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REFLECTING RESISTANT TYPOLOGIES IN RENAISSANCE WOMEN'S WRITING¹

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Introduction

With the publication of her provocative article “Did Women Have a Renaissance?” (1977) Joan Kelly added her name to a tradition that her own researches had traced back to Christine de Pisan (1364-1430). In some ways her more important article, one which was to have been part of a larger project, was “Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1789.” (1982). In this article Kelly situated late European Medieval and Early Modern opposition to oppressive patriarchal systems within a framework of active Feminism.² With the invention of the printing press the opportunities for circulating misogynistic views increased dramatically in the sixteenth century. Kelly notes: “Holy Writ and the pithy sayings of the learned were trotted out by all the misogynists, no matter how learned or ignorant they themselves might be.”(82).³ Biblical women were the most popular textual devices for guiding women's behaviour precisely because the Bible

¹ This paper was sponsored by the National Science Council of Taiwan and presented at the Early Modern Culture Conference: Identity and Politics at National Sun-yat Sen University in May 2004. Thanks are also due to the John Rylands Library for allowing me to consult their Geneva Bibles.

² Joan Kelly. “Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1789.” *Women, History, and Theory: The Essays of Joan Kelly*. Catharine R. Stimpson. Ed. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 1986. 65-109.

³ Joan Kelly. “Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1789.” Grace Jantzen concurs: “Indeed, the virtue of the women is often directly related to their gender: they are good if they are humble handmaidens doing the bidding of men or of God. Like Hannah, Ruth, Esther, and above all Mary, the virgin mother; and bad if they are self-assertive, like Jezebel, Delilah, and Eve, the mother of all sin.” Grace M. Jantzen. *Becoming Divine: Towards a Feminist Philosophy of Religion*. Manchester: Manchester University Press. 1998. 181.

was one of the few texts that was readily available to women of all classes; but how women were told to read, how they actually read their Bibles and how their readings reflected their own empowering reconfigurations of biblical models is a fascinating area of Renaissance women's studies that has not been fully explored.

The Tudor English Bible and the presentation of women

Readers need hardly be reminded of Henry VIII's break with the Roman Catholic Church in 1534 and the events that ensued. Integral to the reformation of the Church was the provision of an English Bible. In 1539 the Great Bible, a revision of the Thomas Matthew Bible (1537), by Miles Coverdale was printed; it was the first of seven editions of this Bible printed between 1539 and 1541. The Great Bible was chained in Churches throughout England so that the common people could, for the very first time in English ecclesiastical history, read it for themselves. All Tudor English Bibles contained a range of prefatory material designed to guide their unlearned readers. They could include large engravings, tables, epistles to the monarch and to the reader, calendars, projections and indexes. Although expunged from the Great Bible, a table that was included in several Bibles issued from John Day's popular Protestant press was of good and bad men and women of the Old and New Testaments. In 1549 Edmund Becke revised the Thomas Matthew Bible for John Day and in it he included the table of "famous women", as good women were called, among which were: "Eva, Sara, Rebecca, Rachel, Lya, Sephora, Maria, Debora, Ruth, Raab, Bethsaba, Susanna, Judith" etc... in the Old Testament, and "Marye the mother of Christe, Elyzabeth, Anna the Prophetysse. Martha, Magdalena, Joanna" etc... In the New Testament. Bad models, or "wycked women", as they were

called, included: “Dalila, Sampsons wyfe, Jezabel, Athalya Putipharis wyfe, The moabytes, the wyves and concubynes of Salomon, amongeste whome Cozbi was chyefe. Michol, the daughter of Saule, the wyfe of David. Anna, the wyfe of Tobias. The wyfe of Job.”(29).⁴ The short list of “The wycked wemen of the newe Testamente” included: “Herodias the wyfe of Phylyp. Math.iii, Saphyra. Act.v” and, rather interestingly, “Babylon the great harlot, and strumpet of fornicacyon.”⁵ Such tables were offered as quick reference guides to godly behaviour to be followed and ungodly behaviour to be avoided. They were part of the apparatus designed to help the otherwise untutored reader to approach the Scriptures in the “right way”, to come to the Scriptures, as Thomas Cranmer advised in his 1540 Bible preface, with reformation in mind; simultaneously, the tables produced an instant typology by which people were subsequently defined according to the various attributes writers wished to attach to them.⁶ As I have elsewhere argued, Reformation writers appropriated the attributes of a range of biblical, and classical, types in their epistles to Tudor monarchs, a close analysis of which reveals the political and religious dynamic throughout the sixteenth century.⁷ In 1549, Edmund Becke’s epistle to the young Protestant King Edward VI addressed him as England’s Josiah in establishing the Law of God among the people, reflecting a concern with Protector Somerset’s abolishing of Ecclesiastical laws and the setting up of new laws.

⁴ Women writers did not necessarily read Michal as wicked. Dorothy Leigh, for instance, extolled Michal as an exemplary woman of the Old Testament on account of her having saved “her husband David from the fury of Saul, although hee were her father and her King, not preferring her owne life before the safety of her husband See Dorothy Leigh. *The Mothers Blessing* (1616). Sylvia Brown. Ed. *Women’s Writing in Stuart England*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing. 1999.

⁵ The Byble, that is to say all the holy Scripture. London: John Day and William Seres. 1549. STC:2077.

⁶ John King and Margaret Aston are among the more prominent twentieth-century scholars that have drawn attention to the use of biblical typologies in patronage pieces. See John N. King. *Tudor Royal Iconography: Literature and Art in an Age of Religious Crisis*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1988.

⁷ For a more in-depth discussion of the politics of Tudor Typology see my article “Paratextual Typologies in Reformation Contexts.” *Sun Yat-sen Journal of Humanities* 17. 2003. 117-134.

The preface warned that in order that these new laws be not so easily erased by future generations, they must be firmly grounded in Scripture. In the wake of the 300 persecutions of Protestants during Catholic queen Mary's reign of 1553 to 1558, Whittingham addressed his 1560 Geneva Bible preface to Elizabeth as a Josiah who must "burn in sign of detestation" the miserable priests upon their altars.⁸ In the same preface Elizabeth was also invested with the attributes of Zerubbabel, the rebuilders of God's Temple. Tudor Political and Religious uses of Typologies are a fascinating study, and as you will already have realized, they are not gender bound. Elizabeth might at one particular moment during her reign be a Deborah, but she might also be a David, a Josiah, or a Zerubbabel. In the process of investing Elizabeth with these attributes gender barriers were transcended, even as other prominent writers of the time were attempting to demonstrate the unfitness of women to rule.

Melanie Hansen's "The Word and the Throne: John Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*" offers a useful illustration of Renaissance perceptions of women who refused to be contained.⁹ Knox's tract was primarily aimed at Mary Tudor and Mary Queen of Scots, in order to demonstrate, by recourse to Aristotle and to Scripture, that women were unfit for Monarchy. With this publication, Knox's reception into Elizabeth's court was rendered problematic, and, Hansen suggests, damaged not only Knox's own position but that of Protestant reformers generally at court, "By denying a woman's right to accede to the throne, Knox's

⁸ The first of these martyrs having been no other than John Rogers, the editor of the Matthew Bible that was to be the foundation of all subsequent Tudor Bibles. He was burned at the stake in Smithfield, London, in 1555. For an account of Reformation martyrdoms see John Foxe. *Actes and Monuments of these latter and perillous Days*. London. John Day. 1563. STC: 11222.

