# NINE

# REDEEMING EVE: DEFENSES OF WOMEN AND MOTHER'S ADVICE BOOKS

IN THIS FINAL chapter, works concerning female rulers, their adventures in love, and their devotion to poetry will seem very distant. Mary Wroth's book does not appear to have influenced other women writers, either in content or form, perhaps because she withdrew it, perhaps because her work might appear as a nostalgic version of an aristocratic past. Indeed, the times seemed not to elicit concern for the virtuous woman's ability to rule kingdoms and to write sonnets, but instead, for the very fundamentals of traditional feminine identity. Rather than continuing the expansion suggested by Cary, Lanyer, and Wroth, other women writers from 1600 to 1625 wrote prose works to provide explicit evidence of women's Christian virtue. They differed from most of their sixteenth-century predecessors, however, because by writing defenses of women and by developing the uniquely feminine genre of the mother's advice book, they self-consciously defined their personas as exclusively and specifically feminine.

At first glance, the defenders of women and the writing mothers seem to have little in common. The authors of defenses of women seem outspoken, raucous, even rude, while the authors of mother's advice books seem conventional, restrained, and pious. Yet both are inspired by their faith, the writing mothers describing themselves as teachers seeking salvation for their children, and the defenders of women

emphasizing the divine mission of the virtuous Christian woman to spread the word. Both groups are essentially conservative in their espousal of traditional female virtue, and both attempt to redeem woman by idealizing her. The differences in their style and voice are significant only insofar as they reflect the different audiences which these writers overtly addressed and the different personas they developed. The defenders of women set out to answer their masculine detractors, to redeem Eve by argument, to use words as their weapons; in the process they discovered both a new verbal power and a new source of anxiety in the clash of language with decorum. The writing mothers assumed the role of redeemer—Mary rather than Eve—and ostensibly instructing only their children or other women, they found a voice that could properly absorb and render all the feminine virtues.

## Defenses of Women

Responding to specific misogynist attacks, four women came to the defense of their sex: Jane Anger answered a pamphlet by a "late Surfeiting Lover" with her *Protection for Women* (1589); Joseph Swetnam's *Araignment of Lewde, idle, froward, and unconstant women* (1615) sparked Rachel Speght's *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (1617), Esther Sowernam's *Ester hath hang'd Haman* (1617), and Constantia Munda's *The Worming of a mad Dogge* (1617). The titles of the last three suggest an unusually aggressive pose for the woman writer; however, the three pseudonyms indicate not simply the writer's chosen role, but her underlying anxiety about publication of her response. Each of these works attempted something stylistically and formally new for the woman writer, although they did not represent the birth of a feminist consciousness. Rather, adopting a genre that had long been exclusively masculine, these women modified its main characteristics to suit their own goal, the vindication of women's Christian virtue. In the process, each created a persona who could argue, assume for herself a hitherto prohibited authority, and develop a strategy of confrontation. To take responsibility for defending them-

selves called for an active, inventive wit which quickly challenged the author's conventional apologies for her inability. The legacy of the defenses of women may lie not so much in what these writers said, but more in how they said it.

Considering how many women writers implicitly or explicitly strove to demonstrate the virtues of their sex, one might expect them to have joined the debate on the "woman question" at an early stage. They did not do so, however, until relatively late in Jane Anger's case, and very late in the case of Speght and her successors. The question of why they entered the discussion at all is best explained by examining specifically what these defenders accomplished.

Perhaps women did boil with rage at misogynist insults for so long that eventually they had to speak; perhaps they were "sincerely" angry. More likely, "Jane Anger" was a useful and appropriate persona to begin the task, just as "Constantia Munda" was an appropriate pseudonym for the defender of women's fortitude under oppression. Once more, it is important to understand the choice of genre.

Woodbridge argues convincingly that the formal controversy over women had developed as an elaborate rhetorical game, a series of conventional arguments for or against women, allowing, for example, one ingenious author to argue both sides.[1] It is almost impossible, however, to imagine Rachel Speght, Ester Sowernam, or Constantia Munda arguing the case against women, surely because of the woman writer's continual struggle for her virtue and her literary identity; instead, these women belatedly took up an old genre specifically to undermine the game and to discredit its perpetrators.[2] Both Jane Anger, who responded to the work of a "late Surfeiting Lover," and her successors took the opportunity to reply to a relatively weak attacker. For the later women, Joseph Swetnam was the perfect target. His attack, lacking wit, skill, polish, and even the rhetorical ingenuity of earlier works, demonstrated how debased the genre had become by 1615.[3]

In its tired state, the controversy provided Speght and her followers with the opportunity to alter its fundamental tone.

If it had always been a masculine game—accompanied by many old jokes—to attack women and then to defend them with similar material, by contrast, these writers perceived the subject and its treatment as a serious task. About the female defenders of women, Woodbridge observes both that Christian beliefs bar them from making feminist arguments and that they either missed the jokes or in Ester Sowernam's case, made the "tactical error" of trying "logical analysis on old jokes" (92, 96, 99). Indeed, these two perceptions belong together: *because* of their Christian beliefs, these women argue seriously about feminine virtue; and to discredit their opponents' style and views, they do not participate in the joshing, but concentrate on a rhetorical response. The importance of this step should be emphasized, that women used the arts of language not only to redeem their sex, but to inflict damage on the methods of the masculine debaters. And if they do not have much new material to contribute to the defense of women, they do assume the more dramatic pose of self-defense, as well as provide the first occasion in this period when women writers attack men in print. While these defenders of women had no sense of humor about antifeminist jokes, fortunately they did cultivate a highly energetic style of attack that enlivens and sharpens their own work.

