



RHETORIC, WOMEN AND POLITICS IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

**Edited by Jennifer Richards
and Alison Thorne**

Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England

Rhetoric has long been a powerful and pervasive force in political and cultural life, yet in the early modern period rhetorical training was generally reserved as a masculine privilege. This volume argues, however, that women found a variety of ways to represent their interests persuasively, and that by looking more closely at the importance of rhetoric for early modern women, and their representation within rhetorical culture, we also gain a better understanding of their capacity for political action.

Offering a fascinating overview of women and rhetoric in early modern culture, the contributors to this book:

- examine constructions of female speech in a range of male-authored texts from Shakespeare to Milton and Marvell;
- trace how women interceded on behalf of clients or family members, proclaimed their spiritual beliefs and sought to influence public opinion;
- explore the most significant forms of female rhetorical self-representation in the period, including supplication, complaint and preaching;
- demonstrate how these forms enabled women from across the social spectrum, from Elizabeth I to the Quaker Dorothy Waugh, to intervene in political life.

Drawing upon incisive analysis of a wide range of literary texts including poetry, drama, prose polemics, letters and speeches, *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England* offers an important new perspective on the early modern world, forms of rhetoric and the role of women in the culture and politics of the time.

Jennifer Richards is Reader in English at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne and **Alison Thorne** is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Strathclyde. They have each published several books and articles on rhetoric and the early modern period.

Contributors:

Danielle Clarke, James Daybell, Martin Dzelzainis, Huw Griffiths, Helen Hackett, Rachel Heard, Hilary Hinds, Patricia Parker, Neil Rhodes, Susan Wiseman

Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England

Edited by
Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne

First published 2007
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa
business*

This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis or Routledge’s
collection of thousands of eBooks please go to www.eBookstore.tandf.co.uk.”

© 2007 Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne

All Rights Reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or
reproduced or utilised in any form or by any electronic,
mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter
invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any
information storage or retrieval system, without permission in
writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-203-96590-6 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 10: 0-415-38526-1 (hbk)
ISBN 10: 0-415-38527-X (pbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-38526-8 (hbk)
ISBN 13: 978-0-415-38527-5 (pbk)
ISBN 13: 978-0-203-96590-0 (ebk)

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<i>Contributors</i>	viii
1 Introduction	1
JENNIFER RICHARDS AND ALISON THORNE	
2 Spelling backwards	25
PATRICIA PARKER	
3 Caught <i>in medias res</i> : female intercession, ‘regulation’ and ‘exchange’	51
RACHEL HEARD	
4 Speaking women: rhetoric and the construction of female talk	70
DANIELLE CLARKE	
5 Letter-writing Lucrece: Shakespeare in the 1590s	89
HUW GRIFFITHS	
6 ‘Presbyterian sibyl’: truth-telling and gender in Andrew Marvell’s <i>The Third Advice to a Painter</i>	111
MARTIN DZELZAINIS	
7 Exemplarity, women and political rhetoric	129
SUSAN WISEMAN	

8	The rhetoric of (in)fertility: shifting responses to Elizabeth I's childlessness	149
	HELEN HACKETT	
9	Women's letters of recommendation and the rhetoric of friendship in sixteenth-century England	172
	JAMES DAYBELL	
10	Embodied rhetoric: Quaker public discourse in the 1650s	191
	HILARY HINDS	
11	Afterword	212
	NEIL RHODES	
	<i>Bibliography</i>	223
	<i>Index</i>	244

Acknowledgements

This collection has been a long time in the making. It originated in a conference held at the University of Strathclyde in 2003, Renaissance Rhetoric, Gender and Politics. First of all we would like to thank all of those who contributed in various ways to its success and, especially, Robert Maslen, Katherine Eisaman Maus, Margaret Philips, Ceri Sullivan and James Thain as well as the Department of English Studies at Strathclyde who generously helped to fund it. We have been very privileged in our contributors, both those who participated in the conference and those who joined the project at a later stage, all of whom have helped to shape the scope and purpose of this book. In particular, we should thank them for their conscientiousness, good humour and staying power in responding to our suggestions. Special thanks go to Neil Rhodes for exemplary patience. Not only was he one of our keynote speakers but he agreed to undertake the difficult task of writing the afterword and did so with characteristic kindness and good grace. We are also grateful to Mariangela Palladino and Patrick Hart for cheerfully lending their computing expertise in the last stages of the project. Finally, thanks must go to our long-suffering partners, George Biddlecombe and Dermot Cavanagh and, of course, to Perdy, for keeping us entertained along the way and making us jelly.

Alison would like to dedicate this book to her mother, Beryl Thorne, whose untiring support has sustained her through every research project. And Jennifer would like to dedicate it to her sisters, Helen and Rosie.

Contributors

Danielle Clarke is Senior Lecturer in the School of English and Drama Studies at University College Dublin. She is the author of *The Politics of Early Modern Women's Writing* (Longman, 2001) and editor of the poems of Whitney, Sidney and Lanyer for Penguin Classics. She has published widely on gender and writing, textual editing, language and sexuality in the early modern period and is currently working on a book-length study of relationships between gender and discourse in the Renaissance.

James Daybell is Senior Lecturer in History at Plymouth University. He has also taught at the University of Reading and Central Michigan University. He is author of *Women Letter-Writers in Tudor England* (Oxford University Press, 2006), editor of *Early Modern Women's Letter-Writing, 1450–1700* (Palgrave, 2001; Winner of the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women award for best collaborative project, 2002), and *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450–1700* (Ashgate, 2004) and has written numerous articles and essays on early modern gender, social and cultural history.