⁹ Melanie Hansen, "The Word and the Throne: John Knox's *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*." Kate Chedgoy, Melanie Hansen and Suzanne Trill. Eds. *Voicing Women: Gender and Sexuality in Early Modern Writing*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 1998. 11-24.

argument rests upon the basic premise that women disfigure and pollute the God-given signs of monarchy and authority.” (22). Although Knox represented a portion of the male population in defaming women, there were others who were ready to defend the honour, rights and role of women in England. John Aylmer quickly responded to Knox in an attempt to deflect some of the consequences of his *First Blast with An Harborowe for Faithful and Trewe Subjectes, agaynst the late blowne Blaste, concerninge the Government of Women* (1559).¹⁰ John Bale, too, was a ready defender of godly women, such as Anne Askew in his promotion of Protestantism in England, although, as Gwynne Kennedy has noted, in the process of extolling Askew, who was sufficiently learned in the Scriptures to be able to dispute with her persecutors, Bale celebrated her weakness: “When she semed most feble, than was she most stronge. And gladlye she rejoyced in that weakenesse, that Christes power myght strongelye dwell in her. Thus choseth the lorde, the folysh of thys world to counfounde the wyse, and the weake to deface the myghtye.” (13).¹¹ As the next twenty years witnessed, women began to demonstrate that they were capable of writing their own defence tracts, and even dared their reputations by putting their names to them. Traub, Kaplan and Callaghan have made the useful point that although Protestantism placed great emphasis on obedience to secular and sacred authority, it simultaneously emphasised the important role of the conscience that enabled resistance to that authority.(3).¹²

¹⁰ For a discussion of the Davidic typology applied to Elizabeth by Aylmer, see Michele Osherow “ ‘A poore shepherde and his sling’: A Biblical Model for a Renaissance Queen.” Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney and Debra Barrett Graves. Eds. *Elizabeth I Always Her Own Free Woman*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 2003. 119-130.

¹¹ Gwynne Kennedy *Just Anger: Representing Women’s Anger in Early Modern England*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press. 2000.

¹² Valerie Traub. M. Lindsay Kaplan, Dymphna Callaghan. Eds. *Feminist Readings of Early Modern Culture: Emerging Subjects*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996.

In this short paper I am going to focus on gendered typology as I explore some of the strategies that women writers used to resist the Bible as a negatively impacting patriarchal text, in order to reclaim it as an empowering female text through their own feminist re-interpretations.¹³

Preaching in Print

Dorothy Leigh's: *A Mother's Blessing*, was published in 1616. Leigh's *Blessing*, although in the genre of a deathbed legacy to her sons, was clearly intended for a much wider audience with exhortations and advices to men, women and the Church of her day. Being a publishing female writer was not merely unusual, but problematic, as Margaret Ferguson has pointed out: "Although a few women below the rank of gentry used the new technology of print to earn their living (Isabella Whitney, for instance,) many well-born women were inhibited from publishing their writing not only by ideologies of gender that defined women as 'private' beings, but also by aristocratic codes that defined the press as 'vulgar'." (156).¹⁴ Leigh admits that for a woman to be a writer is "a thing so unusuall among us", but in her defence she argues that there are plenty of books written by men lying unread, mouldy and neglected in men's studies, just as there are clothes hanging moth-eaten in their wardrobes whilst other men freeze on the streets. Leigh thereby compresses two faults into one habit of neglect, a fault that her own book seeks

¹³ Although positive typological rhetoric tended to be gender dynamic, negative typological rhetoric tended to be gender bound. In the process of engaging with Swetnam's negative rhetoric, Speght, using positive rhetoric, becomes for her readers a David "casting a stone at vaunting Goliath."

¹⁴ Margaret Ferguson. "Renaissance Concepts of the 'Woman Writer.'" Helen Wilcox. Ed. *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500-1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996. 143-168. Ferguson discriminated between women writers and women who took advantage of the printing age to publish their writings and articulated the fact that the problems associated with women's writing were more particularly about women's publishing.

to remedy. In fact Leigh sees herself as a mediator between Scripture and reader. In chapter seven, 'The first cause is not to fear death', she assumed the role of a preacher, a role denied to her in the public space of the time, but one enabled by the printed page.

She preached:

Shew thy selfe a good member of Jesus Christ, a faithfull subject to thy Prince, and alwaies fit to governe in the Christian common-wealth; and then thou mayest faithfully and truely say "Whether I live or dye, I am the Lords." (Rom. 14.8) But without continuall meditation of the Word this cannot bee done. And this was one of the chiefe causes why I writ unto you, to tell you that you must meditate in the Word of God; for many read it and are never the better, for want of meditation.(26).

Having defended her right to preach in print, Leigh then asserted her authority as a mother to supervise the spiritual well-being of her own sons by contending with St. Paul himself. If Paul, she argued, could "say unto the Galathians, that were but strangers to him concerning the flesh, only he had spent some time amongst them to bring them to the profession of the truth, from which hee feared they would fall: and could hee, I say, write unto them, *my little children, of whom I doe travaile againe in birth, untill Christ be formed in you?* {Gal, 4.19} And can any man blame a mother (who indeed brought forth her childe with much paine) though she labour againe till Christ bee formed in them?" (23). Leigh argued that if Paul, who knew nothing of childbirth pain, could appropriate it to express his self-sacrificing desire to re-birth the Galatians in Christ, how much more authority could a woman claim in this pursuit who had indeed felt the pain of childbirth (23). Mothers, she further argued, did not endure the hellish pain of childbirth only to see their children "endure the endlesse paine in hell." (23).

Leigh attached special importance to the naming of children after worthy biblical models and, extending her maternal role to that of naming her as yet unconceived grandchildren, she explained why she had chosen certain models of Philip, Elizabeth, James, Anna, John and Susanna over others. Leigh teasingly omitted the name of Mary from this list in anticipation of some objection from her readers. Philippa Berry has explained: Mary was seen as a selfless *material* mirror of heavenly purity, a ‘speculum sine macula’ worthy to be the *theotokos*, mother of God.”(9).¹⁵ Although she had been an important focus in Roman Catholic worship she had been marginalized in the first Articles of the English Reformation Church. Here, Leigh deliberately marginalized Mary so that she could devote a special treatment to her as the most important of all biblical women, and so central to an empowered female identity that only a “woman so senselesse” could forget her:

It may be, that some of you will marvaile, since I set downe names for the imitation of their vertues, that bore them; why I placed not Mary in the first place, a woman vertuous above all other women. My reason was this, because I presumed, that there was no woman so senselesse, as not to looke what a blessing God hath sent to us women through that gracious Virgin, by whom it pleased GOD to take away the shame, which EVE our Grandmother had brought us to: For before, men might say, The woman beguiled me, and I did eate the poysoned fruit of disobedience, and I dye. But now man may say, if he say truly, The woman brought me a Saviour, and I feede of him by faith and live. Here is a great and wofull shame taken from women by God, working in a woman: man can claim no part in it (28).

In her “Advice for women from mothers and patriarchs” Valerie Wayne pointed out that for all Christians: “Eve had her counterpart in Mary, and the redemption that Mary offered to humankind through giving birth to Christ could become not only a means of

¹⁵ Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power : Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen*. London and New York: Routledge. 1989.

cleansing the sins of Eve but of recovering the procreative capacities of women that had been displaced by other accounts. Mary also made it possible for women to claim access to authorship through their maternal role.”¹⁶ In spite of her marginalized status in public worship, Mary continued to be an empowering model for Protestant women across the social spectrum, not least of all for Elizabeth I who appropriated the traditional reverence accorded to the Virgin by fashioning herself a Virgin Queen.¹⁷ However, implicit in Leigh’s interpretation of the historical role of the Virgin Mary was a denunciation of men. Whilst the Old Testament had recorded God’s failed Covenant with men, the New Testament recorded His new Covenant with women through Mary. Leigh’s resistant reading would have been familiar to those who were already acquainted with Lanyer’s 1611 work *Salve Deus Rex Judeorum*.¹⁸ Any shame to womankind caused by Eve, Leigh argued, had been “taken from women by God”, it was not for men to reinscribe what God had erased. But at the time of Lanyer and Leigh’s writing the monarch was no longer Elizabeth, but James who had in his *Daemonology* (1597) defied such attempts by women to hold up the mirror of virtue that was Mary, and insisted that “the Serpents deceiving of Eve at the beginning” had made him “the homelier with that sex ever since.”

¹⁶ See Valerie Wayne. “Advice for Women from Mothers and Patriarchs.” Helen Wilcox. Ed. *Women and Literature in Britain, 1500-1700*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1996. 56-79.

She noted that Dorothy Leigh’s *The Mothers Blessing*, “appeared in at least sixteen editions from 1616 to 1674, which means it was wildly popular in the middle of the seventeenth century.” 59.

¹⁷ There are numerous essays and books on this topic, but see Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford. Eds. *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1998. and Carole Levin. Jo Eldridge Carney and Debra Barrett Graves. Eds. *Elizabeth I Always Her Own Free Woman*. Aldershot: Ashgate. 2003.

