

Defences of Women

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Yet she was not produced from Adam's foot, to be his too low inferior; nor from his head to be his superior; but from his side, near his heart, to be his equal: that where he is lord, she may be lady.

Rachel Speght, *A Mouzell for Melastomus*

Defending Eve

Whether defending Eve or all womankind, a Renaissance writer had to address this argument: since women are descended from Eve, they are morally inferior, which in turn leads them to be socially and intellectually inferior. Controversy over women's nature is by no means new to the Renaissance. Medieval and Renaissance writers knew that the subjugation of women had existed from biblical times. As Betty S. Travitsky argues, 'in the civilizations of the ancient Greeks, Jews, and Romans, the subordinated position of the respectable woman ranged from one of almost complete seclusion . . . to one conferring prestige on certain female roles within the family'. One consequence of their long-term subordination was that women 'came to be identified more and more with the body and temptation'. As a result, 'distrust for women remained an undercurrent of medieval thought' (Travitsky 1989: 3–4).

Yet medieval attitudes toward women began to change in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Increasingly, the argument ran that men and women were equal spiritually, on the basis that 'souls have no sex'. All equality between men and women ended there, however, for 'the doctrine of equal souls did not entitle women to equal participation in the Church's temporal hierarchy' (Mendelson and Crawford 1998: 31). As any scholar of early modern England knows, women were not allowed to minister to the general population. Of course, one reason for this subjection of women is womankind's descent from Eve:

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. (Genesis 3.6)

Eve, the first woman, ate of the apple first, and then gave the fruit to Adam, causing him to fall. Therefore, Eve's weakness is revisited on the head of every woman. Rachel Speght's defence of women in our epigraph is interesting, because of Eve's identity as the perpetrator of the fall, and thus of womankind's inferiority to man. Speght clearly avows that woman is equal to man because God made woman from Adam's rib, or 'near his heart', so woman is therefore not beneath man, but rather beside him. But even placing woman beside man did not necessarily make them equals. Commentators used the verse 'And the Lord God said, It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him' (Genesis 2.18) to justify female subjugation. Because the woman was only a 'help meet' she was beneath the man in judgement and moral capacity. Therefore, women in early modern England were subservient to the powerful men in their lives, whether fathers, husbands or brothers. This belief in women's subjection to men is an essentialist position with powerful consequences: women were not considered citizens in early modern England. As a result of not being legal citizens, women had no legal rights. A wife could make no legal contract without her husband's consent; she could make no will of her own and could not receive an inheritance to keep for herself (Mendelson and Crawford 1998: 38). To complete the notion that women were the property of the men they married or were related to, records of wife sales exist as well (ibid.: 142).

Because of their supposed moral and social inferiority to men, women were also considered mentally inferior to men. Literacy of any kind was usually limited to 'noble or upper-class families and to occasional religious or professional clerks' (Hull 1982: 2). Girls in these upper-class families might be encouraged to study, but learning was by no means extensive. Margaret More Roper, Sir Thomas More's daughter, is an exceptional example of a learned woman. Most lower-class girls, if taught to read early, went out into service; they were to help provide for the family, not to waste their time studying (Mendelson and Crawford 1998: 90). (One must note here a difference in the modern meaning of the word 'literacy'. Some women in the Renaissance could read, but not write, and are therefore 'literate' in some sense: see Hull 1982: 4). The movement towards having women learn to read was furthered by England's Protestant leaning and the belief that individuals should read scripture for themselves. So women were increasingly taught to read to give them access to the scriptures.

Speght was not the only woman to answer biblically based attacks. An earlier woman who explicitly defended Eve was Aemilia Lanyer, whose book *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611, STC 15227–15227.5) included a poem, 'Eve's Apologie in defense of Woman' (for more discussion of Lanyer's defence, see chapter 8, this volume). Another defender of Eve was Margaret Askew Fell Fox, who published a pamphlet

entitled *Women's Speaking Justified* (1667, Wing F643), which Moira Ferguson (1980: 114) considers a 'feminist revision of conventional biblical interpretations'. In it, Fox does indeed reinterpret the traditional readings. For example, she says, '[T]he Lord is pleased, when he mentions his Church, to call her by the name of Woman. . . . Thus much may prove that the Church of Christ is a woman, and those that speak against the womans speaking, speak against the Church of Christ' (ibid.: 116). Here Fox implies that if Christ is happy enough to associate woman with his infallible church, then woman cannot be the horrible entity that men have made her out to be. Fox then goes on to discuss famous, faithful women of the Bible, such as 'Mary Magdalen, and Mary the Mother of James, and Salome' (ibid.: 118). Her argument is that God reveals his truths to them, so therefore women cannot be the morally weak beings men conceive them to be.