Martin Dzelzainis is Professor of Early Modern Literature and Thought at Royal Holloway, University of London. He has written many articles on John Milton, Andrew Marvell and Civil War culture and politics. He has edited Andrew Marvell, *The Rehearsal Transpos'd* and (with Annabel Patterson) *The Rehearsal Transpos'd: The Second Part*, in *The Prose Works of Andrew Marvell* (Yale University Press, 2003). He is also editor of *John Milton: Political Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 1991) and, with Warren Chernaik, *Marvell and Liberty* (Macmillan, 1999). With Paul Seaward, he is general editor of *The Works of Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon* and editor of Volume

X: The Histories for *The Complete Works of John Milton* (both forthcoming from Oxford University Press). Currently, he is completing *The Flower in the Panther: Truth-telling, Print and Censorship in England, 1662–1695*, also for Oxford University Press.

Huw Griffiths is Lecturer in Early Modern English Literature at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. He has published a number of articles on national geographies in early modern England and a book on *Hamlet: A Reader's Guide to Essential Criticism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). He is currently working on a monograph entitled 'A Nation in Ruins'.

Helen Hackett is Reader in English at University College London. Her publications include an Introduction to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Penguin Shakespeare edition, *Women and Romance Fiction in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge University Press, 2000), *Writers and Their Work: 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'* (Northcote, 1997) and *Virgin Mother, Maiden Queen: Elizabeth I and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Macmillan, 1995).

Rachel Heard completed her Ph.D. at the University of St Andrews. She has written a series of biographies for Volume III of the *Oxford History of Literary Translation in English* (forthcoming), and she is working on a book provisionally entitled 'Shakespeare, Gender and Rhetoric'. She has taught medieval and Renaissance literature at the Universities of St Andrews and East Anglia.

Hilary Hinds is Senior Lecturer in English at Lancaster University. She is the author of *God's Englishwomen: Seventeenth-Century Radical Sectarian Writing and Feminist Criticism* (Manchester University Press, 1996), editor of Anna Trapnel's *The Cry of a Stone* (1654) (MRTS, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies 2000) and co-editor of *Her Own Life: Autobiographical Writings by Seventeenth-Century Englishwomen* (Routledge, 1989). She has also published a number of articles on early modern sectarian writing in *Literature and History*, *Renaissance and Reformation* and *Quaker Studies*.

Patricia Parker is Professor of Comparative Literature at the University of Stanford. She is the author of *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (Methuen, 1987) and *Shakespeare from the Margins: Language, Culture, Context* (University of Chicago Press, 1996). She is the co-editor, with Geoffrey Hartman, of *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* (Methuen, 1985), with David Quint, of *Literary Theory/Renaissance Texts* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

and, with Margo Hendricks, of *Women, 'Race' and Writing in the Early Modern Period* (Routledge, 1994). She is currently editing the Arden III *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Neil Rhodes is Professor of English Literature and Cultural History at the University of St Andrews. His publications include *The Power of Eloquence and English Renaissance Literature* (Harvester, 1992) and *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* (Oxford University Press, 2004). He has also co-edited, with Jonathan Sawday, *The Renaissance Computer: Knowledge Technology in the First Age of Print* (Routledge, 2000) and, with Stuart Gillespie, *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture* (Arden Shakespeare, 2006).

Jennifer Richards is Reader in English at the University of Newcastle. She is the author of *Rhetoric and Courtliness in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), the editor of *Early Modern Civil Discourses* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) and co-editor, with James Knowles, of *Shakespeare's Late Plays: New Readings* (Edinburgh University Press, 1999). *Rhetoric: The New Critical Idiom* is forthcoming with Routledge.

Alison Thorne is Senior Lecturer in English at the University of Strathclyde. She is the author of *Vision and Rhetoric in Shakespeare: Looking through Language* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2000) and the editor of the *New Casebooks: Shakespeare's Romances* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). She is the author of various articles and essays on Shakespeare, rhetoric, aesthetics and other aspects of early modern culture and is currently writing a book on 'Female Supplication in Early Modern Drama and Culture'.

Susan Wiseman is Reader in English at Birkbeck College, the University of London. She is the author of *Aphra Behn* (Northcote House, 1996), *Politics and Drama in the English Civil War* (Cambridge University Press, 1998) and *Conspiracy and Virtue: Women, Writing and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (forthcoming from Oxford University Press).

1 Introduction

Jennifer Richards and Alison Thorne

[Women] whom nature hath made to keep home and nourish the family [. . .] [are] not to meddle with matters abroad, not to bear an office in the city or commonwealth, no more than children and infants.

(Smith 1583: 20)

In what ways can we conceive of early modern women as politically active? We are not the first to ask this question, or to struggle to answer it positively. Remarkably, in England two women held supreme power from 1553–1603, but despite this extraordinary state of affairs women were largely excluded from the early modern public sphere. They could not serve as jurors, lawyers, magistrates, counsellors or as members of parliament. They did not study in the universities or at the inns of court; nor did they write treatises about, or debate publicly, constitutional or theological matters. As the painstaking efforts of many feminist scholars have established, in this period women of aristocratic and middling rank did write prolifically. Yet this often took the form of ‘private’ devotional works as well as poems and plays intended for circulation among family and friends. When women did venture to publicise their thoughts through the medium of print, they risked infamy (Krontiris 1992: 17–18). A notable exception to women’s removal from public life, of course, is the interventions made by female religious radicals and political activists in the 1640s and 1650s, figures such as Elizabeth Poole who related her visions to the Army Council in 1648 and 1649, the Fifth Monarchist Anna Trapnel who spoke out against the ‘pomp of Cromwell and the rulers of England’ in 1654 (Crawford 1996: 137) and the leveller women who petitioned Parliament in the 1640s about a range of issues (Higgins 1973: 200–18). However, female petitioning was frequently

met with ridicule and hostility. Ann Hughes describes the response to the leveller women who petitioned parliament on 23 April and 7 May of 1649, initially to secure the release of leveller men from prison, the second time for the 'right' to petition and to represent their grievances. Contemporary newsbooks record that the Speaker responded belatedly to the first petition to the effect that he had already made his answer to their husbands and that they should go home and manage their domestic affairs (Hughes 1995: 163). In this case, such an injunction was not successful because, as Hughes notes, the leveller women 'considered themselves as citizens as well as wives, mothers and widows' (1995: 164); hence the second and stronger petition in May.

