), Victorian Contradictions (1832–1895), Modern Experiments (1895–1945), and Late Twentieth-Century Directions (1945–2000). Together they trace the sweep of literary feminism in English across five centuries. As a result, the history section could serve as the foundation for a course on women's literature. The individual chapters can also stand alone and may be used with other materials for courses specializing in a particular period.

- The criticism and theory section is intended to be used in conjunction with the literary history section by offering approaches to reading women's literature. But it could also be used on its own as part of a course on feminist literary criticism and theory. Instructors may also choose to begin here, referring students back to the history section for discussion of the texts in question. The Critical Intersections chapter focuses on the most promising engagements of feminist theories with emerging work in studies of gender and sexuality, race and ethnicity, and ideology and culture. These discussions also stand alone and can be used in courses investigating these theoretical issues, as well as in relation to the literary history section.

- The Glossary provides brief definitions of the key terms invoked in the text. Terms contained in the glossary are identified in boldface in the text.

- Bibliographies guide readers to works mentioned in the text itself and also to the many other primary and secondary resources available. The bibliographies are divided into sections, corresponding to the chapters in the text.

In addition, we have provided a time line that traces the historical and cultural events shaping literary feminism, including major publications by author. Birth and death dates for each author are included in the history section of the text.

# Part 1

## History

## Early Modern Traditions: 1500–1700

Literary feminism, broadly conceived as a visible tradition of women's voices asserting a woman's position within the culture, is a product of the printing press. Until the late fifteenth century all publication was by manuscripts, whose circulation was often confined to a small coterie. In the late 1400s, as Johannes Gutenberg and others developed movable type, books were still mostly handwritten, sometimes by one person copying another's book, sometimes by an assembly of monks or nuns in a "scriptorium." Despite the obvious limits of manuscript production, some women in earlier European society found voices and a wide readership through manuscript publication going back as far as ancient Greece, where the poet Sappho (sixth century B.C.E.) achieved lasting fame for her extraordinary love poems, mostly to other women. Plato called her "the tenth muse," and her influence on European lyric poetry extends to the present day. In Rome several patrician ladies also became recognized writers, including another famous lyricist, Sulpicia (first century B.C.E.).

In medieval Europe, too, a few women sustained reputations as writers and intellectuals, notably nuns such as Heloise in France (ca. 1100–63), Hildegard of Bingen in Germany (1098–1179), Catherine of Siena in Italy (1347–80), and the anchorite Dame Julian of Norwich in England (1342–after 1416). Both Julian and the other great medieval English woman writer, Margery Kempe (ca. 1373–1439), may have been illiterate or semiliterate, although it is difficult to know for sure since standards for literacy were more complex in their time. Literacy usually meant the ability to read and write Latin, so it was no particular shame to dictate one's vernacular voice and have it preserved by more learned clerics, but the resulting text does involve mediation by a hand belonging to someone else, usually male. Margery certainly dictated her book, the first autobiography in English, and Julian may have dictated the visions that comprise the two versions of her "Showings."

While literacy rates were low in the middle ages, clerics and other religious scholars could generally read and write Latin and their own vernaculars, and others might well be able to read but not write (Finke 64–72; Clanchy). The nobility could often read (though not necessarily write) English and French. Both men and women of the gentry and mercantile classes might well be able to read their vernacular language but would hire scribes to write as the demands of their estates or business required. One of our richest troves of information about fifteenth-century England comes from a series of letters from the Paston family, whose matriarch, Margaret Paston,



wrote (or dictated) with lively immediacy. Even earlier, in the fourteenth century, the popular Lollard religious movement encouraged both men and women to copy and circulate books. John Wycliff's translation of the Bible into English in the 1390s was forcefully suppressed by church authorities but managed to reach a wide audience anyway (Aston). By the later middle ages "literacy was no longer the sole preserve of the aristocratic class," and women of the middle classes increasingly owned books (Finke 71).

Women could also become familiar with literature through the common experience of hearing books read out loud. From the earlier monastic practice of reading aloud during mealtimes through the late sixteenth-century report of Edmund Spenser reading his *Faerie Queene* to Queen Elizabeth's court, women and men in reading communities were in this sense "literate" whether or not they could read by themselves. By the late middle ages continental writers, such as Christine de Pisan (1365–ca. 1430), whose *City of Ladies* is perhaps the first popular feminist text, were read widely in England alongside Chaucer and other English court poets. Christine's influence, including her arguments for women's education, continued into the print era as she became one of the earliest continental vernacular writers translated and published in England (in 1521).

At the dawn of the print era many women owned books, many could read, and others who could not read had communities in which books were read to them, and the international literature included texts by as well as for women. Print, however, had a subversive effect on the control of literary production, making it somewhat easier for more women to publish.

The printing press allowed for a largely uncontrolled proliferation of reading opportunity, even though it took two centuries after the press's first appearance for it to dominate manuscript circulation fully. Until nearly 1700 members of the ruling class still considered it brash and inappropriate to have their work printed (Eisenstein, Marrotti). Manuscript circulation allowed an elite to control culture in a way print did not, since usually a reader would need access to the privileged group to get a copy of the manuscript. By contrast, in the early days of printing almost anyone with a few shillings could arrange for multiple copies to be printed, advertised in the common bookstall area of St. Paul's Cathedral yard, and sold to anyone with a few pennies. This relatively uncontrolled circulation of texts posed a threat to cultural hegemony and quickly led to a variety of libel and censorship laws, along with some clear anxieties about women as readers and writers (Wall 279–83). A similar situation exists today, at the dawn of another new technology, as print has itself become a kind of coterie publication largely controlled by a wealthy few through business conglomerates. Anyone with access to a computer, however, can post and read (and see and hear) the unregulated publications of the Internet and Web.