The controversy over women continues through the Renaissance, well into the seventeenth century. Linda Woodbridge divides the controversy into three sections: 'The Early Tudor Controversy', 'The Elizabethan Controversy' and 'The Jacobean Tragedy to 1620'. She then says: 'defenses outnumber attacks by four to one' (Woodbridge 1984: 44). In the early Tudor period, for example, Edward Gosynhyll's 'The Scole house of Women' (1541?, STC 12104.5) is the only attack. The assaults continue throughout the Elizabethan period, with Thomas Nashe's 'The Anatomie of Absurditie, Contayning a breefe confutation of the slender imputed prayes to feminine perfection' (1589, STC 18364). The controversy diminishes between 1592 and 1615 (Woodbridge 1984: 74), but Joseph Swetnam's publication of *The Arraignement of Lewde, idle, froward, and unconstant women* in 1615 revives it and sparks Rachel Speght's *A Mouzell for Melastomus*, Ester Sowernam's and Joane Sharpe's *Ester bath Hang'd Haman* and Constantia Munda's *The Worming of a Mad Dogge*. Once again, the anti-woman text is outnumbered by the defences of women (one to three).

Thus, from anti-woman invectives, a literary form emerged: the defence of women. The defence of women exists in two literary traditions: the literary catalogues in praise of exemplary women and the more formal polemical defences that characterized the later *querelle des femmes* and are characteristically written by women. In the next section of this essay we shall explore these categories, with particular stress on defences of women written during the period 1500–1700. Our treatment of Mary Astell, like our treatment of Lanyer, is brief, since both writers are thoroughly discussed elsewhere in this volume.

Early Defenders

When scholars speak of the *querelle des femmes* they mean a collection of seventeenth-century texts, discussed below, arising from the 1615 attack by Joseph Swetnam. Yet that moment, when the controversy over women peaked for early modern

Englishwomen, grows from a much longer tradition, just as arguments about whether women most resembled Eve or Mary were many centuries old. Sixteenth-century works defending women are less coherent or influential than those in the Swetnam contretemps. Yet they raise significant theoretical questions, both about how best to defend women and about how such defences should be voiced. Pamela Benson argues that works about women take different forms, each of which has its own conventions that a reader is expected to understand if they are to appreciate the texts fully: Renaissance writers considered the controversy over women 'first in collections of biographical sketches of famous women written in imitation of Boccaccio's, then, in a variety of documents about the education of women, in encomia and defenses of womankind, in dialogues on the nature of women and her place, and in narratives such as the *Orlando Furioso* and *The Faerie Queene*' (Benson 1992: 1–2). We shall concentrate on two traditions: the catalogue and the polemic.

The former is the older European tradition, starting in the late fourteenth century with Boccaccio's *De Mulieribus Claris* (c.1370) and Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* (c.1380). Both of these works list exemplary women, ostensibly to praise the sex, without much consideration of why women face criticism as men's inferiors. The catalogue form is one that worked well for male authors who wished to enter the controversy over women, for it places the author as a kind of judge who gazes at womankind and then selects individual women for his purposes and pleasure. With Christine de Pizan's adaptation, *Livre de la Cité des Dames* (c.1407), the encomiastic catalogue has for the first time a female voice and begins to investigate the source of misogyny, reversing the male stance by allowing a woman to serve as the judge. Her conclusions are conservative, for she too isolates women, both by the act of selecting and by her insistence that women cannot compete with men and must withdraw to a city where they will be protected in the contemplative life. Nevertheless, Christine de Pizan is of particular importance, for in her work we hear for the first time a woman's voice defending women.

While male-voiced works continue in the early modern period, increasingly the works either are or purport to be by women. This convention has a double edge. On the one hand, it suggests an acknowledgement that a woman may be able to speak for and defend herself, doing without a masculine protector. On the other hand, the belief that a defence of women is more plausible and convincing when undertaken by a woman implies that men and women are irretrievably separated by gender roles; the only way that a man may defend women is by surrendering his masculine identity and playing a woman. In such a false binary the assumption is that one may defend women only by attacking men. This double-edged quality also affects our understanding of the catalogue tradition, which often influences writing by early modern women. Ostensibly the encomiastic catalogue defends women by providing proof that a woman might be silent, chaste and obedient, contrary to misogynist images of all women as loquacious, lascivious libertines, but it often includes women who are exceptional because they are active, eloquent and independent. Thus the form is inherently

inconsistent. Moreover, by mentioning exceptional women only, catalogues may imply that an ordinary female reader falls short in significant ways simply by being ordinary (if any woman reading such works is ordinary in the sixteenth century). Despite these problems the catalogue tradition has great importance because it offers an answer to misogyny and because it provides models of achievement to women who have been repeatedly told that their principal precursor is Eve, who lost paradise. As a form that male and female writers were permitted to use, its popularity helps to account for Brian Ansley's early translation of Christine de Pizan's *City of Ladies* (1521, STC 7271), as well as the many editions of Thomas Heywood's *Gynaikeion, or History of Women* (1624, STC 13326), Charles Gerbier's *Elogium Heroinum* (1651, Wing G583), or Henry Cornelius Agrippa's *Female Pre-eminence* (1670, Wing A784). These works chronicle excellent women in an effort to invoke *auctoritas* for a particular construction of woman; the catalogues' essentialism may help explain why male authors so often employed them.