### *Jane Anger (fl. 1589)*

Although Jane Anger is known only for one work, she is a significant figure. As the first woman to write a defense of women, she added to feminine literature the persona of a woman angry on behalf of her whole sex.

Choosing to launch her *Protection for Women* (1589) with a direct attack on a pamphlet by a "late Surfeiting Lover" and so on "all other like Venerians," Jane Anger quickly defines her perspective as that of the virtuous woman outraged at the insults of lecherous men and determined to show that men are false while women are constant, chaste, and honest.[4] The terms are familiar, drawn from rhetorical tradition rather than life, and Jane Anger supports her claims with classical

references, exempla, and apothegms. But her style differs profoundly from the almost universal restraint of women's works that preceded hers, because rather than pious and disciplined, it conveys the fertility of a mind whizzing from idea to idea, excited, determined, willing to use any means to make the point. Exclamation and rhetorical questions mark the dedication "to all women in generall, and gentle Reader whatsoever":

> Fie on the falshoode of men, whose minds goe oft a madding, and whose tongues can not so soone bee wagging, but straigt they fal a railing. Was there ever any so abused, so slandered, so railed upon, or so wickedly handeled undeservedly, as are we women? Will the Gods permit it, the Goddesses stay their punishing judgments, and we ourselves not pursue their undoinges for such divelish practises? ... and shall not *Anger* stretch the vaines of her braines, the stringes of her fingers, and the listes of her modestie, to answere their Surfeitings? (Title page v)

The jingling of rhymes, parallel constructions, and climactic arrangement bespeak a writer who labors for a style to match the persona of Anger, a startlingly new character in the female canon.

Although she herself uses rhetorical techniques, she attacks them as the very heart of misogynist tracts: women's enemies are "so caried away with the manner, as no care at all is had of the matter: they run so into Rethorick, as often times they overrun the boundes of their own wits, and goe they knowe not whether" (B). And with amused irony she comments particularly on the work of the "late Surfeiting Lover" as a triumph of style over substance, "So pithie were his sentences, so pure his wordes, and so pleasing his stile" (B).

Anger's own style is an entertaining mix of supposition, learned glosses of Latin tags, expostulation and "proofs" of woman's virtuous character and man's folly, intended to justify women rather than change their lot. For instance, she notices, as others had, that the virtues tend to be represented

by female figures. Ironically, she wonders why the gods had not assigned some of the moral virtues to men, "except their Deities knewe that there was some soverainty in us women, which could not be in them men." Further, to rationalize the clear supremacy of men in religion and society, she suggests that this is a way to prevent women's "wonderfull vertues" from turning into mere pride, thus leaving only men to Lucifer (B2v). The tone here and the "arguments" (no better or worse than many found in contemporary pamphlets) suggest that while Anger admits that men dominate, they do so only to compensate for their own faults and women's strengths; that is, she is not admitting to anything, least of all the natural ability of men to rule.

That she is interested in a moral victory is suggested by Anger's determined rehabilitation of Eve. Near the end of her work, Anger considers creation and concludes that as the creation of man from dust was a process of purification, so the creation of woman from man indicates "how far we women are more excellent than men." Women are "fruiteful, whereby the world encreaseth," and they preserve the race. Most important,

> From woman sprang mans salvation. A woman was the first that beleeved, and a woman likewise the first that repented of sin. In women is onely true Fidelity (except in her) there is no constancie, and without her no Huswifery. (C-Cv)

Omitting any mention of Eve's guilt, Anger insists instead on women's adherence to the ideals embodied in the Virgin Mary, the first to receive grace. Since "ther is no wisdome but it comes by grace," women are wise, and more, because the first is the best, "therefore women are wiser than men" (C2).

Ignoring the contradictions in her own principles, Anger depends on a witty restatement of conventional defenses to create her position. Believing also in the usefulness of attack to a defense, she castigates men for their "*Dishonestie* and *unconstancie*," promising that they will be the cause of their

own downfall. Trotting out exempla as easily as the misogynists did, Anger notes that men like Paris have ruined women, but that women like Artemisia and Portia have been models of virtue.

Her final advice to women is to be skeptical, to avoid the worst fault of their sex, credulity, when dealing with male flattery which is directed solely at depriving women of their "virtue." This seems to be a mixture of practicality and literary stereotyping, and marks the general toning down of style as the work progresses. The persona of Anger proves hard to maintain, perhaps because the author recognized the need to modulate her voice in order to argue convincingly. In the closing verses to the Reader, an admirer even appears to blame her anger for any offense given, "For ANGERS rage must that asswage,/as wel is understoode."

What Jane Anger initiated, however, was a generic adaptation in which women could represent themselves and try out a new literary role. The literary stance implicit here is that of a virtuous, chaste sex, maligned and mistreated by wicked men: this siege mentality produces a vigorous, sometimes entertaining work, but one that is finally flawed by a cramping single-mindedness. Later writers managed to diversify both form and content, perhaps learning to build on Jane Anger's foundation.