While aristocrats resisted having their writing put into print during the first 200 years of the new print technology, the situation was fluid. The Countess of Pembroke permitted a wide manuscript circulation of her poems based on the Psalms, for example, although they did not reach print

until the nineteenth century, 200 years after her death (ed. Hannay et al.). On the other hand, she carefully edited and supervised the posthumous publication of her brother's work and had no compunction about publishing works that she translated from French to English. When her niece, Lady Mary Wroth, published the *Urania* in 1621, she provoked a scandal, and as Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, began in the 1650s to publish and distribute volume after volume of her essays, poems, and plays, critics such as Dorothy Osborne and Samuel Pepys reacted with shocked fascination. Yet the Countess of Pembroke used print to enshrine her brother and to promote the Huguenot (French Protestant) ideas they both favored, and Cavendish certainly knew, as did at least a few of her predecessors, that if she were to speak to both present and future audiences and achieve the fame and visibility she desired, she would need printed books to do it. Despite the rich tradition of manuscript circulation, the assertive female community that we associate with literary feminism developed only (and slowly) with the beginning of print.

Among the earliest printed works in English were a few pages from the manuscript *Book of Margery Kempe*, offered as a short pamphlet in 1501 by Wynkyn de Worde and titled *A Short Treatise of Contemplation*. The excerpted pamphlet was reprinted in 1521 by Henry Pepwell, the same year that he printed Bryan Ansley's translation of Christine de Pizan's *City of Ladies*. It would be interesting to know who read Christine's provocative book, and whether it inspired any Englishwomen to assert themselves. As far as we can tell, however, no living Englishwoman brought her own words to the printing press within the first 50 years of its life in English.

Finally, sometime between 1524 and 1526 there appeared in print *A Devout Treatise upon the Pater Noster* (Lord's Prayer), whose subtitle tells us that it was "made first in Latin by the most famous doctor Erasmus Roterdamus, and turned into English by a young, virtuous and well-learned gentlewoman of 19 year[s] of age." The translator was Margaret More Roper, one of the famously learned daughters of Sir Thomas More, the great humanist scholar and author of *Utopia*. More was a Lord Chancellor of England (chief minister to the king) who became a Roman Catholic martyr for his refusal to swear the oath of succession that made Henry VIII the head of the Christian church in England. His daughter Margaret tended him in the Tower of London during his last weeks, and their letters to each other (published in a biography of More by Margaret's husband, William Roper) are an early and moving example of a father-daughter relationship based on intellectual respect as well as familial affection.

That Margaret More Roper's translation should be the first printed English work by a living woman suggests a great deal about cultural values and gender roles. In the sixteenth century, women were legally and socially defined in relation to men and in terms of their sexuality. They were daughters (and virgins) before marriage, wives (and expected to be faithful and fruitful) after marriage, and widows (and expected to remarry or remain chaste) should they survive their husbands. It was the man's role to speak

and work in the public sphere. A woman who went beyond the bounds of the home, who appeared and spoke in public, became an accessible sexual temptation. Men so deeply feared female sexuality and self-assertion, often associated with unauthorized speaking, that they defined the virtuous woman as “chaste, silent, and obedient” (Hull).

Margaret More Roper’s translation of Erasmus both enacts and challenges that definition. On the one hand a translation hides the translator behind the authority of the original, in this case (as in all but a few cases in the early modern period) a man. In that sense Roper maintains her silence. On the other hand the “new learning,” what we have since come to call Renaissance humanism, advocated translation of classical texts as both homage to the civilizing power of the original and a serious exercise of one’s own rhetorical skill. Roper’s translation of a text in Latin by a contemporary and family friend, an important voice for religious reform within the Catholic church, may have been a volley in the rhetorical wars of religion set off by Martin Luther in 1517. Roper feigns anonymity; her name appears nowhere in the book. Her authorship was no secret, however, and both her contemporaries and her father’s biographers refer to this and other manuscript works, most of them unfortunately lost, as evidence of her “elegant and graceful” work in English, Latin, and Greek (Verbrugge in Hannay, *Silent* 30). Roper’s silence, then, is a vexed issue, although as daughter and wife of learned men who encouraged her intellect, her chastity and obedience were never in question.

The Reformation and counter-Reformation, along with the printing press, were the principal motivating forces of change in the sixteenth century. Their effect was almost universal, touching gender roles and responses along with everything else. Starting around 1540 (toward the end of the reign of Henry VIII), intellectual women and the Protestant movement encouraged and reinforced each other so that the radical appeal of reform Protestantism recurs like a refrain in the history of early literary feminism.

### FEMINISM AND RELIGION IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

The word “feminism” usually signifies a range of recent ideas, most of them less than 100 years old. The term should be used carefully in relation to early modern women (that is, women writing between about 1500 and 1700), since the effort to find present-day meanings often leads to serious distortions of early modern experience. There are some analogies we can use, however, to begin to understand the terms in which early modern women perceived and sometimes challenged their social, political, and economic situation—challenges that we may call in retrospect a form of feminism. One useful analogy is between twentieth-century psychology and sixteenth-century religion.

Modern feminists have had to grapple with the ideas, beliefs, and language of twentieth-century psychology, from Sigmund Freud’s assertion that “biology is destiny” and his analysis of the mind, through Carl Jung’s gendered archetypes with their “anima” and “animus,” to later renderings of human relationships and sexuality.

In sixteenth-century Europe it was religion, not psychology, that determined the principal ideas, beliefs, and language from which discussion of gender developed. Like twentieth-century psychology, sixteenth-century European Christianity defined the healthy individual and the healthy community, and just as Freudian and post-Freudian psychology posited the driving force of desire, never to be fully satisfied, so Reformation and counter-Reformation religion talked about the longing for a perfect God by creatures forever separated from Him by sin. If the psychologically healthy twentieth-century person was one who knew how to relax into discovering who he or she is, the sixteenth-century Christian was one who had to learn to abandon all pretense of self-creation in order to receive God’s revealing grace.

