BETTY TRAVITSKY

The Lady Doth Protest: Protest in the Popular Writings of Renaissance Englishwomen

DURING the English Renaissance (roughly 1500–1640), the predominantly Catholic Christian-humanists of the circle of Sir Thomas More and the slightly later Protestant religious reformers conceived of woman as a full human being with spiritual and intellectual potential.[1] The result of this new respect was Englishwomen of types unimaginable in medieval, Christian Europe.[2] The new types of Englishwomen tended to be of a particular kind because humanism came late to England and consequently became coupled there with questions of religious reform.[3] Women in England—to a much higher degree than those in the earlier Renaissance in Southern Europe—were educated to fulfill specific private responsibilities, in accordance with humanist and reformed ideas.[4] There was little interest in England in liberating women from the private sphere or incorporating them into the public or professional world.[5] Instead, women's domestic piety was encouraged. Women were taught to run their homes decorously and to raise their children properly.[6]

Considered from a slightly different perspective, Renaissance English ideals concerning women, or, more accurately, Tudor and Stuart ideals,

1. Sherrin Marshall Wyntjes, "Women in the Reformation Era," *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal and Claudia Koonz (Boston, Mass., 1977), pp. 170–71.

2. A contemporary roll call of these women is provided in William Bercher (Barker), *A Dysputatacion off the Nobylyte off Wymen . . .* (written, London, 1559; first printed by Charles Brinsley Marley, owner of the mss.), ed. R. Warwick Bond (London, 1904). They are discussed by Myra Reynolds, *The Learned Lady in England, 1650–1760* (Boston, Mass., 1920), pp. 1–45; Pearl Hogrefe, *Tudor Women, Commoners and Queens* (Ames, Iowa, 1975). A remark by William Wotton is also illuminating: "[T]here are no Accounts in History of so many very great Women in any one Age, as are to be found between the years 15[00] and 1600" (*Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* [1694], p. 350).

3. Dorothy Gardiner, *English Girlhood at School* (London, 1929), p. 170.

4. Juliet Dusinberre, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (London, 1977), pp. 199–231.

5. Ruth Kelso, *Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance* (Urbana, Ill., 1956), p. 1 and passim.

6. Chilton Powell, *English Domestic Relations, 1485–1653* (New York, 1917), pp. 169–76; Louis B. Wright, *Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1935), pp. 201–04.

were ambivalent since they recognized women's need for intellectual and religious development but maintained traditional barriers against women's legal and social equality with men. These barriers included limitations on public freedom of action and on public rights (particularly for the feme covert), and the double standard of restraints on women's sexual behavior, both of which were reinforced by the secular and church courts.[7] Reform-oriented protests against fundamental legal inequality were still unthinkable. At most, an unusual male writer might champion women's need to know the laws pertaining to them.[8]

With the new humanism, and reform theories, and with Elizabeth I to support them, Renaissance women—first noblewomen and eventually middle-class women as well—wrote over one hundred works of varying types and lengths.[9] Most of these works were religious: many were prayers, meditations, and confessions. With three exceptions, the women who wrote them conformed to Renaissance conventions concerning women, except insofar as they dared to write at all.[10] Moreover, the great majority of these writings were staid, even when they dealt with controversial subjects, and they were aimed at an elite audience.[11]

In contrast, the six works of protest apparently written by middle-class women[12] which are the subject of this essay, and which range from mildly satirical verses to turbulent polemics, were all aimed at a popular

7. Frederick W. Maitland and Sir Frederick Pollock, *History of English Law Before the Time of Edward II,* second ed. (Cambridge, Eng., 1923), I, 482–85; Keith Thomas, "The Double Standard," *Journal of the History of Ideas,* 20 (1959), esp. pp. 195–203. A lucid account of the way in which the two court systems could reinforce each other is given by Barbara Harris, "Marriage Sixteenth Century Style: Elizabeth Stafford and the Third Duke of Norfolk," *Journal of Social History,* 15: 3 (1981), pp. 371–82.

8. T. E., *The Lawes resolutions of womens rights: Or, The Lawes Provision for Woemen* (1632), notes that "Women onely Women . . . have nothing to do in constituting Lawes, or in hearing them interpreted at lectures, leets or charges, and yet they stand strictly tyed to mens establishments; little or nothing excused by ignorance, mee thinkes it were pitty and impiety any longer to hold from them such Customes, Lawes, and Statues, as are in maner, proper, or principally belonging to them" (I, sig. B1v).

9. This phenomenon constitutes a major change from the medieval period. See Betty Travitsky, ed. *Paradise of Women* (Westport, Conn., 1981), pp. 3–5.

10. The three exceptions were Anne Askew, Mary Stuart, and Elizabeth Cary; see Travitsky, chapters 4, 5, and 6. Renaissance women writers constantly expressed their sense of overstepping themselves by writing.

11. Therefore Aemilia (Bassano) Lanyer, who wrote a feminist poem, is not included here, nor is Anne (Edgecumbe) Trefusis, although she wrote a partisan poem on religious conflict, nor Margaret Tyler, who prefaced a popular romance which she had translated with an appeal to justify her working with secular material.

12. In each case there is reason to believe that the writer is a woman from the middle class: in

audience. In some ways each work demonstrates the influence of the early English humanists and the slightly later Protestant religious reformers. Most of these women, for example, cite the Bible to substantiate their points, and demonstrate an interest in classical civilization by their pervasive use of literary allusions, and even in some cases of quotations in Greek and Latin. Although written from the inherently weak position of the "other," the writings also echo the insistence of the male theorists on a single standard of sexual behavior.[13] Put another way, they indicate, as Ian Maclean has stated, "the link between feminist writing and intellectual debate about woman [which] is found . . . throughout Europe at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth."[14] Written between 1567 and 1640, during both the strongly supportive late Tudor period and the less enthusiastic Stuart years, these works protest the traducing of women and the double standard with varying degrees of humor, moderation, and humility.

As historical artifacts and early expressions of feminism, the protests have received some attention.[15] Historically, they demonstrate that hard-headed businessmen would print them, and therefore that the popular reading public, to whom they were addressed, was thought ready to examine the woman's point of view. But the extent of this public interest was limited, since none of the six works reached a second edition, despite its novelty, while the works of the men to which each

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some cases her identity is known; in others internal evidence in the text points to a female writer from a middle-class background. Charlotte Kohler does not discuss the evidence, but gives a summary statement: "no set piece of defense . . . has been traced to the pen of a woman of noble or even of exceptionally gentle birth" ("Elizabethan Woman of Letters, the extent of her literary activity" [Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 1936], 279–80). I believe that individual remarks in each work and the collective stance of the writers point to female authorship. Nonetheless, the case cannot be proved for a pseudonymous writer. But at the very least the use of a female persona to argue seriously against the abuse of women demonstrates a growing attention to the position of women. See below, p. 28 and note 45.

13. See John K. Yost, "The value of married life for the social order in the early English renaissance," *Societas* 6: 1 (Winter, 1976), 25–39; and Dusinberre, pp. 51–62.

14. Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman* (Cambridge, Eng., 1980), p. 91. Further quotations from Maclean's book will be identified in the text and paginated parenthetically. See also John Peter, *Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 114–17.

15. E.g. Kohler, pp. 240–81; Ruth Hughey, "Cultural Interests of Women in England, from 1524–1640, Indicated in the Writings of the Women" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 1932), pp. 38, 50, 83–86, and 94; Wright, pp. 465–507; Helen Andrews Kahin, "Jane Anger and John Lyly," *Modern Language Quarterly,* 8 (1947), 31–35; Carroll Camden, *The Elizabethan Woman* (New York, 1952), pp. 241–71.

replied often reached multiple editions.[16] Although protests also testify clearly to the self-confidence of women writers willing to engage in public controversy, at least half of them wrote pseudonymously.

The writings have also received some notice in discussions of the perennial *querelle des femmes* which raged throughout the Renaissance and which flared up in the mid-sixteenth century, at the turn of the century, and in the second decade of the seventeenth century.[17] But I believe that the greatest significance of this group of six complaints, which attack the double standard and the general abuse of women in sometimes high-spirited, scurrilous, or wistful, but basically serious and subversive ways, lies in their feminine differences from the polemic writings produced by the men engaged in the literary war of the sexes. These differences, the subject of this essay, have not been noticed before.

In contrast to male polemics, which range between attacks on women as necessary evils and the contention that their limited "goodness" (of its own kind) is inferior to the essential worth of man, female counterattacks variously assert woman's limited goodness, her essential equality with man, and even her superiority over him.[18] This last position, however, is a rhetorical stance, a method of humorous subversion which corroborates the essential seriousness of the women, but is never sustained throughout an entire work.[19] I shall consider these six works as a

16. It is generally true, as Francis Lee Utley has stated, that "defenders have little to say beyond stating sober truth," and that their writings tend to be "more long-winded, less unified, and less witty and amusing," than those of satiric attackers. (*The Crooked Rib* . . . [Columbus, Ohio, 1944], p. 50). But the writings of these women have particular vigor and poignancy which often render them unusually interesting and witty; that they were not reprinted is no reflection on their inherent merit. Utley does not notice Isabella Whitney, the only woman writer to fall into his time period, and the earliest of the women to be considered here.

17. R. M. Alden divides Renaissance satire into three periods: 1540–1590; 1590–1600, especially 1597–1600; and 1613–1625 (*The Rise of Formal Satire in England under Classical Influence* [Philadelphia, Pa., 1899; rpt. New York, 1961], p. 238). Attacks on women are often satirical in tone if not in form, and while Alden's first period should be refined for a general discussion of polemic against women, the other periods remain useful for our purposes. There was one major peak in polemic on women around 1541, beginning with the appearance of the *Scholehouse of Women* (see Utley, pp. 71–74 and 251–57). This period coincides with what Samuel Marion Tucker describes as the beginning of "a new age" for English satire (*Verse Satire in England before the Renaissance* [New York, 1966], p. 227). The period beginning around 1560 should be associated with the polemic by John Knox and his opponents following Elizabeth I's accession in 1558. Utley (p. 73) and Wright (pp. 470–73, 488) associate it with the commercial instincts of the printers John Kynge and Abraham Vele, and Harold Stein also discusses it ("Six Tracts about Women: A volume in the British Museum," *Library*, 4th Series, 15 [1934–1935], 38–48). John Peter (*Complaint and Satire in Early English Literature* [Oxford, 1956]) distinguishes still further the years 1580–1600 as "crucial in the 'Satyre'" (pp. 106–09). Since the first protest by an Englishwoman appeared in 1567, it is enough

group of moderate feminist defenses against attacks on female virtue. Because they are little-known, I have incorporated generous quotations from the works in my discussion.

