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Feminism and Misogyny in Early Modern England: The Historical Context of the Swetnam Controversy

by

Donnalyn McClymont

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research through the Department of History inPartial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts at the University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada
1994

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**HISTORY**
Abstract

Although there has been a great deal of research done on the English Renaissance Controversy about women, it has been dominated by literary critics. Whereas some fine scholarship has been contributed, there are literary critics and historians who argue that the texts involved in the controversy are unconnected to woman's status during this particular period. There are others, however, who believe that this controversy emerged out the particular social and political ferment of the times. This thesis redresses these views through careful analyses of the primary sources themselves and by placing them in a historical context.

Perhaps the central components of this English *querelle des femmes* were Joseph Swetnam's *The Araignment of Lewde, idle, froward and unconstant women* and the responses it received. *The Araignment* denounced women as immoral; and yet a necessary evil. The difficulty in addressing Swetnam's work is its historical accuracy. As literary critics have argued, The Swetnam controversy could be merely a literary game, part of traditional education in which the student learns to argue both sides of the debate. The question addressed in this thesis is whether or not historians can rely upon literature as a source for women's history.

A quick read of the works may reveal no more than a literary game, but for a feminist historian they are a wealth of information about societal attitudes towards women, for if they did not have a climate in which to flourish they would not be in existence today. It is now time that historians deconstruct the texts of the Swetnam controversy and develop a better understanding of their place in seventeenth-century England.
Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank a few people who have been helpful in my experience of writing this thesis. First and foremost I extend my appreciation to Jacqueline Murray for her constant support and encouragement. Also thanks to Leslie Howsam and Maureen Muldoon for their advice and participation on my committee. As well I would like to thank my family and friends, especially my mother for her patience and understanding. And finally I want to say a special word about my nephew. Although he is no longer here to witness the successful completion of this project, something he hoped he would be able to do, I want to acknowledge that his courage and faith has helped me to complete this journey. Thank you Jamie.
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Vita Auctoris
Introduction:
The English Renaissance Controversy about Women.

Questions concerning the nature of women have occupied the minds of men for centuries. Such concerns have been manifest in religious writings, novels, and pamphlets. For example, the early Christian fathers debated the nature of women. They interpreted the Biblical story of the Fall as the result of Eve's transgression. The image of Eve leading mankind astray came to characterize all women. Such a misogynist evaluation was widespread and unquestioned for centuries. In the fourteenth century a new wave of misogynist literature appeared, as Renaissance writers claimed that women could never aspire to the Renaissance ideal of "man." In response to this attack, a young widow in fifteenth-century France took up her pen and initiated a four-century long debate known as the *querelle des femmes*. Christine de Pisan wrote a series of works in which she defended her sex and criticized and refuted the virulent misogyny of her time. *Le livre de la cite des Dames* (1404) is a formal defense of women that counters some of the common patriarchal views of her society. "It would seem impossible," Christine wrote, "that so many famous men . . . could have spoken falsely on so many occasions that I could hardly find a book of morals where I did not find several chapters or certain sections attacking women, no matter who the author was." Christine began what was

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2. Ibid.

probably the first literary *querelle*, arguing against Jean de Meun's *The Romance of the Rose*. De Meun's work expressed a low opinion of women and their sexual morality. Christine challenged this in a war of letters in which she was the champion of the female gender. Christine's rebuttal is the first sustained reply that met misogyny on its own intellectual terms. As Joan Kelly remarks, "Christine had created a space for women to oppose this onslaught of vilification and contempt, and the example of her citadel served them for centuries." Christine de Pisan was not only the advocate of fifteenth-century women but also was the model for all women writing in response to misogyny.

The English translation, *The Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes*, appeared in England in 1521, more than a century after its composition. It served as a political vehicle that constructed the image of women as powerful and authoritative in a country that lacked a male heir. Constance Jordan traces the subsequent development of the *querelle* in England and contends that these works served as the pretext upon which English readers could construct an image of women as both authoritative and powerful.

Richard Hynde translated Juan Luis Vives' *De institutio foeminae christiana* (1523) as the *Instruction of a Christen Woman* (1540). Mary Tudor then

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6Ibid., 345-6.

7Ibid., 73.