Also like twentieth-century psychology, religion in the sixteenth century was a battleground of disputed terms and ideas, but with the stakes not present happiness but eternal joy or damnation, the life or death of the soul. The language of sin and salvation, damnation and grace, not only ordered and controlled social and personal behavior but also became the vocabulary for defining and expressing the premodern self. We do not find modern feminism in this period, but we do find ideas that could and did empower some women to question gender roles and risk the opprobrium of appearing in print.

The Reformation and counter-Reformation both assumed an all-powerful, personal God. Everyone agreed, following Genesis 1–3, that God created humankind and had given men and women free will, but they had chosen to disobey God and follow their own desires. Not everyone agreed exactly how this happened and who was to blame, however. The two versions of the creation story in Genesis present quite different views of the relation of male to female, with the second version also providing the theological foundation for distrust of women generally. In the first Genesis story, male and female were created together in the image of God (Gen. 1:27; all citations are from the King James translation, 1611), while in the second God makes Adam first, gives him dominion over the world, and then forms Eve from one of Adam’s ribs to be his companion (Gen. 2:21–23). In the first version God sees that everything he has made is “very good” (Gen. 1:31), while in the second he warns Adam (before Eve is formed) to stay away from the “tree of knowledge of good and evil” (2:17). Eve, however, is tempted by a serpent: “and when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Gen. 3:6). The result of this “original sin” was separation from God and therefore all that was good, which meant pain and death. The object of life was to get back to God, which meant happiness and eternal life.

Both Catholics and Protestants agreed that the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross had provided the means of salvation, but they differed substantially on how that means applied to the salvation of individuals, and their theological arguments often carried class and gender implications. One trigger of the Reformation, for example, was the longstanding Catholic prac-

tice of granting “indulgences,” or mitigation of a person’s individual sins, through a variety of “works.” Catholic theology posited a temporary hell, purgatory, which virtually all saved sinners must endure before their translation to heaven (saints were an exception). Good works, whether your own or ones you paid to have done for you, could cut down your time in purgatory. In practice, wealthy people could give money to monasteries to say prayers on their behalf, both before and after their deaths, effectively buying their way out of responsibility for their actions, and unscrupulous wandering preachers and “pardoners” (such as Chaucer’s most wicked pilgrim) could scare the poorer folk and con them out of their money.

Protestants also dismissed the Catholic tradition of saints, charging it with encouraging idolatry and the practice of indulgences. One consequence was to eliminate the longstanding worship of Mary as a co-redeemer with her son, Jesus, and so eliminate the only widespread female symbol of divinity. While Mary represented the apotheosis of female obedience, virginity, and motherhood, she was also imbued with enormous power and with values assumed to mitigate the harsher judgments of a patriarchal God.

Honorable churchmen had long attacked abuses such as the sale of indulgences, but Martin Luther questioned many of their very premises. In 1517 he put 95 topics for debate on the church door at Wittenberg, the usual method for inviting theological discussion, but his questions were volatile and included a denial of many standard Catholic practices, such as the Catholic sacrament of penance, or confession. Luther’s core belief was that faith alone in Jesus Christ saved the sinner, and not works, whether performed by the sinner or his surrogate. If faith alone made a person righteous, then why have a special sacrament of priesthood to mediate between a person and God?

Luther also questioned the Catholic doctrine that celibacy was a holier calling than marriage, which was to have mixed results for women. One result was considerable attention to the idea of Christian marriage, and ultimately the development of a patriarchal family structure alongside, and often in place of, the authority of religious hierarchy. At the same time, by disparaging celibate life, glorification of marriage led to the decline of monasteries and convents, eliminating a socially approved and productive environment for single women.

The Reformation did have two unquestionably positive effects for women. Its emphasis on scripture and on the centrality of the Bible promoted vernacular literacy for everyone, including women. And its assertion of the salvific power of faith, with Christ (not priests or saints) the only mediator between a person and God, placed great emphasis on the integrity of the individual conscience. As a result, if a woman of faith firmly believed that Christ was calling her to do something (including write and publish), no one could tell her with authority that she could not.

Further, the Catholic counter-Reformation saw girls as a powerful resource for challenging the progress of the Reformation, since, as mothers, they would become their children’s first teachers. An important result was

an effort to catechize (that is, teach the doctrine of the church) and make literate as many Catholic girls as possible, not just those from the upper classes. This effort in turn spawned educational movements throughout Catholic Europe, including the teaching nuns of the Ursuline Order and St. Vincent De Paul’s Daughters of Charity.

Both Protestants and Catholics in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw merit in vernacular female literacy, if not in the more extensive education usually confined to men. It seems reasonable to suggest that literary feminism begins in the turmoil of religious change in early modern England, and often in the language of religion.

## WOMEN AND THE BEGINNINGS OF THE ENGLISH REFORMATION (1533–60)

Some years ago rumor had it that a serious young graduate student in history had submitted an M.A. thesis with the unfortunate title “The Position of Women under Henry VIII.” In the popular imagination Henry is the king with many wives who did not like the Pope telling him he could not divorce them, so he broke with Rome and founded the Church of England. The full truth is considerably more complicated, but it is true that religion and wives were central to the last half of Henry’s long reign, with far-reaching consequences both for English political history and for the history of Englishwomen as thinkers and writers.

The story of Henry VIII and his time is worth a pause, since it shows some of the issues women confronted in a culture very different from our own. Women’s power, with rare exceptions, came through their relationship to men, primarily through marriage. In marriage women remained subject to the authority of their husbands, the law, and the church. Henry embodied all three.

The popular perception of Henry’s divorces and brutality misses the larger point. Women’s bodies were tools of the realm. Yet dangerous as their positions could be, high-born women still had the greatest potential to achieve the education and visibility that might allow them to challenge patriarchal assumptions. During its first century, Protestantism was a principal avenue for that challenge, limited though it was by tradition and by the social and political realities of the time.