### *Rachel Speght (fl. 1617–1621)*

In her dedication of *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (1617) "to all vertuous Ladies Honourable or Worshipfull, and to all other of Hevahs sex fearing God," Rachel Speght, "though yong, and the unworthiest of thousands," claims to have been moved to defend women by Joseph Swetnam's defamations in *The Araignment of . . . women*.[5] Excusing her own "insufficiency in literature and tendernesse in yeares," as she would also do in *Mortalities Memorandum*, she addresses great ladies as well as commoners because Swetnam had slandered "all Hevahs sex," rich and poor, learned and illiterate. She promises them "this Antidote, that if the feare of God reside in

their hearts, maugre all adversaries, they are highly esteemed and accounted in the eyes of their gracious Redeemer, so that they need not feare the darts of envy or obtrectators" (A3v). To carry out her Christian purpose, Speght's main tactics to restore women's character are first, to castigate Swetnam's unchristian attack on God's creatures, his blasphemy and misuse of Scripture, and second, to compose portraits of a redeemed Eve and her idealized descendants.

Speght's largely *ad hominem* attack on Swetnam is characterized by the new feminine literary mode of sharp language and name-calling. She calls him the "pestiferous enemy," a "monster," his work an "illeterate Pamphlet," and she fortifies her aggressive tone with descriptions like "your mingle mangle invective," bolstering her own authority with learned phrases like "contagious obtrectation" and "this my Chirograph." But Speght's tract gathers its real substance from her discussion of the creation of Eve, again an attempt to return to the beginnings to restore women's image. One by one, she considers the objections of women's detractors: that Eve listened to Satan and brought death and misery to the world; that ony Eve, not Adam, was deceived; that St. Paul said it is not good to touch a woman; and that Solomon could not find a faithful woman.

In response, Speght argues that Eve cannot bear the full burden of guilt and that women have been a source of good in the world. At the same time, her assumption, like that of other defenders of women, is still that women are weaker than men, physically and morally. For this reason, Satan attacked her first. "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 eate, so likewise was it his" (4). And Speght reasons, if Adam did not approve of Eve's deed, he should have reproved her; one cannot blame "the bellowes that blowed the fire" if one burns one's hand. To remove further the full burden of guilt from Eve, Speght notes that Eve's punishment was "particular to her owne sex, and to none but the female kinde: but for the sinne of man the whole earth was cursed" (5). On the

contrary, Eve becomes, by God's promise, the source of salvation, for woman will bring forth a Saviour. Expanding here, Speght calls Christ the "Saviour of beleeving women, no lesse of men, that so the blame of sinne may not be imputed to his creature, which is good; but to the will by which *Eve* sinned, and yet by Christ's assuming the shape of a man was it declared that his mercie was equivalent to both Sexes" (7). Despite its long antifeminist history, this was no more than Christian tradition allowed, for Paul himself affirmed "that male and female are all one in Christ Jesus." But if Speght insists on the unqualified acceptance of this doctrine, she does not affirm what was argued by the polemicists at the end of her own century, that women and men are simply equal. Like so many of her contemporaries, she separated her insistence on women's spiritual equality from her acceptance of women's social and political inferiority, and she colored the rest of her argument accordingly.

Ingeniously and fervently, she responds to misogynist defamation. Like Protestant women writers of the century before her, Speght relies heavily on her reading of the Biblical text, weighting her exegesis in favor of women as much as Swetnam does against them. Consistent with her whole argument, she claims that Adam too was deceived (1 Cor. 15:22); that St. Paul's injunctions to the Corinthians against women must be put in the particular historical context of the persecutions against the early Christians; and that Solomon's diatribe must be seen in the light of his 700 wives and 300 concubines who turned him from God.[6] But Speght's central discourse focuses on women's initial creation, neatly presented in traditional terms of efficient, material, formal, and final causes. Speght argues first that woman must be good, since God made her; second that she was created from Adam's side, "neare his heart, to be his equall; that where he is Lord, she may be Lady": for as Genesis 1:26 tells, God makes "their authority equall, and all creatures to be in subjection to them both" (10). Third, woman resembles only man, for she too is created in the image of God, and fourth, the end of her existence is "to glorifie God, and to be a collaterall companion for man

to glorifie God." Indeed, citing the examples of those women who served Christ—Mary Magdalen, Susanna, Joanna, and the Virgin Mary—Speght claims women's central purpose is to serve God. Part of this service does include helping man, but in one of the more emphatic passages, she explains that helper means *helper*, that women should not bear the "whole burthen of domesticall affaires and maintenance" by themselves. Since the husband is stronger, he should bear the most weight.

Because she accepts male strength and authority, Speght can more easily emphasize spirituality for women, rather than concur with traditional fleshliness and domesticity. When she considers marriage, the traditional analogy to Christ's love for the Church and the Chosen serves her purpose very well. Acknowledging that man is woman's head, Speght argues convincingly in scriptural terms that this supremacy gives man "no authoritie . . . to domineere, or basely command and imploy his wife, as a servant . . ." (16). Indeed, following in Christ's footsteps, "*Men must love their wives, even as Christ loved his Church*" (17). She pictures a marriage in which the husband loves, honors, and teaches the wife, and the wife obeys and learns from the husband. Paradoxically, Speght's repetition of traditional doctrine, couched in traditional rhetoric, is meant to aid in the restoration of women's credit and position.[7] Her argument may even be a quid pro quo: men are dominant if women are virtuous.

By studying, recapitulating, and reinterpreting Scripture in favor of women, Speght would best convince her selected audience of God-fearing women, and perhaps even men, to consider women's worthiness. She allied herself with the highest authority, associated women with important moral attributes, and found an acceptably Christian way to rationalize their subjection to men. Her approach is quintessentially Protestant in its emphasis on individual reading of Scripture and spiritual self-determination, although she does not overstep the bounds of decorum appropriate to a minister's daughter. While accepting women's worldly inferiority, she also asserts the spiritual worth and social value of the "weaker vesel,"

and in her writing, she appears to find no conflict in her position. She directs all her aggressiveness at Swetnam, finding little to attack in her society.

