



The Polemics and Poems of Rachel Speght (Women Writers in English 1350-1850)

Rachel Speght

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Rachel Speght was the first Englishwoman to identify herself, unmistakably and by name, as a polemicist and critic of contemporary gender ideology. This edition includes her polemical foray into the Jacobean gender wars and her collected poems. Speght's tract, *A Mouzzell for Melastomus* (1617), is at once a spirited answer to Joseph Swetnam's attack on women and a serious effort to stake women's claim to the prevailing Protestant discourse of biblical exegesis. In other words, she tried to yield a more expansive and more equitable concept of gender. Speght's volume of poems, *Moralities Memorandum with a Dream Prefixed* (1621)--printed, in part, to counter charges that her prose was actually her father's-- includes a long memento mori meditation and an allegorical dream vision that recounts her own rapturous encounter with learning. Both texts vigorously defend women's education and encourage women's talents. This volume should find a ready audience among scholars and students of early seventeenth-century literature, history, and religion, as well as among those in women's studies.

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