To begin, I would like to quote a few statements from Maclean's recent and valuable study of "the notion of woman to be found in [scholarly] Renaissance texts," a notion which he shows to have undergone "less change . . . throughout the Renaissance than intellectual ferment and empirical enquiry of various kinds might lead one to expect" (p. 1). Maclean states that "From the earliest times, and in the most far-flung cultures, the notion of female has in some sense been opposed to that of male, and aligned with other opposites" (p. 2). He traces in Renaissance texts what he terms an "Aristotelian taxonomy of opposition [with underlying] . . . Pythagorean dualities, which link, without explanation, woman with imperfection, left, dark, evil and so on. These emerge most obviously in medicine, but are implied in theology and ethics also. Although they are nowhere explicitly defended, they may nonetheless be the most accurate indicator in anthropological terms of the status of woman in Renaissance society and culture. The connection of woman with imperfection and evil may well have deeper mystical than scholastic roots" (pp. 87–88). Such dialectical thinking is not surprising when we remember that traditional male polemic is diatribe, whether the ultimate root is scholastic, mystic, perverse, or natural.

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for our purposes to distinguish periods of intense polemic activity beginning around 1560, 1590, and 1613, and to remember that the first decade of the seventeenth century is associated with the war of the theaters. Satiric drama, often featuring satirically conceived women, flourished in that war, and Alden attributes "a noticeable blank" in the proliferation of other satirical writing in this decade to dramatic abundance (p. 238). In her interesting new study, *Women and the English Renaissance* (Urbana, 1984), Linda Woodbridge describes many polemic materials about women, written between 1540 and 1620, as part of a "formal controversy." Her analysis of the rebuttals to Swetnam is consonant with mine. She does not discuss Whitney, and mentions Tattlewell only in passing. We differ in our readings of Jane Anger's *Protection.* Perhaps she would agree that the six works described here form a grouping of their own, and cannot be characterized a part of her construct.

18. Kelso discusses these four standpoints, but she does not consider the group of women's protests which are the subject of this essay.

19. I have long felt that the humor used by these women writers is central to their intention to subvert. Maclean states that the assertion of woman's superiority "is paradoxical in the Renaissance except in certain neoplatonist contexts," that "the humour may indicate the impossibility of discussing in serious terms the proposition of woman's equality, and [that it] therefore represents a strategy of discourse which is subversive in intention" (pp. 90–91; see also p. 86).

The more moderate nature of the female protests, I believe, derives from the writers' sense of their own capacities and of their actual experience of life. The difference in approach is clear in the earliest of the six writings, a poem included in *The Copy of a Letter . . .* (1567) by Isabella Whitney (fl. 1567–1573), apparently the first declared professional woman poet in England.[20] The collection deals with the theme of faithlessness in love, and the individual poems are thrusts in a traditional literary *debat* dealing with the relative fickleness of men and women.[21] The work was issued after the second sixteenth-century period of popular controversy concerning women had begun, and probably was intended to capture a popular audience interested in the debate. "A Letter . . . to her unconstant Lover," Whitney's earliest known poem, is written in thirty-five four-line stanzas of alternating four- and three-accent lines, rhyming *abab*. It breaks with the *querelle* tradition in an obvious way, for the "given" of the tradition was its male attacks on and defenses of women; before Whitney, English women had not ventured even moderate criticism of men.[22] In this relatively good-humored complaint a jilted lover compares herself to the subordinated woman of antiquity, who also often suffered from male callousness and the double standard. But the weakness of the female position is implicit from the title, a "Complaint," through the last lines, which express Whitney's good wishes to her unfaithful lover.

The opening lines underscore male freedom. Whitney, who had

20. Isabella Whitney, *The Copy of a Letter, lately written in meeter, by a Yonge Gentilwomen: to her unconstant Lover. With an admonition to al yong Gentilwomen, and to all other mayds in general to beware of mennes flattery. By Is. W. Newly joyned to a Loveletter sent by a Bacheler (a most faithfull Lover) to an unconstant and faithles mayden.* (1567), STC 25439. Ent. 1566–1567. For a discussion of Isabella Whitney, see Betty Travitsky, "The 'Wyll and Testament' of Isabella Whitney," *English Literary Renaissance*, 10 (Winter, 1980), 76–94.

21. The poem falls within the tradition recently defined by Ellen Moers as "loving heroinism [or] . . . the woman writer's heroic resolve to write herself, as men for centuries had tried to do, the love story from the woman's point of view," commonly in the form of "verse letters of love that a woman writes to a man" (*Literary Women, the Great Writers* [New York, 1976], pp. 147 and 164).

22. The great earlier protests had been written by Christine de Pisan, some of whose defenses had been translated into English at the beginning of the sixteenth century. (*Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes,* tr. Brian Ansley [1521]; *L'Epistre au Dieu d'Amours,* tr. Thomas Hoccleve (1402, Huntington MS HM 111), printed in *Hoccleve's Minor Poems,* ed. F. J. Furnivall, *Early English Text Society Extra Series, LXI* (1892; rpt. 1937), pp. 72–91. She is discussed by Utley, pp. 57–64. More recent discussions can be found in Diane Bornstein, *Distaves and Dames* (Delmar, New York, 1978), xi–xvii, and in Susan Groag Bell, "Christine de Pizan (1364–1430): Humanism and the Problem of a Studious Woman," *Feminist Studies,* 3 (1977); 173–84.

apparently been waiting patiently on the sidelines, writes to protest her former lover's initiative: "As close as you your wedig [sic] kept / yet now the trueth I here:" (sig. A2). The forced passivity of women is underlined again when the poet, in feeble hope that the rumors she has heard are false, suggests, "then take me to your wife" (sig. A2v). But her resigned dependence on her lover's actions is repeated several times:

> for this I seeke,
> wishes may not attaine it
> Therfore may hap to me what shall,
> and I cannot refraine it. (sig. A5)

Furthermore, she refers to her successful rival, and to herself, in parallel terms,

> But if I can not please your minde,
> for wants that rest in me:
> Wed whom you list, I am content
> your refuse for to be. (sig. A4)

In contrast to male writers who tar all women by the same brush, Whitney does not brand all men false. She does not generalize, as R. W. does in his companion piece, "Against the wilfull Inconstancie of his deare Foe E. T. . . .,"[23] when he warns other men to beware of all women:

> Frequent not Womens company
> but see thou from them swarve
> For thy Rewarde shall be but smal,
> whatever thou deserve.
> Take heede for thou maist come in thrall
> Before that thou beware:
> And when thou art entangled once
> thou canst not flie the snare. (sig. B3)

Unlike R. W., Whitney confines her observations to known cases of male inconstancy:

> Let Theseus be, let Jason passe,
> let Paris also scape:
> That brought destruction unto Troy

23. R. W. "Against the wilfull inconstancie of his deare Foe E. T. Whiche Example may justly be a sufficient warnyng for all yongmen to beware the fained Fidelytie of unconstant Maydens" in Whitney (sigs. B1–B3v).

all through the Grecian Rape (sig. A3v).
And unto me a Troylus be,
if not you may compare:
With any of these parsons that
above expressed are. (sig. A4)

In a witty thirty-two stanza addendum to her poem, "An admonition by the Auctor, to all yong Gentilwomen: And to al other Maids being in Love" (sigs. A5v–A8v), written in the same form as the body of the "Letter," additional strength is brought to this woman poet's warning to other women against male falsehood. Her advice reverses conventional ideas, as in this striking instance:

Beware of fayre and painted talke,
beware of flattering tonges:
The Mermaides do pretend no good,
for all their pleasant Songs! (sig. A6)

Yet Whitney's advice is practical, not declamatory, and it suggests painful experience, rather than rhetoric, by virtue of its restraint:

Trust not a man at the fyrst sight!
but trye him well before:
I wish al Maids within their breasts
to kepe this thing in store. (sig. A6)

Finally, Whitney touches on a point which recurs in every one of the writings to be discussed here: women's credulity, the weakness which renders them easy prey to men. Whitney discusses Scylla, Oenone, and "Phillis," several mythological women who trusted too far, to their own grief, and warns that,

like Leander there be fewe,
therfore in time take heede:
And alwaies trie before ye trust,
so shall you better speede. (sig. A7v)

At the bittersweet close of the poem, Whitney compares herself to a fish lucky enough to escape the hook, who has thereby learned to beware of snares,

now he pries on every baite,
suspecting styll that pricke:
(For to lye hid in every thing)
wherewith the fishers strike,

. . . . . .

And I, who was deceived late,
by ones unfaithfull teares:
Trust now for to beware, if that
I live this hundred yeares. (sig. A8v)

Unlike Whitney's "Letter," the remainder of the protests to be considered here are in prose, although each includes at least one satiric poem. These begin at a time when the prose pamphlet was undergoing changes usually associated with the vivid, impudent Martin Marprelate tracts, and particularly with their confident, informal tone and their deliberate use of hyperbole and name-calling, a time, in C. S. Lewis' words, when "English*men* [italics mine] learned to write."[24] It is disappointing that Lewis confined his attention to English men, mentioning neither Isabella Whitney nor Jane Anger (pseud. fl. 1589), the latter apparently the first woman in England to have written a feminist pamphlet, and the only other known sixteenth-century English woman writer of a popular protest.[25]

Jane Anger, her Protection for Women . . .[26] does not appear, like Whitney's poem, together with an opposing piece, but as the running title makes clear, it is a reply defending women "*against the Scandelous reports of a late Surfeiting Lover,*" a work which Anger later describes as "newe" (sig. B1v), and which I believe she names as *Boke his surfeit in love* (sigs. C2v and C4).[27] Anger's subject is men's sexual trickery and its effects on women, and her approach suggests that she was from the middle ranks of society.[28]

24. C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century, Excluding Drama* (Oxford, 1954), p. 418. The subject of the development of polemic style is discussed also by James Sutherland, *English Satire, The Clark Lectures, 1956* (Cambridge, Eng., 1967), pp. 33–38.

