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The jacket to this book depicts Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, in a dramatically feathered classical helmet, a transparent bodice above thickly swathed skirts labelled ‘depe pink’, ‘deep murrey’, and ‘skie color’, and with sword in hand.¹ Her costume, Inigo Jones’ design for her role as Penthesilea, Queen of the Amazons, in Ben Jonson’s Masque of Queenes (1609), does not exactly correlate with what the term ‘puritan woman’ might bring to mind. Nor does it seem the epitome of a feminine intellectualism. Although Jonson commented, in relation to this scene in the ‘House of Fame’, that the twelve masquers therein presented by the masculine ‘Heroic Virtue’ were allocated their parts ‘rather by chance, then by election’,² Barbara Lewalski has contended that Russell’s role ‘is not likely to be accidental.’³ Indeed, Jonson continued that ‘yet it is my part to justify them all: and then the lady that will own her presentation, may’. Of Penthesilea, he remarked specifically, echoing Justin: ‘She is no where named but with the preface of honor and virtue; and is always advanced in the head of the worthiest women.’⁴

Lucy Russell’s portrayal encapsulates why we need to revisit the critical conceptions of some remarkable women in early modern England. The categories of ‘puritan women’ and ‘intellectual culture’ have remained stubbornly distinct in modern scholarship, despite the significant gains made in each field of study. Lucy Russell’s part as both heroine in a Stuart masque and patron to its author, in conjunction with Jonson’s cynical allusion to election and the allocation of artistic roles, invites us to reconsider the way some early modern women identified their puritanism as provoking and stimulating, rather than complicating or repressing, their vibrant participation in intellectual communities and cultures.

The purpose of this collection of essays is to reveal how the intellectual contributions (in literary, educational, artistic, political, theological
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and scientific contexts) of several early modern women – some familiar, others less so – can be characterised by their identification with Puritanism. It is a response to the residual double prejudice endured by the scholarship of women and of Puritanism in early modern studies: first, that early modern women were excluded from a public sphere of intellectual thought and culture; and secondly, that Puritanism itself was hostile to both popular culture and high art. These prejudices are multiplied by the prevailing popular stereotype about Puritan attitudes to gender, presuming that domestic hierarchies both dominated within the household, and were the mark of a patriarchal theology which applied to all spheres of cultural interaction. The Puritan women presented here provide ample evidence to challenge such lingering preconceptions. They affirm that such women played a lively and often indispensable part in the production and reception of what scholars now investigate as the public sphere of early modern intellectual culture.

The intellectual history of Puritanism has shifted radically since critics such as John W. Draper were able to describe seventeenth-century Puritans as ‘inarticulate in the fine arts’. If a Puritan aesthetic of plainness and simplicity is now accepted, this is no longer seen as restrictive, and great diversity has been identified within Puritan styles of both art and devotion. However, claims that Puritanism was anti-literary, inward-looking and iconoclastic also seem to have had some enduring legacies, including a scholarly neglect of the Puritan women acting within recognised spheres of intellectualism. Theories of both women’s writing and intellectual culture have often seen royalism and the court as the most productive frameworks for creativity in the early modern period. The voluntary or enforced movement of ‘Puritan’ affiliates away from courtly circles of influence in the 1620s and 1630s amid the rise of Laudianism has led to the deduction that Puritanism increasingly discouraged women from writing, and from intellectual participation generally.

This collection builds on the recent critical developments which strongly challenge these preconceptions and legacies. Together these fourteen essays provide a variegated history of religious belief and cultural practices, and contribute some new, and some significantly enhanced, case studies for consideration within the scholarly field of early modern intellectualism. The theological foundations of Puritan beliefs, the ideals of marriage and domestic structures seen in practice, and the development of Puritan networks, indicate that it was a movement that was highly supportive of women’s direct and influential involvement in their intellectual surroundings.
The first anthology explicitly devoted to establishing a female canon of literature in the early modern period, *Kissing the Rod: An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Women’s Verse*, was published in 1988. Three years earlier, the historian of nonconformity, Richard L. Greaves, wrote of the concept of ‘a partnership between the sexes’ in English puritanism. Greaves implied that puritanism articulated an ideology which, while purposefully geared towards ‘the propagation of the gospel’, also fostered a cultural milieu strikingly conducive to women’s intellectual lives. This ‘partnership’ concept, Greaves remarked,

received concrete expression as Puritan women actively catechised children and servants, using their patronage to provide benefices to Puritan ministers, intervened on their behalf at the royal court, encouraged the publication of godly literature, and even demonstrated in public on behalf of their cause. A handful even made their own translations of the writings of Protestant reformers.

