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978-0-521-83063-8 - Domesticity and Dissent in the Seventeenth Century: English Women Writers and the Public Sphere

Katharine Gillespie

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DOMESTICITY AND DISSENT IN THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

In *Domesticity and Dissent* Katharine Gillespie examines writings by seventeenth-century English Puritan women who fought for religious freedom. Seeking the right to preach and prophesy, women such as Katherine Childley, Anna Trapnel, Elizabeth Poole, and Anne Wentworth envisioned the modern political principles of toleration, the separation of church from state, privacy, and individualism. Gillespie argues that their sermons, prophecies, and petitions illustrate the fact that these liberal theories did not originate only with such well-known male thinkers as John Locke and Thomas Hobbes. Rather, they emerged also from a group of determined female religious dissenters who used the Bible to reassess traditional definitions of womanhood, public speech, and religious and political authority. Gillespie takes the “pamphlet literatures” of the seventeenth century as important subjects for analysis, and her book contributes to the growing scholarship on the revolutionary writings that emerged during the volatile years of the mid-seventeenth-century civil war in England.

KATHARINE GILLESPIE is assistant professor of English and American literature at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. She has published articles in *Genders*, *Bunyan Studies*, *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, and *Symbiosis*.

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For Nick

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Do not you enact any law against any Saints exercising the gifts of
the spirit that are given to them in Preaching or prophesying because
the Lord hath promised in the latter dayes to power out his spirit
more abundantly upon all flesh, & your sons and your daughters shall
prophesie

Mary Cary, *A Word in Season To the Kingdom of England*
(1647), p. 15

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Acknowledgments

This book began, I'm pretty sure, back when my grandmother, Eleanor Henry Walke, reassured the anxious kids who had gathered in her basement for one of her many private prayer meetings that, yes, had he lived in the late twentieth century, Jesus would have worn jeans. That interesting combination of independent religion, basements, freelance preaching women, and topical exegesis (not to mention the denim-clad Jesus) so indelibly forged in my mind at that moment, has continued to fuel my enjoyment of the ways in which ordinary individuals participate in the creation of new cultures and new ideas.

Since then, a whole lot of Beat literature and L*A*N*G*U*A*G*E poetry has come in between me and the study of seventeenth-century English Puritanism, and so my story picks up again several years later at Temple University, where I earned my master's degree. There, in a seminar in early American literature, Sharon Harris asked, why do so few people read Anne Bradstreet's early poetry? Intrigued, I began a quest that led me to learn that Bradstreet's sister, Sarah Keayne, had done a little street preaching during a trip to London. A woman? Street preaching? In the seventeenth century? I've never stopped being intrigued. I am grateful to Sharon for firing my imagination, and to the many faculty members who continued to stoke it both at Temple and at SUNY Buffalo, where I earned the Ph.D. In particular, Susan Eilenberg showed me how pleasurable it can be to read Milton late into the snowy Buffalo night. Mili Clark gave me actual course credit for reenacting almost all of the Putney Debates. And Susan Howe, whose *Eikon Basilike* first taught me to see the world upside down, took the time to teach me Du Bartas and to convince me that my obsession with a handful of blurry pamphlets by women named Anna Trapnel and Elizabeth Poole was worthwhile.

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my dissertation when it was needed most. Deidre Lynch and Stacy Hubbard represented enabling role models as feminist scholars and inspired me to use my work on female sectarians to engage larger critical questions. And the arrival of director James Holstun during my second year at Buffalo was somehow meant to be. Pleased (and somewhat startled) to learn that I had actually done a whole qualifying exam list on mid-seventeenth-century English prophetesses, Jim took me under his wing and shared with me his own vast expertise in the field and his enthusiasm for the enthusiasts. He has worked ever since to make me feel that a girl from small-town Ohio can be part of a larger transatlantic community of scholars working in the pamphlet literatures of seventeenth-century England. The warm encouragement that he and Joanna Tinker have given me over the years has made all the difference.

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