25. The name may not have been a pseudonym. According to Kahin, "Miss Ruth Hughey has discovered two Jane Angers living in England in 1589, either of whom might have written the pamphlet" (p. 31, n. 3). I have been unable to locate this statement but I find it suggestive.

26. *Jane Anger, her Protection for Women. To defend them against the Scandelous reports of a late Surfeiting Lover, and all other like Venerians, that complaine so to bee overcloyed with womens kindness, written by Ja: A Gent* (1589). STC 644. Jones had a hand in printing many popular works such as Isabella Whitney's (above, n. 20).

27. No longer extant. Listed in the *Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640,* ed. E. Arber, 5 vols. (London; 1875), II, 238. Although Kahin narrowed the works to which Anger replied to two—Lyly's *Eupheus his Censure to Philautus* or the anonymous *Boke his Surfeyt in Love*—and decided for Lyly, I believe her decision mistaken since Anger mentions *Boke* by full title.

28. Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York, 1977), pp. 603–04, and Thomas, p. 207, both comment on the greater freedom of behavior among the lower classes of society; such freedom is compatible with Anger's rather cavalier remarks.

Her prefaces are of particular interest, since, like Whitney's "Admonition," they are directed to women. In the first, addressed "To the Gentlewomen of ENGLAND," she puns that "it was *ANGER* that did write" her work, and she craves "the protection of your selves, and the judgement of the cause to the censures of your just mindes" (sig. A1). In the second preface, addressed "To all Women in genenerall [sic], and gentle Reader whatsoever," she indicts "the falshoode of men, whose minds goe oft a madding & whose tongues can not so soone bee wagging, but straight they fal a railing."[29] Of her addressees she asks help "in defence of my Willingnes," since she wonders whether "there [were] ever any so abused, so slaundered, so railed upon or so wickedly handeled undeservedly as are we women?" (sig. A1v). To stop men's abuses, she asks, "shall not *Anger* stretch the vaines of her braines, the stringes of her fingers, and the listes of her modestie to answere their surfeitings?" (sig. A2v). The following angry hyperbole need not have embarrassed Thomas Nashe: "O *Paules steeple* and *Charing Crosse*: A halter hold al such persons! Let the streames of the channels in *London* streates run so swiftly, as they may be able alone to carrie them from that sanctuarie. Let the stones be as Ice, the soales of their shooes as glasse, the waies steep like *AEtna* & every blast a whirlwind puffed out of *Boreas* his long throat, that these may hasten their passage to the *Devils* haven" (sig. A1v).

Anger begins the text itself with a comment—characteristic of the prose writings of all the women—about her opponent's imprecise, illogical, and often mistake-ridden writing. Like the women who would follow her, she protests against the traditional ideas of well-schooled but essentially illogical men: "The desire that every man hath to shewe his true vaine in writing is unspeakable, . . . [with] no care . . . of the matter; they run so into Rethorick, as often times they overrun the boundes of their own wits" (sig. B1).

Less aware of her social limitations than Whitney and Tyler, Anger questions men's presumption in penning their many attacks on women, attributing it to the supposed "weaknesse of our wits, and our honest bashfulnesse, by reason whereof they [men] suppose that there is not one amongst us who can, or dare reproove their slanders and false reproches . . . they think we wil not write to reproove their lying lips" (sig. B1). Like Whitney, Anger insists that "The greatest fault that doth remaine in us women is, that we are too credulous" (sig. B2v). Anger states that

29. These lines are printed as prose.

lascivious men play on female credulity and, in a witty comparison that will recur in one of the later works, describes men as "so like to Buls, that it is no marvell though the Gods do metamorphoze some of them, to give warning to the rest, if they coulde thinke so of it, for some of them will follow the smocke as Tom Bull will runne after a towne Cowe" (sig. B2). But this situation is not really funny, given the double standard, for, "if we cast our reckoning at the end of the yeare, wee shall finde that our losses exceede their gaines, which are innumerable" (sig. C2v). Anger gives a witty new twist to a truism undeniable in her time, that "it is most manifest that the man is the head of the woman, and that therfore we ought to be guided by them" (sig. B2v), glossing this conventional religious idea with the perhaps unconvincing statement that "The Gods . . . having thoroughly viewed the wonderfull vertues wherewith women are inriched, least they should provoke us to pride, . . . bestowed the supremacy over us to man, that of that Cockscombe he might onely boast" (sig. B2v). To men's traditional roll calls of evil women, she responds with a list of evil men, asking, "shal not Nero with others innumerable, & therefore unnameable joine handes with them and lead the daunce?" (sig. B3v).

For all the force of these early sallies, Anger's actual attack begins with an explanation, from the biblical account of Creation, of "howe and in what, they that are our worst enemies, are both inferiour unto us, & most beholden unto our kindenes" (sig. C1). The familiar answer is that the material from which woman was formed was more refined than that from which man had been taken. Anger departs from the more common Renaissance stance that woman's origin in Adam's rib demonstrated her essential nobility or her equality to, not her superiority over, man. With varying degrees of vigor and wit, Anger shows woman's importance to man and the importance which men themselves ascribe to woman's wit and other virtues. She repeats her arguments about men who cause women to fall, and who, in blaming women for their fall, inadvertently blame themselves for their lust, "Wherin they resemble Envie, who will be contented to loose one of his eies that another might have both his pulled out" (sig. C4). Anger's moderation deflects her anger when she writes, "I have set down unto you (which are of mine owne Sex) the subtil dealings of untrue meaning men: not that you should condemne al men, but to the end that you may take heed of the false hearts of al & stil reproove the flattery which remaines in all" (sig. C4).

She returns again and again to her "burden" concerning female credulity and male deceitfulness, finally warning women, in an extended analogy, that, "At the end of mens faire promises there is a Laberinth, & therefore ever hereafter stoppe your eares when they protest friendship, lest they come to an end before you are aware whereby you fal without redemption. The path which leadeth therunto, is Mans wit, and the miles ends are marked with these trees, Follie, Vice, Mischiefe, Lust, Deceite, & Pride. These to deceive you shall bee clothed in the raimentes of Fancie, Vertue, Modestie, Love, Truemeaning, and Handsomnes . . . Therefore take heed of it which you shall doe, if you shun mens flattery, the forerunner of our undoing" (sigs. C4v–D1). We cannot help being touched when Anger associates herself with the women to whom she is writing, "mans flattery bites secretly, from which I pray God keepe you and me too. Amen!" (sig. D1).

In Stuart times, under a monarch who asked of one erudite maiden, "But can she spin?"[30] attitudes about women's abilities became less positive. The renowned Tudor women prodigies, most eminently Elizabeth I herself, became a largely extinct breed. After a decade (1590–1600) of considerable literary controversy about women, another decade (1600–1610) of war among the theaters in which satire on women was an important motif, and amid an outburst of renewed attacks on women bolstered in part by the Overbury scandal,[31] misogynist sentiments, expressed in traditional literary attacks on women, rose in number. The defenses of women composed by women grew more pointed.

In 1615 a particularly virulent misogynist prose tract by Joseph Swetnam called *The Arraignment of Lewde, idle, froward, and unconstant women* appeared in London.[32] In 1617 it reached a fourth edition, and three women writers composed individual answers to Swetnam's attack.[33] Only the first of these women, Rachel Speght (fl. 1617–1621), apparently

30. Cited by William J. Thoms, ed. *Anecdotes and Traditions, Illustrative of English History and Literature derived from ms. sources* (London, 1839), p. 125. Thoms quotes from the *Commonplace Book of John Collet* (1633), p. 129.

31. Alden, p. 328; Wright, p. 484.

32. *THE ARRAIGNMENT Of Lewde, idle, froward, and unconstant women: Or the vanities of them, choose you whether. With a Commendacion of wise, vertuous and and [sic] honest Women. Pleasant for married Men, profitable for Young Men; and hurtful to none* (1615). STC 23533–23542.

33. The STC describes two pamphlets by men as answers to Swetnam as well: Daniel Tuvil, *Asylum Veneris, OR A SANCTUARY FOR LADIES Justly PROTECTING THEM, their virtues, and sufficiencies from the foule aspersions and forged imputations of traducing Spirits* (1616), STC 24393; and Christopher Newstead, *An APOLOGY FOR WOMEN: OR, Womens Defence.* (1620). STC 18508.

the daughter of Thomas Speght, the editor of Chaucer, used her own name in publishing her reply, *A Mouzell for Melastomus,* which was coupled with *Certaine Quaeres to the Bayter of women.*[34] Like Jane Anger and Isabella Whitney, Speght addressed her work to other women. Her first preface is directed "To all vertuous Ladies Honourable or Worshipfull, and to all other of Hevahs sex fearing God, and loving their just reputation," to whom, in the religious spirit which permeates the main body of the tract, Speght wishes "grace and peace through Christ, to eternall glory" (sig. A3). With repeated apologies for her temerity in writing, "though yong, and the unworthiest of thousands," Speght explains that she could not allow Swetnam to remain unanswered, "least if his unjust imputations should continue without answere, he might insult and account himselfe a victor; . . . [and] the vulgar ignorant might have beleeved his Diabolicall infamies to be infallible truths, not to bee infringed" (sigs. A3–A3v). Despite this disclaimer, her polemic is strong. She inveighs wittily, for example, against "some [who] speake evil of others, not that the defamed deserve it, but because through custome and corruption of their hearts they cannot speake well of any. . . . [Therefore Swetnam must be seen] according to the portraiture which he hath drawne of himselfe, his Writings being the very embleme of a monster" (sig. A4). She explains that her work is dedicated to all women, since "the *Bayter of Women* hath opened his mouth against noble as well as ignoble; against the rich as well as the poore" (sig. A4v).

A second preface, in a very different tone, is addressed "Not unto the veriest Ideot that *ever set Pen to Paper, but to the* Cynicall Bayter of Women, or, *metamorphosed Misogunes,* Joseph Swetnam" (sig. B1v). In it Speght blasts Swetnam's "mingle mangle invective against Women" (sig. B2), charging specifically that he often fails in "Grammer sense" (sig. B2), and that he is guilty of "dishonoring of God by palpable blasphemy, . . . of Scripture, . . . and opprobrious speeches against that excellent worke of Gods hands, which in his great love he perfected for the comfort of man" (sig. B2v). Finally Speght attacks Swetnam for "condemning all [women] in generall, . . . excepting no sort of Women" (sig. B3), although his title promised "a distinction of good from badde, [and] . . . a Commendation of wise, vertuous, and honest women" (sig. B3).