Henry was just 19 when he came to the throne in 1509. One of his first acts was to marry the wealthy Spanish princess Catherine of Aragon, who had originally come to England in 1501 to marry Henry’s older brother, Arthur. Arthur died only a few months after the wedding, and their father, Henry VII, whose victory over Richard III in 1485 had finally ended the Wars of the Roses, was reluctant either to send Catherine and her wealth back home or to marry her to his younger son. Freed by his father’s death, the younger Henry proceeded with the marriage. Since church law forbade a man to marry his brother’s widow, the young king first asked for and received papal dispensation to marry Catherine (Scarisbrick 7–13). By all accounts it was a love match, and if Henry and Catherine had produced a male

heir, English history would have been very different. Instead, a daughter, Mary, became the only issue who lived beyond a few weeks, and by the mid 1520s Catherine was beyond her childbearing years. England had never had a successful queen. The king's fear that a royal succession dependent on a woman, his daughter Mary, would be fragile illustrates the patriarchal assumptions of the day.

Henry had numerous affairs, widely considered acceptable indulgences of his royal and masculine authority. When he became enamored of Anne Boleyn in the late 1520s Henry had already enjoyed a liaison with her sister, Mary, but Anne was smart enough to hold him off as he became increasingly convinced that God had frowned on his hasty liaison with his brother's widow. The good Catholic Henry again sought a papal injunction, this time one that would render the original dispensation null and void, making his marriage to Catherine illegal and their daughter a bastard. Despite Henry's efforts on behalf of papal Catholicism, the Pope was at the time dependent on the Holy Roman Emperor, who was Catherine's nephew, and so he was in no position to grant Henry's divorce from Catherine.

Anne picked this time to succumb to Henry's advances and by early 1533 she was pregnant. Henry's English bishops granted him the divorce he wanted, and thus the English church broke from Rome. Despite the popular imagination, which has historically credited (or blamed) Henry for the English Reformation, England did not make a full transition to becoming a Protestant nation until well into the reign of that daughter, Elizabeth, whose birth in 1533 had so disappointed Henry and Anne's hope for a son. In any case, the issues roiling during the early days of the Reformation were to have continuing consequences until at least the eighteenth century.

Despite Henry's insistence on masculine power and traditional religion, women played important roles in the early days of the English Reformation. Anne Boleyn had Protestant sympathies and encouraged Protestant-minded clerics during her brief reign. With the birth of Elizabeth and then a subsequent miscarriage, however, Anne was doomed. Henry allowed Anne's enemies to accuse her of infidelity, which was legally defined as treason since her husband was the king, and he had her beheaded. By then Henry had become infatuated with another young woman, Jane Seymour, who gave him his long-desired son, Edward. Jane died shortly thereafter, but her family members were Protestant sympathizers, and their continuing presence at court, and influence on the young prince, affected the direction of English religion.

Henry's next two wives had little impact on the course of English history, but his last queen, Katherine Parr, became a central figure of the English Reformation and the core of a group of women whose influence extended over several generations. This group may well have included but certainly influenced Anne Askew (ca. 1521–46) and Anne Vaughan Lock (ca. 1532–90). These important Protestant writers inaugurated what we might call the first wave of literary feminism in modern English.

Anne Askew's outspoken Protestant beliefs were in direct opposition to the English church laws passed in 1539, the "Six Articles of Religion" that

largely supported Henry's theological orthodoxy. Askew's report of her *Examinations* by the bishops of London and Winchester, conservative members of Henry's council, made clear her opposition to her expected role as silent and obedient wife. Among things about Askew that scandalized the bishops were her use of her maiden name, despite her marriage to "Mr. Kime," and her insistence on reading the newly translated copy of the Bible kept in the church.

Askew was convicted for not believing in transubstantiation, the doctrine that insisted that bread and wine become the literal body and blood of Christ in the communion service of the mass. She held, instead, the Calvinist view that communion was a memorial of Christ's sacrifice, not its reenactment. This view threatened the special status of priests, who alone, according to the church, had the power to effect transubstantiation. In her *Examinations*, published on the continent shortly after her death, she records her examiners' efforts to have her admit her heresy and displays a keen wit:

Fourthly he asked me, if the host [i.e., consecrated bread] should fall, and a beast did eat it, whether the beast did receive God or no? I answered, seeing ye have taken the pains to ask this question, I desire you also to take so much pain more, as to assoyle [resolve] it yourself, for I will not do it, because I perceive ye come to tempt me. And he said that it was against the order of schools [i.e., against the scholarly form of asking questions] that he which asked the question should answer it. I told him, I was but a woman, and knew not the course of schools.

In the last years of Henry's reign many others were examined and condemned for outspoken Protestant beliefs, but Askew, a woman of respectable birth but no national importance or influence, seems on the surface an odd target. The bishops most likely pursued her prosecution in order to find evidence against Queen Katherine Parr and the other high-born ladies of Katherine's immediate court circle. That they interrogated Askew about such women strongly suggests that the circle of Protestant women extended across traditional class boundaries. When Askew refused to implicate them she was tortured on the rack, and when she refused to recant her Protestant beliefs she was burnt as a heretic. Before her death she arranged to have her record of her examinations, which construct a godly martyr (and reveal a clever and principled woman), given to John Bale, who assured they would be printed. Bale could not resist an interpolated commentary, running to more prose than Askew's own, in which he seeks to define and enclose the portrait of Askew for the Protestant cause. A reader who ignores Bale and just reads Askew's own text will get a more authentic sense of her experience and self-definition. Reading Bale afterwards makes it easy to see the difference between Askew's voice, with its sly construction of a God-empowered female, and the effort by the emerging Protestant patriarchy to reconstruct her into a humble martyr.

A few years after Askew's execution another strong-minded young woman, Anne Vaughan, born into an influential merchant family sympa-

thetic to the Protestant cause, married Henry Lock, another Protestant merchant. Anne Vaughan Lock (later Dering, then Prowse, as she married successively) was the most important woman writer to emerge during the first years of Queen Elizabeth's reign. Her translation of four sermons by John Calvin, published in 1560, is prefaced by a rhetorically sophisticated dedication to the legendary Protestant Duchess of Suffolk and followed by an original **sonnet sequence** based on Psalm 51, the first sonnet sequence published in English. As Anne Prowse she would frame one more translation in a similar way, *On the Marks of the Children of God* by Jean Taffin, in 1590, but it is the earlier work that is most original and remarkable as a precursor of literary feminism.

