

1. Record Nr.	UNINA9910967552603321
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Titolo	Dido's daughters : literacy, gender, and empire in early modern England and France / / Margaret W. Ferguson
Pubbl/distr/stampa	Chicago, : University of Chicago Press, c2003
ISBN	9786611125592 9781281125590 1281125598 9780226243184 0226243184
Edizione	[1st ed.]
Descrizione fisica	1 online resource (521 p.)
Disciplina	809/.89287/0904
Soggetti	European literature - Women authors - History and criticism Literature, Modern - History and criticism French literature - Women authors - History and criticism English literature - Women authors - History and criticism Women and literature - England Women and literature - France Women - Education - England Women - Education - France
Lingua di pubblicazione	Inglese
Formato	Materiale a stampa
Livello bibliografico	Monografia
Note generali	Description based upon print version of record.
Nota di bibliografia	Includes bibliographical references (p. [435]-483) and index.
Nota di contenuto	Front matter -- Contents -- Illustrations -- Acknowledgments -- Prologue -- 1. Competing Concepts of Literacy in Imperial Contexts Definitions, Debates, Interpretive Models -- 3. Sociolinguistic Matrices for Early Modern Literacies Paternal Latin, Mother Tongues, and Illustrious Vernaculars -- 3. Discourses of Imperial Nationalism as Matrices for Early Modern Literacies -- Interlude -- 4. An Empire of Her Own Literacy as Appropriation in Christine de Pizan's Livre de la Cité des Dames -- 5. Making the World Anew Female Literacy as Reformation and Translation in Marguerite de Navarre's Heptaméron -- 6. Allegories of Imperial Subjection Literacy as Equivocation in Elizabeth Cary's Tragedy of Mariam -- 7. New World Scenes from a Female Pen

Sommario/riassunto

Winner of the 2004 Book Award from the Society for the Study of Early Modern Women and the 2003 Roland H. Bainton Prize for Literature from the Sixteenth Century Society and Conference. Our common definition of literacy is the ability to read and write in one language. But as Margaret Ferguson reveals in *Dido's Daughters*, this description is inadequate, because it fails to help us understand heated conflicts over literacy during the emergence of print culture. The fifteenth through seventeenth centuries, she shows, were a contentious era of transition from Latin and other clerical modes of literacy toward more vernacular forms of speech and writing. Ferguson's aim in this long-awaited work is twofold: to show that what counted as more valuable among these competing literacies had much to do with notions of gender, and to demonstrate how debates about female literacy were critical to the emergence of imperial nations. Looking at writers whom she dubs the figurative daughters of the mythological figure Dido-builder of an empire that threatened to rival Rome-Ferguson traces debates about literacy and empire in the works of Marguerite de Navarre, Christine de Pizan, Elizabeth Cary, and Aphra Behn, as well as male writers such as Shakespeare, Rabelais, and Wyatt. The result is a study that sheds new light on the crucial roles that gender and women played in the modernization of England and France.