34. *A Mouzell for Melastomus, the Cynical Bayter of, and foule mouthed Barker against Evahs sex. Or an Apologeticall Answere to that Irreligious and Illiterate Pamphlet made by Jo. Sw. and by him Intituled, The Arraignment of Women* (1617). STC 23058. Archer was connected, as well, with the Swetnam pamphlet.

The invective of Speght's preface, however, is altogether distinct from the tenor of the main body of the work, which is a sweet-tempered tract defining nobility and celebrating the creation of woman, in which "the resplendent love of God toward man appeared, in taking care to provide him [Adam] an helper before hee saw his owne want, and in providing him such an helper as should bee meete for him" (sig. C1v). Speght's account is divided into sections which analyze the nature of man and woman from the accounts in Genesis, weigh the relative guilt of both sexes, and contain arguments for the excellence of women on the basis of "efficient," "materiall," "formall," and "finall" causes (sig. D1). Herein it effectually subverts school-terms to feminist purposes. The tract is eloquent on the domestic ideals which were the subject of many male writers during the Renaissance,[35] and is based, like them, chiefly on the Bible. Speght's commendation of companionate marriage is also moving: "Marriage is a merri-age, and this worlds Paradise, where there is mutuall love" (sig. D3v). There is but one mild reference to Swetnam in this entire section of the tract (sigs. C1–E2), in a moderate, reasonable context which says a great deal for the genuineness of her protest,

> least I should seeme too partiall in praysing women so much as I have (though no more then warrant from Scripture doth allow) I adde to the premises, that I say not, all women are vertuous, for then they should be more excellent then men, sith of *Adams* sonnes there was *Cain* as well as *Abel*, and of *Noahs, Cham* as well as *Sem*; so that of men as of women, there are two sorts, namely, good and bad, which in *Mathew* the five and twenty chapter, are comprehended under the name of *Sheepe* and *Goats* . . . But farre be it from any one, to condemne the righteous with the wicked, or good women with the bad (as the Bayter of women doth:) (sig. E1v).

In the next section of her pamphlet, Speght returns to the hyperbolic, self-confident prose invective which was still new in England, and considers the trait of ingratitude, beginning with "the ingratitude of those men toward God, that dare presume to speake and exclaime against *Woman,* whom God did create for mans comfort" (sig. E2v). Her style in both the prefaces and text of this final section of the tract (sigs. F1–G3), is needle-sharp. Speght offers an ironical apology for her seemingly disordered queries and responses to Swetnam, explaining that "the

35. Powell discusses the domestic conduct book, esp. pp. 101–02; early humanist tracts bearing on women and marriage are included in Foster Watson, *Vives and the Renaissance Education of Women* (London, 1912). The great interest in this subject was intensified by the sensational marital difficulties of Henry VIII, and the interest generated by the humanists and Protestant reformers in the woman question.

Beare-bayting of Women, unto which I have framed my Apologeticall answere, . . . beeing . . . a promiscuous mingle mangle, it would admit no such order to bee observed in the answering thereof, as a regular Respousarie [*sic*] requireth" (sig. F1). Moreover, since Swetnam's *Arraignment* is rather "like a Taylers Cushion, that is botcht together of shreddes [and since] a crooked pot-lid well enough fits a wrie-neckt pot, an unfashioned shooe a mis-shapen foote, and an illiterate answere an unlearned irreligious provocation" (sigs. F1–F1v), her answer is sufficient, Speght states.

Speght's series of specific objections to points in Swetnam's text are rather tedious reading today, but her final remarks about Swetnam deserve notice, because they may have inspired the title (and perhaps the format) of the next of the replies to his tract. In an unforgiving final paragraph Speght wishes "unto every such *Misogunes,* a *Tiburne Tiffenie* for curation of his swolne necke, which onely through a Cynicall inclination will not indure the yoke of lawfull Matrimony" (sig. G3).

The next of the replies, *Ester hath hang'd Haman . . .,* was intended to complete Speght's attack which the author, Ester Sowernam (fl. 1617; the pseudonym apparently was chosen for the play on Swetnam), thought an inadequate answer to the *Arraignment*.[36] In her first preface, addressed "To ALL RIGHT HONOUrable, Noble, and worthy Ladies, *Gentlewomen, and others, vertuously disposed, of the Faeminine Sexe,"* Sowernam explains that she was first told of Swetnam's pamphlet when in "*London* this last *Michaelmas* Terme; being at supper amongst friends, where the number of each sexe were equall; As nothing is more usuall for table-talke; there fell out a discourse concerning women, some defending, others objecting against our sex: Upon which occasion, there happened a mention of a Pamphlet entituled *The Arraignment of Women,* which I was desirous to see . . . [but] which when I had superficially runne [it] over, I found the discourse as far off from performing what the Title promised, as I found it scandalous and blasphemous" (sig. A2). She explains that she delayed her initial response, in deference to Speght who

36. *Ester hath hang'd Haman: or an Answere to a lewd Pamphlet, entituled, The Arraignment of Women. With the arraignment of lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant men, and Husbands. Divided into Two Parts. The first proveth the dignity and worthiness of Women, out of divine Testimonies. The second shewing the estimation of the Foe-minine Sexe, in ancient and Pagan times: all which is acknowledged by men themselves in their actions. Written by Ester Sowernam, neither Maide, Wife, nor Widdowe, yet really all, and therefore experienced to defend all* (1617), STC 22974. Sowernam states, for example, "whereas the Maide doth many times excuse her tendernesse of yeares, I found it to be true in the slendernesse of her answer" (sig. A2v). She refers again to Speght on sig. C4v.

was known to be preparing a reply, but, finding the *Mouzell* inadequate, she decided to undertake her "hanging." At a time when women were denied most forms of participation in the legal process (see note 8), it is intriguing that Sowernam (here and later in the pamphlet) relates her movements to the court terms. Equally interesting, if ultimately inexplicable, is her choice of a legal device to handle Swetnam. Her second preface, addressed to London apprentices, suggests that she was of middle-class origin. Was she part of the servant population which descended on London during the busy court sessions? Was she independent-minded, like Whitney, because she was self-supporting? The Greek and Latin phrases and quotations run into her text from time to time suggest a sound education, and her protest, like Whitney's, Anger's, and the others to follow, provides evidence of the trickling down of education for women from the most privileged to the lower classes of Renaissance English society.

Her tone and imaginative responses agree with our sense of her freedom of movement and independence of mind. They agree also with the assurance of her second preface, addressed, most interestingly, "TO ALL WORTHY AND HOPE-full young youths of Great-Brittaine: But respectively to the best disposed and worthy Apprenticees of LONDON," these young men she styles, "*worthy young youths, which are well disposed*" towards and interested in women, because "*[w]hen you have past your minority, or served your Apprenships* [sic] . . . *when you begin the world for your selves, the chiefest thing you looke for is a good Wife* . . . [but] *[i]f you believe him* [Swetnam] *that women are so bad Creatures, what a dangerous and miserable life is marriage? . . . How could you love? nay, how would you loath such a monster, to whom* Joseph Swetnam *poynteth*?" (sig. A3v–A4). Attacking Swetnam rather than merely defending her sex, Sowernam emphasizes her own involvement in the argument and appeals to the good will of members of the opposite sex: "*Some will perhaps say, I am a woman and therefore write more for women then they doe deserve: To whom I answere, if they misdoubt of what I speake, let them impeach my credit in any one particular*" (sig. A4). To Swetnam's "*patched and mishapen hotch-potch*" (sig. A3v), to his breezy acceptance of the double standard, she replies, that "None *are here arraigned, but such olde fornicators as came with full mouth and open cry to Jesus, and brought a woman to him taken in adultery, . . . [But] let them raile against women, who never tempted any woman to be bad*" (sig. A4v).

Despite the above remark and many other citations of scripture, Sowernam is far less parochial than Speght in her allusions, which range

through classical literature even in her Biblical section. Still, she does not eschew traditional religious proofs. She refers to Speght in this section, noting that woman was "created . . . out of a subject refined, as out of a Quintissence: . . . as the Maide, in *her Mussell for Melastomus* hath observed" (sig. B3v). She repeats another point made by Speght when she writes that she knows Swetnam's disposition—that "he is as monstrous as the worke is mishapen" (sig. B1v). She subverts schoolmen's logic when she comments that Swetnam, "undertaking a particular, prosecuteth and persecuteth a generall" (sig. B2v). She uses Latin quotations run into her text, suggesting excellent knowledge of the language, no mean achievement in a woman presumably of the middle class.[37] Finally, even in this section of biblical proofs, Sowernam writes powerful invective and not a sonorous nobility tract like Speght's. The following examples illustrate my point: "Spending and consuming . . . is by this Authour the use for which Women were made. And yet (saith hee in the Argument) *most of them degenerate from the use they were framed unto.* . . . Ergo, *Midasse* doth contradict himselfe. Beside this egregious folly, he runneth into horrible blasphemy" (sigs. B1v–B2). And, "if Woman receaved her crookednesse from the rib, and consequently from the Man, how doth man excell in crookednesse, who hath more of those crooked ribs?" (sig. B2). She misses no opportunity to blast any falsehood, as in her discussion of the fall: "the woman taking view of the Garden, shee was assaulted with a Serpent of the masculine gender" (sig. B4).

Since Sowernam did not lack vigor in her discussion of biblical proofs of the essential goodness of woman, "the courteous and friendly READER," to whom the next section of her tract is directed in still another epistle, may well be surprised to learn that she feels that "in my first Part I have (when I might) strictly observed a religious regard, not to entermingle anything unfitting the gravitie of so respective an Argument" (sig. C4v). She follows in the steps of the sixteenth-century humanists in her "second Part" (sig. C4v), entitled, "At what estimate Women were valued in ancient and former times" (sig. D1).[38] This

37. Examples occur on sigs. B1v, C2, F3, and F4. On sig. F3 she writes, "*Volenti non sit injuria,* hee who is wounded with his owne consent, hath small cause to complaine of anothers wrong: . . . [and] The difference is in the minde, things which are called *Adiaphora,* things indifferent whose qualities have their name from the uses."