Such catalogues influenced works by women as well. Later writers such as Bathsua Makin (discussed below) or Rachel Speght in her *Mortalities Memorandum* (1621, STC 23057) include catalogues as central parts of their argument. Such verse works as Diana Primrose's *Chaine of Pearle* (1630, STC 20388) and Mary Fage's *Fames Roule* (1637, STC 10667) show the marks of the catalogue tradition, the former in the way that Primrose lists Queen Elizabeth I's virtues and the latter in her catalogue of anagrams. (Arguably the catalogues also influence Aemilia Lanyer in the string of dedications that opens *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*.) For Primrose, the concentration on a single figure and her fragmentation of Queen Elizabeth into a catalogue of allegorical qualities says much about both the hunger early modern women felt for models and the way that a woman constructed her own identity, as well as that of others. For Fage, the catalogue is an end in itself; the multiplication of names and their reworking into anagrams and acrostic verses (420 in all) implicitly establish that writer's skill with language and her refusal of a cloistered life as she reaches out to prominent courtiers. One's evaluation of such works, which today may seem tedious or repetitive, depends on a recognition of the way that they appropriate elements of the catalogue tradition for their own purposes.

While the catalogue is an important form in defences of women, it is not the only one. Another is the polemic, in which the text (often, though not always, an anonymous pamphlet) takes a strong position on a controversy, mocks those opposed to that position, and flamboyantly sets forth the case in favour of that position. Clusters of pamphlets that replied to or decried one another were popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: inevitably some considered the controversy over women. While the pamphlets of the *querelle des femmes* are the best known of these polemics, they are not the first. In the sixteenth century the 'Maydens of London' answered a misogynist attack on their virtue with a polemic pamphlet, *A Letter Sent by the Maydens of London* (1567, STC 16754.5); Margaret Tyler wrote a mildly polemical defence of women in the preface to her translation of a Spanish romance (1578, STC

18859–18861); and Jane Anger scourged ‘the newe surfeit of an olde lover’ in *Jane Anger her Protection for vvomen* (1589, STC 644). Tyler uses her own name, while the other works may be by men rather than women, but all three raise the question of how authorship and authority could be gendered.

In *A Letter Sent by the Maydens of London*, which R. J. Fehrenback has edited (Farrell, Hageman and Kinney 1990: 28–47), ‘Rose, Jane, Rachell, Sara, Philumias, and Dorotheie’ write to the ‘right wise, sober and discrete Matrons, and Mistresses of London’. These maidservants declare their intention of defending women’s liberties; specifically, of defending themselves against a misogynist attack in a pamphlet by the lawyer Edward Hake, ‘A Boke Intituled a Mery Metynge of Maydes in London’ (1567). Hake’s work, written at a time of ‘intense attacks and defences’ in the controversy over women (ibid.: 31), condemns the unmarried women who worked as servants because they have too much liberty and too little religious devotion. *A Letter* is probably written by a man, another lawyer, posing as the various maidens, not only because it would be unusual for a group of working-class London women to respond to such a pamphlet, but also because *A Letter* uses a sprinkling of Latin and demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the law. The voicing of *A Letter* nonetheless has relevance for a history of defences of women. First of all, the pamphlet suggests that in the mid-sixteenth century the idea of female authorship was plausible. In other words, women were sufficiently literate and articulate that such a pamphlet was not immediately denounced as a hoax. Indeed, Hake’s response to the pamphlet seems to have been ‘suspiciously disproportionate’, suggesting that he feared he had indeed been the target of ‘domestic maidservants . . . collaborating on a mocking, humiliating riposte to the pontifications of a moralizing windbag’ (ibid.: 30). In the second place, the multiple voices of *A Letter* reflect an interesting cultural assumption that women worked most effectively in groups, i.e. that their strength came from affiliation and collaboration. Not only do the six maidens stand together against their attacker, but they also address themselves to the matrons of London for support. This attitude has particular importance when one turns to the misogynist pamphlets in which a male attacker imagines himself in opposition to a group, even a monstrous regiment, of women. For whoever wrote *A Letter*, whether a lawyer or a group of women, the claims of female gender and affiliation are empowering.

Margaret Tyler translates a Spanish romance as *The Mirrour of Princely Deedes and Knighthood* (1578, reprinted in 1580 and 1599, STC 18859–61), and in her polemical preface she makes both gender and affiliation claims as well. Acknowledging herself to be a woman, she defends her right to translate, if not author, books, while she positions herself socially by announcing that she is a member of the aristocratic Howard household (implicitly affiliating herself both to a noble family and to a Roman Catholic stronghold). Perhaps because she connects herself to a powerful male figure rather than to a network of like-minded women, her preface drew no response that survives, although the work was published three times. The argument she makes is quite interesting because it employs indirection to argue for her right to publish

her translation, acknowledging the common arguments against women's writing and then incorporating them into her own defence. She suggests that what society sees as improper in a woman's writing is the interaction between men and women, not the woman author's refusal to remain silent. Turning around the usual state of affairs, she points out that if a woman may experience a man by reading what he has written, or if a man may represent a woman by writing about her, then the relationship that occurs when a woman writes for a male reader can hardly be said to be improper. The ingenious argument is temperately expressed and invokes the modesty topos, for while she defends herself against the charge that it is 'unseemly for a woman' to translate, she also seeks to reassure the reader of her propriety, 'least perhaps understanding of my name and yeares, those mightest be carried into a wrong suspect of my boldnesse and rashnesse' (Ferguson 1980: 56).