Beyond her careful stance, Speght may have gained further acceptance from her audience through the continual insistence on her youth and attendant purity. Any vigorous language or assertiveness might be saved from indecorousness or unnaturalness by characterizing the author as a chaste and virtuous young woman bent on a pious mission; thus, both the author and her supporters repeat the conventional motif of the woman writer as chaste and private. Speght allies herself with the female stereotype by citing her "imperfection in both learning and age" as reasons for seeking the patronage of great ladies. More explicitly, the praisers of the author and her work, "Philalethes and Philomathes," characterize her as a David fighting Goliath and the champion of the so-called "feeble women" slandered by Swetnam. Verses by "Favour B" set out most precisely the qualification of Speght's chaste innocence as the accompaniment to her education and her position as women's defender: she is "a Virgin young," not yet twenty, whose wit, learning, and magnanimity have triumphed over women's detractors (B4v). The implication is that only such a paragon as this could be an accredited public voice for women. Swetnam, of course, needed no such qualities in order to be heard, nor did he have to establish the virtue of his sex. To redeem hers, Rachel Speght chose to appear as an exemplary woman reasoning and arguing from Scripture for the justice of her cause.

## *Ester Sowernam (fl. 1617)*

Speght's obeisance to men, whether genuine or politic, was firmly rejected by her successor, aptly self-created as "Ester Sowernam." Also motivated by Joseph Swetnam's *Araignment*, this writer combines her defense of Eve with a frontal attack on misogyny and an "arraignment" of Swetnam himself, thus fulfilling her name as Ester, the redeemer of her people and "Sowernam," the bitter antithesis of Swetnam. Anger cer-

tainly lies at the heart of Ester Sowernam's work, yet she depends less than her predecessors on vituperation to color her position. Instead, through the down-to-earth, knowledgeable voice of the bourgeoise, she argues as teacher and preacher to strengthen women and correct men. While her description of women follows the familiar idealization, she labors diligently to establish the seriousness of her defense. Less successful is her attack on men, because it merely reverses misogynist terms.

The author appears briefly at the beginning of her work in her dedication "to all Right Honourable, Noble, and worthy Ladies, Gentelwomen, and others, vertuously disposed, of the Foeminine Sexe."[8] Having arrived in London the previous Michaelmas term, at supper one night she hears about Swetnam's work, and having read it the next day, she denounces it for condemning all women, not just the "lewde, idle, inconstant" women it purported to pillory (A2). Clearly accustomed to action, Ester Sowernam at once begins a reply, but hears that a minister's daughter, Rachel Speght, had already written an apology for women which was ready for press. Sounding rather annoyed, Ester Sowernam claims that the "Maidens Booke" is too short, that Rachel Speght is too young to argue effectively, and actually condemns women; she decides to proceed with her own work.

In laying out the plan of her book, Ester Sowernam emphasizes, as others had, the divinely ordained mission of women in the world: "I doe in the first part of it plainely and resolutely deliver the worthinesse and worth of women, both in respect of their Creation, as in the worke of Redemption" (A2v). Examples from both Testaments support her claims for women "as gratious instruments to derive Gods Blessings and benefits to mankinde." With such authority for support, she then cites ancient and modern authorities who have valued women; responds to their detractors; and finally arraigns "lewd, idle, furious and beastely disposed" men. She aims to praise God through his work, woman; to encourage women to live up to their divinely ordained purpose; and to castigate those who have fallen away from the nature of true

womanhood: "in Creation, noble; in Redemption, gracious; in use most blessed" (A3).

While Ester Sowernam assumes that middle-class women will read her book, she also addresses the group of men most likely to affect their lives, "All Worthy and Hopeful young youths of Great-Brittaine." Even more specifically, she aims at "the best disposed and worthy Apprentices of London." At the other end of the spectrum from Lanyer's exaltation of the female aristocracy, Ester Sowernam's interest is in the quality of marriages to be made among the men and women of the middle class. To educate potential husbands, to encourage them to admire and respect women is as much part of her plan as to establish women's virtue in their own eyes. Advocating a kind of chivalry in these "worthy youths," she urges them to defend women's reputations, not to believe Swetnam's slanders, and encourages them "to be joyned in marriage with a Paraditian Creature. Who as she commeth out of the Garden, so shall you finde her a flower of delight, answerable to the Countrey from whence she commeth" (A4). To Ester Sowernam, freeing women from the burden of Eve's sin is not only an intellectual or theological concern, but also a practical aspect of the status of women in marriage. She not only points out that "there can be no love betwixt man and wife, but where there is a respective estimate the one towards the other," but also suggests how to attain this state.

While echoing the Puritan recommendations for marriage, Ester Sowernam's motive, like Rachel Speght's, is to restore women's dignity, rather than to exalt marriage itself. She thus foreshadows the work of the late seventeenth-century feminists, although she ultimately remains circumscribed by the cautions and limitations of her own time. But as a self-conscious writer, Ester Sowernam is aware that her subject, her method, and her mood are engendering a new kind of writing for women, for she comments that she may "use more vehement speeches then may seeme to correspond the naturall disposition of a Woman," although the provocation demands this or more. Her awareness that she is defending her sex and taking a stand against a battery of male opinion results

in a style that employs ingenious (and sometimes ingenuous) argument, careful rhetoric, and a confident tone. For instance, if Joseph Swetnam attributes women's crooked disposition to her creation from a rib, Ester Sowernam trumps him by responding that man was made from dust and clay and so has a dirty, muddy disposition, that woman's spirit is from God, and that man has more crooked ribs than woman.