38. Watson supplies background and extracts from some humanist texts. Pearl Hogrefe gives useful information in *The Sir Thomas More Circle: a program of ideas and their impact on secular drama* (Urbana, Ill., 1959); see also Travitsky, *Paradise,* pp. 3–13.

compilation begins with Plato's "*Bookes de Legibus,* . . . [and] his so absolute a Common-wealth, [in which he allows them] government of Kingdomes and Common-weales, if they be either borne thereunto by Nature, or seated in government by Election" (sig. D1). Sowernam ranges through mythology to present such benefactresses of humankind as "*Ceres,*" "the nine Muses," "*Carmentis,*" "*Aglaia,*" "*Thalia,*" and "*Enphrosune,*" "*Palestra,*" and "*Proserpina*"; through British myth and history to evoke "valient *Boadicea,*" "devout *Helen* . . . the mother of that religious and great *Constantine,*" "chaste *Aemma* [from] the time of the *Danes,*" "the *Saxons* Queene *Elsgive* the holy widdow," and "the Kings daughter *Edith* a Virgin Saint;" "[s]ince the *Normans* . . . *Elenor* wife to *Edward* the first," "*Philip,* wife to *Edward* the third," . . . "*Margaret* . . . wife to *Henrie* the sixt," "*Margaret* of *Richmond,*" "*Elizabeth,* wife to *Henrie* the seventh," "the [unnamed] happy Mother of our dread Soveraigne [who caused] the two Kingdomes . . . [to be] blessedly conjoyned," and "*Elizabeth* our late Soveraigne, not onely the glory of our Sexe, but a patterne for the best men to imitate" (sigs. D1–D3).

In short, Sowernam summarizes her review by stating that "[d]aily experience, and the common course of Nature, doth tell us that women were by men in those times highly valued" (sig. D3). Furthermore, no matter what the trouble, men still seek "to gaine our good-wil, love, and liking . . . Sutors doe ever in their suites confesse a more worthinesse in the persons to whom they sue, . . . [since] it is naturall . . . for the Female to be better then the Male" (sig. D3–D4). The very vehemence of male assaults on women are therefore a measure of men's high regard for women. She touches upon the double standard in the same original but self-defeating way when she later observes that

> in all offences those which men commit, are made light and as nothing, slighted over; but those which women doe commit, those are made grievous and shamefull, and not without just cause: for where God hath put hatred betwixt the woman and the serpent, it is a foule shame in a woman to carry favour with the devill, to stayne her womanhoode with any of his damnable qualities, that she will shake hands where God hath planted hate (sigs. D4v–E1). . . . If I do grant, that woman [sic] degenerating from the true end of womanhood, proove the greatest offenders, yet in grauting that, I doe thereby prove that women in their creation are the most excellent creatures (sig. E1) . . . which the devill knowing he doth more assault woman than man, because his gaine is greater, by the fall of one woman, then of twentie men. (sig. E1v)

Her earlier remarks about the serpent are brought back into play most wittily when she states, "The Serpent at first tempted woman, he dare

assault her no more in that shape, now he imployeth men to supply his part; and so they doe: . . . When they have done all and gotten their purpose, then they discover all the womans shame, and imploy such an Author as this (to whose *Arraignment* I doe make haste) to raile upon her and the whole Sexe" (sigs. E1–E1v).[39]

The last portion of Sowernam's tract does indeed refer to Swetnam's *Arraignment,* but with still another ironical twist, for, reverting to judicial matters, Sowernam arraigns Joseph Swetnam before "two Judgesses, *Reason,* and *Experience,* . . . [before] his Jurie, [comprised of] . . . his five Senses, . . . and the seaven deadly sinnes [and before] [t]he partie which did give evidence against him . . . *Conscience"* (sigs. E2v–E3). Although Swetnam pleaded "*not guiltie,* being asked how hee would be tryed, he stood mute,[40] for *Conscience* did so confront him, that he knew upon tryall there was no way but one" (sig. E3v). To undo the harm done by Swetnam's tract, Sowernam was appointed by the court to deliver remarks to the entire assembly; these comprise point by point refutations of specific statements in Swetnam's *Arraignment,* which, although given a form and an order in this manner, remain tedious reading. Our Portia, after delivering a stinging, lawyer-like rebuke to the defendent, ends by asking, "according to the question of *Cassian* [sic], *Cui bono*? what have you gotten by publishing your Pamphlet"(sig. G4). With a final intriguing allusion to her usual residence outside London, she promises that "where I leave now, I will by Gods grace supply the next Terme, to your small content . . . in the meane space . . . forbeare to charge women with faults which come from the contagion of Masculine serpents" (sig. G4v). Perhaps the last of the feminine replies to Swetnam forestalled Sowernam's intended attacks on the Swetnam tract; in any case, aside from a rimed satiric envoy which follows this statement and is signed Joane Sharp, Sowernam wrote no more.

A third reply, *The Worming of a madde Dogge*[41] by the pseudonymous Constantina Munda (fl. 1617), was the last non-dramatic response to Swetnam by a woman. It is perhaps the surest sign of Munda's confidence that she does not address women as a separate audience. In the first of her

39. References to the serpent appear also on sigs. C4, E1, E1v, and F1.

40. The choice for a defendant in a Renaissance court was either to plead or to stand mute. The latter course brought the penalty of "peine fort et dure" (pressing to death) but saved the defendant's goods, land and blood from the taint of felony.

41. *The Worming of a madde Dogge: or a Soppe for Cerberus the Jaylor of Hell. No confutation but a sharpe Redargution of the bayter of Women. By Constantia Munda* (1617). STC 18257.

prefaces, an epistle in heroic couplets whose reverential tone contrasts sharply with the sting of the body of the tract, Munda addresses "THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL LADY her most dear Mother, the Lady PRUDENTIA MUNDA, the true *patterne of Pietie and Vertue* [to whom] C. M. wisheth increase of happinesse." Munda acknowledges her indebtedness to her mother, for her "*paines in bearing me,*" her "*pangs of sorrow . . . / In child-birth,*" and her "*perpetuall* Labour *with me, even untill / The second birth of education perfect me*" (sig. A3), and states that she can never repay these debts: "*Yet lest you thinke I forfait shall my bond / I here present you with my writing hand. / . . . / . . . in lieu / Of greater dutie . . .*" (sig. A3v). Like Sowernam, Munda refers to her literary antecedents in the Swetnam flyting, to Sowernam within this epistle, ("Hester [who] hang'd/Haman before" [sig. A3v]), and to Speght, in the body of the tract ("shee [who] hath beene the first Champion of our sexe that would encounter with the barbarous bloodhound, and wisely dammed [sic] up your [his] mouth, and sealed up your [his] jawes" [sig. D1]).[42] The respectful tone vanishes at the end of this poem, to be replaced by Juvenalian invective as Munda begins, in her second preface, addressed "To Joseph Swetnam," with the question,

> What? is thy shameles muse so fleg'd in sin
> So cocker'd up in mischiefe? or hast bin
> Train'd up by Furies in the schoole of vice,
> Where the licentious Devils hoyst the price
> Of uncought mischiefe, & make a set reward,
> For hell-hound slanderers that nought regard
> Their reputation, or the wholesome Lawes
> Of vertues Common-wealth, but seek applause
> By rayling and reviling to deprave
> The mirrour of Creation" (sig. A4).

Munda challenges Swetnam's "poyson'd drops of hemlocke" (sig. A4), "sottish lies" (sig. A4), and "bald and ribald lines, / . . . . / . . . to please / The giddy-headed vulgar," and "deface / Natures best ornament" (sig. A4v).

In addition to the specific issue of Swetnam's style and correctness raised by Speght and Sowernam, Munda is interested in the general

42. In a later work (*Mortalities Memorandum* . . . [1621], STC 23057), Speght alludes to the women who engaged in the Swetnam debate after her: "*Haman* shee hangs, 'tis past he cannot shun it, / For *Ester* [Sowernam] in the Pretettense hath done it." And "the childe of *Prudence* [Munda] . . . / . . . / . . . gave to *Cerberus* a soppe" ("The Dreame," ll. 250–52 and 255–57).

literary scene. Indeed, her pamphlet opens with a strong reference to current materials, and the vigor of the opening sentence signals the formidable quality of her response:

> The itching desire of oppressing the presse with many sottish and illiterate Libels, stuft with all manner of ribaldry, and sordid inventions, when every foule-mouthed male-content [sic] may disgorge his *Licambean* poyson in the face of all the world, hath broken out into such a dismall contagion in these our days, that every scandalous tongue and opprobrious witte, like the Italian Mountebankes will advance their pedling wares of detracting virulence in the publique *Piatza* of every Stationers shoppe. (sig. B2)

Munda makes occasional use of biblical proofs of woman's goodness, as in the preface to Swetnam where she asks, "could you be so mad / As to deprave, nay to call that bad / Which God calls good? can your filthy clawes / Scratch out the image that th'Almighty drawes / In us his pictures?" (sigs. B1–Bv). Nonetheless, her more usual proofs are drawn from secular, largely classical sources, and are cited in Greek and Latin as well as in some modern vernaculars, sometimes with translations, and sometimes merely with marginal notes about sources. She draws attention to her own training and to Swetnam's deficiencies when she calls him "*Nero*-like in ripping up the bowels of thine own Mother: for I have learnt so much Logicke to know *quicquid dicitur de specie, dicitur de unoquoq individuo eiusdem speciei:* whatsoever is spoken or praedicated of the kinde is spoken of every one in the same kinde" (sig. D2).

The tract is the closest in manner to male polemic of any of the pieces considered so far in this essay. Witness the sweep of the following remark:

> foolish man will reprehend his Creator in the admirable worke of his generation and conservation: Woman the second edition of the Epitome of the whole world, the second Tome of that goodly volune compiled by the great God of heaven and earth is most shamefully blurd, and derogatively rased by scribling penns of savage & uncought monsters. (sig. B2v)

There is none of the hesitation or sense of inferiority that characterized the earlier works by feminist apologists, and the attack is even more assured than Sowernam's. Swetnam receives as good as he has given, not in tedious point by point refutation, but in blow for blow exchange.

