

WOMEN, FEMINISM AND RELIGION IN EARLY ENLIGHTENMENT ENGLAND

Illuminating a formative period in the debate over sexual difference, this book contributes to our understanding of the origins of feminist thought. In late seventeenth-century England, female writers from diverse religious and political traditions confronted the question of women's subordination. Their feminist protests disturbed even those who championed women's education and defended female virtue. Some of these women, including Lady Mary Chudleigh and the Tory feminist Mary Astell, have attracted interest for their literary achievements and philosophical originality. This book approaches them from a new perspective, arguing that the primary impulse for their feminism was religious reformism: manifest in personal devotion, serious theological reflection and a vision for moral renewal and social justice. This reforming feminism, Sarah Apetrei argues, links Astell to the assertive women of dissenting and spiritualist traditions. Far from being a constraining influence on feminism, religion was a stimulus to new thinking about the status of women.

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ENGLAND

SARAH APETREI

*Keble College,
University of Oxford*



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UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
 978-0-521-51396-8 — Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England
 Sarah Apetrei
 Frontmatter
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CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
 One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
 477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
 314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre, New Delhi - 110025, India
 103 Penang Road, #05-06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

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www.cambridge.org
 Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521513968

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First published 2010
 First paperback edition 2014

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication data
 Apetrei, S. L. T. (Sarah Louise Trethewey), 1979–
 Women, feminism, and religion in early Enlightenment England / Sarah Apetrei.
 p. cm. – (Cambridge studies in early modern British history)
 Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-521-51396-8

1. Women—England—History—17th century. 2. Feminism—England—
History—17th century. 3. Women's rights—England—History—17th century.
4. Women and religion—England—History—17th century. I. Title.

HQ1149.G7A64 2010
 20.82—dc22 2010000055

ISBN 978-0-521-51396-8 Hardback
 ISBN 978-1-107-69670-9 Paperback

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978-0-521-51396-8 — Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England
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*To Marius,
and my parents*

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Acknowledgements

This book owes its inception and completion in large part to my two wonderful doctoral supervisors, Judith Maltby and Lyndal Roper, to whom I offer my first thanks. Their deep knowledge of the period and its historiography, their penetrating comments and questions, thorough attention to successive manuscript drafts, and belief in and sympathy for the project from the outset, have been vital to its survival. I could not have wished for two more inspiring or diligent mentors, and I am indebted to them more than I can say.

There are many other debts to be acknowledged, but among them I am particularly grateful for the support and encouragement of Alex Walsham, who restored my faith in the project at a key moment. She helped me to write the book I really wanted to. The revisions also owe much to the incisive comments of my examiners, Ann Hughes and Christopher Rowland, who helped to nuance and reshape my argument. The flaws which remain are, of course, entirely my own. I am also enormously thankful to Ewan Fernie, Charlotte Methuen, Nigel Smith, the All-Star Blackwells Women's Writing Workshop and Lyndal Roper's magnificent graduate workshop for reading and commenting on drafts of chapters, while Dominic Keech was the first to read the manuscript in full. His theological perspicuity has saved me from many errors. Burkhard Dohm, Jeffrey Hamburger, Tim Hitchcock, Hildegard Keller, Niklaus Largier, Christopher Rowland, Laura Runge and Hilda Smith kindly allowed me to see their excellent unpublished work. I am also indebted to the editors of *Eighteenth-Century Studies* and *Gender and History* for granting permission to reproduce material from articles published in their journals.

The institutions which have supported this project include the AHRC, the Past and Present Society, the Institute of Historical Research at the

University of London, Keble College, Oxford, the Faculty of Theology at Oxford and the British Academy. Without their investment in my research and the resources they have made available to me, this book simply could not have been written. The origins of this research lie in an extremely rewarding period of study at Wycliffe Hall in Oxford, where Jeremy Duff and David Wenham offered particular support, and Diarmaid MacCulloch also offered advice and direction at a crucial time. I also wish to offer particular thanks to the Warden and Fellows of Keble College for providing such a stimulating and hospitable environment for my research since 2003.

It is a pleasure to recall how I have been sustained during the writing of this book by great friends and colleagues, among them: Clare Ashdowne, Sophie Cartwright, Sarah Foot, Michael Hawcroft, Daniel Inman, Eleni Kechagia, Dominic Keech, Rosie King, Charlotte Methuen, Clara Mun and Allen Shin, Sophie Ratcliffe, Nina Reinholdt, Alison and Alan Waters, and Simon Whalley. Ros Steel offered wisdom and refuge when it was most needed. My family – the Apetreis, Tretheweys and Davidsons – provide constant love, encouragement and grounding.

Finally, I dedicate this book to my parents, Fred and Margaret Trethewey, and to my husband, Marius Apetrei. No thanks can really express my debt to them, and I count them as partners in this project. The book is theirs as much as it is mine: inspired, despite its many inadequacies, by their faith, humanity and compassion.