The ‘handful’ was a nod to the prominence of women such as Anne Lock and Anne Bacon at the literary forefront of Elizabethan England’s strengthening identification with a more radical and continental Protestantism. Greaves anticipated a perspective on puritan women which has taken some time to filter into the literary history of women’s writing, and particularly into the ‘canon’ of early modern women writers. The achievements of anthologies such as *Kissing the Rod* are not to be underestimated – they have introduced a generation of students to the riches of early modern women’s writing, particularly to their poetry and life-writing. The evocative depictions of women poets as ‘all untrained, ill-equipped, isolated and vulnerable’, however, permitted Virginia Woolf’s now infamous assertions about the embattled, prohibited status of early modern women writers to prevail for longer than necessary. Consequently, studies of early modern women have often located their intellectual lives primarily in the context of responses to societal, political, or theological oppression. Thus, the names of proto-feminists such as Margaret Cavendish, Aphra Behn, and Aemilia Lanyer, are among the most familiar figures in early modern women’s literary culture.

The essays here build upon the interdisciplinarity now innate to scholarship of the early modern period and the important recent research that has acknowledged a place for certain early modern women in distinct intellectual cultures. For instance, David Norbrook has analysed women’s part in republican thought and in a wider ‘Republic of Letters’; Susan Wiseman, Hilda Smith and Mihoko Suzuki have positioned
seventeenth-century women writers within political discourse; and Smith, Lynette Hunter and Sarah Hutton have revealed women's role in philosophical and scientific thought. The essays also build upon the archival achievements of Margaret Hannay and Barbara Lewalski, among others, to emphasise further evidence that translation and patronage were both crucial cultural tools and literary arts. At the opening of our chronological spectrum, Mary Sidney Herbert's psalms are read as autonomous poems as well as skilful paraphrases and, as Greaves signalled, Anne Bacon's 1564 translation from Latin of John Jewel's *Apologie of the Church of England*, endorsed and published by Archbishop Matthew Parker, became one of the central texts defending Elizabethan Protestantism. Nearing the end of this timespan, Katherine Ranelagh combined her interests in the politics of puritanism and contemporary developments in experimental science, challenging the modern conception that science became masculinised in the seventeenth-century, and that faith inhibited a spirit of rigorous empirical enquiry. Across the early modern period, puritanism fostered artistic endeavour and intellectual curiosity as much as iconoclasm.

Placing these case studies within a framework of intellectual culture not only further enhances what scholarship on writers such as Francis Bacon, Thomas Hobbes and Andrew Marvell has long realised about early modern culture, but designates puritan women with more appropriate agency within this culture. For early modern thinkers the disciplines of classics, history, theology and literature were not distinct, and neither was literary expression contained by notions of either public (printed) or private (introspective) genres. This collection builds on such scholarship to provide evidence of women's equally varied cultural engagement; for women as linguistically talented as Anne Bacon or Anne Lock, language was no barrier to continental or classical texts, and women's intellectual activities were sensitive to puritan culture's local, national, and international dimensions. Scientific experimentation and theological writing could be co-ordinated in the same physical space, as for Ranelagh in the home which she shared with her brother Robert Boyle, a founding member of the Royal Society.