¹⁸ Aemilia Lanyer is an interesting case in point. Her own *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* subverts the premise on which male patriarchal power depends, that of the sentence against Eve in Genesis 3.16, “Unto the woman he [God] said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and they conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.”(AV) In the middle of her retelling of the passion narrative, Lanyer introduces the Genesis narrative of the Fall as a pericope in which we see the relative innocence of Eve set against the broader canvass of the historical betrayals of God by men, culminating in the slaying of God Himself. See Aemelia Lanyer. *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. London: Valentine Simmes for Richard Bonian. 1611. STC:15227.5.

In attaching witchcraft to Eve and the Fall, King James overtly gendered witchcraft as a feminine practise and authorized the persecution of women on those grounds.”¹⁹ Any perceived weaknesses or failures of particular women could easily become fuel for misogynistic attacks on womankind through a Scriptural reference to Eve. Leigh, and subsequent Jacobean women writers attempted to deflect this abuse by offering the mirror of godly women and promoting themselves as such. Leigh challenged the canonical marginalization of Susanna: “The story of Susanna, though it be not canonical, nor to be equalled to those books that are, yet it may bee true, and of good use as many other histories written by men are.” Though she began in this rather reticent way, her promotion of the Susanna narrative to the exclusion of all other narratives pertaining to Philip, Elizabeth, James, Anna and John, subverted the canonical marginality of Susanna and reinscribed her centrality for women. Within the narrative of Susanna, Leigh sermonised against unchaste women, who were whores of Babylon, and male seducers who were Judases, before returning her discussion of the exemplary Susanna as a model of chastity.

Chastity silence and obedience were frequently advertised as the three important qualities in a woman. The necessity of obedience extended to everyone under God, and so the anticipated audience of the obedience tracts such as William Tyndale’s *Obedience of a Christian Man* (1528), John Ponet’s *A Shorte Treatise of Politike Power* (1556) Christopher Goodman’s *How Superior Powers Oght to be Obeyd of their Subiects* (1558) and numerous homiles, extended to the wider population. Silence was directed more

¹⁹ Margaret King has argued “So bright burn the fires that consumed the witches of Europe that they cast special light on the condition of the Renaissance woman.” She also notes that whereas accusations of witchcraft were age-old, the Renaissance gendering of it as female was new. Margaret L. King. *Women of the Renaissance*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. 1991. 145.

specifically at women. Richard Taverner translated *Mulierem ornat silentium* as “Silence garnysheth a woman” for the highly popular editions of Erasmus’s *Adagia*, and, as Elaine Beilin has noted, in “Juan Luis Vive’s *Instruction of a Christian Woman*, Sir Thomas More’s familiar letters, Thomas Elyot’s *Defence of Good Women*, and Richard Mulcaster’s *Positions*, each writer argued that the thoughts of educated women should be limited to private utterance. With a few royal exceptions, women preserved a public silence appropriate to their absence from positions in the state, the academy, and the church (250).²⁰ However, chastity was especially prized, and a woman without it was considered not just an embarrassing social problem but worthless, not least of all because male property rights depended on it.²¹ The ideal of the truly chaste woman of mind and body was an emblem of hope, and as Philippa Berry has argued, the ideal of the Sophia, or Sapientia, figure was: “a key influence upon the Renaissance use of a chaste woman as a mediatrix between heaven and earth.” (4). In his *The Voyce of the Laste Trumpet* published in 1549, the Tudor gospeller Robert Crowley held up a mirror of chastity, silence and obedience taken from Genesis 12-23 and instructed women to make this image their own to ensure not merely their lives, but their salvation. Thomas Salter’s caution to mothers in his *The mirror of modesty* (1578) was that:

There is no manne of reason and understandyng, but had rather love a mayden unlearned and chast, then one suspected of dishonest life, though never so famous and well learned in Philosophie. Wherefore I wish all Parentes too beware and take heede, how they suffer their young Daughters beyng fraile of Nature, to be bolde disputers(Bviiiiv)²²

²⁰ Elaine Beilin “Writing Public Poetry: Humanism and the Woman Writer.” *Modern Language Quarterly*. 1990.51.2.249-271.

²¹ Richard Taverner. Tr. *Proverbes or Adagies* by Desiderius Erasmus. London:Richard Bankes. 1539. STC: 10437. The popularity of Erasmus’s *Adagies* and *Proverbes* in the sixteenth century can hardly be overstated. Erasmus’s work was the staple intellectual diet of English schoolboys.

²² Thomas Salter exhorted mothers to control their daughters’s reading: “in steede of suche bookes and lascivious ballades, our wise Matrone, shall reade or cause her Maidens to reade, the examples and lives of godly and vertuous Ladies, whose worthy fame, and bright renowme, yet liveth and still will live for ever,

Mothers themselves contributed to the jealous protection of female chastity, since the blame for loose daughters would ultimately be laid at their own doors. Dorothy Leigh's biblical models for chaste and unchaste women were stock appropriations of the time, but her re-reading of seductive men as Judases encouraged a more egalitarian approach to apportioning responsibility for female chastity:

The unchaste woman is proud, and alwayes decking her selfe with vanity, and delights to heare the vaine words of men, in which there is not only vanity, but also so much wickednesse, that the vain words of men, and womens vainnesse in hearing them, hath brought many women to much sorrow and vexation; as wofull experience hath, and wil make many of them confesse. But some wil say, Had they onely lent an eare to their words they had done well enough. To answere which, I would have every one know, that one sinne begetteth another. The vaine words of the man, and the idle cares of the woman, beget unchaste thoughts oftentimes in the one, which may bring forth much wickednesse in them both./ Man sayd once, *The woman which thou gavest mee, beguiled me, and I did eate.* {Gen 3.12} But wee women may now say, that men lye in waite every where to deceive us, as the Elders did to deceive Susanna. Wherefore let us bee, as she was, chaest, watchfull, and wary, keeping company with maides. Once *Judas* betrayed his Master with a kisse, and repented it: but now men, like *judas*, betray their Mistresses with a kisse and, repent it not : but laugh and rejoyce, that they have brought sinne and shame to her that trusted them. The only way to avoid all which, is to be chaste with Susanna, and being women, to imbrace that vertue, which being placed in a woman, is most commendable (Leigh 28).

Here Leigh revealed her rather idiosyncratic appropriations of Scripture for secular purposes. In the Synoptic gospels the kiss was a sign to the soldiers to arrest Jesus from among a number of men in the garden of Gethsemane, but Leigh turned this kiss into another point of connection between women and Christ. Here women are the Christ-like betrayed, whilst men are the Judas-like betrayers of women. Having distorted the biblical

whiche shee shall make choise of, out of the holy Scripture.” Thomas Salter. *A Mirrhor Mete for all Mothers, Matrones, and Maidens, Intituled the Mirrhor of Modestie*. London: J Kingston for Edward White. 1578. STC:21634. Biiir.

mirror to show men's faithlessness, Leigh then suggested that there was no biblical mirror to contain such men - they were worse than Judas. Judas at least repented where seducers rejoiced in their betrayals. Jocelyn Catty has argued that: "Leigh's reference to the kiss seems consciously understated; the malice attributed to the men, and the woman's 'shame', are suggestive of a more extreme sexual coercion." (23). Implicit in Catty's analysis is that Leigh was not merely cautioning women to remain chaste, here, but chastising rapists.²³ This may be going too far, especially since her relation of those women who later wished that they had only lent an ear suggests their complicity in the sexual fall. The yielding ear, here became a synecdoche of the whole body that yields once it envelopes flattery. Leigh, very clearly, implicated women and men in vain behaviour which, in a patriarchal society, seemed only to have damaging implications for the women involved; but by labelling these men as unrepentant Judases, Leigh warned them that their rejoicing was merely a short prequel to their eternal, infernal hangover. In reality then, chastity was an ideal extolled by patriarchal society, but as Hogrefe has pointed out, for many it was an impossible ideal: "Chastity for women was not a mere abstinence from bodily actions: it was a purity of mind without even a consciousness of carnal desire."²⁴

The low success rate of these chastisements can perhaps be gauged by the enormous quantities that were being produced. Hogrefe concludes: "Tudor women would have been models of chaste, passive obedience if they had only followed the advice given them in much didactic literature of the sixteenth century: educational treatises,

²³ Jocelyn Catty. *Writing Rape, Writing Women in Early Modern England*. Basingstoke : Macmillan Press, 1999.