Far less temperate is Jane Anger, whose pamphlet *Jane Anger her Protection for vvomen* complains of the treachery of male seducers. As with *A Letter*, *Jane Anger her Protection* was written in answer to a misogynist attack in another (lost) pamphlet. Because *Jane Anger her Protection* uses a female voice, it is often regarded as a landmark for early women writers. A fair amount of scholarly ink has been spilled over the question of whether Jane Anger is, in fact, a woman, but finally this question is not one we can answer. Of far greater importance is the pamphlet's being voiced as a woman's writing because this circumstance implicitly suggests that a woman's identity lends strength to an attack on a man. Anger is a woman. Just as iconography often presented Wrath as a woman carrying a sword, so this pamphlet allegorizes anger in the person of a woman armed with a pen. Further, the pamphlet is presented as the work of one woman who represents and cares for all women. In the conclusion the text declares: 'I have set down unto you (which are of mine own sex) the subtle dealings of untrue meaning men' (Ferguson 1980: 69). Thus the text defends every woman against the seducer who threatens chastity by revealing his secrets. Once shared, knowledge of his technique renders him harmless, a 'noddie' or a 'jade'. In these sixteenth-century polemics, female voice and affiliation become important.

The *Querelle des Femmes*

The *querelle des femmes*, a series of four pamphlets and a play published between 1615 and 1620, started in 1615 with Joseph Swetnam's *The Arraignment of lewd, idle and froward women*, which provoked the three pamphlet defences mentioned earlier: Rachel Speght's *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (1617), Ester Sowernam's and Joane Sharp's *Ester Hath Hang'd Haman* (1617), and Constantia Munda's *The Worming of a Mad Dogge* (1617). One last publication, *Swetnam the Woman-hater Arraigned by Women*, a tragicomedy, appeared in 1620 (Crandall 1969: ix). (Several pamphlets concerned with cross-dressing also appeared in 1620: *Hic Mulier, or the Man Woman*; *Haec Vir, or the Womanish Man*; and *Muld Sacke: or the Apologie of Hic Mulier*. Since these are not really

defences, but rather attacks on women, we shall not consider them here.) The first three pamphlets in the *querelle des femmes*, those by Swetnam, Speght and Sowernam, focus on the man–woman dichotomy (particularly on the various interpretations of Adam's rib). Constantia Munda and *Swetnam the Woman-bater*, however, take different approaches. Munda focuses more on the lamentable fact that Swetnam could be published, while *Swetnam the Woman-bater* subordinates the gender debate to a love story.

As we have seen, Swetnam's *Arraignment* revived the polemical pamphlet controversy over women that had been on the wane since 1592. And, as Woodbridge argues, 'during the Swetnam controversy, the debate lost an important element of artistic dishonesty: while earlier defences only pretended to be answering a published attack on women, the defences of Speght, Sowernam, and Munda actually did answer such an attack' (Woodbridge 1984: 110).

Swetnam's *Arraignment*, published under the pseudonym Thomas Tel-troth, 'went through at least ten editions by 1637, and at least six more by 1880', and was 'also translated into Dutch' (ibid.: 81). One has only to read his opening epistles to know that Swetnam is a misogynist; he says that 'men will be persuaded with reason, but women must be answered with silence' (Henderson and McManus 1985: 192). In other words, a man, who possesses reason, is worthy of participating in discussion, whereas a woman, with her essentially irrational nature, is to be ignored. Swetnam's attacks on women grow increasingly virulent; he says women are crooked by nature and worse than animals. The 'crooked by nature' argument, of course, stems from the biblical story that Eve was created from Adam's rib. Then, in a selection borrowed from *The Golden Book of Marcus Aurelius* (Woodbridge 1984: 83), he writes: 'A buck may be enclosed in a Park; a bridle rules a horse; a Wolf may be tied; a Tiger may be tamed, but a froward woman will never be tamed' (Henderson and McManus 1985: 194). Swetnam's aggressive posturing cannot disguise the weakness of his attack. Woodbridge argues that he 'has plundered the formal controversy, carrying off an unsorted booty of the controversy's conventions, arguments, authorities, jests, and exempla' (Woodbridge 1984: 87). Elaine Beilin concurs: 'his attack, lacking wit, skill, polish, and even the rhetorical ingenuity of earlier works, demonstrated how debased the entire genre had become by 1615' (Beilin 1987: 249). Yet although Swetnam came late to the fray, his pamphlets drew strong opposition.