We should remember, however, that such examples constitute an important exception to the rule, although this time from the opposite end of the social, not to speak of the political, spectrum to Mary I and Elizabeth I. Undoubtedly, the upheavals of the mid-seventeenth century did favour 'unorthodox behaviour', as Lois G. Schwoerer has noted; we could say that 'religion animated and empowered women, giving them confidence and a sense of responsibility for their church and society', though without advancing sexual equality (Schwoerer 1998: 61–2). In general, though, early modern women did not *usually* intervene quite so openly, not least because of the cultural prohibition against women's speaking in public and also, and in relation to this, because they had not received the formal education that would have prepared them to do so.

Religion empowered women in a way that the humanist educational curriculum did not. Indeed, the different content and aims of male and female education have been emphasised and worried over in feminist histories, not least because of the close association perceived to exist between training in rhetoric and political action in this period. In contrast to their sisters, wives and mothers, for instance, men of middle rank and above who attended grammar school or were tutored at home would have received at least a rudimentary introduction to the classical art of persuasion, and this training was envisaged as preparing them to make some contribution to public life. Rhetoric can be understood, in the first place, as a body of rules, a list of devices that rationalise the act of 'speaking well' or persuasively; in early modern England, it also constituted a programme of reading, supplying boys and university students with linguistic resources that they could deploy, as the need arose, in their own speech or written compositions.

The study of rhetoric was closely associated with the study of Latin which was, again, unavailable to all but a few women. Schoolboys were

first given elementary sentences, usually moral phrases, to enable them to grasp the rules of Latin syntax. After using these to master 'accidence', they would then read dialogues, later Latin letters and plays, excerpting from these texts phrases which they could adapt grammatically in their conversations and writings, but which they could also imitate for 'rhetorical' effect (Mack 2005: 6–7). Boys were encouraged to spot stylistic devices as they read and to collect these as well as any 'commonplaces' that they discovered: that is, proverbs, maxims or pithy sayings, ready-made phrases which were excerpted and stored in 'commonplace books' under headings ('places') so as to facilitate their easy retrieval for future use. Underpinning this programme was the pragmatic philosophy of the Roman technical manuals, perhaps especially Quintilian's encyclopaedic *Institutio oratoria* (*On the Training of the Orator*), the complete manuscript of which had been rediscovered in 1416. From these sources, Tudor schoolboys and their masters gained a new confidence in the possibility of arriving at a 'socially useful, pragmatic truth' (Kahn 1985: 376), and beyond this, they found what we would term a role model, the *vir civilis* (the civil man) 'who knows how to plead in the law courts for justice and to deliberate in the councils and public assemblies of the *res publica* in such a way as to promote policies at once advantageous and honorable' (Skinner 1996: 69). Rhetorical training created resourceful and flexible minds. It produced a generation of public servants, counsellors and 'intelligencers' who were skilled in the art of deliberative oratory, that is, men who were linguistically equipped to move others to act. Arguably, it also produced the *male* polemicists of the religious sects in the mid-seventeenth century, many of whom had received and used this training, even if they made a show of rejecting it in their own writing.

Historians and literary critics largely agree that this male education was dreary but enabling; by contrast, female education is viewed primarily in restrictive terms as inhibiting intellectual development. The same pragmatic philosophy that promoted rhetorical training for men as a necessary prerequisite for a life of public service also served to justify women's debarment from such training on the grounds that they could not hold civic office. Instead of aiming to produce articulate female subjects, women's education was, notoriously, geared to the shaping and management of women's moral character and conduct and to preparing them for their domestic roles as wives, mothers and household managers. In practice, this meant that women were usually expected to confine themselves to acquiring housewifery skills and a level of literacy sufficient to enable them to discharge their domestic

duties and to read the religious and homiletic texts that would fortify them against the perceived weaknesses of their sex. That women were at a notable disadvantage in this respect is well documented and understood, and any number of humanist educationalists can be mustered to support and explain the reasoning behind the rarely qualified refusal to extend formal tuition in the arts of speaking to women.¹ One early contributor to the debate on female education was Italian humanist, Lionardo Bruni. Despite his willingness to open up certain areas of the new curriculum to women, including poetry, history, moral philosophy and the study of the 'great Orators of antiquity', Bruni used the vocational argument in his *De studiis et literis* (c.1405) to refute any suggestion that they should strive to become proficient in rhetoric themselves:

My chief reason is the obvious one, that I have in view the cultivation most fitting to a woman. To her neither the intricacies of debate nor the oratorical artifices of action and delivery are of the least practical use, if indeed they are not positively unbecoming. Rhetoric in all its forms, – public discussion, forensic argument, logical fence, and the like – lies absolutely outside the province of woman.

