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0521025443 - Radical Religion from Shakespeare to Milton: Figures of Nonconformity in
Early Modern England

Kristen Poole

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The figure of the puritan has long been conceived as dour and repressive in character, an image which has been central to ways of reading sixteenth- and seventeenth-century history and literature. Kristen Poole's original study challenges this perception, arguing that, contrary to current critical understanding, radical reformers were most often portrayed in literature of the period as deviant, licentious, and transgressive. Through extensive analysis of early modern pamphlets, sermons, poetry, and plays, the fictional puritan emerges as a grotesque and carnivalesque figure; puritans are extensively depicted as gluttonous, sexually promiscuous, monstrously procreating, and even as worshipping naked. By recovering this lost alternative satirical image, Poole sheds new light on the role played by anti-puritan rhetoric. Her book contends that such representations served an important social role, providing an imaginative framework for discussing familial, communal, and discursive transformations that resulted from the Reformation.

KRISTEN POOLE is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Delaware.

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521641043

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First published 2000

Hardback version transferred to digital printing 2006

Digitally printed first paperback version 2006

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

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Poole, Kristen.

Radical religion from Shakespeare to Milton: figures of nonconformity in early modern England / Kristen Poole.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0 521 64104 7 (hardback)

1. Puritans – England – Controversial literature – History and criticism.

2. Dissenters, Religious – England – Controversial literature – History and criticism.

I. Title.

BX9334.2>p66 1999

285.'9'0942–dc21 99–37800 CIP

ISBN-13 978-0-521-64104-3 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-64104-7 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-02544-7 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-02544-3 paperback

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*To my parents,
David and Marilyn Poole,
and in memory of my grandmother,
Elvera F. Poole*

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So great . . . is the audacitie of those which lacerate the fames of Puritans, & with so much confidence doe they vent their obloquies, that they which know the falsity thereof, & easily perceiue that that same aspersions are more truly due to the Authors and raisers of them, yet they are dazeled, and driven to some doubtfull admittance thereof. Neither could this audacity be so prevalent amongst the vulgar, but that Scholars . . . are now become the most injurious detesters & depravers of Puritans, having taken up in Pulpits and Presses, almost as vile and scurrilous a licence of fiction and detraction, as is usual in Play-houses, Taverns, and Bordelloes.

Henry Parker, *A Discourse Concerning Puritans. A vindication of those, who unjustly suffer by the mistake, abuse, and misapplication of that Name* (1641), 2

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Acknowledgements

Early modern pamphlets frequently tackle questions of religious identity through the form of a dialogue: a curious character, often traveling, encounters a bizarre range of individuals with whom he disputes, banters, ponders, drinks, and converts. On the journey to this book, I have had the good fortune to share the company of many who have guided my steps, prompted me to question, pointed me in new directions, lightened my load with friendship, and transformed my vision of the landscape.

But for Heather Dubrow, I would not have begun the trek. Haphazardly choosing a course to fulfill an undergraduate distribution requirement, I found myself in Heather's classroom; this happy accident put me on an unexpected path. An inspiring teacher, compassionate scholar, and generous mentor, Heather has provided me with guidance ever since.

The book first took shape at Harvard University, where a group of faculty and graduate students created a culture of vibrant intellectual camaraderie. As much for their formal feedback as for provocative comments over coffee, I am grateful to Doug Bruster, Carolyn Dever, Marjorie Garber, Scott Gordon, David Hillman, Stephen Greenblatt, Roland Greene, Carla Mazzio, Curtis Perry, Libby Spiller, Kathryn Schwarz, Marc Shell, Scott Stevens, Doug Trevor, and Eric Wilson. Leo Damrosch provided valuable comments that tempered some of my more hyperbolic claims. Jennifer Carrell sustained me throughout with her imaginative readings, her sane perspective, and, most importantly, her friendship. I spent a year researching this project in Oxford under the supervision of Nigel Smith, whose vast knowledge of seventeenth-century pamphlet literature helped me to navigate a daunting field of text, and whose timely suggestions pushed the dissertation to unexpected points.