The sonnet sequence, the first in English, consists of five introductory sonnets followed by 20 sonnets based on verses from Psalm 51, the most penitential psalm of the Hebrew sequence. The poems are characterized by a passionate denunciation of sin and desire for purification. Interestingly, although the poem denies sin, it never denies the body; Lock would cleanse both body and soul rather than eliminate either. Bodily sickness becomes the metaphor for the soul's sinfulness:

Wash me, O Lord, and do away the stain  
Of ugly sins that in my soul appear.  
Let flow thy plenteous streams of cleansing grace,  
Wash me again, yea wash me everywhere,  
Both leprous body and defiled face.  
Yea wash me all, for I am all unclean,  
And from my sin, Lord, cleanse me once again.

Lock's dedicatee, the duchess of Suffolk, was Catherine Willoughby Brandon Bertie, an interesting pivotal person in the history of sixteenth-century court and church. The duchess had known Queen Mary from her childhood—her own mother, Lady Willoughby, had come from Spain as lady-in-waiting to Catherine of Aragon and remained deeply loyal to the deposed queen. The daughter, however, early developed Protestant sympathies and became Katherine Parr's closest friend, and therefore one of the people Henry VIII's bishops hoped Anne Askew would implicate. The duchess's secret escape to the continent with her infant daughter, Susan Bertie, during Queen Mary's reign inspired Protestant women. The poet Aemilia Lanyer, who grew up in the household of the duchess's daughter, Susan Bertie, centers the story in a poem dedicated to Susan. According to Lanyer, the daughter endured as an infant "all dangerous travels by devouring sea" in order "to fly to Christ from vain idolatry" (that is, from the Catholicism Queen Mary was seeking to reimpose on England). Lanyer explains that Susan's mother, "That noble duchess, who lived unsubjected," fled

From Rome's ridiculous prior and tyranny,  
That mighty monarchs kept in awful fear,

Leaving here her lands, her state, [her] dignity.  
Nay, more, vouchsafed disguised weeds [i.e., clothes] to wear,  
When with Christ Jesus she did mean to go,  
From sweet delights to taste part of his woe.

Printed sources, therefore, allow us to identify one continuing tradition of strong Englishwomen who shared beliefs and influenced each other across class lines and over several generations: Anne Askew knew the duchess of Suffolk, who knew Anne Lock, who knew Aemilia Lanyer's parents (Lock's brother was their close friend), who knew the duchess's daughter Susan Bertie, in whose household Lanyer received her education. Lanyer creates the exile story in terms of a mother and daughter who would not be made subject to a rule that went against individual conscience. Literary feminism in England might be said to begin, then, with three generations of interconnected Protestant women.

#### LITERARY FEMINISM IN THE AGE OF ELIZABETH I

Queen Mary's death in 1558 brought Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603) peacefully to the throne. Despite Catholic and Protestant wrangling over the legitimacy of King Henry's two daughters (if he was never truly married to Catherine, Mary must be illegitimate, and if he was married to Catherine, then Elizabeth must be illegitimate), the succession followed Henry's own wishes and the traditional order of the day: First the son inherited, then the older daughter, then the younger. As Anne Boleyn's daughter, often in real danger during Mary's reign, Elizabeth was assumed to be Protestant. She remained cautious, however, and it took the Pope a full 10 years to be certain that Elizabeth would not be brought to Rome. In 1568 Elizabeth was excommunicated and England was formally and, as it turned out, permanently Protestant.

Elizabeth's 45-year reign finally disproved the prevailing belief that England could not have a successful queen. Historians have assumed that a reigning queen had little impact on the status of women more generally in the later sixteenth century, and that seems largely true. For one thing, Elizabeth and her advisors portrayed her reign as a God-given exception to the natural order of things. Anne Lock's good friend, John Knox, put himself in trouble with Elizabeth when he published *The First Blast of the Trumpet against This Monstrous Regiment of Women* in 1558. In it he argued that it was a violation of nature and an offense against God for women to rule. His targets were Catherine de Médicis (the Queen Mother of France), Mary Tudor of England, and Mary Stuart of Scotland, all Catholics, but his timing was terrible; the book appeared in print right after Elizabeth succeeded her sister on the throne (Davis and Farge 168; Neale). In response to Knox, Bishop John Aylmer quickly produced *A Harbor of True and Faithful Subjects*, in which he carefully showed that God could (and did) raise up some women to rule. Part of Aylmer's argument was based on English law: Women were allowed

to inherit property in England, which was not true throughout Europe. If women can inherit, argued Aylmer, and rule is hereditary, then a woman can inherit her father's rule. In any case, John Knox was quick to respond that his attack against women rulers did *not* include Elizabeth, for whom God had obviously made an exception from the general order of His plan. Elizabeth, in turn, was happy to accept herself as God's exception; she made no changes in English law that would have particularly benefited women, and her influential counselors, as far as we know, were all men.

Nonetheless, Elizabeth's reputation as a scholar and the very fact of her rule affected women's imaginations. Mary Sidney Herbert, the Countess of Pembroke (1561–1621), ruled her own domain with the pomp and assurance of a queen, in large part, her biographer argues, on the model of Elizabeth (Hannay, *Philip's Phoenix*). Aemilia Lanyer remembered vividly her youth spent around Elizabeth's court, images that fired her literary imagination. Further, the two principal means by which Elizabeth ruled, through the ritualized courtesies of love conventions and through religious authority, took their subsequent direction in women's writing from the Elizabethan model. Isabella Whitney (fl. 1565–75) and Lady Mary Wroth (1587–ca. 1653), from very different social positions, explored the love conventions from a woman's point of view, while the Countess of Pembroke and Aemilia Lanyer dealt with issues of religion, authority, and power.