> Your idle muse shall be frankt up, for while it is at liberty, most impiously it throwes durt in the face of halfe humane kinde. *Coriolanus* when hee saw his mother and his wife weeping, naturall love compeld him to leave sacking the City for their sakes, *ab hoc exemplum cape,* but your barbarous hand will not cease to ruine the senses, and beleager the forces of *Gynaecia,* not sparing the mother that brought forth such an untoward

whelp into the world as thy selfe, playing at blindman-buffe with all, scattering thy dissolute language at whomsoever comes next. (sig. B4v)

Munda claims to be able to deal better with him now than the other women writers could before, in the extremity of his anger,

Now the lees of your furie are settled to the bottome, and your turbulent minde is defaecated and clearer, lets have a parle with you. (sig. C1)

She impugns him as a coward, using arguments familiar from Anger and Sowernam,

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 sex. (sig. C4v)

Women are no longer available for such treatment, for "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" (sig. D1v).

Munda concentrates her criticism on Swetnam's language and imprecision with greater relentlessness than Speght's and Sowernam's tracts. She notes a

heaping together the scraps, fragments, and reversions of divers english phrases . . . the glaunders and offals of abusive termes, and the refuse of idle headed Authors, and making a mingle-mangle gallimauphrie of them (sig. D4). . . . let every bird take his owne feather, and you would be as naked as AEsops jay (sig. D4v). Sometimes your dogrill rhymes make mee smile. . . .

Sometimes you make me burst out with laughter, when I see your contradictions of your selfe (sig. E1). . . . accrew to such a tedious and infinite summe, that if any would exactly trace them out, they should finde them like a Mathematicall line, *Divisibilis in semper divisibilia.* Twould put downe the most absolute Arithmetician to make a catalogue of them (sig. E2v).

She particularly criticizes Swetnam for failing to distinguish the good wheat from the chaff:

Because you have beene guld with brasse money, will you thinke no coyne currant? Because you have suffered shipwracke, will you disswade any from venturing to trafficke beyond Seas (sig. C1v) . . . a private abuse of your owne familiar doxies should not breake out into open slanders of the religious matron together with the prostitute strumpet (sig. C2). . . . Is there no reverence to be given to your mother because you are weaned from her teat, and never more shall be fedde with her pappe? (sig. D2v).

Like Anger, Speght, and Sowernam, she concludes with lines of satiric verse, this time taken from an unnamed male writer, "to such an one as

your selfe" (sig. F2v), wishing Swetnam to "ever barke that none shall hear," to "beare / With greefe more slanders then thou canst invent," to "defend / Scorne toward that which all besides commend," and to "write still, / That which no man will read, unlesse to see / Thine ignorance, and then to laugh at thee" . . . till your check't conscience cry, / This this I have deserv'd, then pine and die" (sig. F3).

R. M. Alden and Juliet Dusinberre have both noted the connection between the popular controversy concerning women and satirical drama on the same subject.[43] Alden has suggested that the popular non-dramatic controversy died down in the first decade of the seventeenth century, partly because of the war of the theaters with its satirical treatment of women. From the standpoint of this interaction between dramatic and non-dramatic writing, one of the most interesting of the reactions to Swetnam's *Arraignment* is a drama, *Swetnam the Woman-Hater* (1620), most commonly attributed to Heywood,[44] which contains references to Swetnam's female controversialists.[45] The plot of this comedy revolves around Leonida and Lisandro, two seemingly star-crossed lovers. Swetnam-Misogynos is introduced at the lovers' trial as the traducer of women in a debate which is intended to determine the greater constancy of one of the two defendants. Subsequently, in what I believe is the first trial of the male sex in the English drama (and an unsuccessful one at that), Swetnam is tried and condemned by outraged women who proceed to tie him to a stake, condemn him to be muzzled (shades of Rachel Speght!), bait him, and call in his books to be burnt. The tone of the play is sympathetic to women, and its conclusion serves to vindicate woman's constancy. As a vindication of women's virtue, the play represents a momentary resolution of what Alfred Harbage has called "the war of the theaters, or rather the clash of ideals of which it was an external symptom."[46]

Although Swetnam's pamphlet went on to ten editions by 1640 despite its many absurdities, there were no further replies by women. Popular

43. Alden, p. 238; Dusinberre, p. 7.

44. *SWETNAM, THE Woman-hater, ARRAIGNED BY WOMEN* (1620). STC 23544. I have used Coryl Crandall, ed., *Swetnam the Woman Hater: The Controversy and the Play* (Lafayette, Ind., 1969), which provides information on earlier reprints and editions as well as on the Swetnam controversy.

45. Swash (Swetnam's man) "then we came to London: there forsooth / He put his Booke i' the Presse, and publisht it, / And made a thousand men and wives fall out. / Till two or three good wenches, in meere spight, / Laid their heads together, and rail'd him out of the'Land" (5, 2, 319–22 in Crandall). We see that the popular contemporary perception was that the protests by Speght, Sowernam, and Munda were indeed by women.

46. Alfred Harbage, *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (New York, 1952), p. 119.

controversy concerning women, some of it very heated, continued unabated until the death of James I in 1625,[47] although no other works, to my knowledge, are written solely by women until 1640.

The womens sharpe revenge, written "From our Manner of Make-peace," by the pseudonymous Mary Tattlewell (fl. 1640) and Joane-hit-him-home (fl. 1640), replied to the usually bland attacks of John Taylor, the water poet, whose *A juniper lecture* and *Divers crabtree lectures* . . . appeared in 1639.[48] The protest is marked by pointed good humor and wit which occasionally blend into profoundly serious protests, as in the following passage from "The Epistle of the Female Frailty, to *the Mal-gender, in Generall,*"

> [in this case] we appeale unto your owne Consciences, even to the most crabbed and censorious, . . . which of you all hath not solicited our Sexe? petitioned to our persons? praised our perfections? &c. which of yon [sic] hath not met us coming, followed us flying, guarded us going, staid for us standing, waited on us walking, and ambusht us lying? use Women to Court men? or have wee at any time complained of their Coynesse? Have we bribed them with our Bounties? . . . su'd and solicited, voted and vowed to them? or rather they to us: would you *apprehend* a new *Antipodes,* to make al things to be carried by a contrary course, and run retrograde.
>
> Then let the Radish Roote plucke the Gardner up by the Heeles, and the shoulder of Mutton put the Cooke upon the Spit: for you as well may prove the one, as produce the other. (sigs. A4v–A6)

The good humor of the *Revenge* continues in "The Epistle to the Reader," a mock-dramatic monologue, pronounced by "*Long Megge of*

47. Highlights are presented in Wright, pp. 491–507.

48. *The womens sharpe revenge. Or an answer to Sir Seldome Sober that writ those railing Pamphlets called the Juniper and the Crab-tree Lectures, etc. Being a sound Reply and a full confutation of those Bookes: with an Apology in this case for the defence of us women. Performed by Mary Tattle-well, and Joane hit-him-home, Spinsters.* London (1640). The unique copy of the pamphlet is imperfect, breaking off at p. 214 (STC 23706). Ent. to J. Okes on 24 April 1639. This is the same date and same stationer to whom Taylor's second book of "lectures" were entered, raising the question of legitimate authorship. Taylor's works are the following: *A juniper lecture. With the description of all sorts of women.* The second impression [There is no record of a first one], (STC 23766). *Divers crabtree lectures. Expressing the severall languages that shrews read to their husbands.* London: J. Okes for J. Sweetings, 1639. Entered April 24, 1639 (STC 23747). It is perhaps relevant to note that the Tattlewell pamphlet is unusually full of careless errors (which are noted in the extracts quoted in this paper) suggesting haste. It also unquestionably picks up points in Taylor, such as his use of a preface signed by a female (Margery Quiet of *Tame* in *Oxfordshire,* in the *Juniper Lecture; Mary Make-peace* of the Mannor of *Allwell,* in Northamptonshire, in the *Crabtree Lectures).* Such factors suggest an attempt to make sales, rather than a genuine débat. However, given the developing tradition of female polemic in the Renaissance, there is no reason to discount the ascription of the *Revenge* to a woman. Moreover, some of the arguments break new ground and seem to emanate quite legitimately from a female consciousness. I have been unable to locate a record of a book which Tattlewell calls "your *Bartholomew* Faire booke" (sig. B6).

Westminster,"[49] the jest-book "roaring girl," who, "hearing the abuse offered to Women, riseth out of her grave," to ask "*what have wee women done, / That any one who was a mothers sonne / Should thus affront our sex?*" and to warn any such men that "*if thou should / Take on thee all those figures Proteus could, / It were in vaine: . . . / Even to the grave, I vow my ghost shall haunt thee. / Therefore, what's yet amisse, strive to amend, / Thou knowest thy doom, if farther thou offend*" (n. p.; between sig. A5 and sig. B1). As in the case of Munda's pamphlet, there is no separate preface for women readers.