The first published response was Rachel Speght's *A Mouzell for Melastomus*. Speght, the daughter of the minister James Speght (Lewalski 1996: xi), wrote *A Mouzell for Melastomus* in 1616; it was then published in 1617. As we have seen, Speght, like Swetnam, discusses the issue of Adam, Eve and the rib, though she uses the biblical story to establish women's equality rather than their inferiority and crookedness. As Ann Rosalind Jones argues, 'the sharpest focus in Speght's pamphlet is turned upon antiwoman elements in religion' (Haselkorn and Travitsky 1990: 50). Next, Speght attacks Swetnam's argument that St Paul said it is not good to touch a woman. Speght counters that St Paul's stricture resulted from 'the Corinthians present necessitie, who

were then persecuted by the enemies of the Church' (Lewalski 1996: 16). As Jones notes, Speght seems 'to be aiming . . . at an educated audience seriously interested in biblical interpretation and marriage theory' (Haselkorn and Travitsky 1990: 51).

An interesting side note is Barbara Lewalski's discovery of an annotated copy of Rachel Speght's *Mouzell for Melastomus* in the Beinecke Library (Yale), 'containing some eighty-seven manuscript annotations in a contemporary hand' (Lewalski 1996: 91). The author of these notes could well be Swetnam himself, as Lewalski suggests, particularly given Constantia Munda's report that 'he [Swetnam] was preparing to growl back at Speght' (ibid.). Moreover, the annotator explains that one mistake in Swetnam's pamphlet was a printer's error and 'on at least one occasion, he undertakes to speak for Swetnam' (ibid.). Lewalski does acknowledge that other possible authors exist, such as another polemicist, since the tone 'seems more irate and contemptuous of women' than Swetnam's (ibid.). Though we may never know with certainty who wrote these notes, the likelihood that Swetnam planned a vehement rejoinder suggests that he, like Hake before him, was particularly troubled by a female-voiced response.

Rachel Speght was not the only writer to respond to Swetnam's attack; the next published defender was Ester Sowernam (along with Joane Sharp), who wrote *Ester Hath Hang'd Haman*. While we are certain that Rachel Speght was indeed an actual woman, the name Ester Sowernam is most likely a pseudonym (Shepherd 1985: 86), and a man may well have written the pamphlet. Whatever Sowernam's sex, the voice is gendered female, as Sowernam, like Speght, attacks Swetnam and defends women. Yet her defence includes a sharp critique of Speght: 'When I had likewise run [Speght's pamphlet] over, I did observe that whereas the maid doth many times excuse her tenderness of years, I found it to be true in the slenderness of her answer' (ibid.: 88). Clearly, for Sowernam, Speght's response is inadequate, so she proceeds to write her own. Like Swetnam and Speght, she addresses the rib issue; however, her interpretation differs from Speght, and of course from Swetnam. In her opinion, the woman did receive a crooked rib from man, but she then counters, 'if woman received her crookedness from the rib, and consequently from the man, how doth man excel in crookedness, who hath more of those crooked ribs?' (ibid.: 92). For Sowernam, the account in the Book of Genesis provides evidence of man's moral inferiority. Sowernam continues her argument by giving exempla of zealous, faithful women such as the Virgin Mary, John the Baptist's mother Elizabeth, and Mary Magdalene (ibid.: 97), and important, powerful women in British history, such as Boadicea, Eleanor (wife of Edward I), and the most recent, Queen Elizabeth (ibid.: 100–1). Her use of these examples shows an excellent knowledge not only of the Bible, but also of history, placing the controversy in a specifically English context.

The fourth and last pamphleteer was Constantia Munda. Like Sowernam, Munda's name is a pseudonym; it means 'Moral Constancy' (Shepherd 1985: 126). In addition, Munda, again like Sowernam, does include comments about women's superiority to men. For example, in the introductory poem to Swetnam, she tells him that 'Women [are] the crown, perfection and the means of all men's being, and their well-being'