(Bruni, cited in Woodward 1905: 126)

Another highly influential voice in defining the parameters of female learning was that of the Spanish humanist and tutor to Mary Tudor, Juan Luis Vives, whose *De institutione foeminae Christianae* (1523), translated by Richard Hyrde under the title *Instruction of a Christian Woman* (c.1529), would appear in five English editions before the end of the century (Henderson and McManus 1985: 82). Vives opposed formal training in rhetoric for women not only on account of its lack of practical utility, but also, and more crucially, because its 'public' nature jeopardised women's reputation for chastity which, he insisted, it was the purpose of their upbringing and education to safeguard. Whereas 'it is meet that the man have knowledge of many and divers things, that may profit both himself and the commonwealth', Vives argues that a woman should be mindful only of preserving her modesty by staying at home and 'hold[ing] her tongue demurely' (Watson 1912: 55). Hence his tart pronouncement, much quoted since, that 'As for eloquence, I have no great care, nor a woman needeth it not, but she needeth goodness and wisdom' (Watson 1912: 54). The belief that erudition is acceptable in a woman only in so far as it is commensurate with her 'honesty' and makes her a better 'helpmeet'

or mother was widely echoed in the period, even by those writers such as Hyrde and Thomas More who put a more liberal gloss on this position. More, for example, who came closest to acknowledging the intellectual parity of the sexes, commended the retiring modesty of his studious daughter, Margaret Roper, who 'never hunt[ed] after vulgar praises' for her scholarly accomplishments, 'nor receive[d] them willingly', but contented herself with a readership of two: her father and husband (cited in Watson 1912: 189).

Unsurprisingly, then, feminist historians have concluded that women's education in the period served primarily to close off the possibility of women achieving a public voice and to reinforce the ideological imperatives that confined them to the domestic sphere. However, it is not just a problem of the segregation of male and female education. Rhetorical handbooks have also been seen to contribute to the elaboration of a negative and highly circumscribed model of female speech. As the ground-breaking work of Patricia Parker established in the 1980s, the rhetorical manuals inscribe an unflattering discrepancy between male and female speech forms through their gendered taxonomy of linguistic styles, a classification in which verbal excesses were codified as feminine in relation to a prevailing ideal of 'virile' eloquence that was constructed as pure, orderly, concise, vigorous and, above all, spare (Parker 1996). Thus, Parker argues, Desiderius Erasmus's *Lingua* (1525), a treatise on 'the use and abuse of the tongue', draws on proverbial notions of female loquacity in its disparagement of verbal over-abundance as a feminine 'disease' even as Erasmus acknowledges its affinities with a 'Ciceronian copiousness' that was widely emulated in male writings of the period including his own (Parker 1989). More broadly, Parker sets out, in *Literary Fat Ladies* (1987), to show that popular handbooks on rhetoric or poetics, such as George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1598), conceive of rhetoric as an ideologically 'motivated' discourse, 'an instrument of civil order', its function being not only to regulate instances of verbal and social indecorum but also, and by extension, to maintain the 'natural' hierarchical ordering of the household and commonwealth which language should reflect. If women feature prominently in such discussions of rhetoric, it is not as practitioners of this art, but through their long-standing association with 'unruly tropes' and other linguistic 'abuses' as analogously disruptive 'figures' needing to be brought under control. This connection rested, in turn, upon classical and biblical commonplaces which elided verbal fluency in women with uncontrollable sexual desire and the abandonment of their 'proper' place in the social order, as exemplified by the 'moovable' harlot of

Proverbs 7, who is 'full of babling and loude woordes' and 'whose feete can not abyde in her house' (Parker 1987: 104–7).

A similar agenda is discernible in the constraints imposed on female speech by the conduct literature (homilies, marriage sermons, household manuals) of the period which recycled the familiar derogatory stereotypes of the railing wife, scolding shrew and garrulous gossip. But the key difference is that women's failure to govern their 'glibbery member', here too understood as a by-word for unbridled wantonness and disruption of male authority, is opposed not to manly eloquence, but to an ideal of female reticence. That silence is a woman's 'best ornament' was tirelessly reiterated. Making explicit the double standard underpinning this dictum, Dod and Cleaver affirm that 'the dutie of man is, to be skilfull in talke: and of the wife, to boast of silence' (Dod and Cleaver 1612: 43). But, in a tacit admission that it was neither feasible, nor indeed desirable, for women to observe this ideal in all circumstances, conduct-book writers devoted most of their energies to laying down ground rules as to what is, or is not, a socially acceptable manner of speaking for wives and maids. As a counterpoise to the cautionary anti-type of the verbally (and sexually) incontinent whore or shrew, they promote a normative model of reserved female speech exuding humility, mildness and deference that signifies the wife's acceptance of her subjugation as a divinely ordained state. Thus William Whately argues that 'the wives tongue toward her husband must be neither keene nor loose; neither such as argues rage nor neglect: but savouring of all lowlinesse and quietnesse of affection' (Whately 1619: 196).

Similarly, in *Of Domesticall Duties* (1622), William Gouge advises that when in the company of her husband, a wife's 'words must be few, reverend and meeke', for silence 'implieth a reverend subjection, as on the other side too much speech implieth a usurpation of authoritie' (Gouge 1976: 281–2). Gouge reinforces this message by citing the Pauline edict against women speaking out in church (1 *Timothy* 2: 12), a prohibition which, like other conduct writers, he extends to the domestic sphere. Meanwhile, Richard Brathwait advises a young gentlewoman who finds herself in social situations where she is compelled to talk to pick her topics of conversation carefully:

It suites not with her honour, for a young woman to be prolocutor. But especially, when either men are in presence, or ancient Matrons, to whom shee owes a civill reverence, it will become her to tip her tongue with silence. Touching the subject of your discourse, when opportunity shall exact it of you, and without

touch of immodesty expect it from you; make choyce of such arguments as may best improve your knowledge in houshold affaires, and other private employments. To discourse of State-matters, will not become your auditory: nor to dispute of high poynts of Divinity, will it sort well with *women* of your quality [. . .] In one word, as modesty gives the best grace to your behaviour, so moderation of *Speech* to your discourse.