Rejecting Swetnam's tired old jokes, though sometimes not offering much in return, Ester Sowernam composes an essay that wins the argument largely by not copying his abusive style: she develops a strong, convincing voice that counters Swetnam at every turn and consistently proposes an alternate and serious vision of women as "chosen to perform and publish the most happy and joyful benefits which ever came to man-kinde" (4). She counters the conventional myth of Eve by claiming that woman was made in Paradise, so that she "neither can or may degenerate in her disposition from that naturall inclination of the place, in which she was first framed, she is a Paradician, that is, a delightfull creature, borne in so delightfull a country" (6). Woman's subsequent history evolves from her fundamental nature, deviations from which are caused, as they were in the beginning, by a "Serpent of the masculine gender" (7). Having redeemed women, Ester Sowernam prepares to mount her full attack on the evils perpetrated by men.

As Scripture may be quoted for almost any purpose, Ester Sowernam finds as many texts in support of women as the misogynists do against them; it is all a matter of interpretation, and like Rachel Speght, Ester Sowernam is unafraid to leap in where many women had hesitated to enter before. Ecclesiasticus 25 may say that "Sinne had his beginning in woman," but this only means, she is sure, that sin had its fullness in man. More, St. Paul himself says that "By one mans sinne death came into the world" and that "All die in Adam," clearly exonerating Eve from the burden, says Ester Sowernam. And if woman is commanded to obey man, "the cause is, the more to encrease her glorie. Obedience is better than Sacrifice: for nothing is more acceptable before God then to

obey" (9). Armed with these texts, Ester Sowernam strides on in Chapter 3 with more than a dozen texts from the Old Testament supporting her claim that women are God's instruments, not man's bane. And inevitably this argument culminates with the "blessed mother and mirrour of al womanhood, the Virgin *Marie*."

Like Aemilia Lanyer, Ester Sowernam contends that women are close to the source of Christianity, being thus endowed with a spiritual as well as a physical fruitfulness. She claims that "in all dangers, troubles, and extremities, which fell to our Saviour, when all men fled from him, living or dead, women never forsooke him" (13), that Jesus said woman's faith and devotion were incomparable, that the promise of a Messiah was brought to a woman, his birth was by a woman, and "the triumphant resurrection with the conquest over death and hell, was first published and proclaymed by a woman." Like other women writers, Ester Sowernam finds that the search for female heroes inevitably leads back to the scriptural sources which authorize a beneficent view of women in both religious and secular history. The most honored women are the members of the early church, the saints and martyrs, but in her sweeping vision reminiscent of Christine de Pisan's catalogue, Ester Sowernam includes homage to classical deities, and ancient and modern women of history, concluding with Elizabeth I, "the glory of our Sex," "a patterne for the best men to imitate," and "the mirrour of the world" (21). Moving from belief to the fanciful attribution of beneficial inventions to classical goddesses (Bellona invented sword and armor; Ceres corn and tillage, Diana hunting, etc.) to praise of the women who stand behind men (Queen Elenor, wife of Edward I who saved his life; Margaret, wife of Henry VI, who had the foresight her husband lacked; Margaret of Richmond, mother of Henry VII, noted for "heroicall prudence and pietie" and for her support of the universities), Ester Sowernam envisions a world in which women are highly valued for their "womanly" qualities, and play active roles in maintaining social and political stability.

Establishing women's virtue at every level is the necessary

prelude to the most dramatic part of Ester Sowernam's work, the "Arraignment of Joseph Swetnam," because in order to sit in judgment of a man, women must be proven worthy and credible judges. The two "Judgesses" are Reason and Experience, and the prosecutor is Conscience. Since the jury must be Swetnam's peers, it is composed of his five senses and the seven deadly sins.[9]

The gist of Ester Sowernam's indictment of Swetnam is that the root of all evil is man himself. The whole war against women, she claims, has been manufactured by malcontent writers who had nothing better to do than slander women. But in a fundamental sense, men have been the source of all women's ills, because Eve herself was betrayed first by the Serpent and then by Adam who taught her to flee God, argue with God, and blame God (34). Adam, says Ester Sowernam, has been the model bad husband throughout history. And if women are said to be the cause of so much of men's woe, men must be weak creatures to begin with—"are men so idle, vaine, and weake, as you seeme to make them?" According to Ester Sowernam, they are indeed lustful, vain, and inconstant, and have only themselves to blame for their problems.

Though ingeniously supported and manipulated, and intended to discredit women's detractors, such arguments merely reverse those offered by the misogynists, thus implicitly accepting their terms. But at this point, such an attack constituted a step forward for a woman writer's self-definition, because it entailed experimenting with a new language and persona, derived from the liberating rejection of female responsibility for the world's evil. But Ester Sowernam is still very much of her time in that these assertions are counterbalanced with her apparent acceptance of women's worldly inferiority. With a disposition "milde, yielding, and vertuous" (43), woman is still "the weaker vessell," still to be governed by men once the male sex has corrected its faults and vices. Perhaps the markedly unyielding disposition of her own persona casts some doubt on her credibility here, but more likely,

women were still not ready to challenge received order, at least in print.