By focusing on the contributions of puritan women to intellectual culture, literary and historical perspectives of early modernity can be enriched. Until recently, when literary and cultural historians have discussed the intellectual milieux and achievements of early modern women, they have associated them with court culture. Carol Barash focused on women poets who were members of the court or among its active supporters, such as Katherine Philips, Aphra Behn, and Anne Finch.
Erica Veevers’ study of the court of Henrietta Maria revealed connections between the intellectual culture of préciosité and Catholicism, and women’s subversive involvement in both, while Hero Chalmers explored the importance of royalist affiliation and iconography to seventeenth-century women writers.20 Other studies, such as Elaine Beilin’s collection on learned Renaissance women who ‘set out’ to write, acknowledged their pious and feminine Protestantism in post-Reformation England but did not elucidate the particularities of their religious convictions. For example, the anonymous voice of the writer of advice, ‘M.R.’, was styled as exemplary of ‘Puritan’ doctrine’s ‘cramping of education and imagination’, fully circumscribing women’s private and public lives.21

Alongside its courtly focus, scholarship in the 1990s saw an increased interest in dissent, broadening the critical focus on early modern women. Studies by Nigel Smith, among others, helped to heighten the profile of civil war prophetesses including Trapnel and radical Quakers such as Margaret Fell.22 The extremes of royalist gentlewomen and sectarian radicals seen here provide a fascinating range for students of early modern women’s writing, but they have also contributed to an unnecessary binary which ignores crucial middle ground. Puritan women writers certainly feature in wider genre studies, such as in James Daybell’s collection of essays on letter writing, Sharon Cadman Seelig’s study of life writing, Erica Longfellow’s monograph on women’s religious writing, Susan Wiseman’s study of women and political writing, and Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne’s collection on women and rhetorical discourse.23 Undeservedly, however, puritan women have not received a literary study of their own.24

This collection aims to give the significant puritan women studied here the broader audience they deserve: Lynne Magnusson brings to our attention Anne Bacon’s magnificent and mostly unpublished prose, while Danielle Clarke provides a rich new reading of Mary Sidney Herbert.25 Diverse genres of writing are explored, including the letters of Mary Vere, Brilliana Harley and Katherine Ranelagh, the sonnets of Elizabeth Melville and Anne Lock, Jane Lead’s extraordinary prophecies and Lucy Hutchinson’s epic poetry, as well as the malleability of cultural forms, such as the evidence of Lock’s sonnets being set to music. For all the women included in this collection, puritanism endorsed and propagated their full intellectual participation.

**Puritanism**

In 1649, the Tewkesbury minister John Geree identified Mary Vere as sharing membership with him in ‘the way that hath been called Puritanisme’.26
Geree is renowned for his retrospective efforts to claim the more moderate Elizabethan expressions of the movement for his definition of puritan ‘character’, but around the same time (the chronological midpoint of this volume, the 1640s and 1650s), Lucy Hutchinson described her husband as ‘branded [...] with the reproach of the world, though the glory of good men, Puritanisme’. Contention over the meaning of this originally derisive term is as lively in current scholarship as it was in Stuart England, and the (still) leading scholars of the movement, Patrick Collinson and Peter Lake, have debated the extent to which the origins of puritanism can only be defined in terms of what it was not; that is, we remain at an historiographical impasse where articulating a monolithic definition is not only supremely difficult but fundamentally inappropriate.