(Brathwait 1631: 89–90)

If staying silent is not an option, women must still strive to approximate this condition by practising a decorous ‘moderation’ in their ‘discourse’; above all, they are enjoined to confine their talk to ‘houshold affaires’ and not presume to discuss ‘State-matters’ and other topics that lay outside their natural capacity and province.

This model of female speech has served as the basis for much feminist critical analysis of women’s talk. Taking their cue from moralists such as Gouge and Brathwait, some critics have suggested that early modern women were caught in an impossible double bind: if they expressed themselves too volubly, they were liable to be branded as harlots, shrews or scolds; if they refrained from doing so, they were reduced to a state of mute impotence, leaving them no valid position from which to speak (Jardine 1983, Belsey 1985, Newman 1991). Yet, there are risks in reading prescriptive writings as though they were uncomplicatedly indicative of women’s actual experience and of the limited discursive opportunities available to them. Despite the prescriptions of the conduct books, historians have noted that the behaviour of women inside and outside the home often ‘diverged from prescribed patterns’ quite dramatically (Capp 1996: 120). For instance, it is hard to reconcile the image of the tongue-tied and submissive woman idealised in the conduct literature with examples that abound in other sources of women haranguing their menfolk or publicly accusing their female neighbours of sexual misconduct (Capp 1996, Gowing 1996). Susan Amussen notes that in practice even the most prosaic activities required of the housewife made ‘the expectation of silence [. . .] virtually impossible to meet’; women could not manage a busy household ‘without talking themselves [. . .] nor did one succeed in the market[place] if one was too meek or obedient’ (1999: 87). While, as literary critics have observed, the Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre produced more than its fair share of strikingly articulate female characters who prove themselves to be not a jot less adept or versatile in their choice of ripostes than their male

counterparts, without necessarily exercising their 'wit' in obviously transgressive ways.

Yet, for all the reasons noted above, scholars who are interested in recovering the political significance of women in early modernity have chosen to focus, not on reclaiming for women a rhetorical culture to which they allegedly did not belong, but on expanding our conception of 'politics'. Thanks in large measure to their efforts, politics is no longer narrowly conceived as debate about constitutional issues or restricted to the institutions of government. Indeed, in an essay that appeared in Hilda L. Smith's landmark collection, *Women Writers and the Early Modern British Political Tradition* (1998), Lois G. Schworer notes that the idea of 'political culture' rather than 'politics' is particularly useful to feminist historians because it provides a framework for a conception of participation that could involve women of different social ranks and take different forms: 'dispensing patronage, influencing decision makers and elections, petitioning, demonstrating, gift-giving, entertaining, haranguing, reporting seditious conduct, writing and disseminating ideas in printed form' (Schworer 1998: 57–8). That our conception of the early modern 'public sphere' needs extending to take account of female activity is now widely granted, though this is subject to differing interpretations. On the one hand, as David Norbrook has noted, in the mid-seventeenth century 'it was not unambiguously clear to the authorities that women could not form part of' the commonwealth, of the 'new public' that was being formed; he cites as examples the petitioning of the leveller women in the 1640s and the reception of the work of the Dutch humanist Anna Maria van Schurman, who was 'strongly admired' by the Parliamentarians (Norbrook 2004). Nonetheless, he recognises the limitations of this activism: 'Agitation by women did not, however, include a demand for female suffrage' (Norbrook 2004: 232). On the other hand, as Smith cautions, to 'focus too narrowly on issues of rights, and voting, as constituting political standing' is to misrepresent a culture that had a 'broader and more inclusive understanding of politics' (Smith 1998: 10, 4), one that is concerned with duties and obligations rather than rights and a more flexible sense of the 'public' sphere.

Indeed, despite Thomas Smith's strict demarcation of the public sphere as masculine and the private sphere as feminine, cited in the epigraph to this chapter, the boundary between these domains was in fact blurred (Capp 1996: 317, Gowing 1996: 26). The domestic idiom of political language compromises our sense of the household as a purely 'domestic' space. Women's domestic roles were generally recognised as already possessing an inherently political dimension.

Thus, Gouge argues in the early seventeenth century that although the overwhelming majority of women 'are not admitted to any publike function in Church or commonwealth', their 'conscionable performance of household duties', inasmuch as it ministers to the good of both, 'may be accounted a publike worke' (Gouge 1976: 18). The assumption that the civic and domestic realms were interconnected – that the family was a 'little commonwealth', as Gouge puts it, 'wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned' (Gouge 1976: 18) – informed the language of household manuals and political tracts in both restrictive and enabling ways (Amussen 1988: 54–64). It could reinforce patriarchal values, most famously in Robert Filmer's defence of absolutism, *Patriarcha; or the Natural Power of Kings* (1680). However, an emphasis on women's 'houshold duties' could also be enlisted to authorise women's entry into the 'public' sphere in ways that Gouge never envisaged. For instance, in their collective petitioning of Parliament in 1649 and 1653, leveller women protested against the violation of their 'honest households' by government troops, arguing that they could not be expected to 'sit in silence' at home while such atrocities were being perpetrated but were forced by the enormity of these 'publick Calamit[ies]' to take a stand in defence of their families and, by extension, of the 'Nations ancient Rights and Liberties'. Despite conceding that 'it is not our custom to address ourselves to this House in the publick behalf', these women held that the political crisis created by parliamentary 'tyranny' left them no option but to quit their normal sphere: 'we are so over-prest, so over-whelmed with affliction, that we are not able to keep in our compass, to be bounded in the custom of our sex'. Familial obligations are pressed into service here in order to argue for women's 'undoubted right to petition', but also, and more boldly still, to stake out a claim for their right to 'an equal interest with the Men of this Nation in those liberties and securities contained in [. . .] the good Laws of the Land'.² This example demonstrates just how problematic the division of the public and private spheres along gendered lines is for this period. Our conception of the meaning of the term 'public', however, also needs fresh consideration; it should be extended to encompass 'all that was "common, open, abroad"', while public space was deemed to include markets, streets, neighbourhoods, playhouses, taverns; anywhere, in fact, where men *and* women were on show and negotiated and conducted business with one another' (Withington 2005: 199–200). In this redefined 'public' of markets, streets and neighbourhoods, 'female' speech – gossip, slander, conversation – can be seen to take on a new political significance.