Indeed, Ester Sowernam's desire to justify women results not primarily in her attack on men, but in her very affirmation of the traditional feminine virtues. Rather than presenting a revised model of active feminine behavior, she develops the conventional version of idealized woman as the alternative to Eve the sinner. If Swetnam never paused to consider the exaggerated, unrealistic nature of his attack, Ester Sowernam gives only slightly more attention to real women. In effect, she is swept away by the rhetorical drive of her own argument, so desirous of redeeming women's good name that her exempla, maxims, and authoritative quotations create an icon of perfect virtue, a Mary to replace Eve.

*Constantia Munda (fl. 1617)*

These defenders of women did know, however, that strictly speaking their works contravened the very virtues they lauded in their sex: modesty and silence, the hallmarks of chastity. The paradox might be eased by assurances of the author's pure soul and by explicit obeisance to male superiority, but the contradiction still existed, hampering the free development of a feminine persona and limiting to name-calling what a woman would publish. Of all the defenses of women, none displays the conflict more vividly or uses it to better effect than the brief work of "Constantia Munda" whose beneficent pseudonym belies the angry title of her response to Swetnam, *The Worming of a mad Dogge* (1617). Praising Rachel Speght for having "Wisely layed open [his] singular ignorance," and for refuting much of Swetnam's calumny, Constantia Munda concentrates on a "sharpe Redargution" of the "bayter of Women" in order to destroy Swetnam as a credible author and to dispel the assumption that women will passively allow his slanders.[10]

Constantia Munda establishes her own credibility through a pious dedication to her mother, "Lady Prudentia Munda," whom she describes "in perpetuall *Labour* with me, even

untill/The second birth of education perfect me."[11] With deceptive quiet she confronts the key issue, whether women may publicly defend themselves, and she resolves that "though feminine modesty hath confin'd our rarest and ripest wits to silence, wee acknowledge it our greatest ornament, but when necessity compels us, tis as great a fault and folly," to be silent (5). The necessity that compels Constantia Munda to abate her modesty and end her silence is indeed an attack on divinely blessed woman, "the second Tome of that goodly volume compiled by the great God of heaven and earth . . ." (2). Joining her predecessors, she makes her case for women by exalting their "matchlesse beauties and glorious vertues shining together," and rhetorically asking men whether women have not been memorialized for "charitable deeds" as often as "couragious Potentates?" In particular, she commends women's "bountifull exhibitions to religious uses and furtherance of pietie" (10).

Having established her imperative need to speak out, Constantia Munda can proceed to her task to mock, to denounce, and to destroy Swetnam. She fashions a persona who at first speaks loudly and clearly, sometimes bitterly, sometimes learnedly, and always with conviction:

> you surmized, that inveighing against poore illiterate women, we might fret and bite the lip at you, wee might repine to see our selves baited and tost in a blanket, but never durst in open view of the vulgar either disclose your blasphemous and derogative slanders, or maintaine the untainted puritie of our glorious sexe: . . . The sinceritie of our lives, and quietnesse of conscience, is a well of brasse to beat backe the bullets of your vituperious scandels in your owne face. (14)

Here, Constantia Munda abandons the decorous phrases of her sex and announces a new verbal power for women. From now on, she cries, not only will women rely on their virtue to defeat their detractors, but "Ile take the paines to worme the tongue of your madnesse, and dash your rankling teeth downe your throat . . . our pens shall throttle you, or like

*Archilochus* with our tart Iambikes make you *Lopez* his godson: we will thrust thee like *Phalaris* into thine owne brazen bull, and baite thee at thy owne stake, and beate thee at thine owne weapon . . ." (16).[12] If women must accept an inferior position in all traditional hierarchies, Constantia Munda is a writer who will verbally challenge and defeat men who slander her sex.

*The Worming of a mad Dogge* is a paradigm of the woman writer's experience with conflicting impulses: to assert her abilities and her verbal power, while yet insisting on chaste decorousness as "our greatest ornament." In vociferously redeeming Eve, she risks her status by becoming too much like the traditional stereotype of her impudent foremother, causing her to defend even more strongly the alternative stereotype of the idealized woman. But her angry persona chooses a rhetorical outburst rather than a demand for change, an attack on a single misogynist rather than an analysis of a cultural problem. She does suggest, however, that woman's virtue, her constancy, must not ignore the unpleasant task of "worming" and that even the virtuous ideal must discover a language to do the job.

This new language is Constantia Munda's attempt to shock her audience into accepting the seriousness of her defense of women, to end once and for all the debate game by impressing upon her readers that even modest, virtuous women, the daughters of "Lady Prudentia," must vigorously oppose the likes of evil Joseph Swetnam.

Constantia Munda brings to a climax this brief spate of women explicitly defending their sex. By taking to an extreme Jane Anger's tactic, she may have succeeded in subverting readers' assumptions about the levity of the debate genre. Assuming for herself a persona (one now understands why she would not have used her own name) whose language violated the very modesty she claimed for her sex was at the least a paradox and at the most a device that risked failure; however, it may well have encouraged readers to sit up and listen. The Christian tradition of righteous anger in the cause

of good against evil would perhaps have worked in Constantia Munda's favor.

Torpedoing an old masculine genre and creating a new uniquely feminine one are tasks requiring radically different approaches; and the defenders of women indeed diverge widely in style and tone from the authors of mother's advice books. It is important to emphasize, however, that the defenders and the mothers espoused the same cause, to prove women's spiritual worth, whether manifested in pious deeds or literary acts.

