

RACHEL SPEGHT (c. 1597–1630+)

## FROM A MUZZLE FOR MELASTOMUS

(1617)

### Introduction

Like Jane Anger's *Protection for Women* written nearly 30 years before, Rachel Speght's *Muzzle for Melastomus* responds to a misogynist attack, in this case Joseph Swetnam's *Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* (1615). His pamphlet provoked several replies, but only Speght's, the first among them, is undoubtedly by a female author, who at the time was the nineteen-year-old daughter of a London clergyman, James Speght.

Perhaps her most important task after deciding to refute Swetnam was to develop an authentic voice which would break completely with *The Arraignment's* misogynist discourse – or discourses, since his pamphlet is a jumble of personas and genres. Swetnam parodies contemporary domestic conduct books, for example, by exaggerating their paradoxically repressive and sentimental advice to husbands about wives (Shepherd 1985: 54–5). His orotund language and conspiratorial tone at other points echo John Lyly's 'Cooling Card for Philautus and All Fond Lovers' in *Euphues the Anatomy of Wit*, the text used by *Book his Surfeit* that provoked Jane Anger (above p. 85). Swetnam also poses as a jaded traveller who amuses himself by stringing together anecdotes of outlandish female depravity. And overall he perpetuates the anti-female harangues of the sixteenth-century *querelle des femmes*, but with a difference: his 'evidence' is not predominantly literary let alone scholarly, but drawn largely from non-textual popular culture – ballads, proverbial lore, traditional pastimes, and urban amusements. As Diane Purkiss argues (1992: 73–8), Swetnam's use of such material reflects his real purpose of generating subversive male pleasure rather than upholding established social values. *The Arraignment* signals the beginning of a pamphlet-scrum that Swetnam hopes other male writers will join for entertainment and profit. Obviously in such a context serious discussion about female nature is not the concern: 'woman' is simply the field over which Swetnam and his mates scramble to score points against each other.

Speght's approach differs, either because the intermittent *querelle* was unknown to her (Woodbridge 1984: 92) or because she recognised the futility of responding to Swetnam on his own terms. Instead she chooses moral argument grounded in scriptural interpretation – not much fun for the gamesters, but valuable to women. This form of discourse, though usually associated with theological inquiry (as other Renaissance women demonstrate), is an inventive solution to the problem of representing female agency within the masculine debate-genre. (Originality in the modern sense of novelty is not to be expected; the Renaissance considered innovation to be compatible with derivation.) While lacking in neither

humour nor playfulness, Speght's *Muzzle* is a serious vindication of women, distinguished structurally from her *querelle* 'co-defendants' and intellectually from Swetnam's jejune attack. While Speght is aware that relying on the Bible means working with a text men have often used to oppress women, she also knows it possesses the crucial advantages of being an unimpeachable authority universally familiar to female readers, and the basis of a cultural discourse they could hope to make partly their own through independent reinterpretation of seminal passages. Rather than being weak 'because of [its] especially religious orientation' (Henderson and McManus 1985: 17), Speght's defence actually offers her seventeenth-century female readers 'some kind of clear and recognizable starting-point from which to speak as woman without attracting instant condemnation' (Purkiss 1992: 94), as using Swetnam's mode inevitably would have done.

