



# Mediatrix: Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England

By Julie Crawford

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*Women, Politics, and Literary Production in Early Modern England* considers the roles women played as literary patrons, dedicatees, readers, and writers in the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries, and the intimate relationship between these literary activities and what has often been called 'politically active' humanism. Focusing on the interrelated communities centered on Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke; Lady Margaret Hoby; Lucy Harrington Russell, the Countess of Bedford; and Lady Mary Wroth, *Mediatrix* argues that women played integral roles not only in the production of some of the most renowned literary texts in the period, including Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, John Donne's poetry, and Mary Wroth's *Urania*, but also in wider networks of intellectual, religious and political activism. Each of the communities discussed was concerned with the cause loosely identified as international or militant Protestantism and frequently mediated through the circulation of texts of all kinds. Illuminating women's constitutive involvement in everything from the genres of the texts produced -- romances, verse letters, texts of religious controversy -- to the places in which those texts were produced and circulated -- the estates of Wilton, Penshurst, Hackness, Twickenham, and Loughton -- and the conditions and hermeneutics by which they were read, *Mediatrix* offers an account of early modern English literary production with women at the center and political activism as one of its primary, rather than merely topical, concerns.

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### Editorial Review

#### Review

This is in most ways an excellent, indispensable book for the political moment through which we are living. Neal Ascherson, *The Political Quarterly* Julie Crawford's book will appeal to any scholar interested in the variety of ways women (not only women writers) were intricately involved in early modern literary culture ... an important new perspective on the central role played by women not only in literary, political and intellectual culture but in the growth and expression of radical Protestantism in England. Johanna Harris, *The Times Literary Supplement* an insightful and thought-provoking contribution to ongoing developments in our understanding of the significant cultural and political roles played by early modern women. It will be of special interest to scholars working on the four women who are focal to the chapters, but it also has much to offer to general discussion of how aristocratic women operated in early modern England. Helen Hackett, *Review of English Studies* Donne's provocative description of Bedford as a "mediatrix" inspires the book's use of the term to capture the ways in which its subjects wielded political power and influence through textual exchanges within networks of family and literary and courtly associates. Tracey Miller-Tomlinson, *SHARP News* With its wide-ranging sense of women's agentive roles in this faction, Crawford's monograph significantly extends scholarship on women's relationship to political, social and textual cultures in the early modern period. Sarah C.E. Ross, *English Historical Review*

#### About the Author

**Julie Crawford** is the Mark van Doren Professor of Humanities in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University. She has published on a wide range of early modern authors, from Shakespeare, Fletcher, and Sidney to Cavendish, Wroth and Clifford, and on topics ranging from the history of reading to the history of sexuality. She is the author of a book on cheap print and the English reformation, called *Marvelous Protestantism* (Johns Hopkins UP, 2005), and is currently completing a book entitled *Margaret Cavendish's Political Career*.

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