## Mother's Advice Books

Although they differ one from another, all the mother's advice books diverge markedly from the angry and argumentative voices of the defenders of woman. Five of these books appeared in the early seventeenth century, written by Elizabeth Grymeston, Elizabeth Jocelin, Dorothy Leigh, Elizabeth Clinton, the Countess of Lincoln, and M.R. Four of the five mothers present their work as a legacy to their children, offered as a deathbed last will and testament, so that their voices offer restrained, pious exhortations to the godly life. Preceding Jocelin's and Leigh's works are elaborate attempts to legitimize the entry of the woman writer into the public sphere, reflecting both the authors' doubts as well as their publishers' concerns.

As mothers, these writers acknowledge their primary identity in a uniquely feminine role, and recognize that this places them in the private sphere and under the jurisdiction of men. But each recognizes that to write, ostensibly for the eyes of her own children, brings her public notice, particularly as she assumes the authority of a preacher. Jocelin, Leigh, and the Countess of Lincoln express their anxiety over this infringement, but find various means to rationalize it and do not let it prevent them from writing down their motherly advice. While the role of loving mother instructing her children may seem to be a safe persona for a woman writer, instead it highlights the conflict between private and public status, and

## Chapter Nine

1. Those who study the Renaissance debate on the woman question will benefit greatly from reading Linda Woodbridge's *Women and the English Renaissance*. The instances in which I differ from Woodbridge's analysis of the female defenders will become clear during the course of my argument.

In her discussion of Edward Gosynhyll who published both a defense of and an attack on women, Woodbridge remarks that "The debater who rebuts himself can be suspected of holding the Ramist view that to dispute well is logic's chiefest end. The facility with which one writer can argue opposing propositions must caution the reader against too blithely accepting any Renaissance pronouncement on women as reflecting the attitudes of his contemporaries" (p. 37). About other defenders of women, Woodbridge observes that they "accomplish little more for women's cause than to create a stereotype of the 'good' woman to counter the misogynist's stereotype of the 'bad.' " (p. 38). Even the extraordinary Agrippa mounts a defense of Eve that Woodbridge cannot believe "was meant to be taken seriously" (p. 40).

2. Woodbridge remarks that "Anger's essay injects new life into a stagnating genre" (p. 64), and that it includes "sardonic reversals of familiar conventions" (p. 65).

3. Of Swetnam's work, Woodbridge writes, "Everything in it was dismally stale, a good deal of it plagiarized from works like *The Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius* and *Euphues*. It is longer than most misogynistic attacks, but one cannot call it sustained—rambling or long-winded, perhaps" (p. 81).

4. *Jane Anger her Protection for Women* (London, 1589), title page. Hereafter cited in the text. The identity of the "Surfeiting Lover" is not known, although Anger refers in her text to *Boke his surfeit in love*, entered 1588, now lost. Jane Anger is reprinted in *First Feminists. British Women Writers 1578-1799*, pp. 58-73. See Betty Travitsky, "The Lady Doth Protest: Protest in the Popular Writings of Renaissance Englishwomen," *ELR* 14 (1984), 255-83, for a consideration of the works of Jane Anger, Rachel Speght, Ester Sowernam, and Constantia Munda as essentially feminine texts.

5. *A Mouzell for Melastomus, The Cynical Bayter of and foule mouthed Barker against Evahs Sex* . . . By Rachel Speght (London, 1617), A3. Hereafter cited in the text.

6. Woodbridge rightly judges that "Speght's historical relativism is impressive; it was a rare quality" (*Women and the English Renaissance*, p. 90).

7. Like Puritan writers on marriage, Speght assumes that to make the husband a beneficent ruler of a willingly obedient wife raises the status of marriage and women. For a discussion of the contradictions in the Puritan position, see David M. Harralson, "The Puritan Art of Love: Henry Smith's 'A Preparative to Marriage,' " *BSUF* 16 (1975), 46-55, esp. p. 52.

8. *Ester hath hang'd Haman: or an Answere to a lewd Pamphlet, entituled,*

*The Araignment of Women*. . . . Written by Ester Sowernam (London, 1617), A2. Hereafter cited in the text.

9. A play, *Swetnam the Woman-hater, Arraigned by Women* was published in 1620. Its treatment of the woman question is examined at length by Linda Woodbridge, pp. 300-22. See also Coryl Crandall, *Swetnam the Woman-hater: The Controversy and the Play, A Critical Edition With Introduction and Notes* (Purdue University Studies, 1969).

10. "Redargution" carries the added meaning of confutation, reprehension, or reproof.

11. *The Worming of a mad Dogge: Or, A Soppe for Cerberus the Jaylor of Hell*. . . . By Constantia Munda (London, 1617). Hereafter cited in the text. Perhaps "Lady Prudentia" indicates Constantia Munda's own station as a gentlewoman.

12. Archilochus, a Greek poet of the seventh century B.C., was forbidden to marry the woman he loved by her father and avenged himself by writing biting satires. Father and daughter are said to have hanged themselves. Phalaris, a Sicilian tyrant (c. 6 B.C.), roasted his victims in a brazen bull invented by Perillus who was the first to die in it.

13. In "The New Mother of the English Renaissance: Her Writings on Motherhood," in *The Lost Tradition: Mothers and Daughters in Literature*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson and E. M. Broner (New York: Frederich Ungar, 1980), pp. 33-43, Betty Travitsky suggests that the writing mother "in the context of Renaissance reality, would one day hope to find in her experience as a mother the outlet for her creative, spiritual, and intellectual needs" (p. 33). See also Christine W. Sizemore, "Early Seventeenth-Century Advice Books: The Female Viewpoint," *SAB* 41 (1976), 41-48, for the suggestion that the piety in each book reflected a "tradition of middle-class womanhood."