The birth and development of puritanism, the distinctions between its moderate and radical strains, and in particular its relationship to Calvinism, are all dimensions of this ongoing historical debate. S. R. Gardiner’s famous ‘Puritan Revolution’, though enormously stimulating to historical interpretation, has now been vigorously challenged, and subsequent studies have shown that stereotyped definitions (employed in conventional ‘Anglican’ and ‘Puritan’ binaries, for example) not only fail to appreciate the distinctive changes puritanism underwent parallel with the ecclesiastical challenges of the Elizabethan and particularly Stuart reigns, but obfuscate the contested status of the label itself, even in its contemporary setting. Collinson, and other distinguished historians of English puritanism, such as William Lamont, Nicholas Tyacke, Kenneth Fincham and Lake, have addressed the contested domination of Calvinism in pre-Civil War Protestantism, arguing that in the face of resurgent Arminianism in Charles I’s Laudian Church, Calvinists were being redefined as puritans. Certainly, as Tyacke has argued, challenges to William Haller’s ‘rise of Puritanism’ thesis and resistance to teleologies in historical scholarship have ‘deflated’ puritanism as a ‘revolutionary force’. The time has indeed come ‘to restore Puritanism to its rightful place of political and religious importance’. This collection concurs with Tyacke and his forebears that a movement of reform, generated by the ‘hotter sort’ of Protestants, and conveniently entitled ‘puritanism’, is traceable from the mid to late-sixteenth century. It found notable (eventually ‘moderate’) expression during Elizabeth’s reign, was far from dead during the reign of James after the rejection of the Millenary Petition, and accumulated intensity as well as some more radical elements and proponents, during Charles I’s reign and beyond. Significantly, the studies of Collinson and Tyacke, among others, have identified the centrality of many women to this movement.
However, just as there was no clear contemporary definition, neither should we use puritanism simply as a tool for such ‘larger projects’ as clarifying the cultural interplay of politics and religion in early modern England, of the cultural origins of colonial America, of the cultural ‘spirit’ of modernity, or of the confessional character of modern reformed theologies. Puritanism did not matter to the women studied in this volume merely because it provided a means for understanding their historical, social, and political circumstances. As the diversity and span of history incorporated here demonstrates, each woman’s distinctive puritanism was an overt influence upon her intellectual development and active cultural engagement, rather than passively inflected because of this engagement. Her puritanism should not be the excuse for the critical neglect of her intellectualism, nor viewed as the hurdle she had to overcome, and thus marking her cultural defiance. This collection builds on scholarship which redefines the meditative puritan woman; the puritanism revealed here is variously mainstream and orthodox, radical and polemical, and disputes the notion that such women conceived of their identity purely in the terms offered by gender distinctions. It thus argues against the idea that it was only later radicalised or sectarian religious culture which positively facilitated greater female intellectual activity. The imperatives behind the integral engagement of these women in their intellectual communities, we suggest, may be precisely linked to their puritanism.

As a whole, this collection of essays therefore testifies to the complexity of early modern puritanism. The chapters range chronologically and geographically, across social classes and political inclinations, and across academic disciplines: history, literature, theology. They highlight the insufficiency of recent feminist scholarship in contending with this range, but also clarify how puritanism, as both a ‘movement’ and a ‘style’, altered throughout the period between 1558 and 1680. As a result, each contributor has retained their own stylistic conventions in their approach to puritanism. No attempt has been made to systematise a capitalised ‘Puritan’ or lower-case ‘puritan’ across the chapters, nor to impose conformity to one definition. Approaching the material in this way, we believe, more accurately reflects the complexity of puritanism for modern scholarship, and each contributor has individually addressed what made the early modern woman in their focus notably ‘puritan’.

**Intellectual culture**

The study of intellectual thought is now a central concern of enquiry in the history of early modern politics and religion. The impact of scientific
movements, of developments in mathematics, and of debates in legal and political theory have been given centrally important places, and are essential aspects of intellectual historical enquiry into early modern English and continental politics and culture. The landmark research and methodology of, and responses to, Quentin Skinner, in particular, have transformed the joint studies of early modern intellectual and political thought. Skinner’s research on Thomas Hobbes’ intellectual milieu, classical republicanism and the origins of the English Civil War, has refocused attention on how political ideas emanated from classical influences. But it is also important to acknowledge religious outlook as often concomitant with the development of political thought, featuring on the same trajectory of early modern intellectual appropriations of classical moral and political sources. As the chapters here on Anne Bacon and Brilliana Harley reveal, the writings of puritan women can provide excellent evidence of the combination of classical influences with religious understanding to define a specifically early modern puritan intellectual outlook.

In terms of studies of women in early modern society generally, the critical notion of intellectual culture helps to challenge stereotypical demarcations of their ‘private’ and ‘public’ participation. It emphasises the active intellectual engagement of puritan women within their wider cultural context, and in so doing challenges some tendencies to study women’s writing and women’s history in isolation from those of men. The multiple networks which emerge here, whether of correspondence, patronage, translation or manuscript circulation, provide a range of intellectual cultures from the intimate, familial and domestic, through the sociable, to an identifiably public sphere.