**Courtly love**, which first appears as a literary system in the twelfth-century poetry of Italy and southern France, was a game in which the lover treated his lady as if she were his feudal lord, swearing faithfulness to her and performing brave deeds on her behalf. His honor was to serve her and protect her reputation; her honor was her chastity and its inspirational value to the knight who served her. In a world in which women, as daughters and wives, were ever subordinate to men, this game allowed women to enact a superior role, however far from the general circumstance of women. Elizabeth, who used her marriageability as her principal diplomatic card for the first 20 years of her reign, used her image as the Virgin Queen throughout her reign. She formed this image in iconic progresses around the country and it was encoded by the art, poetry, and music of her court. For Elizabeth the courtly love game became literal; she *was* the ruler of her vassal-lovers, inspiring (sometimes ordering) their good deeds. But by enshrining her rule in the language of courtly love, she managed to keep and use her culture's construction of the feminine. Her own poetry responds to her courtly lovers, notably Sir Walter Raleigh and her last serious suitor, Francis, Duc D'Alencon, and keeps the game going. In her poetry, as in her more famous speeches, Elizabeth walks a fine line between womanly coquettishness and the ruler's power.

"On Monsier's Departure," for example, is filled with the **Petrarchan** oymorons typical of the genre:

I am and not, I freeze and yet am burned,  
Since from myself, another self I turned,

My care is like my shadow in the sun,  
Follows me flying, flies when I pursue it,  
Stands and lies by me, doth what I have done.

...

Some gentler passion slide into my mind,  
For I am soft and made of melting snow;  
Or be more cruel, love, and so be kind,  
Let me or float or sink, be high or low,  
Or let me live with some more sweet content,  
Or die, and so forget what love ere meant.

The passion is so deeply encoded in the Petrarchan material that it is impossible to say whether the poem is meant to imitate a real expression or a ceremonial one. It is a skillful poem, in any case, in which the speaker never loses the force of her own authority.

The situation is quite different for the powerless. Isabella Whitney was a young woman of the minor gentry who came to London from Cheshire in the 1560s. Her family valued learning enough to provide a university education to her oldest brother, Geoffrey Whitney, who became famous as a writer and translator of emblem books (books of small pictures accompanied by a short explanatory verse, usually with moralizing intent). Isabella Whitney published the first secular book of verse on a theme of love and marriage, *The Copy of a Letter by a Young Gentlewoman to Her Unconstant Lover* (1567), engaging from a more realistic and middle-class perspective the topic that helped secure the Queen's power. Marriage is a central theme of her *Letter*, which admonishes her lover for deceiving her and planning to marry someone else and recounts briefly the stories of various unfaithful lovers (Jason, Troilus). She moves throughout the poem between modestly accepting a situation she cannot change and asserting her own value:

It shall suffice me, simple soul,  
of thee to be forsaken:  
And it may chance, although not yet,  
you wish you had me taken.

Whitney follows with a second poem, described on the book's title page as "an admonition to all young gentlewomen, and to all other maids in general, to beware of men's flattery," and the book concludes with a poem by a male writer, "a loveletter sent by a bachelor (a most faithful lover) to an unconstant and faithless maiden." In all three cases the theme is the pain of love when the lover does not play by the courtly rules. Whitney had entered service in London (presumably as a lady's maid or governess), a position she lost around 1573, prompting her second book of verse, *A Sweet Nosegay*. The book consists of 110 short moral verses, an exchange with family and friends in which she complains of her loss of position, and a poem she describes as a "Last Will and Testament," but which amounts to a review of



London places and life. She is careful to situate her literary work as a form of housework and a compensation for not having "a husband or a house."

Two generations later, a woman of much higher social class, Lady Mary Wroth, describes a love very different from Whitney's affair on the surface but surprisingly similar at the core. Ostensibly a series of sonnets written by the heroine to the hero of her long prose romance, *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* (1621), they have thinly disguised biographical relevance. The eldest daughter of Sir Robert Sidney, Mary was the niece of the famous author Sir Philip Sidney (d. 1586) and his literary sister, the Countess of Pembroke, after whom she was named. Unhappily married to Sir Robert Wroth in 1604, she had long been infatuated with her cousin, the countess's son William Herbert, who became Earl of Pembroke after 1601. At some point after her husband's death she began an affair with Herbert and in the second decade of the seventeenth century had two children by him. She apparently hoped that the otherwise childless Pembroke would designate their son his heir, but that did not happen. The *Urania*, dedicated to Susan, Countess of Montgomery, the wife of her other Herbert cousin, Philip, is filled with lost children, unknown and complicated parentage, faithful women, and faithless men. The sonnet sequence, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, praises love and the beloved man but bemoans the situation of a woman in love:

My pain, still smothered in my grieved breast,  
 Seeks for some ease, yet cannot passage find  
 To be discharged of this unwelcome guest;  
 When most I strive, more fast his burdens bind.  
 Like to a ship, on Goodwins [Sands] cast by wind  
 The more she strives, more deep in sand is pressed  
 Till she be lost; so am I, in this kind  
 Sunk, and devoured, and swallowed by unrest,  
 Lost, shipwrecked, spoiled, debarred of smallest hope  
 Nothing of pleasure left; save thoughts have scope  
 Which wander may. Go then, my thoughts, and cry:  
 Hope's perished, Love tempest-beaten, Joy lost.  
 Killing Despair hath all these blessings crossed;  
 Yet Faith still cries, Love will not falsify.

Although courtly and sophisticated in form and metaphor, the sentiments are remarkably similar to those in the cruder verse of Isabella Whitney: beloved and faithless men remain beloved and infuriatingly faithless, and the faithful lady suffers.