In the opening Dedicatorial Epistle Speght presents herself in the defiant image of Israel's young underdog-champion David, while also seeking patronage and protection from upper-class female readers. To remain silent in the face of Swetnam's defamations, she argues, would be to condone them as well as to court further abuse, since he claimed to be preparing further assaults. Speght also hopes to 'comfort' her women readers, strengthening their self-esteem by defending female moral goodness which male authorities traditionally deny. She then addresses Swetnam in a Preface, condemning him on two grounds: illiteracy, in filling his 'mingle-mangle' polemic with logical and grammatical howlers; and blasphemy, in degrading God's creation, woman, and twisting scripture to suit his opinions. After some brief remarks Speght defers the first topic to the end of her pamphlet ('Certain Queries to the Baiter of Women', not presented here), while the second occupies most of *A Muzzle* proper. It begins with a positive revaluation of Eve as God's divine gift to Adam, and thus as a forerunner of Christ to mankind. Although Speght stops short of demanding full equality between men and women in every respect, in her 'linguistic stress on balance and mutuality to neutralize hierarchical oppositions', she 'may very well be the most important unsung fore-mother of modern liberal feminist commentators' on the Eve story in Genesis (Nyquist 1987: 108). Speght then carefully refutes four supposedly anti-female texts from scripture cited by Melastomus ('black-mouth' or slanderer) as well as other misogynists. Most impressive is her handling of the last two which she contextualises in the light of historical events, and so dares to assert that some biblical passages are locally contingent rather than literally or universally consequential. The final section presented here stresses domestic reciprocity between married couples.

*Editions:*

*A Muzzle for Melastomus* (1617). STC 23058, reel 939. *The Paradise of Women*, ed. Betty Travitsky (Westport, Conn., 1985, brief excerpt). *The Women's Sharp Revenge*, ed. Simon Shepherd (New York, 1985).

RACHEL SPEGHT

FROM A MUZZLE FOR MELASTOMUS, THE  
CYNICAL \* BAITER OF, AND FOUL-MOUTHED  
BARKER AGAINST, EVE'S SEX, OR AN  
APOLOGETICAL† ANSWER TO THAT  
IRRELIGIOUS AND ILLITERATE PAMPHLET  
MADE BY JOSEPH SWETNAM AND BY HIM  
ENTITLED 'THE ARRAIGNMENT OF WOMEN'‡

(1617)

THE EPISTLE DEDICATORY  
TO ALL VIRTUOUS LADIES HONOURABLE OR  
WORSHIPFUL, AND TO ALL OTHER OF EVE'S SEX  
FEARING GOD AND LOVING THEIR JUST  
REPUTATION, GRACE AND PEACE THROUGH  
CHRIST, TO ETERNAL GLORY.

It was the simile of that wise and learned Lactantius that if fire, though but with a small spark kindled, be not at the first quenched, it may work great mischief and damage. So likewise may the scandals and defamations of the malevolent in time prove pernicious if they be not nipped in the head at their first appearance. The consideration of this, right honourable and worshipful ladies, hath incited me (though young, and the unworthiest of thousands) to encounter with a furious enemy to our sex, lest if his unjust imputations should continue without answer, he might insult and account himself a victor, and by such a conceit deal as historiographers report the 5

\* *Cynical*: besides the usual definitions (surly, sneering) the word also means 'dog-like' (cynic = Greek for dog)

† *apologetical*: protective (not regretful)

‡ *Joseph . . . Women: The Arraignment* (1615) was first signed 'Thomas Tel-troth', but later editions (1616, 1617) gave Swetnam's name

1. *Lactantius*: early Christian writer (third–fourth century AD), whose simile is traceable to Quintus Curtius, *De Rebus Gestis Alexandri Magni*, vi.3.11 (Shepherd 1985: 80) and is used without acknowledgement by Swetnam. Speght's identification displays her superior scholarship and intellectual honesty.

6. *young*: Speght says elsewhere that she was 19 when she wrote *A Muzzle*

9. *conceit*: opinion

*historiographers*: natural historians

viper to do (who in the winter time doth vomit forth her poison and in the spring time sucketh the same up again, which becometh twice as deadly as the former). And this our pestiferous enemy, by thinking to provide a more deadly poison for women than already he hath foamed forth, may evaporate by an addition unto his former illiterate pamphlet entitled *The Arraignment of Women* a more contagious obtrectation than he hath already done, and indeed hath threatened to do. 10 15

