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978-0-521-03154-7 - Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance

Helen Hackett

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WOMEN AND ROMANCE FICTION IN
THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE

This book traces the progress of Renaissance romance from a genre addressed to women as readers to a genre written by women. The Elizabethan period saw a boom in the publication of romances by male authors. Many of these, Helen Hackett argues, were directed at an imagined female audience, advertising to male readers the voyeuristic pleasures of fictions supposedly read in women's bedchambers. Yet within a hundred years this imagined audience gave way to real women romance-readers and even women romance-writers. Exploring this crucial transitional period, Hackett examines the work of a diverse range of writers from Lyly, Rich and Greene to Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare. Her book culminates in an analysis of Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania* (1621), the first romance written by a woman, and considers the developing representation of female heroism and selfhood, especially the adaptation of saintly roles to secular and even erotic purposes.

HELEN HACKETT is Senior Lecturer in English Literature at University College London. She is author of *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (1995) and *Writers and Their Work: 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'* (1997). She has published articles on Lady Mary Wroth's *Urania* and other Renaissance literature by or about women.

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Abbreviations

- DNB* *Dictionary of National Biography* on CD-ROM (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd edn) on CD-ROM (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- STC* *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland and Ireland 1475–1640*, comp. A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, 2nd edn, rev. W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson, and Katharine F. Pantzer, 3 vols. (London: Bibliographical Society, 1976–91).

A note on the text

In quotations from primary sources, the use of i/j and u/v has been modernised, printers' contractions have been silently expanded, and obvious printers' errors have been silently corrected. All references to Shakespeare are to *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York and London: W. W. Norton, 1997) unless otherwise stated.