8Ibid.
(1523) as the *Instruction of a Christen Woman* (1540). Mary Tudor then consulted the work as a directive for proper conduct. In his *Defense of Good Women* (1540), Sir Thomas Elyot argues that women are capable of governing when no legally or politically suitable man is available. Jordan believes this defense was written to support Catherine of Aragon in her attempt to resist Henry the VIII's appeals for divorce. 9 Thus the political framework of Tudor England brought the *querelle des femmes* into the realm of popular debate.

The roots of the *querelle*, however, ran far deeper than political controversy. Joan Kelly argues that the declining status of women in the Renaissance was the impetus that sparked the debate. Writers involved in the *querelle* "were animated by a notion of progress and of intentional social change: The feminists of the *querelle* were reacting to changes they seemed to have no control over, or to a Puritan revolution that served mainly to confirm their subjection to men." 10 The *querelle des femmes* introduced a new tone to literary misogyny: women seized the opportunity to refute it in their own voices and on their own terms.

As early as the sixteenth century men and women in England were writing about the nature of women. In the years between 1541 and 1572 *The Schoolhouse of women* and *Mulierum Paean*, were published anonymously. These works dominated the sixteenth-century debate on

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10Kelly, "Querelle," 79.
women. The Schoolhouse was an attack against women that was answered by Mulierum Paean, a work defending feminine virtues. By the seventeenth century pamphlets focusing on the faults and virtues of women were appearing in great numbers in England. Literary critics have assessed these pamphlets and contend that they are an aspect of a much larger literary genre which had existed for centuries. To view the pamphlets as little more than components of a literary game, however, undermines their historical importance. In Linda Woodbridge's words, "the purely literary approach, like the approach of the social or intellectual historian, has its danger." Woodbridge's analysis of the literature on the nature of womankind between 1540-1620 is an attempt to reconcile the literary and historical context of the debate about women from a literary critic's perspective.

The formal controversy about women, according to Woodbridge, was largely a literary game, with tenuous roots in contemporary attitudes. Woodbridge does acknowledge, however, that "in the Jacobean period, the formal controversy was losing its generic consistency and was beginning to show signs of authorial uncertainty over the relationship between this charming parlor game and the realities of life for women."

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13Ibid.

14Ibid., 110.
The debate no longer adhered to the rules of the formal controversy and women themselves were beginning to refute misogynistic humour.

In the later part of this debate, five important pamphlets emerged which touched on some of the important issues of Jacobean English society. Known as "The Swetnam controversy" this pamphlet war began in 1615 with the publication of Joseph Swetnam's *The Aрайgment of Lewde, idle, froward, and unconstant women: Or the vanity of them, choose you whether*. There were four responses to Swetnam, the first, an indirect rebuttal written by Daniel Tuvil was entitled *Asylum Veneris; or A Sanctuary for Ladies* (1616). A year later, Rachel Speght published *A Mouzell for Melastosmus, The Cynicll Bayter of, and foule mouthed Barker against Evahs Sex: or an Apologeticall Answere to that Illiterate Pamphlet made by Jo. Swetnam and by him intituled, The Aрайagement of Women*, (1617). Constantia Munda's *The Worming of a mad Dogge: or, A soppe for Cerberus the Jaylor of Hell. No Confutation but a sharpe Redargution of the bayter of Women*, (1617) and Ester Sowernam's *Ester hath hang'd Haman: or An Answere To a lewd Pamphlet, entitled, The Aрайagement of Women* (1617) followed. These pamphlets are a rich source for historians and literary critics alike because they survive in total and present a full spectrum of the debate: a misogynist man's evaluation of women, a defense of women written by a man and three more defenses written by women themselves. Consequently, the Swetnam controversy exemplifies a variety of perspectives in the English *querelle des femmes*, a microcosm of the greater *querelle* itself. Undeniably the Swetnam controversy is part of a literary discourse but it also has a specific context in Jacobean society.

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15Ibid., 189.
Much of the scholarly work on the Swetnam debate is at best piecemeal, and as of yet a historical examination of the texts and contexts of the debate has not appeared. The controversial intersection of history and literature in the texts makes the source both rich and problematic. Indeed to use these texts as historical documentation is misleading but to dismiss them as little more than a literary game is equally unsatisfactory. The challenge of the Swetnam controversy to the modern day scholar is that it provides the opportunity to read as historical sources, literary texts of depth and complication.