Secondly, if it should have had free passage without any answer at all (seeing that *tacere* is *quasi consentire*), the vulgar ignorant might have believed his diabolical infamies to be infallible truths not to be infringed, whereas now they may plainly perceive them to be but the scum of heathenish brains, or a building raised without a foundation (at least from sacred scripture), which the wind of God's truth must needs cast down to the ground. 20

A third reason why I have adventured to fling this stone at vaunting Goliath is to comfort the minds of all Eve's sex, both rich and poor, learned and unlearned, with this antidote, that if the fear of God reside in their hearts, maugre all adversaries, they are highly esteemed and accounted of in the eyes of their gracious redeemer, so that they need not fear the darts of envy or obtrectators; for shame and disgrace, saith Aristotle, is the end of them that shoot such poisoned shafts. Worthy therefore of imitation is that example of Seneca, who when he was told that a certain man did exclaim and rail against him, made this mild answer: 'Some dogs bark more upon custom than cursedness, and some speak evil of others not that the defamed deserve it, but because through custom and corruption of their hearts they cannot speak well of any'. This I allege as a paradigmatical pattern for all women, noble and ignoble, to follow, that they be not inflamed with choler against this our enraged adversary, but patiently consider of him according to the portraiture which he hath drawn of himself (his writings being the very emblem of a monster). 25 30 35

13. *evaporate*: exhale

15, 29. *obtrectation*: slander, detraction

18. *tacere* . . . *consentire*: to keep silent is as good as consenting

24–5. *fling* . . . *Goliath*: alluding to the young David's deliverance of Israel by killing the Philistine champion (1 Samuel 17). It is part of Speght's strategy, as Diane Purkiss notes (1992: 93), to equate 'female honour and reputation with divine honour and reputation'.

25. *comfort*: strengthen, encourage

27. *maugre*: notwithstanding

29–30. *shame* . . . *shafts*: possibly referring to *The Ethics*, IV.9.6 (Shepherd 1985: 80)

31. *Seneca*: famous Stoic philosopher, poet, and essayist (c. 4 BC–AD 65, whose emphasis on rational self-control Speght admires)

33. *custom* . . . *cursedness*: learned habit . . . innate vicious nature

This my brief apology, right honourable and worshipful, did I enterprise 40  
 not as thinking myself more fit than others to undertake such a task, but as  
 one who, not perceiving any of our sex to enter the lists of encountering  
 with this our grand enemy among men (I being out of all fear, because  
 armed with the truth – which though often blamed, yet can never be shamed  
 – and the word of God’s spirit, together with the example of virtue’s pupils 45  
 for a buckler), did no whit dread to combat with our said malevolent adver-  
 sary. And if in so doing I shall be censured by the judicious to have the  
 victory, and shall have given content unto the wronged, I have both hit the  
 mark whereat I aimed and obtained that prize which I desired. But if Zoilus  
 shall adjudge me presumptuous in dedicating this my chirograph unto per- 50  
 sonages of so high rank, both because of my insufficiency in literature and  
 tenderness in years, I thus apologise for myself, that seeing the Baiter of  
 women hath opened his mouth against noble as well as ignoble, against the  
 rich as well as the poor, therefore meet it is that they should be joint spec-  
 tators of this encounter. And withal, in regard of my imperfection both in 55  
 learning and age, I need so much the more to impetrate patronage from  
 some of power to shield me from the biting wrongs of Momus, who often-  
 times setteth a rankling tooth into the sides of truth. Wherefore I, being of  
 Decius his mind (who deemed himself safe under the shield of Caesar), have  
 presumed to shelter myself under the wings of you honourable personages 60  
 against the persecuting heat of this fiery and furious dragon, desiring that  
 you would be pleased not to look so much *ad opus*, as *ad animum*. And so,  
 not doubting of the favourable acceptance and censure of all virtuously  
 affected, I rest  
 Your honours’ and worships’ 65  
 Humbly at commandment,  
 Rachel Speght.