For example, the status of men in the community depended on their reputation as 'honest' householders; this rested on the behaviour of their dependants, but also on their own reputations, of which women were often 'the brokers' (Gowing 1996: 123). Women's talk could make or break reputations, and although their own were extremely vulnerable in turn, proffered sexual slurs and insults also gave them 'surpassing scope for action'; indeed, women took to the courts in increasing numbers to defend their reputations (Gowing 1996: 137).

Given this development of feminist political history, a collection of essays such as this, which explores the relationship between women, politics *and* rhetoric, might seem an unpromising move. But we think that it is important to recover this term and its close synonym 'eloquence', not least because the conception of rhetoric against which feminised political talk – gossip, slander, conversation, etc. – is implicitly opposed, is oversimplified, and this leaves in place the very gendered division that historians and literary critics have attempted to trouble and contest: men orate; women gossip. Obviously, we do not dispute that men and women had different opportunities to influence others or used different modes of speech or literary forms for that purpose. We do not want to argue that women were 'orators' like men, although women in positions of unusual power, such as Elizabeth I, had been trained in formal rhetoric and were persuasive public speakers (Orlin 1995). But there is a need, we argue, to expand our understanding of the terms 'rhetoric' and 'rhetorical' in just the same way that has been done for the concepts 'politics' and 'political' in order to make visible, on the one hand, the varieties and effectiveness of women's eloquence in a range of contexts and, on the other hand, and just as importantly, how female eloquence was already conceived as being fraught with political meaning. Eloquence is a crucial term for us because it provides a vocabulary and a way of thinking that bring into view the often untutored persuasiveness of women's speech and its capacity for critical engagement with received ideas and structures of authority. Moreover, it can encompass many different sorts of speech, including gossip and conversation, but also more structured rhetorical forms concerned with the traditional oratorical aims of exhortation and dissuasion, accusation and defence. Indeed, rhetoric can help us to understand the intrinsic eloquence of much female speech which seems troublingly self-negating, that is, speech or writing that emphasises the weakness of the speaker or seeks to influence indirectly.

On the current model, as we have seen, rhetorical skill is understood as dependent on the kind of formal training available, usually, only to

boys and young men, while our conception of early modern rhetoric follows closely its definition in early modern technical handbooks, which did inscribe a gendered hierarchy. However, it is important to remember that rhetoric has never been just a system, a body of rules. The ancient theoreticians already understood that ‘eloquence’ – the force, fluency or expressiveness of speech or writing – pre-exists its codification as ‘rhetoric’. The handbooks do indeed advise on the organisation of a speech and its content, and classify linguistic ‘ornaments’. But these represent only one aspect of rhetorical education. Just as important to the development of persuasiveness is ‘practice’. Cicero argued in *De oratore* (*On the Ideal Orator*), that it is not the study of rules that makes one eloquent, but the practice of writing for and speaking to a variety of social occasions and contexts. This idea underpins the rhetorical training of boys in the sixteenth century implicitly and sometimes more explicitly. The collection and analysis of linguistic devices and commonplaces supports the classroom practice of ‘declamation’, arguing pro and contra (Rhodes 2004, Mack 2005). However, humanists could also appeal to Cicero’s endorsement of practice-based rather than technical training in order to challenge the traditional authority of the schoolmaster. In his Cambridge lectures, published as *Rhetor* in 1577, Gabriel Harvey followed Cicero in rejecting the dead theorisation of persuasive speech and argued instead that eloquence depends on ‘reading, praising, criticizing, correcting, refuting, and irritating’ the best rhetoricians, and by joining ‘in discussions, disputes, and dialogues’ (Harvey 1577: 75–6; Richards 2007).

This allows for an important change of emphasis. Harvey may be describing a community of university-educated male disputants, but the importance he attaches to ‘practice’ can be extended to include other kinds of speaker, other kinds of disputational context. Arguably, this is already recognised in many of the handbooks and treatises that ‘theorise’ restrictions on female speech, for these also reveal a more complex engagement with the practice of women’s talk than is often taken account of in critical discussion. For example, there is a danger that excerpting prescriptive advice from *On Domesticall Duties* (1622) obscures the caveats that Gouge is repeatedly prompted to offer his female readers, and also the reflexive engagement with the issue of how women should speak that this text encourages. In his preface, Gouge records the objections raised by his female parishioners when his directives were ‘first uttered out of the pulpit’. In particular, these women rejected ‘the application of the wives subjection to her restraining of the common goods of the family without, or against