²⁴ Pearl Hogrefe. *Tudor Women: Commoners and Queens*. Ames: Iowa State University Press. 1975.

discussions on governments, sermons, and other moral diatribes.”²⁵ Leigh warned her sons to be careful in choosing wives, and of the hazards of choosing badly. She proclaimed against ungodly women, as resistance writers tended to do: “The world was drowned, because men married ungodly wives. (Gen.6.2-3),” but she also warned men to look to their biblical mirror: “Salomon, who was not only the wisest man that ever was, but was also mightily indued with the Spirit of God, by marrying idolatrous women, fell for the time to idolatrie. (1 King. 11.4) Never thinke to stand, where Salomon fell.” (Leigh 31). Carefully avoiding a reference to Eve as the seducer of her husband and the cause of the Fall, Leigh indicted Adam and Eve as a miserable accident of nature from which an adoptive parent, Christ, had rescued mankind. Leigh explained: “our wicked father and ungodly mother, Adam and Eve, cast us into the puddle of sin, and ran away and left us there, where we should never have beene able to have gotten out.” (Leigh 75) As a contrast with these rotten parents, Leigh described Christ who “came by, and washed us, and brought us up at his own cost and charges.” (Leigh 75). She thereby presented the idea of Christian adoption in the most concrete and accessible terms, and in the process created a mirror of good parenting. Leigh’s authority did not, then, merely stem from her appropriation of a rhetoric of maternal deathbed legacies, but from a Pauline rhetoric of Christian rebirth which she assumed with a mother’s right. This enabled Leigh to speak at once on a domestic level to her sons, and to the broader Church

²⁵ Pearl Hogrefe. *Tudor Women: Commoners and Queens*. Ames: Iowa State University Press. 1975.
 3. Pamela Allen Brown has also recently argued for a more aggressive sixteenth-century female culture. “Within English popular culture, sheep and lambs do sometimes stand for the positive values of resignation and endurance – for example, in emblems on patience. But there is no doubt that sheep generally connote passivity, cowardice, and stupidity. In terms of sheer frequency, the negative secular connotation overwhelms the positive religious one.” See Pamela Allen Brown. *Better a Shrew than a Sheep*. New York and London: Cornell University Press. 2003. 187.

of men and women as a self-empowered social matriarch able both to speak of childbirth's hellish pain and to aid her readers in spiritual rebirth. As Sylvia Brown has suggested: "in her obedience to the Word, Dorothy Leigh also makes it entirely her own."²⁶

Protesting Protestant Women

Reading biblical fragments and allusions within women's writings of this period enables us to understand how these women saw themselves in text and in their social contexts, and the extent to which this view resisted male representations of them and the roles prescribed for them. Only a year after the publication of Leigh's *Blessing*, the English presses began to print a series of responses by women to the recently published *Arraignment of Lewde, Idle, Froward and unconstant women* (1615). Although these tracts represented a new order of resistance by women to misogyny, not one of the responses to Swetnam attempted to defend the "lewde, idle, froward and unconstant women" that Swetnam's title page claimed was the focus of his attack. Their defence was of womankind which Swetnam, they argued, had defamed by suggesting that all corruption derived from Eve "a ribbe is a crooked thing good for nothing else, and women are crooked by nature." (B1r).²⁷ Throughout his tract Swetnam used the authority of Scripture to support his argument: "And was not David the best beloved of God and a mighty Prince, yet for the love of women he purchased the displeasure of his God.

²⁶ Sylvia Brown. Ed. *Women's Writing in Stuart England*. Sutton Publishing : Gloucestershire. 1999. 12.

²⁷ Dorothy Leigh argued in her *Mother's Blessing* 1616 that to insist upon Eve as the cause of the Fall was somewhat old fashioned, since through Mary all men were saved, "For before, men might say, The woman beguiled me, and I did eate the poysoned fruit of disobedience, and I dye. But now man may say, if he say truly, The woman brought me a Saviour, and I feede of him by faith and live. Here is this great and wofull shame taken from women by God, working in a woman: man can claime no part in it: the shame is taken from us, and from our posterity for ever." 28.

Samson was the strongest man that ever was, for every lock of his head was the strength of another man, yet by a woman he was overcome, he revealed his strength, and payed his life for that folly. Did not Jesabell for her wicked lust cause her husbands blood to be given to doggs?" (C1v). Swetnam extolled the great men of Scripture and attributed their weakness, downfall and deaths to women. Although he chose liberally from Scripture, he frequently paraphrased without giving the appropriate Scriptural references. It was precisely on this point that his female respondents challenged him; there were no Scriptural passages that endorsed misogyny.

Speght's tract *A Mouzell for Melastomas*, was printed in 1617 by Nicholas Oakes for Thomas Archer. Her alternative title for this work was *An Apologeticall Answere to that Irreligious and illiterate Pamphlete made by Jo Sw [Joseph Swetenam] intituled the Arraignmente of women*. That Swetnam was "Irreligious and Illiterate" was asserted by all of the resistance writers. He was blasphemous, in defaming God's creation, and illiterate in so far as he had misread the Scriptures. Speght's titlepage carried the Geneva Bible's Proverbs 26.5 "Answer a foole according to his foolishnesse, lest he bee wise in his owne conceit." Speght offered herself as Swetnam's "undeserved friend" and, asserting herself as the superlative interpreter she demonstrated how Scripture ought to be read. Throughout her tract Speght insisted upon the equality of the sexes, each having different but complementary roles, her endeavour is: "to make the authoratitive Protestant discourse of biblical exegesis yield a more expansive and equitable concept of gender."²⁸

²⁸ Barbara Lewalski notes that: "The Beinecke Library at Yale has a copy of Rachel Speght's tract defending women - the first piece of polemic certainly written by an Englishwoman - that has some eighty-seven marginal annotations penned by a male contemporary." See Barbara Lewalski. "Female text, male reader response: contemporary marginalia in Rachel Speght's *A Mouzell for Melastomus*" Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth. Eds. *Representing Women in Renaissance England*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri press. 1997. 140.

A few months after Speght's tract was published, another appeared that directly engaged with both Swetnam's *Arraignment* and Speght's *Mouzell* entitled *Esther hath hanged Haman*. (1617). Printed for Nicholas Bourne, it, too, carried an alternative title, *An answer to a lewd pamphlet, entitled, the Arraignment of women. With the arraignment of lewd, idle, froward, and unconstant men, and husbands*. This tract was divided into two parts, the first proving the "dignity and worthinesse of women, out of divine testimonies" and the second focusing on the Classical texts in which women were extolled by men. The title of this tract pertained to a specific event recorded in the book of Esther in which Haman was executed by means of an instrument that he had devised for the extermination of the Jews. The biblical text of Esther 7.8 explains that Ahasuerus executes Haman for what he reads as a sexual attempt upon Ester. In the resistance tract *Esther*, who is the author, Ester Sovernam, of this pamphlet, is, herself, empowered as the executioner of Haman, Swetnam, the author of the *Arraignment*. In devising a pamphlet to eradicate women, he had provided the means by which he could also be eradicated.²⁹

The Scriptural tag that accompanied Sovernam's title page was not, as one might expect, from the Book of Esther, but from the Gospel of John "He that is without sinne among you, let him first cast a stone at her." (John 8.7).³⁰ Clearly Esther Sovernam's agenda was somewhat different from Speght's in not attempting to reflect the virtue of women within the protective framing device of an encomium of marriage. The aim of the

²⁹ Clearly this was not entirely successful, since by 1640 Swetnam's pamphlet was being printed in its tenth edition. See Suzanne Hull. *Chaste, Silent and Obedient*. San Marino: Huntingdon Library. 1982.115. On Sovernam's use of the biblical Esther, see Henriksen, Erin. "Dressed as Esther: The Value of Concealment in Ester Sovernam's Biblical Pseudonym." *Women's Writing*. 2003.10.1.153-169.

³⁰ In the second preface to the tract Sovernam assured the young men of England that they were exempt from any references she might make to the poor conduct of men, "for you are quit by Non-age." A4v. The preface concluded by interpreting the reference to John 8.7 on her titlepage, as "so let them rayle against wemen, who never tempted any woman to be bad." A4v.

first half of *Esther hath hanged Haman* was to demonstrate through Scripture that women were blessed creations whose deviations from their natural blessedness could only be explained by their contact with men, men who were in no position, morally or otherwise, to cast stones.³¹

In Sowernam's preface, "To all right honourable, noble, and worthy ladies..." she explained that the first problem with Swetnam's pamphlet was that the title had misrepresented the text: "I found the discourse as far off from performing what the Title promised." (A2r). Resisting the mirror that Swetenam had created Sowernam remarked: "What his composition of body is I know not, but for his disposition otherwise, in this Pamphlet I know he is as monstrous as the worke is misshapen, which shall plainly appeare in the examination of the first page onely." (B1v). In creating a monstrous mirror for women to see themselves, Swetnam had succeeded, she argued, only in showing his own monstrosity. Swetnam's mirror became in Sowernam's hands his own monstrous portrait displayed to the world.