40. *enterprise*: undertake

42. *lists*: barriers marking off an enclosed area for jousting

45. *example . . . pupils*: i.e. famous examples of virtuous women

46. *buckler*: shield

47. *censured*: judged

49. *mark*: target (continuing the jousting metaphor)

*Zoilus*: fourth-century. BC sophist and biting critic

50. *chirograph*: written bond or formal pledge (to ‘do battle’ with Swetnam)

54. *they*: i.e. persons of high rank

56. *impetrate*: request

57. *Momus*: god of satire

59. *Decius*: accompanied Julius Caesar to the senate on the day he was assassinated

62. *ad . . . animum*: to the work itself but to its motivation

THE PREFACE  
 NOT UNTO THE VERIEST IDIOT THAT EVER SET PEN  
 TO PAPER, BUT TO THE CYNICAL BAITER OF  
 WOMEN,\* OR METAMORPHOSED MISOGENES,†  
 JOSEPH SWETNAM.

From standing water, which soon putrifies, can no good fish be expected, for it produceth no other creatures but those that are venomous or noisome, as snakes, adders, and such like. Semblably, no better stream can we look should issue from your idle corrupt brain than that whereto the rough of your fury (to use your own words) hath moved you to open the sluice. In which excrement of your roving cogitations you have used such irregularities touching concordance, and observed so disordered a method, as I doubt not to tell you that a very accidence-scholar would have quite put you down in both. You appear herein not unlike that painter who, seriously endeavouring to portray Cupid's bow, forgot the string; for you, being greedy to botch up your mingle-mangle invective against women, have not therein observed in many places so much as grammar sense. But the emptiest barrel makes the loudest sound, and so we will account of you. 5 10

Many propositions have you framed which (as you think) make much against women; but if one would make a logical assumption, the conclusion would be flat against your own sex. Your dealing wants so much discretion that I doubt whether to bestow so good a name as the dunce upon you. But minority bids me keep within my bounds, and therefore I only say unto you that your corrupt heart and railing tongue hath made you a fit scribe for the devil. 15 20

In that you have termed your virulent foam 'The Bear-baiting of Women', you have plainly displayed your own disposition to be cynical, in that there appears no other dog or bull to bait them but yourself. Good had

\* *Not . . . women*: this mocks the wording of Swetnam's preface: 'Neither to the best nor yet to the worst, but to the common sort of women'

† *Misogenes*: misogynist

3. *Semblably*: likewise

4. *rough*: disagreeable part; the bombastic refrain 'rough of . . .' recurs throughout Swetnam's piece

6. *excrement*: excretions

7. *concordance*: grammatical agreement between parts of speech

8. *accidence-scholar*: student possessing only a rudimentary knowledge of a subject; *accidence* = rules of grammatical inflection

11. *botch up*: patch together

15. *one would*: one (proposition) were able to

18. *minority*: i.e. being under 21

21. *Bear-baiting*: referring to Swetnam's fourth chapter, 'The Bear-baiting, or the Vanity of Widows', an invective against marriage

it been for you to have put on that muzzle which St James would have all Christians to wear: 'Speak not evil one of another'. And then had you not seemed so like the serpent Porphyryus as now you do (which, though full of deadly poison yet being toothless, hurteth none so much as himself). For you having gone beyond the limits not of humanity alone but of Christianity, have done greater harm unto your own soul than unto women, as may plainly appear. First, in dishonouring of God by palpable blasphemy, wresting and perverting every place of scripture that you have alleged, which by the testimony of St Peter is to the destruction of them that so do. Secondly, it appears by your disparaging of, and opprobrious speeches against, that excellent work of God's hands, which in his great love he perfected for the comfort of man. Thirdly and lastly, by this your hodgepodge of heathenish sentences, similes, and examples, you have set forth yourself in your right colours unto the view of the world, and I doubt not but the judicious will account of you according to your demerit. As for the vulgar sort, which have no more learning than you have showed in your book, it is likely they will applaud you for your pains.