The Countess of Pembroke engages in the Renaissance fascination with love games only indirectly, through her translation of Robert Garnier's French version of the story of Antony and Cleopatra. Her version, *Antonius*, printed in 1592, is, like Garnier's original, a closet drama (that is, a dramatic work meant to be read rather than staged). It very probably influenced Shakespeare's choice of the topic for his *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606), but the

earlier work's attention is to character rather than action, and its principal concern is whether "fortune" or free will governs the course of a life. Pembroke's Cleopatra is remarkably sympathetic, presented as someone who loves truly and takes responsibility for her failures, while Antony rails at fortune and blames Cleopatra. Critics have speculated why the aristocratic Protestant countess would translate and print this work, with the most likely explanation that she saw it as part of the French Huguenot (that is, Protestant) intellectual life that she and her brother Philip had actively supported. The work does raise important moral issues, and was published secondarily along with her translation of Phillipe de Mornay's *Discourse of Life and Death*, an important French Protestant treatise by a personal friend of the countess and her brother.

The countess's greatest achievement is as a lyric poet. She wrote occasional verse, including a very substantial pastoral elegy on the death of her brother, "The Doleful Lay of Clorinda," which the great Elizabethan poet Edmund Spenser included when he published his own tribute to Sidney, *Astrophel* (1595). She joined the fashion of celebrating Queen Elizabeth with "A Dialogue between two shepherds, Thenot and Piers, in praise of Astrea," a classical name that equates the queen with the goddess of justice. In 10 clever dialogue verses Thenot praises "Astrea," and Piers accuses him of lying:

THEN: Astrea sees with Wisdom's sight,  
 Astrea works by Virtue's might,  
 And jointly both do stay in her.  
 PIERS: Nay take from them her hand, her mind,  
 The one is lame, the other blind,  
 Shall still your lying stain her?

At the end all is made clear, as Thenot queries and Piers responds with the queen's incomparability:

THEN: Then Piers, of friendship tell me why,  
 My meaning true, my words should lie,  
 And strive in vain to raise her.  
 PIERS: Words from conceit [metaphor, imagination] do only  
 rise,  
 Above conceit her honor flies;  
 But silence, nought can praise her.

Although her secular poems were as good as any in Elizabeth's court, her poems based on the Psalms remain the Countess of Pembroke's principal legacy. Philip Sidney began the project, producing 43 poems before his death fighting for the Protestant cause in the low countries in 1586, and the countess

completed the sequence with poems based on Psalms 44-150. These lyrics are elegant, graceful, and assured and contain a breathtaking variety of verse forms. Taking into account forms that vary so-called masculine and feminine rhymes (lines that end with stressed or unstressed syllables, respectively), no two of her lyric verse structures are exactly the same throughout the sequence. She brings an assured grace to her translations, moderating, for example, the passion that Anne Lock brought to her version of Psalm 51. In the countess's version of the first stanza, for example, the balance and parallelism of the verse restrain the more impassioned sense of sin Lock conveys:

O Lord, whose grace no limits comprehend [i.e., has no limits]  
Sweet Lord, whose mercies stand from measure free,  
To me that grace, to me that mercy send,  
And wipe, O Lord, my sins from sinful me.  
O cleanse, o wash my foul iniquity.

Cleanse still my spots, still wash away my stainings,  
Till stains and spots in me leave no remainings.

Despite their circulation in manuscript only, the Sidney-Pembroke psalms were known and admired by many poets, including Lanyer, Ben Jonson, John Donne, and George Herbert. The countess herself apparently hoped to be remembered particularly for this achievement: In 1618 when she allowed what was probably the last portrait of her lifetime, an engraving by Simon van de Passe, she portrayed herself holding a clearly marked volume of "David's Psalms." This is perhaps the earliest and certainly one of the most direct published images of a woman choosing to base her fame in her identity as a writer. She could do this without impunity in part because her subject matter is biblical (they are "David's Psalms," after all) and in part because of her position as a countess and as a Sidney.

Whatever the limits on a woman as a writer in the Elizabethan period, the countess of Pembroke found ways to maneuver around them. As patron, editor, translator, and, ultimately, great lyric poet in the reform Protestant tradition, she established an unmistakable place for women who wanted to write. When Lord Denny, offended by references to his own family scandals in Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania*, told Wroth she should go back to needlework, he also conceded that he would not find her literary activities inappropriate if she would stick to her aunt's piety and write religious verse. In some ways, therefore, by so visibly negotiating acceptable paths for women to write, the countess also may have appeared to exclude others. But nothing can take away from the vitality of her presence in the history of women writers in English. She is unquestionably the founding mother of the English literary tradition.

Aemilia Bassano Lanyer (1569-1645) was perhaps the first woman to respond explicitly to the countess's model. The daughter of an Italian court musician and his English wife, Lanyer grew up around Elizabeth's court and within the influence of the English Reformation.

Lanyer's volume of poetry, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (Hail God, King of the Jews, 1611), has some claim as the first feminist literature. It consists of 11 dedicatory pieces, all to women (including a particularly notable one to the Countess of Pembroke), followed by a long poem on the story of Christ's death and the events surrounding it told entirely from women's points of view. The volume uses religious themes to encompass poetic ambition and to speak directly on behalf of women. The long poem includes, for example, a speech in defense of Eve, spoken in the voice of Pilate's wife, which concludes that the male-ordered crucifixion far outweighs any guilt for original sin attributable to Eve:

Then let us have our liberty again,  
And challenge to yourselves no sovereignty;  
You came not in the world without our pain,  
Make that a bar against your cruelty.  
Your fault being greater, why should you disdain  
Our being your equals, free from tyranny?  
If one weak woman simply did offend,  
This sin of yours hath no excuse, nor end.

Similarly, her prose dedication "To the Virtuous Reader" condemns women who join with men in attacking other women:

Often have I heard that it is the property of some women not only to emulate [i.e., disparage] the virtues and perfections of the rest, but also by all their powers of ill speaking to eclipse the brightness of their deserved fame. Now contrary to this custom . . . I have written this small volume, or little book, for the general use of all virtuous ladies. . . . And this I have done, to make known to the world that all women deserve not to be blamed though some, forgetting they are women themselves, and in danger to be condemned by the words of their own mouths, fall into so great an error as to speak unadvisedly against the rest of their sex.