If Speght argued that Swetnam could not read, then Sowernam argued that he couldn't write either. Sowernam explained that her own endeavour was not only to respond to Swetnam, but to supply what she thought was lacking in Speght's response, that is, a strong defence of woman kind.³²

³¹ At B4r she explains that Satan tempted Eve as a serpent in the "masculine gender." In the second part of the tract she resorts to Classical literature to demonstrate the superlative nature of women. It is useful to compare Sowernam's tract with Lanyer's 1611 *Salve Deus* in terms of reconfigurations of human history as historical betrayals by men of God, resulting in a new Covenant between God and women through Mary.

³² She makes an explicit reference to Speght's *Mouzell* within the text of the pamphlet at B3v. For interesting studies of a contemporary male reader and annotator of Speght's *Mouzell* see Cis Van Heertum. "A Hostile Annotation of Rachel Speght's *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (1617)." *English Studies* 1987.68.6.490-497; and Barbara Lewalski. "Female Text, Male Reader Response: Contemporary Marginalia in Rachel Speght's *A Mouzell for Melastomus*." Claude J. Summers and Ted-Larry Pebworth. Eds. *Representing Women in Renaissance England*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri press. 1997. 136-158.

Using the Geneva Bible margins as her guide, Speght had set about to educate Swetnam in the use of the Scriptures. Her tract began with a prefatorial letter, after which followed poems, the text itself and an epilogue. In each section the marginal space was occupied with biblical references, but within each section there was a discernably different use of scripture. In her preface, the marginal references were to James 4.11, an admonishment not to speak ill of one's brother, 1 Peter 3.16, which reinforced that message with a reminder that those who falsely speak ill should be ashamed, and finally, a reference to 1 Timothy 4.3. which dealt with false doctrine, and in particular the Roman Catholic doctrine forbidding marriage. Speght's inclusive interpretation of Scripture can be observed even in the first of her prefatorial marginal citations, that of James 4.11., which she renders as "Speake not evil one of another", conspicuously omitting the "brethren" to whom it is addressed. The message was clear that all things that are made by God are good, including women and marriage, and that those who speak ill of them are themselves evil.³³

Throughout the *Mouzell* Speght makes twenty six marginal cross-references to the New Testament epistles and twenty one to Genesis; remaining references extended to Exodus, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, 1 Chronicles, Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, Isaiah, Zachariah, the Gospels and Revelation.

³³ In her comparative study of Speght and Milton, Desma Polydorou has argued that "Milton's masculinist and Speght's feminist readings of Genesis and Paul's epistles ultimately betray the self-interested, supra-theological motives driving their individual arguments. Far from being implausible, as some supporters of Milton's progressive representation of women believe, mutual-egalitarian interpretations of women were not only possible, they were also in existence during the seventeenth century. And early modern women writers such as Rachel Speght, I believe, became the vanguard of this tradition by recognizing the potential of mutual egalitarian interpretations of Scripture to revolutionize the concept of woman." Desma Polydorou "Gender and Spiritual Equality in Marriage": *Milton Quarterly* 2001. 35.1. 22-33. 34.

Speght began her tract with a quotation from Proverbs 18.22 “He that findeth a wife, findeth a good thing, and receiveth favour of the lord.”(C1r). Her first biblical marginal cross reference of the tract was not to Adam and Eve, but to Abraham’s request that Isaac be found a wife from his own family at Genesis 24.4. The Geneva Bible margins had explained only that Abraham did not wish his son to marry anyone who was ungodly. Speght makes an unconventional analogy between God’s provision of a wife for Adam with Abraham’s provision of a wife for Isaac in order to signal that this tract was not a defence of women per se, as is so often suggested, but rather a defence of marriage. The Geneva Bibles had interpreted Genesis 2 in the context of marriage, and at Genesis 2.24 had explained that men had a responsibility toward their wives: “So that marriage requireth a greater duetie of us toward our wives, then otherwise we are bounde to shewe to our parents.” Throughout, Speght combined Christian precedence with Classical examples to demonstrate her learning and endorse her argument, and this may indeed be, as Elaine Beilin has suggested, another strategy of female inclusion; but as Gwynne Kennedy has pointed out: “Speght moves beyond the usual practice of citing biblical verses or figures or even debating scriptural interpretation when she subjects the entire classical and secular misogynistic tradition to Christian doctrine.” (36).³⁴

Both Speght and Sowernam had access to a Geneva Bible which held in its margins the seeds from which their own interpretations grew in sometimes unexpected directions. At Genesis 2.22 the Geneva margin explained the text as “Signifying, that mankinde was perfit, when the woman was created, which before was like an unperfit

³⁴ Gwynne Kennedy. *Just Anger: Representing Women’s Anger in Early Modern England*. Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press. 2000.

building.”³⁵ The Geneva Bible annotation used “perfitte” in the sense of completion of a building, registering that the Hebrew word for “built” had been reserved for the annotation rather than the text, which was rendered “made.” Speght used the annotation in the sense in which it was intended. Having reminded the reader that God made man in his own image, “In wisdom, righteousness and true holiness; making him Lord over all,”³⁶ she explained that: “God extracting a rib from his side, thereof made, or built, Woman; shewing thereby, that man was as an unperfect building afore woman was made; and bringing her unto Adam, united and married them together.” (C1v). Sowernam appropriated the same annotation to suggest that Eve was the superlative creation:

God created the woman his last worke, as to supply and make absolute that imperfect building which was unperfected in man, as all Divines do hold, till the happy creation of the woman. Now of what estimate that Creature is and ought to be, which is the last worke, upon whom the Almighty set up his last rest: whom he made to adde perfection to the end of all creation I leave rather to be acknowledged by others, then resolved by my selfe (B3v).

As Sowernam’s text related the essential perfection of Eve in having been made for Paradise, her marginal note insisted that: “Men are worldlings, Women are paradicians.” (B3v).³⁷ She argued that no sin ensued from either the offering or the taking of the forbidden fruit from Eve’s hand, but only from the eating of it. (B4v). She appropriated Romans 5.12: “By one mans sinne death came into the world” in order to point out that

³⁵ The Bible, that is to say all the holy Scriptures. London: Deputies of Christopher Barker. 1599. STC:2175. JRL 23.1 DM 189.

³⁶ A bum reference of Colosians 3.30 precedes a reference to Ephesians 4.24 which is quoted in the text.

³⁷ Hogrefe suggests that sixteenth-century English women enjoyed enormous liberties compared with women in Europe. He cites the following anecdote “Frederick, Duke of Wirtemberg, visiting England in 1592, reported that women had more freedom in England than in any other place. Other nations have a saying, he added, that “England is a paradise for women, a prison for servants, and a hell or purgatory for horses - for the females have great liberty and are almost like masters.” See Pearl Hogrefe. *Tudor Women: Commoners and Queens*. Ames: Iowa State University Press.1975. 9.

there was no mention of woman here, and therefore no attachment of blame; and 1 Corinthians 15.22: “all die in Adam” to suggest that “woman had her part in the Tragedy, but not in so high a degree as the man.” (B4r).³⁸ At this point Speght had added a Genesis 2.20 reference which was duplicated in the margin as she emphasised that God’s provision of Eve was a sign of his great love and mercy to Adam (C1v). Again, in a startling analogy, Speght compared this great sign of Love with that of Christ’s weeping over the death of Lazarus at John 11.36. In the process, however, she foregrounded what was considered to be a feminine affect and made a subtextual link between Christ and women. The Geneva Bible margins had been defensive of Christ’s weeping. In 1560 the marginal note argued: “We read not that his affections were so excessive that he kept no measure, as we do in our sorowes, joyes & other affections.” Tomson removed this note and substituted a more general note to the weeping episode, attaching a note to “he grieved in the spirit”, rather than to any weeping, “These are tokens that he was greatly mooved, but yet they were without sinne: and these affections are proper to mans nature.” With a distinctively Protestant understanding of the role of woman in marriage Speght insisted that God: “created woman to bee a solace unto him,[Adam] to participate of his sorrowes, partake of his pleasures, and as a good yoke-fellow beare part of his burthen.” (C2r). Although the Geneva Bible annotations had at this point given 1 Corinthians 11.8 “For the man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man”, Speght altered this reference to 1 Corinthians 11.9 “For the man was not created for the womans sake : but