As for your 'bugbear' or advice unto women, that whatsoever they do think of your work they should conceal it, lest in finding fault they bewray their galled backs to the world (in which you allude to that proverb, 'Rub a galled horse and he will kick'), unto it I answer by way of apology that, though every galled horse being touched doth kick, yet every one that kicks is not galled; so that you might as well have said that because burnt folks dread the fire, therefore none fear fire but those that are burnt, as made that illiterate conclusion which you have absurdly inferred.

In your title-leaf you arraign none but lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant women, but in the sequel (through defect of memory as it seemeth), forgetting that you had made a distinction of good from bad, condemning all in general, you advise men to beware of and not to match with any of

25. *Speak . . . another*: James 4.6–11. Most of the scriptural references cited below derive from marginal notes in the original edition and are probably Speght's, though occasional errors may have been introduced by the printer.

26. *serpent Porphyryus*: purple snake with a white head, said by Claudius Aelianus (*De Natura Animalium* IV, 36) to come from the hottest regions of India and to lack fangs. It was capable, however, of vomiting a putrifying venom. I am indebted to Professor M.J. Mills for this information.

32–3. *testimony . . . do*: 2 Peter 3.16 (original edn = 1 Peter)

38–9. *demerit . . . vulgar sort*: deserts . . . common people

41. *advice*: Swetnam attempts to forestall criticism by placing women in a classic double bind: if they object to his attacks they will confirm his accusations

42–3. *bewray . . . galled*: betray . . . chafed or diseased

48. *illiterate conclusion*: 'Criticizing Swetnam's logic is good strategy: a recurrent misogynist's allegation was that women are incapable of logic' (Woodbridge 1984: 88) *inferred*: alleged

49. *froward*: difficult to deal with

these six sorts of women; *viz.* good and bad, fair and foul, rich and poor. But this doctrine of devils St Paul, foreseeing would be broached in the latter times, gives warning of. 55

There also you promise a commendation of wise, virtuous, and honest women, whenas in the subsequent, the worst words and filthiest epithets that you can devise you bestow on them in general, excepting no sort of women. Herein may you be likened unto a man which upon the door of a scurvy house sets this superscription, 'Here is a very fair house to be let', whereas the door being opened, it is no better than a dog-hole and dark dungeon. 60

Further, if your own words be true that you wrote with your hand but not with your heart, then are you an hypocrite in print. But it is rather to be thought that your pen was the bewrayer of the abundance of your mind, and that this was but a little mortar to daub up again the wall which you intended to break down. 65

The revenge of your railing work we leave to him who hath appropriated vengeance unto himself, whose pen-man hath included railers in the catalogue of them that shall not inherit God's kingdom, and yourself unto the mercy of that just judge who is able to save and to destroy. 70

Your undeserved friend,  
Rachel Speght.

## A MUZZLE FOR MELASTOMUS

**Proverbs 18.22: He that findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and receiveth favour of the Lord.**

If lawful it be to compare the potter with his clay, or the architect with the edifice, then may I in some sort resemble that love of God towards man in creating woman unto the affectionate care of Abraham for his son Isaac, who, that he might not take to wife one of the daughters of the Canaanites, did provide him one of his own kindred. 5

Almighty God, who is rich in mercy, having made all things of nothing and created man in his own image (that is, as the apostle expounds it, 'In

54–5. *doctrine . . . of*: that being forbidden to marry is not divine law (1 Timothy 4.3)

60. *scurvy*: diseased, wretched

65. *bewrayer*: betrayer

68–9. *him . . . himself*: i.e. God (in Romans 12.19)

69–70. *pen-man . . . kingdom*: St Paul in 1 Corinthians 5.11

2. *resemble*: liken

3–5. *Abraham . . . kindred*: Genesis 24.4. Isaac's wife was Rebecca

6. *rich . . . mercy*: Ephesians 2.4.