her husbands consent', but failed to notice, he adds, the 'Cautions and Limitations' that he had also given them on this subject (Gouge 1976: ¶3v). Tellingly, this text is full of such cautions and limitations which acknowledge the impracticality of restrictive advice applied to *all* women and which stress the importance of negotiation within the household. For instance, Gouge may recall that 'the Apostle enjoyneth *silence* to wives in their husbands presence', but it should be noted that this is almost immediately qualified as he warns that St Paul's command is not to be taken too literally: 'for silence in that place is not opposed to speech, as if she should not speake at all, but to loquacitie, to talkativenessse, to over-much tatling: her husbands presence must somewhat restraints her tongue, and so will her verie silence testifie a reverend respect'. But on the latter point he is again forced to concede that silence is a far from unambiguous signifier of female submission and may indeed 'imply' its opposite: 'stoutnesse of stomacke, and stubbornnesse of heart' (Gouge 1976: 281–2) (Luckyj 2002: 58–62). We could argue that Gouge is being forced to compromise the rigid rules that he is offering wives, except that his advice is also self-consciously structured to initiate negotiation of these norms. Key to this is the rhetorical reading that Gouge's text invites: the reader is asked to follow the process of its composition, taking note of its 'disposition' (arrangement), for example, of the fact that the elaboration of the 'wives duetie' is meant to 'answer' her husband's, but also vice versa (¶4r). In this regard *On Domesticall Duties* is by no means exceptional; many conduct books of the period incorporate 'objections' to their own prescriptions and even, in some cases, adopt a more overtly dialectical structure.³

This is, of course, a small 'gain': the redoubtable Gouge is not quite so unyielding on the subject of women's speech as we initially thought. However, there are other reasons why emphasising rhetoric as 'practice' is helpful in making visible women's rhetorical activities. Once rhetoric is conceived as the study of 'eloquence', the development of which depends on 'practice' in a variety of contexts rather than technical training and scholarly regimens, then it is possible to begin to extend its exercise to women of all ranks, not merely the small classically educated and privately tutored female elite (Queen Elizabeth, Lady Jane Grey, More's daughters, the Cooke sisters) that has tended to monopolise critical attention. Indeed, we should bear in mind that rhetorical skills could be acquired by women through a variety of channels, formal or informal, direct or indirect. Attending a play, reading a letter or listening to a sermon, to cite but a few examples, would all have offered opportunities to develop an awareness of a

range of rhetorical forms. As James Daybell remarks in this collection, the sophisticated mastery of the structure and stylistic conventions of different epistolary genres displayed by upper-class female suitors was probably acquired 'less from formal tuition, than from vernacular letter-writing manuals that transmitted classical epistolary models to a wider non-Latinate audience', or through 'practical contact' with everyday correspondence (see p. 173). Lower down the social scale, female sectaries, many of them from the middling or 'meaner' sort, were not deterred by their lack of instruction in formal disputation from speaking out on matters of ecclesiastical doctrine or arguing with ministers. On the contrary, they often made a point of contrasting their own untutored yet divinely inspired eloquence favourably with the sophistries of a university-educated clergy. Patricia Crawford notes how in her debates with the Presbyterian minister Thomas Edward, the separatist and later leveller, Katherine Chidley deployed 'the standard rhetorical ploys about lack of scholarly training, but in such a way that this became a strength: her answers were "not laid downe in a Schollerick way, but by the plaine truth of Holy Scripture"' (Crawford 1996: 133). Equally, Laura Gowing and Tim Stretton have shown how the testimony of female witnesses and litigants who flocked to the consistory and equity courts in unprecedented numbers in this period often demonstrated an intuitive grasp of the persuasive efficacy of particular narrative strategies that owed more to popular oral culture than to knowledge of forensic discourse (Gowing 1996, Stretton 1998).

All of this sounds very positive, but crucial questions remain. What forms did women's eloquence take? How did women negotiate the cultural constraints imposed on female speech and behaviour? And, perhaps most importantly of all, given the meagre credibility ascribed to women's words relative to those of men (Gowing 1996: 50–2), how did they establish their *ethos*, that is, an authoritative and trustworthy rhetorical persona from which they could persuasively intervene in 'public' debate? These are tricky issues. For while there is abundant evidence to suggest that women's lack of formal rhetorical training did not prevent them from speaking effectively in a variety of contexts, it is still necessary to recognise that their interventions *were* restricted. An important source of female authority, as we have already noted, lay in the household, and this informed how women represented and probably conceived of their rhetorical interventions: as a natural extension of their established roles as wives, mothers, mistresses of households, patrons and godly women, prompted by the various duties and responsibilities that were associated with these functions. Many early modern

women used their familial or domestic identities to speak or write of matters that exceeded the confines of domestic life. For example, women of gentry or aristocratic stock took advantage of their extensive family, local and court connections as a means of participating informally in the patronage system (Harris 1990). Their recognised duty to promote the interests and standing of their family, through the use of their epistolary skills, licensed them to solicit political favours of one kind or another from government officials on behalf of kin, clients, neighbours, 'friends' and other dependants. Moreover, when interceding for close family members, they projected themselves as exemplary spouses and mothers driven to act purely from maternal solicitude or wifely devotion, secure in the knowledge that 'familial responsibility provided a firm moral justification for women's intervention in business matters beyond the strictly defined domain of the household' (Daybell 2006a: 16). Other factors, notably socio-economic status, could contribute to the fashioning of a confident rhetorical persona capable of transacting 'business' of various sorts within the public sphere. Thus, James Daybell attributes the remarkable self-assurance with which elite female suitors deployed a Senecan language of political friendship in their correspondence – an idiom normally reserved for men – to consciousness of their elevated rank and the considerable sources of political influence and patronage at their disposal (see p. 179, also Magnusson 2004).