14. Elizabeth Grymeston, *Miscelanea, Meditations, Memoratives* (London, 1604), A3. Hereafter cited in the text. Three subsequent, expanded editions were dated by Ruth Hughey and Philip Hereford as 1605 or 1606; before 1609; about 1618. "Elizabeth Grymeston and her *Miscellanea*," *The Library* 15 (1934–1935), 61-91, esp. p. 71.

15. Ibid., pp. 76-81.

16. So wrote Simon Grahame in his sonnet "to the Authour" (Bv).

17. *Englands Parnassus* quotes *FQ* III.iv.17 accurately except it gives "Theaters" for "th'altars" in l.4. Grymeston changes the last line, "So fell proud *Marinell* upon the precious shore" to "So downe I fell on wordlesse precious shore" (B4). Other changes are orthographic. See *Englands Parnassus or The choysest Flowers of our Modern Poets, with their Poeticall comparisons* [ed. Robert Allott] (London, 1600), pp. 453-54.

18. In *Englands Parnassus* (p. 133) the lines appear:

> A deadly gulfe, where nought but rubbish growes,
> With foule blacke swelth in thickned lumps that lies:
> Which vp in th'aire such stinking vapour throwes.

That over, there may fly no fowle but dies,
Choakt with th'pestilent savours that arise.

Grymeston omits the second line, perhaps because she wanted two couplets for pithy effect. She changes "fowle" to "bird" (B4v).

19. In *Englands Parnassus* (p. 230), the lines from Drayton are:

Our fond preferments are but childrens toyes,
And as a shadow all our pleasures passe:
As yeares increase, so waining are our joyes,
And beautie crazed like a broken glasse,
A prettie tale of that which never was.

Grymeston writes (C):

Your fond preferments are but childrens toyes.
And as a shadow all your pleasures passe.
As yeeres increase, so waning are your joyes.
Your blesse is brittle, like a broken glasse,
Or as a tale of that which never was.

Grymeston appears to prefer the standard image to Drayton's variation. Another example of her conflating originals in order to write concise couplets occurs in her stanza (C):

What in this life we have or can desire,
Hath time of growth, and moment of retire.
So feeble is mans state as sure it will not stand,
Till it disordered be from earthly band.

The first two lines are from Lodge and are accurately quoted from *Englands Parnassus*, p. 168. The next two lines (p. 169) are from Spenser, coming from the end of the stanza:

So feeble is mans state, and life unsound,
That in assurance it may never stand,
Till it disordered be from earthly band.

For the Harington quotation, see *Englands Parnassus*, pp. 120-21; for Daniel, p. 265. Hughey and Hereford suggest that Grymeston might have used a book like Hugh Platt's *Flores Patrum* (i.e., Hugonis Platti armig. *manuale, sententias aliquot Divinas & Morales complectens: partim e Sacris Patribus. Partim e Petrarcha philosopho & Poeta celeberrimo decerptas*, London, 1594) for her prose quotations, but they add that "it is certain that she treated her quotations as she did those from English writers" ("Elizabeth Grymeston," p. 90). Hughey and Hereford trace a number of Grymeston's allusions and borrowings, showing briefly how she "made the borrowings very much her own."

20. Elizabeth Jocelin, *The Mothers Legacie to her unborn Childe* (London, 1624), A3-A3v. Hereafter cited in the text.

21. Dorothy Leigh, *The Mothers Blessing: Or, The godly Counsaile of a*

*Gentle-woman*. . . . The seventh Edition (London, 1621), title page. Hereafter cited in the text.

22. *The Countess of Lincolnes Nurserie* (Oxford, 1622), p. 13. Hereafter cited in the text.

23. M.R., *The Mothers Counsell, or, Live within Compasse* (London, 163[0?]), p. 1. Hereafter cited in the text.

24. M.R. writes, "Chastitie is a veile which Innocents adorne,/ th'ungathered rose defended with the thorne" (p. 5), basing the lines on Daniel, "The unstained vaile which innocents adorne,/Th'ungather'd rose defended with the thorne" (*Englands Parnassus*, p. 26). The quotations from Drayton and from Harington appear in *Englands Parnassus*, p. 27.

25. The first two lines are Drayton's (*Englands Parnassus*, p. 311), and the last are Harington's (*Englands Parnassus*, p. 311), altered to make two couplets.

26. STC notes that *The Mothers Counsell* (STC 20583) was probably issued with the tenth impression of *Keepe within Compasse* (14900). The latter was entered in the Stationer's Register first in 1619, then assigned to John Wright on January 24, 1623, when *The Mothers Counsell* is also entered to him.

27. That M.R. wrote her advice in response to *Keepe within Compasse* is likely, not only from the similarity in titles, but from consistent echoes of language: the father writes, "He is happily religious, whom no feare troubleth, no sorrow consumeth, no fleshly lust tormenteth, no desire of worldly wealth afflicteth, nor any foolishnesse moveth unto mirth" (A3); M.R. writes, "That chaste woman hath got to the height of felicitie, whom no feare troubleth, no pensiveness consumeth, no carnall concupiscence tormenteth, no desire of worldly wealth afflicteth, nor any foolishnesse moveth unto mirth" (p. 4).

ELAINE V. BEILIN

# Redeeming Eve

## WOMEN WRITERS OF THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE

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