As recent important studies have revealed, probably the largest proportion of early modern women participated in literary endeavour through manuscript circulation and in contexts of collaborative exchange. A major insight into intellectual culture is provided through coteries, family networks, and correspondences, all the evidence for which exists primarily in manuscript form. Thus, a large part of the ‘writings’ considered in this collection were not published in print, and yet received wide dissemination. Recognising that Anna Trapnel, Anne Bradstreet, Lucy Hutchinson and Jane Lead published their writings, and were recognised by their peers as pioneering in doing so, other chapters here provide introductions to exciting, newly discovered manuscript writers, such as Elizabeth Melville and Elizabeth Isham. These contexts of intellectual networks and collaborative exchange also ensure that studies of puritan women’s intellectual activism must include non-literary forms of
participation: several women are included by whom we have no extant texts, but who did leave evidence of pivotal and influential interaction in their intellectual spheres. In many cases, it was their specific support, patronage and intellectual engagement which facilitated the writings and intellectual endeavours and achievements of others.

Three strands of enquiry are drawn together in this volume: puritanism, gender, and intellectual culture. In combination, these strands have remained unexplored yet yield challenging findings which call for the re-evaluation of established binaries and of enduring preconceptions, and thus generate multiple avenues for further research. The breadth of chronology and of definitions of puritanism aims to encompass the contribution of the most significant and high profile women, such as Lock, Sidney Herbert, and Ranelagh, who stood at the centre of the most significant intellectual circles of the period, alongside those women more usually remarked upon for their marginal sectarianism, such as Trapnel and Lead. The diversity of this volume therefore aims to be faithful to the early modern period, when the categories of writer, scientist, theologian, and poet overlapped and when communities of knowledge and their participants were united by networks of manuscript circulation and of print, of patronage, friendship, and faith.

Notes

5. Patricia Crawford’s Women and Religion in England 1500–1720 (London: Routledge, 1993), for example, retains an influential position in the scholarship of early modern women, but its binaries regarding puritan women’s domestic and social experiences can be challenged productively.
7. See Peter Lake and Michael Questier (eds), Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c. 1560–1660 (Suffolk: Boydell, 2000) on a move from categories to styles.
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8. Peter C. Herman sees the poetry of Milton, for instance, emerging from within a radical protestant culture deeply imbued with anti-poetic sentiment, which he explains as antipathy to images, fiction and pleasure. See Herman, *Squitter-Wits and Muse-Haters* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996).


14. Supported, for example, by other anthologies such as Paul Salzman (ed.), *Early Modern Women’s Writing: An Anthology 1560–1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).


35. The challenges to Tyacke’s thesis, maintaining the notion of an Anglican-Puritan dichotomy, have been largely directed by Peter White and Kevin Sharpe: White, Predestination, Policy and Polemic: Conflict and Consensus in the English Church from the Reformation to the Civil War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Sharpe, The Personal Rule of Charles I (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 1992).


37. These interpretations of puritan historiography are helpfully outlined by Coffey and Lim (eds), The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism, pp. 7–9.


39. See David Como, Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Anitnomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); Lake and Questier (eds), Conformity and Orthodoxy.

40. Similarly, each contributor has made their own decision about how to refer to their subjects, whether by married or maiden name, inherited or marital title, generally keeping to the name and title each woman would have recognised and used herself.


43. See, for example, Quentin Skinner, Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Skinner, The Foundations of Modern Political Thought, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); David Armitage, Armand Himy, and Quentin Skinner (eds),


46. The Perdita Project directed by Elizabeth Clarke has compiled a database of the wealth of women manuscript writers, and in 2005 an anthology of some of their findings was published, including three of the women represented here: Sidney Herbert, Southwell and Hutchinson. Jill Seal Millman and Gillian Wright (eds), Early Modern Women’s Manuscript Poetry (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005).

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