Inevitably, early modern women's tendency to speak and write in terms of a traditional understanding of their place, identities and roles within the social order often steered them towards rhetorical forms which it is difficult for us nowadays properly to appreciate or, indeed, accept. Nowhere is this more evidently the case than with such apparently disabling yet pervasively used speech forms as supplication and complaint, which accentuated the speaker's lowliness, weakness and incapacity. In their different ways, both these already-feminised modes of utterance suggest a speech situation in which the speaker typically assumes a stance of humble and grief-ridden self-abnegation that declares their helpless dependency on more powerful others (usually the male interlocutor or absent addressee) to redress the wrongs they have endured. Examples of female speakers pleading and 'complaining' abound in classical and scriptural texts and were carried over into, and popularised by, the vernacular literary tradition (see Heard in this collection, p. 51). Ovid's *Heroides* – a collection of verse epistles purportedly authored by mythical heroines such as Penelope, Dido, Ariadne and Medea and addressed to the lovers who have abandoned them in subtly modulated accents of lamentation,

entreaty, accusation, vituperation and reproach – offered early modern readers perhaps the richest illustration of the infinitely flexible uses to which these overlapping modes of persuasion could be put. As Ovid's text became more widely accessible as a result of the numerous translations and 'imitations' published in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries – including those of George Turbeville (1567), Michael Drayton (1597) and Wye Saltonstall (1636) – it was increasingly appropriated and adapted to a range of expressive purposes by female poets, notably Isabella Whitney, Mary Wroth and Aphra Behn. Indeed, although the lamenting or beseeching female voice was of course a rhetorical 'fiction' initially scripted, interpreted and printed by and for men, women were not slow to recognise its potential value as a linguistic resource that could be mobilised in a range of contexts beyond the literary and that was amenable to being manipulated to their advantage as well as in their disfavour.

Nevertheless, it remains hard for us to understand why female speakers and writers of the period were attracted to such overtly disempowering forms of self-presentation. From a feminist critical perspective the representation of a female voice that emphasises the speaker's passivity and vulnerability obviously makes for uncomfortable reading. Neglect of these speech forms, though, is compounded by the inattention of political historians to supplication and complaint in favour of more traditional forms of rhetoric, especially the deliberative oration. This is despite the fact that their connections with the mainstream rhetorical tradition were well recognised by influential rhetoricians in this period. Thus Erasmus and Thomas Wilson categorise the language of entreaty as a form of deliberative speech that seeks to persuade or dissuade an audience from taking a specific course of action (Wilson 1982: 76, 144, Erasmus 1985: 71, 172–81). Originally denoting a 'bill' of grievances submitted by a plaintiff, 'complaint' was also understood to have strong affinities with forensic rhetoric, a link that was sustained by the use of legal terminology and the adoption of postures of accusation, defence and self-exculpation which were constitutive features of this 'genre' (Kerrigan 1991: 7). Even so, the preference for 'milder', less agonistic types of persuasion that characterise such 'genres' as supplication and complaint increases the difficulty of thinking of them as a form of political *action*. In order to address the relationship between women, rhetoric *and* politics, however, it is essential that we recover their significance as a moral and affective force within early modern political culture.

Supplication and complaint could provide a highly effective vehicle for social and moral protest, often ventriloquised through female speakers in texts authored by both men and women. The suffering (*pathos*) on which these speech forms are predicated may invest the speaker's accusations, pleas or laments with a compelling moral authority and affective eloquence (*pathos* in its other sense) that serves, ironically, to restore the very agency they seemed to erase. Isabella Whitney, for example, marshals both Ovidian and Christian strains of 'moral complaint' in order to denounce the treachery of men in *The Copy of a Letter* (1567) and to express social dissatisfaction through her identification with the hardships suffered by the urban poor in her 'WYLL and Testament' (1573) (Beilin 1990). Moreover, in a culture where social relations were governed by the principle of reciprocal obligation, the articulation of such grievances could exert considerable political pressure by appealing to the moral duty of the strong to come to the aid of the weak. We should not be surprised, then, to find women drawing upon these 'literary' modes of expression in more public contexts: for example, when writing suitors' letters, giving legal testimony or, during the Commonwealth, in their petitioning and printed 'complaints' protesting against government policy (Kerrigan 1991: 60). It was not uncommon for female suitors who found themselves in desperate straits – in cases, for instance, where they or their spouses had fallen from political grace – to adopt an excessively deferential posture and sorrowful language of entreaty, reminiscent of that employed by Ovid's forlorn heroines, in their written pleas for succour. These women typically highlighted their feminine frailty and dramatised the afflictions laid upon them in ways that were designed to elicit the pity and favourable intercession of state officials (Thorne 2006). In his study of women's dealings with the Court of Requests during Elizabeth's reign, Tim Stretton documents the strategic use of a similar rhetorical ploy by female litigants. In a bid to gain judicial sympathy, single women and widows were apt to play upon their own poverty or 'simplicity' and consequent vulnerability to sharp practices, aligning themselves with such scriptural types as the 'importunate widow' of Luke 18 as objects deserving of equitable treatment (Stretton 1998: 49–51, 180–7). These examples show how such rhetorical practices could work to 'put women in relation to politics' (to borrow Susan Wiseman's useful phrase in her essay in this collection, p. 132), albeit in more oblique, complex and mediated ways than were available to their male coevals. Moreover, we would argue that these distinctive forms of eloquence facilitated women's attempts to influence the course of political (or legal) action and