7. *created . . . image*: 1 Colossians 3.10 (original = 30) from Genesis 1.27

7–8. *apostle . . . all*: St Paul to the Ephesians 4.24

wisdom, righteousness, and true holiness', making him lord over all), to avoid that solitary condition that he was then in, having none to commerce or converse withal but dumb creatures, it seemed good unto the Lord that as of every creature he had made male and female, and man only being alone without mate, so likewise to form an help-meet for him. Adam for this cause being cast into a heavy sleep, God, extracting a rib from his side, thereof made or built woman, showing thereby that man was an unperfect building afore woman was made, and, bringing her unto Adam, united and married them together. 10 15

Thus the resplendent love of God toward man appeared, in taking care to provide him an helper before he saw his own want, and in providing him such an helper as should be meet for him. Sovereignty had he over all creatures, and they were all serviceable unto him; but yet afore woman was formed there was not a meet help found for Adam. Man's worthiness not meriting this great favour at God's hands, but his mercy only moving him thereunto, I may use those words which the Jews uttered when they saw Christ weep for Lazarus: 'Behold how he loved him'. Behold, and that with good regard, God's love, yea his great love which from the beginning he hath borne unto man; which as it appears in all things, so, next his love in Christ Jesus, apparently in this: that for man's sake, that he might not be an unit when all other creatures were for procreation dual, he created woman to be a solace unto him, to participate of his sorrows, partake of his pleasures, and as a good yoke-fellow bear part of his burden. Of the excellency of this structure (I mean of women), whose foundation and original of creation was God's love, do I intend to dilate. 20 25 30

9. *commerce*: have social (or perhaps sexual) intercourse. Accent on the second syllable.

13. *heavy sleep*: Genesis 2.21

18. *before . . . want*: Mary Nyquist reads this phrase as Speght's 'highly provocative' reinterpretation of Eve's creation story in Genesis 2, in which Adam's need for a companion was traditionally assumed to arise from his own desire, which prompted God to create Eve from his rib. Speght instead views Adam as a passive recipient of God's independently planned gift of divine love, woman (1987: 114). She thus depicts Eve as the fulfilment of God's image in human nature.

21. *meet . . . Adam*: Genesis 2

24. *Behold . . . him*: John 11.36

26. *next*: second to (i.e. woman is below only Christ in importance as a manifestation of divine grace to humans)

27. *apparently*: openly, visibly

30. *burden*: 1 Corinthians 11.9

**Of woman's excellency, with the causes of her creation, and of the sympathy which ought to be in man and wife each toward other.**

The work of creation being finished, this approbation thereof was given by God himself, that 'All was very good'. If all, then woman, who, excepting man, is the most excellent creature under the canopy of heaven. But if it be objected by any: 35

First, that woman, though created good, yet by giving ear to Satan's temptations, brought death and misery upon all her posterity.

Secondly, that 'Adam was not deceived, but that the woman was deceived and was in the transgression'. 40

Thirdly, that St Paul saith, 'It were good for a man not to touch a woman'.

Fourthly and lastly, that of Solomon, who seems to speak against all of our sex: 'I have found one man of a thousand, but a woman among them all have I not found' (whereof in its due place). 45

To the first of these objections I answer that Satan first assailed the woman because where the hedge is lowest, most easy it is to get over, and she being the weaker vessel was with more facility to be seduced (like as a crystal glass sooner receives a crack than a strong stone pot). Yet we shall find the offence of Adam and Eve almost to parallel; for as an ambitious desire of being made like unto God was the motive which caused her to eat, so likewise was it his, as may plainly appear by that *ironia*: 'Behold, man is become as one of us'. Not that he was so indeed, but hereby his desire to attain a greater perfection than God had given him was reprov'd. Woman sinned, it is true, by her infidelity in not believing the word of God but giving credit to Satan's fair promises that 'she should not die', but so did the man too. And if Adam had not approved of that deed which Eve had done, and been willing to tread the steps which she had gone, he, being her head, would have reprov'd her and have made the commandment a bit to restrain him from breaking his maker's injunction. For if a man burn his hand in the fire, the bellows that blowed the fire are not to be blamed, but himself rather for not being careful to avoid the danger. Yet if the bellows had not blowed, the fire had not burnt; no more is woman simply to be condemned for man's transgression. For by the free will, which before his fall he enjoyed, he might 50 55 60