³⁸ It is interesting to compare Speght and Sowernam’s account of Adam and Eve with Leigh’s 1616 reading of them as the epitome of miserable parents from which we were rescued by Christ. See Dorothy Leigh. *The Mothers Blessing* (1616). Sylvia Brown. Ed. *Women’s Writing in Stuart England*. Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing. 1999.75.

the womans for the mans sake”, which served to augment Speght’s point that woman was a sign of God’s Love.³⁹

Speght began the second part of her tract with the Creation of the world and a marginal reference to Genesis 1.31. before proceeding to raise four objections with which her tract subsequently engaged. The first was that Eve brought “death & misery upon all her posterity.”; the second was that Eve transgressed in allowing herself to be deceived (1 Timothy 2.14); the third was Paul’s injunction for men not to touch women (1 Corinthians 7.1) and the fourth was Solomon’s suggestion that women were all unrighteous. She argued the first objection by relating the events of Genesis 3, setting the relevant verse references in the margin, but she added her own interpretation as she related the events. As her Head, Adam should have reproved Eve. He should have:

Made the commandement a bit to restrain him from breaking his Maker’s Injunction: For if a man burne his hand in the fire, the bellows that blowed the fire are not to be blamed, but himselfe rather, for not being carefull to avoyde the danger: Yet if the bellows had not blowed, the fire had not burnt; no more is woman simply to be condemned for mans transgression: for by the free will, which before his fall hee enjoyed, hee might have avoyded, and beene free from beeing burnt, or singed with that fire which was kindled by Sathan, and blowne by Eve. (C3r).

In Speght’s analogy, Eve was rendered a neutral instrument, a mere bellows between Adam and the fire “It therefore served not his turne a whit, afterwarde to say, *The woman which thou gavest mee, gave mee of the tree, and I did eate.*” (C3r). The Geneva

³⁹ For a fascinating account of how Elizabeth I uses 1 Corinthians as an empowering text, see Linda Shenk “Turning Learned Authority into Royal Supremacy: Elizabeth I’s learned personal and her University orations.” Carole Levin, Jo Eldridge Carney and Debra Barrett Graves. Eds. *Elizabeth I Always Her Own Free Woman*. Aldershot: Ashgate 2003. 78-96.

Bible marginal annotations had explained Adam's behaviour as "wickednesse", and his fall the consequence of his own ambition, whilst the running heads to Genesis 3 read "The woman seduced", but Speght further pointed out that although Eve's punishment extended only to women, Adam's extended to the whole of mankind to signify that because he was the sovereign he "should have yeilded greatest obedience to God." She argued chronologically and suggested that although Eve sinned, it was Adam who brought about the Fall, since there was no mention of spiritual nakedness until Adam's Fall. Sin, she maintained, was not in itself sufficiently strong to overturn God's blessings, but required Adam as the active agent for its completion. She cited St Augustine, a reference that she can not have gleaned from the Geneva Bible, "Saint Austin thus distinguished, *the man sinned against God and himselfe, the woman against God, herselfe, and her husband.*"(C3v). Yet, Speght insisted, Eve had intended no malice in offering the fruit to Adam. God's promise of the woman's seed was the first promise made in Paradise, after which Adam had named her "*Hevah, life.*" Since woman had been the occasion of sin so "should woman bring foorth the Saviour from sinne." The marginal reference to Galatians 3.28 signalled an erasure of religious, class and gender boundaries in the matter of Salvation, as Speght emphasised that: "*all are one in Christ Jesus.*" (C4r). The 1560 Geneva Bible had given the note "As all one man", which was subsequently replaced by Tomson with "You are all one: and so is this great knot and conjunction signified." Desma Polydorou has seized upon Galatians 3.28 to emphasize the contrasting positions of Speght and Milton on this point. Noticing a lack of this reference in either Milton's prose or poetry, she goes on to argue that: "in fact every example that Speght offers to support the view that women are as deserving as men to be

favoured by God seems almost deliberately overlooked by Milton in *Paradise Lost*.”(29). Although Speght seemed determined through Scriptural reference to demonstrate the equality of women, Sowernam was more interested in asserting their superlative qualities. Noting Adam’s weakness in blaming Eve for the Fall she argued: “Now what is become of that love, which Adam was bound to beare towards his wife? He chargeth her with all the burden; so he may discharge himselfe he careth little how hee clog her.” To this Sowernam added the marginal note “Adams love like his childrens in these Days”, and thereby attributed the faults of the men around her to the miserable inheritance of Adam’s deceitful nature. (C1r). Her conclusion was that Adam received justice, but woman received mercy in the promise of Christ, as her dowry. Only when Adam, “now a bonds slave to death and hell, stroke dead in regard of himselfe” saw “his wives dowrie, and what blessings God hath bestowed upon her” did he call his wife by name “in whose effects not onley he but all mankinde should most blessedly share: hee calleth her Eve, which is, the mother of the living.” (C1v).⁴⁰

At Genesis 3.6 the Geneva Bible margin had offered a cross-reference to 1 Timothy 2.14, which, no doubt, provoked the second objection in Speght’s tract. She argued that the intention was not to blame Eve as the primary transgressor, since, as she pointed out with a further cross reference to 1 Corinthians 15.22, one that was not in the Geneva Bible margin, “*as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive.*” (C4r). To the Pauline injunction that man should not touch a woman, Speght responded by contextualising the prohibition: “The Apostle makes it not a positive prohibition, but speakes it onelie because of the *Corinths* present necessitie, who were then persecuted by

⁴⁰ Sowernam devoted chapter 3 to a list of Old Testament women and chapter 4 to a list of New Testament women who were God’s instruments to the benefit of mankind.

the enemies of the Church, for which cause and no other hee saith *Art thou loosed from a wife? Seeke not a wife.*" (C4r). In the margin was the reference to 1 Corinthians 7 without verse references, but throughout her argument she quoted from 1 Corinthians 7.1; 7.27 and then 7.28, ending with 7.33-34. The 1560 Geneva Bible had given as a first note to 1 Corinthians 7.1. in which it replaced "good" in the text with "expedient." The note read "Or, expedient because mariage, through mans corruption, and not by Gods institution bringeth cares and troubles." At 1 Corinthians 7.35, however, the note argued the Protestant position on marriage, which was that: "Seing S. Paul colde binde no mans conscience to single life, what presumption is it that anie other shulde do it." When Tomson revised the New Testmament he replaced the first note with a more positive marriage friendly note, "He teacheth concerning mariage, that although a single life hath his commodities, which he wil declare afterwards yet that mariage is necessarie for the avoiding of fornication: but so that neither one man may have many wives, nor any wife many husbands." Tomson even used 1 Corinthians 7.8 to argue in the margin that: "This whole place is flat against them which condemne second mariages." Speght argued that according to Eusebius Paul himself had later married, and endorsed this biographical detail by arguing that it made sense of 1 Corinthians 9.5 "*have we not power to leade about a wife, being a sister, as well as the rest of the Apostles and as the brethren of the Lord and Cephas?*" (C4v). The 1560 Geneva Bible had interpreted "sister" in a marginal annotation as "A faithful and Christian wife", which was subsequently substituted by Tomson with a note which read "One that is a Christian and a true believer?"