(ll. 40–1), and in the text of her pamphlet she calls women ‘the greatest part of the lesser world’ (ibid.: 131). But as in Sowernam’s case, scholars speculate that the ‘she’ is indeed a ‘he’: both Simon Shepherd and Ann Rosalind Jones assert their suspicions (Shepherd 1985: 126; Haselkorn and Travitsky 1990: 58, respectively). Shepherd notes the significance of Munda’s references to classical authorities like Juvenal, whom he sees as ‘an unlikely author in a woman’s education’ (Shepherd 1985: 126). Jones, on the other hand, bases her suspicion on the fact that Munda ‘is more interested in excluding upstart scribblers like Swetnam from the press than in defending women in any sustained way’ (Haselkorn and Travitsky 1990: 58). Indeed, the author does seem excessively concerned with the press; Munda’s pamphlet changes to an invective against ‘the itching desire of oppressing the press with many sottish and illiterate libels’ (Munda, quoted in Shepherd 1985: 130). In addition, Munda seems to be more concerned with a demonstration of learning than with defending women. In the first paragraph alone, the author uses five foreign-language phrases (four Latin and one Italian), all carefully translated. As Jones argues, ‘Munda thunders from above’, in opposition to Swetnam (Haselkorn and Travitsky 1990: 60). The ‘you’ in this text is clearly Swetnam, and the author is lecturing him. Moreover, Munda is ‘not interested in constructing a persona based on contemporary ideologies of the good woman’ (ibid.). The author does not create a sense of ‘womanly’ identity nor attempt gender identification except for the odd ‘we’, although the pamphleteer is kinder to Speght than Sowernam was, since she ‘uses Speght quite heavily’ (Shepherd 1985: 126). Josephine Roberts agrees with Shepherd and Jones, though her contention is that the problem of Munda’s gender arises from the way it ‘hints at a male writer’s mocking the entire process of responding to Swetnam’ (Amussen and Seeff 1998: 45–6). The issue of voice becomes one of affiliation: the author uses a female voice not to strengthen the polemic, but to undercut the argument by suggesting the argument itself is foolish.

The Swetnam controversy has one last hurrah with *Swetnam the Woman-hater Arraigned by Women*. Unlike the previous publications, *Swetnam the Woman-hater* is a play, and hence has no authorial voice, nor does it, strictly speaking, arraign Swetnam. The arraignment is placed in a larger story about Lisandro and Leonida, ‘the noble lovers whose story is the main plot’ (Crandall 1969: 11). The Swetnam character, Misogenos, appears early on in the play, but his trial does not begin until late in Act 3, and it is not until Act 5, scene 2 that the old women call out ‘Guiltie, guiltie, guiltie. / Guiltie of Woman-slander, and defamation’ (289–90). Then, in the Epilogue, Swetnam enters, muzzled (stage direction) and repents (Crandall 1969: 12). Crandall argues that while the play does ‘arraign’ Swetnam, ‘the major concern of *Swetnam the Woman-hater* is not the man–woman question’, but simply having fun at Swetnam’s expense (Crandall 1969: 18, 19).

In his introduction to Munda, Shepherd comments that ‘by 1621 Swetnam was silent’ (Shepherd 1985: 126). And indeed, after the last pamphlet and play, the *querelle des femmes* was over as well, at least in publication. One interesting item to note is that Swetnam’s attack drew the largest publishing base. It also drew a large response,

spawning three defences and a play that denounced his attack. Of course, these responses complicate the issues of voice and affiliation, both by challenging the assumption that all women think alike and by suggesting that a female voice could write against women. The play presents a different story altogether, especially since the audience was probably more concerned with amusement than with the question of which sex was superior (Crandall 1969: 19). Misogyny has become a figure of fun when Swetnam is muzzled and humiliated. As James I's reign drew to a close, the formal controversy over women seems of less importance than laughter. But perhaps we would do well to interpret the *querelle des femmes* as a 'literary exercise' (Woodbridge 1984: 110) rather than a serious pamphlet war.

The Later Defences

The play *Swetnam the Woman-bater* signals not only the end of the controversy about Swetnam's *Arraignment of . . . Women*, but also the end of the polemic as a line of defence for women. Yet misogyny certainly continued in the seventeenth century, as did a marked rise in literacy among both men and women. Given these factors one can readily understand why defences of women continued to appear. New forms took the place of the invective associated with the polemical pamphlets.

Later in the seventeenth century pamphlets written in defence of women have a very different tone. To some extent one can posit a shift connected to the Civil War and the Commonwealth years, for women in the decades from 1640–60 were far more likely to be engaged in writing, particularly petitions or religious tracts. Even after the Restoration the energetic invective of the earlier pamphlets gave way to more dignified and polished writing. Another probable factor is that such defences, even when the author's identity is disguised, are by women and not men pretending to be women. Unlike the anonymous Jane Anger or Ester Sowernam with their gleeful personal attacks in a woman's voice, later defenders sought a more balanced tone.

A good example is Anna Maria van Schurman's *Amica Dissertatio . . . de Capacitate Ingenii Muliebris ad Scientia* (1638), translated into English by Clement Barksdale as *The Learned Maid, or Whether a Maid May Be a Scholar* (1659, Wing S902). In it van Schurman does not examine women's 'essential' nature as earlier defences had done. Rather she appropriates male discourse as she constructs a formal debate on the educability of women. The work itself is, of course, by its very existence proof that a maid may indeed be a scholar. Her use of rhetoric and logic to construct her case for women implies that both genders operate in a world of reasoned ethical arguments. Moreover, she adds to the tradition of affiliation, including a range of letters from learned men and women that testify to her excellence as an individual and as a scholar and that establish her as a participant in a network of worthy people. Her work is not one that could be turned into a mocking play.