34. *All . . . good*: Genesis 1.31

39–40. *Adam . . . transgression*: 1 Timothy 2.14

41–2. *It . . . woman*: 1 Corinthians 7.1

44–5. *I . . . found*: Ecclesiastes 7.30 (Geneva; Authorised Version = 28)

48–9. *weaker . . . pot*: Speght's comparison emphasises Eve's physical rather than her moral qualities (cf. 'stronger vessel' l. 72)

52. *ironia*: irony (because spoken by God)

52–3. *Behold . . . us*: Genesis 3.22

56. *promises . . . die*: Genesis 3.4

have avoided and been free from being burnt or singed with that fire which 65  
 was kindled by Satan and blown by Eve. It therefore served not his turn a  
 whit afterwards to say: 'The woman which thou gavest me gave me of the  
 tree, and I did eat'. For a penalty was inflicted upon him as well as on the  
 woman, the punishment of her transgression being particular to her own 70  
 sex and to none but the female kind; but for the sin of man the whole earth  
 was cursed. And he, being better able than the woman to have resisted  
 temptation because the stronger vessel, was first called to account, to show  
 that to whom much is given, of them much is required; and that he who was  
 the sovereign of all creatures visible should have yielded greatest obedience 75  
 to God. . . .

To the second objection I answer that the Apostle doth not hereby  
 exempt man from sin, but only giveth to understand that the woman was  
 the primary transgressor and not the man; but that man was not at all  
 deceived was far from his meaning, for he afterward expressly saith, that as 80  
 'in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive'.

For the third objection . . . the Apostle makes it not a positive prohibi-  
 tion, but speaks it only because of the Corinthians' present necessity, who  
 were then persecuted by the enemies of the church; for which cause and no  
 other he saith, 'Art thou loosed from a wife? Seek not a wife' (meaning 85  
 whilst the time of these perturbations should continue in their heat),

'but if thou art bound, seek not to be loosed; if thou marriest thou  
 sinnest not, only increasest thy care. For the married careth for the  
 things of this world, and I wish that you were without care, that ye  
 might cleave fast unto the Lord without separation. For the time  
 remaineth that they which have wives be as though they had none; 90  
 for the persecutors shall deprive you of them, either by imprisonment,  
 banishment, or death.'

So that manifest it is that the Apostle doth not hereby forbid marriage but  
 only adviseth the Corinthians to forbear a while till God in mercy should

67–8. *The . . . eat*: Genesis 3.12

69–70. *punishment . . . sex*: the pains of childbirth (Genesis 3.16)

78. *primary*: can mean first in sequence or in importance

80. *in . . . alive*: 1 Corinthians 15.22

81. *positive*: absolute

83. *cause*: i.e. pertaining to particular local circumstances, rather than universal principles.  
 Speght takes the same historicising approach in her reading of Solomon's words  
 (ll. 100ff.). Such critically contextual readings of the Bible were relatively rare at the  
 beginning of the seventeenth century.

84–92. *Art . . . death*: a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 7.27–31

curb the fury of their adversaries. For, as Eusebius writeth, Paul was afterward married himself, the which is very probable, being that interrogatively he saith, 95

‘Have we not power to lead about a wife being a sister, as well as the rest of the Apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?’

