



Women's Speaking Justified and Other Pamphlets

Nilab Ferozan

Volume 42, Number 2, Spring 2019

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1065143ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065143ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Iter Press

ISSN

0034-429X (print)

2293-7374 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Ferozan, N. (2019). Review of [Women's Speaking Justified and Other Pamphlets]. *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme*, 42 (2), 216–218. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1065143ar>

Fell, Margaret.

Women's Speaking Justified and Other Pamphlets. Ed. Jane Donawerth and Rebecca M. Lush.

The Other Voice in Early Modern Europe: The Toronto Series 65 / Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 538. Toronto: Iter Press / Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2018. Pp. xx, 223 + 4 ill. ISBN 978-0-86698-595-6 (paperback) US\$39.95.

The recently edited volume, *Women's Speaking Justified and Other Pamphlets* by Jane Donawerth and Rebecca M. Lush, fits well with the growing body of scholarship on women's voices from the past and their roles in religious life of the early modern period. This volume is a great addition to the *Other Voice in Early Modern Europe* series and to Quaker studies. More broadly, it is of great relevance to the history of rhetoric, women, feminism, and religious studies. Donawerth and Lush describe Margaret Fell as "one of the most prolific" women writers of the seventeenth century. They also call the text written by Fell a "political activist's Bible" and an example of early feminist texts. In this volume, Fell is given her rightful place as one of the founders of the Society of Friends, or Quakers. Fell's writing contributed to the development of the unique theology of the Friends. Her written works consist of autobiography, epistle or formal letters, and examination of a trial. The selection chosen in this edition aims to show why Fell belongs in the series of the *Other Voice* and demonstrates how her writings serve as evidence of women's vernacular literacy in the early modern world, which was different from men's education. This edition also aims to demonstrate how Fell uses her unique position in society to carve a place for herself in religious circles by writing and preaching.

Fell was born near Dalton-in-Furness, Lancashire, into a wealthy family who were believed to be related to the famous Protestant martyr Ann Askew. She married Thomas Fell at a young age, and while raising their eight children she began a search for a deeper religious experience. She became a "Seeker," an individual who opts for "an inward attitude of waiting upon God." As a Seeker, she travelled and listened to many religious sermons. She, like many others, was deeply concerned with the religious and political conflicts of the seventeenth century and found it troubling and distracting from the cultivation of true faith. Though Thomas never adhered to the state religion during Catholic Queen Mary's reign, to protect his office and properties, he was supportive of

his wife and children's religious beliefs, which were influenced by George Fox. The Fells hosted many of the Quakers' meeting at their house, and Margaret began writing as a way to preach the new religion. With Thomas's death, the Quakers lost a "judicial protector." During the reign of Charles II, even though the Declaration of Breda protected the right to religious freedom, Fell was arrested for preaching and holding religious meetings. She also suffered loss of her income and property. Her subsequent marriage to George Fox resulted in a hostile relationship with her only son. Her son's legal action to transfer his father's estate to his name landed Fell in prison for a second time.

Through her writings, Fell established the theological idea that Christ was fully present inside each converted Friend, making the argument that since every Christian is equal in the eyes of God, Christ exists in both women and men. Fell's *Women's Speaking Justified* uses direct quotations from the scriptures to justify her claim of gender equality in Christianity. Her writings influenced Friends' beliefs in the equal right of women to speak out and testify to their faith, which was forbidden in other sects of Protestantism.

This edition claims that studying Fell helps us to understand women's reading and writing practices in the early modern period. Recently, scholars such as Mary Hamilton and David Barton have argued that women's "literacy is best understood as a set of social practices." Francis Teague suggests that early modern women's reading must have been a practice characterized by "rereading and memorizing for moral profit." While many girls were only taught reading, Fell was both a writer and a reader. However, Donawerth and Lush claim that her reading was limited to the Bible. She quotes the King James version of the Bible regularly, but in some cases inaccurately. In many instances, it seems that Fell is quoting from memory. While some historians have claimed that Fell's memorization and excessive quotation of the Word is an indication of women's passive acceptance of patriarchal authority, and a way of hiding women's voices behind words written by men, Donawerth and Lush claim that Fell's reading practices, memorization, and inexact quotations represent her independent judgment in interpreting Scripture, as well as her extreme devotion to the Word.

The insightful introduction, which includes detailed analysis of Fell's writings, gives readers a glimpse of the eventful life of Margaret Fell, as a wife, a mother, a religious activist, a preacher, an accomplished writer, and a deeply religious woman who was fearless in her convictions. Although she came from a place of privilege, as a woman she suffered many hardships and overcame

many challenges. The edited volume is an excellent addition to scholarship on the history of early modern religious women and will be of great interest to scholars of religion, gender, and literacy in post-Reformation culture.

NILAB FEROZAN

McMaster University

Grindlay, Lilla.

Queen of Heaven: The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin in Early Modern English Writing.

Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018. Pp. xi, 297. ISBN 978-0-26-810410-8 (paper) US\$45.

However one understands the process and politics of the Reformation, the practice of Christianity in England in 1600 was certainly characterized in part by a series of dramatic absences relative to the practice of Christianity in 1500: purgatory, devotion to the saints, and the Mass itself, among others. How did individual believers, for whom the transformation of devotional practice changed so dramatically within their lifetimes, respond to such losses? Lilla Grindlay's *Queen of Heaven* enters this conversation by focusing on one of the most prominent elements of late medieval Christianity displaced by the Reformation, namely, devotion to Mary, particularly in her role as Queen of Heaven. For Grindlay, this displacement, even as late as the early seventeenth century, was not complete, and not simply because of the intensity of Marian devotion among English Catholics. As Grindlay shows, Mary as Queen of Heaven remained influential in Protestant discourse in polemical and literary texts, and also, fascinatingly, in some devotional works. As such, this version of Mary stands as a useful index for assessing the full complexity of confessionalization in Elizabethan and early Jacobean England.

The book conducts its study along two lines of inquiry. The first is constituted by the still-dominant critical narrative to which Grindlay is responding. Mary, this narrative holds, effectively vanishes from the devotional landscape over the course of the Reformation, as a relic of medieval Catholicism. While acknowledging Mary's reduced presence in the reformed liturgy, Grindlay argues that she became instead a subject of dramatic contestation, as