Another such defence is the livelier *Essay on the Antient Education of Gentlewomen* (1673, Wing M309) by Bathsua Reginald Makin. She too appropriates the masculine role, even more explicitly, by writing a series of letters purporting to be from men, one opposed to educating women and one in favour. The man who attacks women has the more foolish arguments; indeed his voice blusters and argues by assertion without any substance to his claims. In a nice inversion of earlier pamphlets claiming to be by women though actually written by men, the masculine defender in the pamphlet insists that his praise of women is disinterested, for 'I am a man myself'. Every argument made against educating women is debunked, and in the process the speaker implies that those opposed to such education are unworthy sons and fathers, ignorant of the Bible and the classics, who would be content with a mandrill for a wife. Makin appears (indirectly) on the final page when readers who wish to educate their daughters are urged to send them to Mrs Makin's new school, where they will be taught according to the very latest methods. While this essay plays with voice in a particularly interesting way, developing and complicating the technique found in earlier pamphlets, it also fits into the pattern of introducing the author's affiliations and of cataloguing notable women. Throughout, the essay lists women who have been renowned for their learning in various fields. Among these are a number of women who are associated with Makin: Lucy Hastings, the Dowager Countess of Huntingdon, who had been one of Makin's pupils (as had her children); another pupil, Princess Elizabeth Stuart, daughter of Charles I; Anna Maria van Schurman, epistolary friend of Makin; and so forth.

(An interesting sidelight is that, as a girl, Makin had lived only a few streets away from Rachel Speght, whom she might well have known, since both girls had reputations for exceptional learning. In 1616 Bathsua Reginald's first book appeared, just a year before Speght's 1617 pamphlet defending women from Swetnam's 1615 attack. This work was *Musa Virginea* (STC 20835), a collection of poetry and epigraphs in half a dozen languages demonstrating her learning. The two girls may well have been friends who planned their works as a collective response – one pointing out Swetnam's shortcomings, one demonstrating feminine learning – but this friendship must remain speculation.)

In addition to the pamphlet defences, which principally concerned women's education, women writers began producing verse defences in the later seventeenth century. Such authors include the anonymous author of *The Triumphs of Female Wit* (1683, Wing T2295); Sarah Fyge Egerton, *The Female Advocate* (1686, Wing F56a), and Mary Lee, Lady Chudleigh, *The Ladies Defence* (1701). *The Triumphs of Female Wit* is a work that plays with male and female voices to defend the ability of women to write the Pindaric odes that had become so fashionable in this period. The work begins with an essay, 'The Preface to the Masculine Sex', in which 'The Young Lady' asks the men why women 'should not be thought capable of all the Endowments of humane Nature' (3). She then asserts that she is sure that women 'seem framed . . . with the same Materials too both of Body and Mind as the best composed of you all' (4). In

these few brief lines 'The Young Lady' asserts, as did the pamphleteers (specifically Rachel Speght), that women are equal to men since they are made of the same materials. She then goes on to refute the argument that women were stupid and dull: 'the Faculties of our souls are always brisk and sprightly, our Senses quick and intelligent' (4). For 'The Young Lady', women are, at least at this point in the work, clearly equal to men in make-up and in mental capacity.

After the essay, a series of odes follows: 'The Young Lady' writes in favour of women's abilities in her ode, as does a Mr F, while a Mr H writes against women. In her ode, 'The Young Lady' reiterates her belief that women are equal to men; she says 'We've souls as noble, and as fine a Clay' (l. 9). But she then pulls back from her strong argument and says that women have no desire to reign over anything but 'those passions which we find / Too potent for the Mind' (ll. 52–3). Her apology for women is answered by a Mr H, who positions himself against 'The Young Lady' from the beginning. He asks her to 'Stand valiant she, a Parley I desire' (l. 11). His first condescending remark is to inform 'The Young Lady' that 'twas from Jove's Brain alone Minerva came' (l. 17), which implies that a woman has no intelligence save what she receives from a masculine figure. Mr H then asserts that women should not exert their minds; for example, he says 'Knowledge divine you may attain / Without the labour of the Brain' (ll. 80–1). He goes on to say that 'But for the Learning of the Schools, / That can't make Women wise, that makes Men Fools' (ll. 84–5). With both comments, the speaker condescendingly tells 'The Young Lady' not to worry about educating herself and exercising her mental capacity because it will not help her. Besides, she can read the Bible and attain 'knowledge divine' (l. 80), which is all a woman needs. Mr F then responds, and complicates the situation by the curious use of a woman speaker. The speaker in Mr F's ode refutes Mr H's arguments and answers his challenges, specifically his Jove and Minerva example, just as the female pamphleteers addressed Swetnam's arguments. In refuting the example of Jove and Minerva, Mr F counters the argument that men provide women with 'brains' by pointing out that women give men life and therefore 'sense' (ll. 25–6). Mr F's speaker then goes on to say that 'Tis Female Souls shall then appear / The most unsullied, bright and clear' (ll. 97–8); as with Sowerham and Munda, the claim is that women are superior. An interesting note is that Greer et al. (1988: 309) suspect the entire work is by a male author, but it seems just as plausible to argue that the Young Lady is just that: a young lady. One should, however, still be suspicious of the true identities of Messers F and H. (It is worth noting that the tone of the poems is similar to that found in Mary Astell's poetry written in the 1680s.) For the first time, a defence of women is doubly voiced, with both male and female speakers.