The fourth and last objection is that of Solomon. . . . For answer of which, if we look into the story of his life we shall find therein a commentary upon this enigmatical sentence included; for it is there said that Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, which number connexed make one thousand. These women, turning his heart away from being perfect with the Lord his God, sufficient cause had he to say that among the said thousand women found he not one upright. He saith not that among a thousand women never any man found one worthy of commendation, but speaks in the first person singularly, ‘I have not found’, meaning in his own experience. For this assertion is to be holden a part of the confession of his former follies and no otherwise, his repentance being the intended drift of Ecclesiastes. . . . 100 105 110

Woman was made . . . to be a companion and helper for man; and if she must be an helper, and but an helper, then are those husbands to be blamed which lay the whole burden of domestical affairs and maintenance on the shoulders of their wives. For as yoke-fellows they are to sustain part of each other’s cares, griefs, and calamities. But as if two oxen be put in one yoke, the one being bigger than the other, the greater bears most weight; so the husband being the stronger vessel is to bear a greater burden than his wife. And therefore the Lord said to Adam, ‘In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat thy bread, till thou return to the dust’. And St Paul saith that ‘he that provideth not for his household is worse than an infidel’. Nature hath taught senseless creatures to help one another, as the male pigeon, when his hen is weary with sitting on her eggs and comes off from them, supplies her place, that in her absence they may receive no harm, until such time as she 115 120

95. *Eusebius*: Bishop of Caesarea and earliest Church historian, AD 260–340. Speght alludes to his *Ecclesiastical History* iii.30 (Shepherd 1985: 81). Her use of Eusebius to reinterpret Paul’s epistles anticipates the readings of modern feminist theologians (e.g. Fiorenza 1992: 225–6).

96. *interrogatively*: rhetorically

98–9. *Have . . . Cephas*: 1 Corinthians 9.5; sister = female member of the brethren; Cephas = Paul

104. *connexed*: added together

119–20. *In . . . dust*: Genesis 3.19

120–1. *he . . . infidel*: 1 Timothy 5.8

is fully refreshed. Of small birds the cock always helps his hen to build her nest, and while she sits upon her eggs he flies abroad to get meat for her, who cannot then provide any for herself. The crowing cockerel helps his hen to defend her chickens from peril, and will endanger himself to save her and them from harm. Seeing then that these unreasonable creatures by the instinct of nature bear such affection each to other that without any grudge they willingly, according to their kind, help one another, I may reason *a minore ad maius* that much more should man and woman, which are reasonable creatures, be helpers each to other in all things lawful, they having the law of God to guide them, his word to be a lantern unto their feet and a light unto their paths, by which they are excited to a far more mutual participation of each other's burden than other creatures. So that neither the wife may say to her husband nor the husband unto his wife, 'I have no need of thee', no more than the members of the body may so say each to other, between whom there is such a sympathy, that if one member suffer, all suffer with it. Therefore, though God bade Abraham forsake his country and kindred, yet he bade him not forsake his wife, who, being 'flesh of his flesh, and bone of his bone' was to be co-partner with him of whatsoever did betide him, whether joy or sorrow. Wherefore Solomon saith, 'Woe to him that is alone'; for when thoughts of discomfort, troubles of this world, and fear of dangers do possess him, he wants a companion to lift him up from the pit of perplexity into which he is fallen; for a good wife, saith Plautus, is the wealth of the mind and the welfare of the heart, and therefore a meet associate for her husband; and 'woman', saith Paul, 'is the glory of the man'. . . .

131–2. *a . . . maius*: from smaller to greater things

137–8. *I . . . thee*: 1 Corinthians 12.21

141. *wife*: Sarah, whose advice Abraham was commanded to heed (Genesis 21.12)

143–6. *Woe . . . fallen*: paraphrasing Ecclesiastes 4.10

146. *Plautus*: Roman dramatist c. 254–184 BC. Shepherd suggests that the words could derive from his *Amphitryo*, 839ff. (1985: 82).

148–9. *woman . . . man*: 1 Corinthians 11.7

# WOMEN WRITERS IN RENAISSANCE ENGLAND

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EDITED BY  
RANDALL MARTIN



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