Speght's final objection was that of Solomon's denegration of women. The marginal biblical reference of Ecclesiastes 7.30, as it exists in the Geneva Bible, was

given: “And yet my soule seeketh, but I finde it not: I have found one man of a thousand: but a woman among them all have I not found.” In search of biographical evidence she turned to 1 Kings.11.3. in her Geneva Bible where she found a “Commentary upon this enigmatical sentence” and, no doubt, the accompanying note which explained “concubines” simply as those “To whom appertained no dowrie.” Again she employed her contextualizing strategy and argued that Solomon actually did have one thousand wives and concubines who turned him away from God; this demonstrated only that he had picked his companions unwisely, not that all women were unrighteous. She further argued that since Ecclesiastes was generically penitential it must therefore be understood as pertaining only to his own folly. She began: “Hee saith not, that among a thousand women never any man found one worthy of commendation, but speakes in the first person singularly, *I have not found*, meaning in his owne experience: for this assertion is to be holden a part of the confession of his former follies, and no otherwise, his repentance being the intended drift of Ecclesiastes.” (D1r). The misunderstandings about women and about their role in religion and society had emerged, she argued, from fundamental literalist and uncontextualised readings of the Scriptures. She was not alone in this belief, as Phyllis Mack has shown in her discussion of Anna Trapnel’s *A Legacy for Saints*.⁴¹ Having removed what Speght called “stones... whereat some have stumbled, others broken their shinnes” she proceeded to deal with the efficient cause, the material

⁴¹ She notes that “Anna Trapnel was well aware of her audiences’ expectation that she would show herself to be either a monster, a whore, or a madwoman: “My desire is to imitate that approved *Hannah* ... who was in bitterness of soul, and prayed unto the Lord...And if handmaids in these days pray and weep for their lord.... Such praying cannot be borne by the inhabitants of this nation there is such an evil sprit of misconstruing...England’s rulers and clergy do judge the Lords handmaid to be mad, and under the administration of evil angels, and a witch, and many other evil terms they raise up to make me odious, and abhorrd in the hearts of good and bad, that do not know me.” See Phyllis Mack. “Talking back: women as prophets during the Civil War and Interregnum, 1640-1655.” Robert Shoemaker and Mary Vincent. Eds. *Gender and History in Western Europe*. London: Arnold. 1998. 232-275. 246.

cause, the formal cause and the final cause of woman's creation. She began with Genesis 1.28 and the joint receiving of God's blessings. The first of her Psalm references, Psalm 100.3, emphasised the inclusion of women in the goodness of God's creation. She then included a reference to Psalm 100.4 as an exhortation to thank God for his beneficence. She immediately followed this up with Matthew 19.17 to further endorse this idea of God as goodness with an exhortation to follow His commandments. The 1560 Geneva Bible had given two annotations to this Matthew 19.17. The first note read: "Because this yong man knewe nothing in Jesus Christ but his manhode, he leadeth him to higher things, to the intent, that his doctrine might better take place." The second note, which was assigned to the text "kepe the commandments", read: "He spake this that he might learne to knowe him self." Tomson subsequently erased the notes without substitution. Speght summed up this argument with: "Bitter water can not proceede from a pleasant sweete fountain, nor bad worke from that workman which is perfectly good." (D1r). Woman was, then essentially good, simply because she was the work of God. In the second part of her argument Speght explained that Adam was made of dust, but Eve "of a refined mould" and from a living soul. She was made not from his foot or head to be either beneath or above Adam, but from his side to signify that she was his equal. Genesis 1.26 reinforced the fact that they were assigned to the task of ruling the earth jointly, and she cited Genesis 3.23 and Ephesians 5.28 to exhort seventeenth-century men to treat their wives with the equality and love with which Adam treated Eve.

Her discussion of the formal cause for woman's creation, which formed the third part of her argument, was that God gave Eve the same "lofty countenance" so that they would "looke up toward Heaven Unlike animals which, she noted, lose feathers, hair or

scales, humans have smooth skin and were created in the image of God.” The final cause or end “for which woman was made, was to glorify God, and to be a collateral companion for man to glorify God.” (D2r). This part of her argument shared much in common with Aemelia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judeorum* (1611) which had depicted biblical history as a series of betrayals of God by men against the advice of good women. Mariam at Exodus 15.20 was Speght’s first example appropriated to warn women “not to utter words of strife, but to give good counsell unto her husband, the which hee must not despise.” She continued:

For Abraham was bidden to give eare to Sarah his wife. Pilate was willed by his wife not to have anie hand in the condemning of Christ, and a sinne it was in him, that hee listened not to her: Leah and Rachel counselled Jacob to do according to the word of the Lord and the Shunamite put her husband in mind of harbouring the Prophet Elisha: her hands shold be open according to her abilitie, in contributing towards Gods service, and distressed servants, like to that poore widow, which cast two mites into the Treasurie, and as Marie Magdalen, Susanna, and Joanne the wife of Herods Steward with many other, which of their substance ministrered unto Christ. Her heart should be a receptacle for Gods Word, like Mary that treasured up the sayings of Christ in her heart. Her feete should be swift in going to seke the lord in his sanctuarie, as marie magdalen made haste to seeke Christ at his Sepulchre. Finally, no power externall or internall ought woman to keep idle, but to imploy it in some service of God, to the glorie of her Creator, and comfort of her owne soule .(D2r-D3v).

The appropriate scriptural references accompanied the text. It was a man’s duty to help his wife, and as the stronger vessel, to take a greater share of the burden, to which she added Genesis 3.19. 1 Timothy 5.8 endorsed her argument: “And Saint Paul saith, That he that provideth not for his houshold is worse then an infidel.” (D3r).

She chose the analogy of a male Pigeon and his Hen to argue that even senseless creatures recognised that they must help each other. Smaller birds always shared the nest

building and Cockrells helped to defend chicks from danger. Since unreasonable creatures help each other, she argued, so much more should men and women blessed with reason. She appropriated 1 Corinthians 12.21: “And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no neede of thee: nor the head againe to the feete, I have no need of you” and altered it to: “neither the wife may say to her husband, nor the husband unto his wife, I have no need of thee, no more then the members of the body may so say each to other” (D3r-D3v) to emphasise the importance of mutual support and cooperation. The 1560 Geneva Bible had included no note to this verse, but Tomson had included an ample marginal annotation which read:

Now one the other sid, hee speakest hun to them which were indued with more excellent gifts, willing them not to despise the inferiours as unprofitable, and as though they served to no use for God, sayeth hee, hath in such sort tempered this inequalitye that the more excellent and beautifull members can in no wise lacke the more abject and such as we are ashamed of, and that they should have more care to see unto them, and to cover them: that by this meanes the necessitie which is on both parts, might keepe the whole body in peace and concord: that although if ech part be considered apart, they are of diverse degrees and conditions, yet because that are joyned together, they have a communitie both in commodities and discommodities.

Although Tomson’s note had stressed equality, Speght had taken the note further in gendering it to assert the importance of equality between man and wife in marriage. Speght developed her argument using Ecclesiastes 4.10: “*Woe to him that is alone* for when thoughts of discomfort, troubles of this world, and feare of dangers do possesse him, he wants a companion to lift him up from the pit of perplexitie, unto which he is fallen: for a good wife, saith Plautus, is the wealth of the minde, and the welfare of the heart and therefore a meete associate for her husband. And *woman*, saith Paul *is the glorie of the*

man. Marriage is a merri-age, and this worlds Paradise, where there is mutuall love.” (D3v). There was no mention of marriage in Ecclesiastes 4.10, but Speght overcame this oversight by merging it with an adage from Plautus to create a semantic bridge to 1 Corinthians 11.7, extolling women.

Similarly, Speght appropriated John 2 to make the point that Christ’s first miracle was to turn water into wine at the wedding feast at Canaa, wine being “a farre more excellent liquor; which, as the Psalmist saith, *Makes glad the heart of man;*” but she went further in comparing the transformation of water into wine to the transformation from a solitary life to a married life.⁴² Her interpretations were not derived from any Geneva Bible annotation to John 2, which, because of its proximity to the doctrine of transubstantiation, was evaded or avoided by the annotators. The 1560 Geneva Bible included a short anti-Papal reference to the purifying pots at John 2.6, and the Tomson annotations in subsequent Geneva Bibles avoided discussing the miracle altogether. Speght avoided the associative problem by merging John 2 with Psalm 104’s endorsement of good wine, and metaphorically with the goodness of marriage. Citing Proverbs 12.4: “*A vertuous woman, saith Salomon, is the Crowne of her husband,*” Speght metonymically appropriated the “Crown” of Proverbs:

For a King doth not trample his Crowne under his feete, but highly esteemes of it, greatly handles it, and carefully laies it up, as the evidence of his Kingdom and therefore when David destroyed Rabbah hee tooke off the Crowne from their Kings head: so husbands should not account their wives as their vassals, but as those that are heires together of the grace of life and with all lenitie and milde perswasions set their feete in the right way, if they happen to tread awry, bearing with their infirmities, as Elkanah did with his wives barrenesse. (D4r).