The verse is often witty and sometimes quite moving, particularly as she focuses a female gaze on the beautiful body of Christ on the cross. In terms taken from the Bible's Song of Solomon, for example, she praises his outward as well as inward beauty. His hair is

Black as a raven in her blackest hew;  
His lips like scarlet threads, yet much more sweet  
Than is the sweetest honey-dropping dew  
Or honeycombs, where all the bees do meet.  
Yea, he is constant, and his words are true,  
His cheeks are beds of spices, flowers sweet.  
His lips, like lillies, dropping down pure myrrh,  
Whose love before all worlds we do prefer.

### CONTROVERSY AND DEFIANCE IN THE REIGN OF JAMES I (1603–25)

Lanyer's work is in part a response to the longstanding *querelle des femmes*, or debate about the nature, virtues, and (especially) vices of women. At the turn of the fifteenth century, for example, Christine de Pisan participated in a round of this debate that included the chancellor of the University of Paris. Jokes about women have long been a staple of masculine bonding, and the learned wits of the English Renaissance were happy to use their rhetorical skills to excoriate the other sex. In 1589 the pseudonymous "Jane Anger," most probably a woman, reacted with a spirited attack against this practice. But the "woman controversy" continued well into the seventeenth century, when James I (1603–25) came to power following Elizabeth's death. The controversy was fueled in part by King James's preference for the company of men and his dislike and distrust of female transgression. When women took to adding masculine feathers to their hats or wearing small daggers as accessories, James reacted by ordering the practice attacked from English church pulpits. In James's world, it was not male homosexuality that was "effeminate" (James's own strongest attachments with men may have included sex) but, rather, too much attention to women. In this atmosphere Joseph Swetnam's 1615 attack against women, *The Arraignment of Lewd, Froward, and Idle Women*, was immediately popular, but it also sparked a series of responses. The first of these marks the first polemic on behalf of women by a known woman author.

Rachel Speght's *A Muzzle for Melastomous* (or "black-mouth," 1617) relegates direct response to Swetnam to an appendix with a separate title page, but uses the opportunity of his fairly typical diatribe to compose something considerably more serious as the main body of her work: a treatise that challenges the most negative biblical interpretations of woman's nature and role. Daughter of the Rev. James Speght, a Puritan Protestant clergyman, Rachel Speght (ca. 1597–?) apparently wrote and published with her father's permission and shows considerable evidence of a very good education, presumably under her father's supervision.

While Speght accepts the biblical texts on which the arguments against women are based, she uses the *Muzzle* to liberalize their interpretation. Like Lanyer and others before her, Speght argues that Eve did not know she was sinning when the serpent tempted her to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, but, when she offered the fruit to Adam, he did know, and his sin completed the fatal act. Men are not therefore exempt from blame, as much of the anti-woman rhetoric implied, but men and women are together both in their responsibility for sin and in the promise of human redemption (Aughterson 272). Speght can be quite clever, as well as earnest and logical, sometimes turning arguments about women's expected inferior role to her advantage. If woman was made secondarily in order to be man's companion and helper, she argues, "then are those husbands to be blamed who lay the whole burden of domestical affairs and maintenance on the shoulders of their wives?" (Lewalski 20). This may be the earliest published suggestion that men should share in housework.

Speght's second work, *Mortality's Memorandum* (1621), is a long poem on mortality sparked by the loss of her own mother. She precedes it with an introductory dream allegory expressing the speaker's love of learning and prefaces both poems with an introductory defense of her previous effort against Swetnam. She insists particularly that the *Muzzle* was indeed her own work, and not her father's (as rumor apparently had it). Speght's modern editor notes that publication of these more personal poems was "in part an excuse to reassert her authorship" of the *Muzzle* (Lewalski 157). While the poetry is not elegant, it is skillful enough to make her case. In support of her own love of knowledge, for example, is this stanza:

True knowledge is the window of the soul,  
Through which her objects she doth speculate.  
It is the mother of faith, hope and love;  
Without it, who can virtue estimate?  
By it, in grace thou shalt desire to grow;  
'Tis life eternal God and Christ to know.

Rachel Speght's work continues the line of Protestant women interested in the enterprise of reinterpreting church tradition to include women more fully. Nearly a century after Queen Katherine Parr's circle challenged English Catholicism, England had become securely Protestant and a few women risked being more vocal and visible than they had been in the past, but the state of women generally was hardly better than in earlier times. *The Law's Resolution of Women's Rights* (1632, but probably written at the end of Elizabeth's reign) notes that God's punishment of Eve in Genesis 3 (that she will thenceforth be subject to her husband) is "the reason . . . that women have no voice in parliament. They make no laws, consent to none, they abrogate none. All of them are understood either married or to be married, and their desires are subject to their husband. I know no remedy, though some women can shift it well enough" (Aughterson 153). The Protestant patriarchy remained suspicious of women's speech, while a defiant wife was a sinner. Still, some women apparently did "shift it well enough."

Elizabeth Tanfield Cary, Lady Falkland (1585–1639), became a defiant wife. As early Protestant women risked their lives for what they perceived to be the true faith (and an expanded role for their personal conscience), so English Catholic families risked their property and perhaps more as they continued in secret the traditions of the Catholic mass through Elizabeth's reign and beyond. Elizabeth Cary was in an even more precarious position: She converted to Catholicism against the wishes of her Protestant husband and raised her younger children in the Catholic faith. In so doing, she challenged directly the patriarchal system that English Protestantism had newly codified and raised again the issue of what women had lost, as well as what they might have won, with the Reformation.

Arranged marriages were nothing new, but Protestant patriarchy emphasized the obedience of children to their fathers, making it sinful as well as disrespectful to resist a parental arrangement. According to a *Life* written