The *Revenge,* additionally styled "an answer to Sir *Seldome Sober,* that writ those scandelous Pamphlets called the *Juniper* and *Crab-tree Lectures,*" is consistent with the earlier protests by women in its moderating argument that Taylor is guilty of casting "most false aspersions upon all women generally . . . [so that] we are each of us accused and blazed to bee addicted and and [sic] frequently delighted with one grievous enormity or other, wherein, although it be true, that we are all the daughters of *Eve* in frailty, yet they might have remembered that they likewise are all the sons of *Adam,* in failing, falling, & offending. We are not so partial in the defence of all Womens vertues, that we thereby doe hold none to be vicious" (sig. B3v). And it advances almost immediately to a discussion of the double standard, with no amelioration of its injustices:

> whereas a Womans reputation is so poore, that if it be but so much as suspected, it will belong [sic] before the suspition will be cleared: but if it be once blemished or tainted, the staines and spots are of such a tincture, that the dye of the blemishes will sticke to her all her life time, and to her Children after her. But for the man hee takes or assumes to himselfe such a loose liberty, or liberty of licentious loosenesse, that though he be (as they call it) a Common Towne Bull, or a runner at sheepe though hee passe the censures of spirituall courses, or high Commissions, yet (by custome) his disgrace will be quickly worne out, and say it was but a tricke of youth: for the shame or scandall of a whoremaster is like a nine dayes wonder, or a Record written in sand, or like a suit of Tiffany, or Cobweb Lawne, soone worne out: but the faults of a weake Woman, are a continuall alarum against her, they are ingraven in brasse, and like a suit of Buffe, it may be turn'd and scour'd, and scrapt, and made a little cleanly, but it lasts the whole life time of the wearer. (sig. B5)

Unable to trust to the judgment "of the many headed monster Multitude, which consisteth of *Man* [their good opinion of Taylor's work is] now called into question by a Feminine Jury of women . . . before whom, your *Bartholomew* Faire Booke, and most lying Lectures, hath not

49. Lewis, pp. 427–28. See also F. O. Mann, ed., *Works of Thomas Deloney* (Oxford, 1912), pp. xiii, xxiii, xxviii, xxx.

onely beene convented, but arraigned, lawfully convicted, and most justly condemned" (sigs. B6–B6v). In what seems a further echo of Sowernam's arraignment of Swetnam, the jurors are named: "*Sisley set him out, Sarah set on his skirts, Kate call him to account, Tomasin Tickle him, Prudence pinch him, Franke firk him, Besse bind him, Christian Commit him, Parnel punish him, Mall make him yield, Beterish banish him, Hellen Hang him*" (sigs. B6v–B7). The women consider "the person who put these foule and and [sic] calumnious aspersions upon us: If hee were a Tailer [an obvious pun on Taylor], most sure he was womans Tailer, or (if so) no good Artist, because not being able to take the measure of a womans body, much lesse was he powerfull to make a true dimension of her minde" (sig. B7).

The *Revenge* follows in the tradition of female protest with a knowledgeable, witty attack on grammatical logic:

> Next in our Curious Inquisition and search, we finde him moreover to be no Schollar at all, as neither understanding us in our Gender, Number, nor Case, &c
>
> Not in one Gender, for in all the Creatures that were ever made, there is a mutuall love, and an alternate affection betwixt the Male and the Female: for otherwise there would be no Generation at all. But this most approved consociety, by all his industry and endeavor hee striveth to annihilate, and disanull . . . .
>
> Then he faileth in Number, by making all of us in generall, not onely to bee wayward, but wicked, tedious, but troublesome, lazy, but loathsome, with many of the like enormities . . .
>
> But in our Cases hee is most horrible out, and directly opposeth all the Rules of Grammar. For instance,
>
> In the Nomnative [sic], by calling us out of our Names, and in the stead of Maidenly Modest, Matron-like, &c. to brand us with . . . all the abusive Epithites that spleene or malice can invent, or devise.
>
> In the Genitive, by making us to be loose, lascivious, . . . and the Mothers of misbegotten Children, by which hee unadvisedly bringeth himselfe within the doubtfull suspition of spuriousnesse and Bastardy.
>
> In the Dative, by giving and conferring upon our geneneral [sic] Sex, such strange and almost unheard of aspertions: . . . forgetting that he includeth his Mother, Sisters, & Nieces, Daughters: nay, his own bosome wife, if hee have any in the same Catalogue.)
>
> In the Accusative, by false calumnies, and unjust Accusation contrary to all Schollarship . . . .
>
> In the Vocative, because it is like to the nominative.
>
> In the Ablative, because he striveth to take away our credits, reputations, Fame, good Name, &c. All which argue, and approve, that hee was in a bad Moode, and worse Tence at the Writing of those malicious Lectures. (sigs. B8v–B11)

Since the tract is quite long, only a few other especially well-expressed ideas can be cited. Of these, perhaps the most compelling is a

passage which moves beyond the surface of sexual relations to protest yet another injustice, which is appended to a short list of model women, tendered to counter the names traditionally cited as exemplars of woman's evil. At the end of this list, the authors state, rather plaintively:

> An [sic] this is an argument which we might amplifie even from the Originall of all History; nay, and would not spare to doe it, had wee but the benefit of your breeding. But it hath beene the policy of all parents, even from the beginning to curbe us of that benefit, by striving to keep us under, and to makes [sic] us mens meere Vassailes even unto all posterity. How else comes it to passe, that when a Father hath a numerous issue of Sonnes and Daughters, the sonnes forsooth they must bee first put to the Grammar schoole, and after perchance sent to the University, and trained up in Liberall Arts and Sciences, and there (if they prove not Block-heads) they may in time be book-learned: And what doe they then? read the Poets perhaps, out of which, if they can picke out any thing maliciously devised, or malignantly divulged by some mad Muse, discontented with his coy or disdainfull Mistris; then in imitation of them, he must divise some passionate Elogy [sic], and pitifull ay-me: and . . . follow [those poets] who doe nothing but raile at us . . . .
>
> When we, whom they stile by the name of weaker Vessells, though of a more delicate, fine, soft, and more plyant flesh, and therefore of a temper most capable of the best Impression, have not that generous and liberall Educations, [sic] lest we should bee made able to vindicate our owne injuries, we are set onely to the Needle, to pricke our fingers: or else to the Wheele to spinne a faire thread for our owne undoings, or perchance to some more durty and deboyst drudgery: If wee be taught to read, they then confine us within the compasse of our Mothers Tongue, and that limit wee are not suffered to passe; . . . and thus if we be weake by Nature, they strive to makes [sic] us more weake by our Nurture. And if in degree of place low, they strive by their policy to keepe us more under. (sigs. C7–C9v)

A reader with the leisure to read through this tract in its imperfect entirety would find many intriguing passages, but the following excerpts will have to demonstrate my point:

> as there is no sword made of steele, but it hath Iron: no fire made of the sweetest Wood, but it hath Smoake: . . . So there is no Woman made of flesh, but she hath some faults. And I pray you are there any men, who are not subject to the like frailties. (sigs. C10–C10v)

And,

> I touch not any way upon good Poets, for to them *Fortune* is blind, . . . but I speake of our mungrill Rimsters, that with an affectate over-weening conceite of themselves, doe imagine that they can cough Logicke, speake *Rhetoricke,* neese [i.e. sneeze] *Grammer,* belch *Poetry,* pisse *Geometry,* groane *Musicke,* vomit *Apothegmes,* and squirt *Oratory.* These (and such as these) are the most furious and fierce Pendragonists, these are the pestifferous Jacksquiterers, that if they could, would blow and blast the fame of women. (sigs. E9–E10)

There is a tribute to chastity, and perhaps surprisingly to

the best and most blest (the one and onely Virgin Mother, she that was at one time Maid, Mother, Wife, Child, & Sister to her Son: she that most happily was elected) from all Eternity to be the blessed bringer forth of a Saviour, . . . [as well as to] *innumerable of our noble Sexe, that have liv'd and dyed Virgins, . . .* [and]

Moreover women were so chast, that though they did marry and were married, it was more for propagation of Children, than for any carnall delight or pleasure they had to accompany with men; . . . and surely if there had beene any lawfull way for them to have had Children without Husbands, there hath been, and are, and will bee a numberlesse number of Women that would or will never be troubled with wedlocke, nor the knowledge of man. (sigs. G6–G7)

Before final sections which address questions to Taylor, an extended character sketch of a drunkard (Sir Seldome Sober), and several anecdotes concerning drunken men, Tattlewell and Joane hit-him-home summarize their arguments pithily:

Thus have I truely and impartially proved, that for Chastity, Charity, Constancy, Magnanimity, Vallour, Wisedome, Piety, or any Grace or Vertue whatsoever. Women have alwayes bin more than equall with men; and that for Luxury, Sarquedrin obscenity, prophanity, Ebriety, Impiety, and all that may be called bad wee doe come farre short of them. (sigs. G10–G10v)

Whitney's "Letter," the earliest of the protests discussed here, is good-humored, rather than polemical, but its wholly secular spirit is in advance of the first of the prose pamphlets, which are likewise not bitingly aggressive. Over the years when these six works were composed the secular spirit of Whitney's poem and the polemic of Anger's second preface came to predominate in women's popular protests, as the resignation of Whitney gave way to the exasperation of Tattlewell. Nonetheless, these writings differ in some ways from works by male controversialists. Particular male traits are attacked, but only to defend women against exploitation. Furthermore, there are continual references to men who do not exploit women. In other words, these writings are characterized by reasoned defense rather than by theoretically motivated, generalized, hyperbolic attack.

This air of reasonableness is largely achieved through the use of humor. Self-references and expressions of what can perhaps best (although anachronistically) be termed "sisterhood" posit the writer's personal involvement in the argument, and sometimes her painful experience. Practical "queries," like those cited above, also maintain a level of discourse which is realistic, sometimes humble, and demark these writings as serious attempts to discuss social problems rather than mere

exercises in polemic. That these women writers acknowledge the weaknesses of some women and attempt to warn women against men's blandishments serves the same purpose. And the use of logical terms and methods effectively marks the turning of the worm against traditional schoolmen's tactics and the dualistic system of thought.

Finally, each of these women writers made some original contribution to the tradition which their works developed: Whitney initiated the woman's voice in poetic protest; Anger in prose; Speght was the earliest English woman to compose a tract of nobility on women; Sowernam originated the use of the mock trial in this controversy; Munda, the mock dramatic monologue; and Tattlewell, arguments concerning the wider issues of equality for men and women. (These, as the reader has no doubt noted, have a remarkably contemporary ring.)

Maclean notes "that the latter part of the sixteenth century and the early part of the seventeenth witnessed a shift in scholarly attitudes towards the female sex which is reflected in more popular polemical works" (p. 89). But in the early seventeenth century, there was as yet no writer in England to call for the equal education of men and women and for the right of women to engage in any work, as Marie du Gornay did in her *Egalité des hommes et des femmes* (1622). Instead, the early seventeenth century tracts by women were moderate and well within acceptable English limits. Still, their very existence presaged a post-revolutionary England. By the end of the century, writers such as Bathsua Makin, author of *An essay to revive the antient education of gentlewomen* (1673), were sounding clarion calls to reform like those of du Gornay.[50]

NEW YORK CITY

50. A slightly different version of this essay was presented to the Renaissance Seminar of the University of Pennsylvania during my tenure there as a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow. I wish to thank Georgianna Ziegler and Phyllis R. Rackin for their helpful comments.