⁴² She brings in the example of Pericles “more unwilling to part from his wife, then to die for his Country” and Antonius Pius “O cruell hard-hearted death in bereaving mee of her whom I esteemed more then my owne life!”

Speght thereby wove together 1 Chronicles 20.2, 1 Peter 3.7., which Desma Polydorou has argued is the foundation of Speght's insistence upon the honour due to a wife, and 1 Samuel 1.17 into a narrative about valuing, sharing with and supporting one's wife. She combined Matthew 22: "The Kingdome of God is compared unto the marriage of a Kings sonne" (D4r) with the promise of Revelation 19.7: "*John* calleth the conjunction of Christ and his Chosen, a Marriage" and the Song of Songs: "And not few, but many times, doth our blessed saviour in the Canticles, set forth his unspeakeable love towards his Church under the title of an Husband rejoycing with his Wife" (D4r-v) to establish the sanctity of marriage.

Emphasising that God's love toward women was as great as that towards men she referred the reader to John 3.18, and argued that salvation was open to all believers, men and women. She further argued that if this were not the case then God would not have saved as many women as men from the flood, nor would Christ have appeared first to a woman after the resurrection, which signified that he had died for women as well as for men. At this point in the Geneva Bible's Gospel of Luke 24.9, Tomson had added a marginal note of chastisement to the disciples: "The cowardly and dastardly minds of the disciples is upbraided by the stout courage of women, (so Wrought by God's great mercie) to shew that the kingdome of God consisteth in an extraordinarie power." There was no indication in the Geneva Bible marginal accounts of equal election being signified by the appearance of Christ to Mary, as Speght had construed.

Speght resisted masculinist interpretations of Scripture with alternative feminist interpretations throughout, and she was not deterred by the more difficult Pauline texts.

She began her discussion of 1 Corinthians 11.3 by admitting that “a truth ungainesayable is it, that the *Man is the Woman’s Head*”, but proceeded to define the “Head” as authority existing in relation to Christ. She argued that this supremacy did not imply that a man had the authority to dominate and oppress his wife, rather, to love her as Christ loved his Church of which he was the head. (Er). Tomson’s Geneva Bible annotation explained 1 Corinthians 11.3 in the following way: “Hee setteth downe God, in Christ our mediatour, for the ende and marke not onely of doctrine but also of ecclesiasticall comelinesse. Then applying it to the question purposed touching the comely apparell both of men and women in publike assemblies, he declareth that the woman is one degree beneath the man by the ordinance of God, and that the man is so subject to Christ, that the glory of God ought to appeare in him for the preeminences of the sexe.” Speght picked up this note and placed it in a context of marital conduct, so that this extra degree was not to be a source of pride for men, but of extra responsibility toward a wife to be a Christian in all of his intentions towards her.

Speght appropriated John 15.13: *Greater love then this hath no man, when he bestoweth his life for his friend*” and offered a gendered reading of it to further emphasise man’s duty to love his wife. Drawing the analogy between man and his wife and Christ and his Church, she stressed the sanctity of the marital relationship. For a woman to be obedient it was essential, she argued, that she choose a husband from whom she will gladly receive instruction, advice that she endorsed with a follow-up reference to 1 Corinthians 14.35 cautioning women to choose husbands from whom they may learn so that as they “*grow in yeaeres, they may grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord.*”(E1r). In the margin beneath 1 Corinthians 14.35 was the reference to 1

Peter 3.18 which she sensibly omitted from the text. Just as women were commanded to submit themselves to their husbands, she argued so must men remember that women owed them obedience as to the Lord, and must not be expected to obey anything that is not prescribed by Christ. Her marginal reference pointed to Ephesians 5, on which her argument was based, but in Speght's hands, it became a text authorising disobedience to those who did not remember their responsibilities to their wives. (E1r). Speght further cautioned women not to be Saphira in obeying the evil commandments of her husband. (Acts 5.2.). Speght insisted that although she may seem to have praised women too much in her tract, all her examples were grounded in Scripture, which is precisely the argument that misogynists used to endorse their own interpretations of women as evil.

Speght insisted that although she did not deny that there were bad women, there were plenty of good ones, just as there were bad and good men, and she cited Cain and Abel and Cham and Sem in the Old Testament, and noted that in the New Testament, for instance, Matthew 25, they were denoted as sheep and goats. Afterall, she added, if women were not sinful they would not need the Messiah, and even "*Mary rejoiced in God her Saviour Ergo: she was a sinner.*"(E1v). She reminded her reader that in Revelation "the Church is called the Spouse of Christ; and in Zachariah, wickedness is called a woman, to shew that of women there are both godly and ungodly: for Christ would not Purge his Floore if there were not Chaffe among the Wheate; nor would gold neede to bee fined, if among it there were no drosse." (E1v). Even here, Speght deflected the discussion from bad women to a discussion of bad men, arguing that just as "there are some scabbed sheepe in a Flocke, we must not therefore conclude all the rest to bee mangie" so too, we must not think all men bad because some are so. She assured her

reader that her intention in this tract had been to defend “the good sort” of women only, since to do otherwise would itself be wicked: “I should have incurred that woe, which by the Prophet Isaiah is pronounced against them that speake well of evill, and should have justified the wicked, which thing is abhominable to the Lord.” (E2r). In the margin were the final scriptural references of the tract, “Esay 5.20” and “Prou.17.15.” Isaiah 5.20 read “Woe unto them that speake good of evill, and evill of good, which put darknes for light, and light for darknesse, that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for sour.” Speght combined a scriptural endorsement with a witty retort to Swetnam which Esther Sowernam subsequently employed for her pseudonym as she framed her own response to the sour Swetnam’s *Arraignment*.

Speght added an Epilogue or “upshot of the premises” to which she attached only two marginal references, the first was to Genesis 40.23 which she appropriated in order to make a comparative analysis between the ingratitude of the Butler, who neglected to speak for Joseph in the presence of the Pharaoh, and the ingratitude of men who speak against women. She then juxtaposed these narratives of ingratitude with one from Romans 13.10: “*Love is the fulfilling of the Lawe,*” to which she added: “But where Ingratitude is harbored, there Love is banished.” (E2r-E2v). Speght’s re-reading of Genesis through the Pauline Epistles was derived from her reading of the Geneva Bibles, in which this interpretive strategy was set in margins. Speght was, nevertheless, able to re-read some of the stock misogynistic Scriptural texts in startling and fresh ways, to present a mirror of virtue that more closely reflected the nature and role of women than the monstrous mirrors that men had made of them. God had made them one face and men had made of them another that women were refusing to accept as theirs.

Building on the work of Speght, Sowernam offered her own interpretations of Scriptural passages and denied Swetnam the same right, precisely because he hadn't cited the Scriptural passages from which he had derived his argument: "Out of what Scripture, out of what record, can hee prove these impious and impudent speeches? They are onely faigned and framed out of his owne idle, giddie, furious, and franticke imaginations." (C1v). In doing so, she appropriated the rhetoric of Reformation, and configured Swetnam as a Bible-ignorant anti-christian.⁴³

Speght and Sowernam re-read the negative biblical models offered to them in Swetnam's *Arraignment* as positive. The texts of their Geneva Bibles gave them the authoritative Word of God and the margins offered them an interpretation, but through the model of marginal mediation women writers, Leigh, Speght and Sowernam being three among many, realized the possibility of alternative, empowering interpretations that enabled them not only to resist misogynists, but to reclaim the Bible for Renaissance women.

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⁴³ Speght makes a similar allusion in her 'Epistle Dedicatorie' when she calls Swetnam's attack "the persecuting heate of this fierie and furious Dragon." A4v.

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ABSTRACT

Holding up the Bible as a mirror of womanly virtue was one way in which women attempted to deflect the abuses of their male contemporaries, but they clearly saw something of themselves reflected in those biblical models in a way that seemed incongruous to their male observers. In this paper I will argue that women were not simply configured by the biblical models presented to them as paragons of virtue, they reconfigured themselves according to their own, individual, readings of the Scriptures, readings that subsequently manifested themselves in material ranging from privately annotated books to published responses to misogynistic texts such as *The Arraignment of Women*.

Key words: Renaissance Women; Bible; Typology; Resistance Writing.