Sarah Fyge Egerton published a work also entitled 'The Triumphs of Female Wit' in 1703, although she uses heroic couplets in it and shows no interest in Pindaric odes, which probably removes her from consideration as the author of the earlier work. Egerton also published *The Female Advocate*, which has a polemical tone closer to that of the *querelle des femmes* writers. For example, her poem opens with the epithet 'Blas-

phemous Wretch', immediately engaging in abuse of a masculine attacker. Like Sowernam and Munda, Egerton will clearly refute the argument that women are prideful, lustful and inconstant. Her argument, like the pamphleteers', addresses the problem of Eve. For Egerton, as with Sowernam and Munda, Eve is superior to man because

Woman she had a far nobler Birth
For when the Dust was purify'd by Heaven,
Made into Man, and Life unto it given,
Then the Almighty and All-wise God said,
That Woman of that Species should be made
(ll. 27–31)

Since the dust that made man had been purified in the process of making him, woman was that much better and nobler. Egerton goes on to praise women's constancy, saying that 'they often men excell' (l. 127). At the end of the poem Egerton laments that woman has been made the scapegoat, when men themselves have been just as sinful and 'sharers of Impiety' (p. 23). Thus, defences of Eve continued late in the period.

Chudleigh's *The Ladies Defence* was more influential than either *The Triumphs of Female Wit* or *The Female Advocate*. Its form is slightly different from the other two; while *The Triumphs of Female Wit* is a series of Pindaric odes and *The Female Advocate* is an extended verse argument against women's inferiority, *The Ladies Defence* is a dialogue between Sir John Brute, Sir William Loveall, Melissa and a Parson. Sir John Brute, the host, is clearly on the side of male superiority; he calls wives 'Furies' (Ezell 1993: l. 16) and congratulates Sir William Loveall's bachelorhood (ibid.: l. 24). The Parson, by his own admission, teaches the church's doctrine: that the wife is to obey and please her husband (ibid.: l. 58). Sir William Loveall is the male defender of women. The main female character, Melissa, is of course the female defender. Again, this defence of women is doubly voiced. We see Melissa's chagrin from the outset, when she asks 'Must Men command and we alone obey / As if design'd for Arbitrary Sway?' (ibid.: l. 64). Already she challenges patriarchal conventions and men's domineering ways. Melissa, like the young lady from *The Triumphs of Female Wit*, argues for the education of women on the grounds of women's equality. She says that men think women are happy if they know how 'to Work, to Dance, and Dress . . . As if we were for nothing else design'd' (ibid.: ll. 545, 547). But if women were not just designed for 'work, dance and dress', Melissa asserts, then their minds can handle other thoughts too. While these comments sue for women's equality, she also reminds men that they are not quite as superior as they think they are. Later in the dialogue she, like Egerton, reminds men that they are sinful as well, so they must 'live those Sermons you to others Preach' (ibid.: l. 806).

These verse defences tend to be longer poems and, of necessity, somewhat programmatic. They certainly point to the prominence of women poets in this period, such as Aphra Behn and Anne Finch, Countess of Winchelsea, and their form and approach is much closer to the satiric verse epistles of the eighteenth century than to

the lyrics of the seventeenth. In the later seventeenth century the catalogue form so loved by earlier writers fades away, while the harsh tone of the polemics is softened. Yet the topics discussed in defences of women remain: the guilt of Eve, the relative merits of men and women, and the education of women.

Finally, at the end of the century, Mary Astell writes to defend women in a new way (see chapter 15, this volume, for a full discussion of Astell). Her work attacks as well as defends, urging a rejection of the masculine world and its values. For Astell, at least, the central issue was affiliation with other women. Thus in *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* she seeks segregation of women from men in an academy that will provide autonomy. Gone is any suggestion that women should study languages like Latin, Greek or Hebrew, attaining masculine skills if they wished to compete in the educational world. Astell refuses to compete, withdrawing instead from a system she regards as inherently unjust. While such arguments are novel, they may suggest a return to the old essentialism and repudiate the playful voicing that implicitly interrogated the construction of gender. And although Astell breaks new ground in defending women, she too considers the same topics as other defences when she remarks that for women a retreat for education 'will be the introducing you into such a *Paradise* as your Mother *Eve* forfeited, . . . Here are no Serpents to deceive you' and 'Men will resent it, to have . . . Women invited to tast of that Tree of Knowledge they have so long unjustly monopoliz'd' (*A Serious Proposal to the Ladies*: 67, 87). For women, the best defence against calumny remained education.

See also WOMEN AND WRITING; AEMILIA LANYER, *SALVE DEUS REX JUDAEORUM*; MARY ASTELL, *CRITIC OF THE MARRIAGE CONTRACT/SOCIAL CONTRACT ANALOGUE*

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A COMPANION TO

EARLY MODERN
WOMEN'S WRITING

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