JEAN C. CAVANAUGH

Lady Southwell's Defense of Poetry

ONE of the earliest known essays of literary criticism in English by a woman has recently been discovered in a seventeenth-century commonplace book belonging to Lady Anne Southwell. The essay, in the form of a letter, is a defense of poetry written in 1627 and addressed to Lady Southwell's friend Lady Ridgway, apparently in reply to her friend's stated preference for prose.

Little is actually known about Lady Southwell. She was born in Cornworthy, Devon, in 1574 and baptised there on August 22, the daughter of Sir Thomas Harris, a prosperous landowner and lawyer, and a sister of Sir Edward Harris, Third Justice of the King's Bench in Ireland. She married Sir Thomas Southwell of Spixworth, Norfolk, and seems to have gone with him to Ireland when he settled there as a planter in Munster. Shortly after the death of Sir Thomas in 1626, she married Sir Henry Sibthorpe, sergeant major and privy councillor in the Province of Munster. Memoranda in the commonplace book suggests that, at least after 1631, they lived in Clerkenwell and Acton.[1] Lady Southwell died in Acton on October 2, 1636.

If little survives about Lady Southwell's life, there is nevertheless ample evidence in her poems and letters that she had more than a merely polite interest in poetry. Nor was she just a theorist. She practiced writing poetry, experimenting with different kinds and sometimes making sweeping revisions of her own work, excising a whole page at a time. These poems were, for the most part, devotional, even those addressed to such contemporaries as the Countess of Somerset; Dr. Bernard Adams, bishop of Limerick; and the first Earl of Castlehaven.

Lady Ridgway, to whom she addressed the defense of poetry published here, was the wife of Sir Thomas Ridgway, Lord Treasurer of Ireland from 1606 to 1616. Before her marriage, Lady Ridgway was Cecily Macwilliam, sister of Henry Macwilliam of Ireland and like Lady Southwell a maid of honor to Elizabeth I. Barnabe Riche dedicated to her his *Catholicke Conference* (1612). She died in 1627. Lady Southwell's attachment to her is shown in a poem of 120 lines, "An Elegie written by the Lady A:S: to the Countesse of London Derrye supposyenge hir to be dead by hir longe silence" (fols. 19v–20), and by an elegy Lady Southwell wrote upon her death (fol. 21).

The present defense of poetry shows Lady Southwell's knowledge of Renaissance critical theory, particularly that of Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie* (published 1595). She is primarily concerned with such problems as the form and function of poetry, truth and fiction, subject matter and the poet's intention, and the poet as a teacher, moral guide,

1. Her letters after 1626 are sent from Polynalong Castle, near Cork, or from Acton when she returned to England, sometime after 1631.

and transmitter of learning. Believing that the imagination prepares the way for reason, reality, and beauty as best exemplified in the Psalms of David, she argues primarily for the harmony of the created world, the "iust proportions [by which] all thinges are propagated" through the four elements perfectly balanced, which continually reveal a principle that is "poetically composed." Anyone who does not know and appreciate poetry, Lady Southwell writes, is not in harmony with the natural world. For her, good poetry provides patterns for directing one's life; hence it should not offend one's moral sense or waste time by being a "busye nothing" like Marlowe's *Hero and Leander.* Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* is likewise unacceptable to her because it also presents a wrong pattern for moral behavior. Although such arguments lean heavily on traditional ideas, Lady Southwell's presentation is not lacking in originality or charm. While her unusual use of architectural terms to explain the primacy of poetry among the arts may draw on a suggestion initially made by Sidney,[2] her own analogy of the string of pearls seems especially apt in a comment written by one member of the nobility for another.

The present text is a literal transcription of the manuscript now at the Folger Shakespeare Library (V.b.198, formerly Phillipps 8581). It is in a calf-bound folio titled *Lady Southwell's Works* and dated 1626. The letter, neither in Lady Southwell's nor Sibthorpe's hand, is on a sheet inserted into the book to form folio 3 and precedes another letter by Lady Southwell addressed to Lord Holland, Deputy of Ireland, dated 1628. Both letters—like a number of other manuscripts similarly pasted into the book—must have formed part of a gathering intended to complete Lady Southwell's writings, either put together by the author or by her husband after her death. The last pages of the folio contain Captain Sibthorpe's commendations and a biographical sketch of his wife as well as copies, in the Captain's hand, of the lady's inscriptions and epitaphs (fol. 73–74).

LAYTONSVILLE, MARYLAND

To my worthy Muse;
the Ladye Ridgway
that doth these lines infuse.

How falles it out (noble Ladye:) that you are become a sworne enemye to Poetrie; It being soe abstruse an art, as it is, that I may say, The other artes are but Bases & Pedestalles, vnto the w^{ch} this is the Capitall. The meere Herald of all Ideas; The worldes true vocall Harmonye, of w^{ch} all other artes are but partes, or rather, may I iustly say; It is the silke thredd that stringes your chayne of pearle; w^{ch} being broken, your iewells fall into the rushes; & tho more you seeke for it, the more it falles into the dust of obliuion. You say: you affect prose as your auncestors did; Error is not to bee affected for antiquitye. Therefore, (Noble & wittye Ladye:) giue mee your hand, I will leade you vpp the streame of all mankind. Your great great grandfather had a father, & soe the last, or rather the first father, was God; whose neuer enough to bee admired creation, was poetically confined to 4. generall genusses, Earth, Ayre, water & fire: The effectes w^{ch} giue life vnto his verse, were, Hott, Cold, Moist & Drye, w^{ch} produce

2. Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apologie for Poetrie* (1595), sigs. C4–D1.

Choller, melanchollye, Bloud & Flegme: By these iust proportions, all thinges are propagated. Now being thus poetically composed; How can you bee at unitye with your self, & at oddes wth your owne composition: It may bee, you will say, that Poesye is a fiction, & fiction is a lye: O but; Rahabs concealing the spyes,[3] was more to bee approued, then Doegs truth.[4] But heerein, Poesye seemes to doe more for nature, then shee is able to doe for her selfe, wherein, it doth but lay downe a patterne what man should bee; & shewes, that Imagination goes before Realitye. But hee is not worthy the name of a phisitian, but of an Emperick only, that giues one potion to all manner of diseases: for it is as great an error to giue purges to one in a consumption, as it is to giue cordialls to one in a Repletion. Therefore it is necessarye to knowe how the humor aboundes, that soe wee may the boldlyer applye. Then, since all are eyther fooles, or phisitians, to escape the former I will take vppon mee to knowe, what hath soe distasted / your palate against this banquett of soules, devine Poesye. some wanton venus or Adonis hath bene cast before your chast eares, whose euill attyre, disgracing this beautifull nimph, hath vnworthyed her in your opinion & will you, because you see a man madd, wish your self wthout melancholye, w^{ch} humor is the hand of all the soules facultyes. All exorbitant thinges are monstrous; but bring them agayne to theyr orbicular forme & motion, & they will retayne theyr former beautyes. Our Reason ought to bee the stickler in this case: who would not skornefully laugh wth Micholl, to see the old Prophett daunce, but when wee knowe hee daunced before the Arke, must wee not thinke the Host of heauen was in exaltation wth him, as well as that of Jerusalem:[5] To heare a Hero & Leander or some such other busye nothing, might bee a meanes to skandalize this art. But can a cloud disgrace the sunne: will you behold Poesye in perfect beautye: Then see the kingly Prophett, that sweete singer of Israell, explicating the glorye of our god, his power in creating; his mercye in redeeming, his wisedome in preseruing making these three, as it were the Coma, Colon, & Period to euery stanzae: who would not say, the musicall spheares did yeeld a cadencye to his songe, & in admiration crye out; O neuer enough to bee admired, deuine Poesye: It is the subiect, that comends or condemmes the art. But noble Ladye, I will trouble you noe further, now; yett when I haue your honorable word of reconciliation I will then delineate out every lime of her, & how shee is envelloped vpp wth the rest of the artes. In the meane time I rest more then thankfull for your noble louing letter, as the louer of your virtues.

(Signed) Anne Southwell[6]

3. Cf. 2 Samuel 8:3–8.
4. Cf. 1 Samuel 21:7–9.
5. Michal; cf. 2 Samuel 6:16–20.
6. At the end of the page is a smudged erasure, apparently a note beginning "vera copie" but the remainder is indecipherable.

To my worthy Muse, that doth these lines infuse. the Ladye Ridgway.

How falles it out (noble Ladye) that you are become a sworne enemye to Poetrie; It being soe abstruse an art, as it is, that I may say, The other artes are but Bases & Pedestalles, vnto the wch this is the Capitall. The meere Herald of all Ideas. The worldes true vocall Harmonye, of wch all other artes are but partes, or rather, may I iustly say; It is the silke thredd that stringes your chayne of pearle; wch being broken, your iewells fall into the rushes, & the more you seeke for it, the more it falles into the dust of oblivion. You say, you affect proze as your auncestors did. Error is not to bee affected for antiquitye. Therefore, (Noble & wittye Ladye) giue mee your hand, I will leade you vpp the streame of all mankind. Your great great grandfather had a father, & soe the last, or rather the first father, was God; whose neuer enough to bee admired creation, was poetically confined to 4 generall genusses, Earth, Ayre, water & fire. The effectes wch giue life vnto his verse, were, stoft, Cold, moist & Drye, wch produce Choller, melancholye, Bloud & flegme. By these iust proportions, all thinges are propagated. Now being thus poetically composed; How can you bee at vnitye wth your selfe, & at oddes wth your owne composition. It may bee you will say, that Poesye is a fiction, & fiction is a lye. O but Rahabs concealing the spyes, was more to bee approued, then Poegs truth. But heerein, Poesye seemes to doe more for nature, then shee is able to doe for her selfe, wherein, it doth but lay downe a patterne what man should bee; & shewes, that Imagination goes before Realitye. But hee is not worthy the name of a phisitian, but of an Emperick only, that giues one potion to all maner of diseases. for it is as great an error to giue purges to one in a consumption, as it is to giue cordialls to one in a Repletion. Therefore it is neecessarye to knowe how the humor abounds, that soe wee may the boldlyer applye. Then since all are eyther fooles, or phisitians, to escape the former I will take vppon mee to knowe, what hath soe distasted

Folger MS V.b. 198, folio 3