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Social convention may have prevented Renaissance women writers from openly taking part in the political and religious debates of their day, but they found varied and innovative ways to intervene. Collecting the work of three great poets-Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney, and Aemilia Lanyer-this volume repositions women writers of the Renaissance by presenting their poems in the context of their history and culture. Whitney's poems offer the only glimpse into her life, express a concern for women's lack of social and economic power, and powerfully evoke sixteenth-century London. Sidney produced potent translations of Petrarch's works and the Psalms, as well as original verse. Lanyer wrote poems that advocate and praise female virtue and Christian piety, but reflect a desire for an idealized, classless world. The strong and original voices of these three women-each from different social, cultural, and historical strata-demonstrate the emergence of a new female identity during the Renaissance and broaden the common notions of English Literature's golden age.

About the Author

Aemilia Lanyer (1569-1645) was the mistress of the Lord Chaimberlain and later married an Italian musician.

Isabella Whitney (c. 1550-?) was born into the Cheshire gentry, went into service in London, and published two volumes of poetry.

Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke (1561-1621), worked in close collaboration with her brother, Sir Philip Sidney, and oversaw publication of his works after his death.

Danielle Clarke has published numerous articles about women's writing, critical theory, and modern literature. She is lecturer in English at University College, London.