The thesis was steered by the unholy alliance of Jeffrey Masten

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and Barbara Lewalski. Jeff read an onslaught of chapter drafts with an unflinching sense of good humor and generosity. Barbara directed the dissertation in a way that kept me in step with her rigorous scholarly expectations while still allowing the freedom of my offbeat improvisations. Her unbounded joy of Renaissance literature made an arduous process exciting, and her professional dedication and integrity have provided me with a model I can only hope to emulate.

The project was deeply influenced by my participation in a National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute, “Religion and Society in Early Modern England,” directed by David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell. A Folger Institute seminar, “Tudor Historiography,” led by David Kastan, was also inspiring; David continually challenges my ideas and makes them grow.

Along the way, I have benefited from the comments and suggestions of Joan Bennett, Bryan Crockett, G. Blakemore Evans, Tom Freeman, Matt Greenfield, Jay Halio, Ann Hughes, Mat Morrison, the infinitely patient Barbara Mowat, Tom Olsen, Gail Kern Paster, Michael Schoenfeldt, Andy Shifflett, Luke Wilson, and a very helpful anonymous reader at *Shakespeare Quarterly*. My graduate students have forced me to look at familiar texts in unfamiliar ways. I have also received valuable responses and bibliographical tips from audience members at conferences of the Modern Language Association, the Shakespeare Association of America, and the Renaissance Society of America. Tom Hamill kindly provided his research assistance in the unwieldy task of checking all my quotes. The staff at the Bodleian, British, Cambridge University, Huntington, and Newberry Libraries have been pleasantly helpful; the staff at the Houghton and Folger Shakespeare Libraries have been cheerfully tolerant. Without the financial support of a Jacob K. Javits Fellowship, a Mellon Dissertation Fellowship, traveling fellowships from Harvard University, and a General University Research grant from the University of Delaware this book would not exist as it does. A version of chapter 1 first appeared in *Shakespeare Quarterly* 46 (1) (1995), and a subsequent version was reprinted in *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin*, ed. Ronald Knowles (London: Macmillan Press Ltd. and New York: St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1998); variation of chapter 4 will be published in *Form and Reform in Renaissance England: Essays in Honor of Barbara Kiefer Lewalski*, eds. Amy Boesky and Mary Thomas Crane (University of Delaware Press, 2000). I am grateful for permission to include these chapters here.

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At Cambridge University Press, I was honored to have Patrick Collinson read an initial draft of the manuscript; the present book records my debt to him not only through innumerable citations of his scholarship, but also through the silent testimony of chapters rewritten and re-conceived in response to his insightful comments. The suggestions of “Reader B” were also perceptive. The unflappable Josie Dixon was an ideal editorial guide, and Ann Lewis made her way through a haze of early modern orthography with a keen eye and a steady humor.

For their encouragement, criticism, and quirky wit, I am indebted to Lois Potter and Julian Yates, my colleagues at the University of Delaware. Jonathan Grossman graciously read the entire manuscript in the eleventh hour, and his keen and incisive observations substantively contributed to the final revision in the twelfth. Barbara Silverstein’s reading saved the book from some of its less successful logical leaps.

The book’s dedication only begins to acknowledge how much I owe my parents, David and Marilyn Poole, who fostered creativity and curiosity, and who unquestioningly supported and encouraged journeys into the unknown. I would also like to recognize the influence of my grandmother, Elvera F. Poole, and my aunt, Jean Fletcher Schmidt, models of strong-minded women. And, although they can’t read, it seems unfair not to honor the contributions of Cleo and Floh, who always keep things in perspective.

Through many years and over many miles, Martin Brückner has been my companion. He has shared in my fits of enthusiasm, suffered my sloughs of despond, and read, many times, every word. He has critiqued and edited, structured and sustained. Always, he makes me laugh, and he inspires.

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Note on the text

In all quotations of primary sources I have kept original spellings, except for standardizing long “s.” In citing titles of pamphlets and sermons, I have also standardized fonts and capitalization. For sixteenth- and seventeenth-century texts, the place of publication is London unless otherwise noted.