Poststructuralist theory proposes a means through which an interdisciplinary approach can give voice to the past. Gabrielle Speigel argues that literature offers, "an index of socially construable meaning rather than an image of reality; it is to the construction of social meaning, rather than the transmission of messages about the world, that the exercise of literature is directed." 16 For the historian, then, literature can reveal the cultural and social context of a society if the text itself is read closely, carefully, and sensitively. Such an approach will clarify "the hidden meanings which the text attempts, in vain, to impose. And what this unmasking reveals, ultimately, is the 'inability of language to represent anything outside its own boundaries.' 17 Consequently, deconstruction allows a text to be read and understood in its historical context. By focusing on the location of the text within a broader network of social and


inter-textual relations. Historians become better attuned to the "specific historical conditions whose presence and/or absence in the work alerts us to its own social character and function. Its own combination of material and discursive realities that endow it with its own sense of historical purposiveness." 18 Thus in the process of analysing literary texts the historian must contextualize the work in order to place it within the broader social dynamics.

For historians of women this textual deconstruction provides countless opportunities to recover women's voices in the past. In the publication of the symposium on "Women, History and Theory," Jacqueline Murray argues that "the intersection of historical and literary methodologies holds out hope for a more coherent and comprehensive understanding of the past. Yet in many ways the disciplines differ so profoundly that there is a degree of isolation and lack of communication." 19 In an attempt to bridge this gap, Murray and other panelists, from the fields of History and English, attempt to explore ways of eradicating the problems of interdisciplinary studies. The question Merry Wiesner poses to feminist historians is:

How do we bring together our understanding of the subjectivity of doing history, the necessary bias and incompleteness of our stories, with our desires to present the most complete picture possible of the women and men we study, to give them the respect they deserve? Can we develop a theory which ... grows out of our own work as feminist historians rather than one taken from elsewhere? 20

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18 Speigel, "History, Historicism," 85.


The mandate of women's history can be identified as to provide a contribution to the ongoing struggle to regain women's place in the past, to give voice to the texts themselves while remaining aware of our own subject positions. This study is a contribution to the ongoing debates between literature and history in the quest for truly interdisciplinary and enlightening approaches to the past. As historical and literary texts, the pamphlets of the Swetnam controversy are a window into the past. They reveal much about attitudes towards women, the family, and marriage in Jacobean England.

Linda Woodbridge's contribution to our understanding of the Renaissance literary game is invaluable but it is beyond the scope of her study to reveal the historical background of the texts. It is now, however, the time for historians to provide an analysis which places these texts in seventeenth-century society. To take the pamphlets as a literal representation does not provide an adequate assessment of history. Rather, they must be examined alongside the interpretations of historians and their examination of court proceedings, prescriptive literature, and church records of contemporary society. The comparison of the similarities between the images provided in the texts with lived experiences enables the texts to be placed in Jacobean society. Giving these texts a history reveals how the Swetnam debate reflects the concerns and issues that were at the forefront of seventeenth-century society, and the value of an interdisciplinary approach to history.
Chapter 1: 

The Aainenment of lewe, idle, froward and unconstant women as Evidence of Societal Attitudes Towards Women.

In 1615, Joseph Swetnam published The Aainenment of lewe, idle, froward and unconstant women which depicted women as lustful, wanton, untrustworthy and evil. In accordance with the literary tradition of pamphlet writing, Swetnam masked his true opinions in what may seem to be purely a literary game. The question which remains to be addressed is the degree to which Swetnam's work reflects the popular beliefs about seventeenth-century English women.

Analyses by historians and literary critics' of Swetnam's work present two distinctly opposing views. Literary critics envision The Aainenment as merely an aspect of the literary genre which had existed for centuries. There are historians, however, who have concluded that Swetnam's pamphlet developed out of socio-economic and political movements which shaped and transformed early modern England. Although most studies of Renaissance England refer to the Swetnam controversy, few do more than mention it in passing.

The most thorough study is Linda Woodbridge's Women and the English Renaissance. Woodbridge analyses the texts of the period and concludes that the Swetnam controversy is simply one component of a much larger Renaissance literary game that was deeply rooted in the sixteenth century. The formal controversy contained elements of style such as addressing the nature of women in general, and attacking women in abstract terms. Woodbridge contends that Swetnam misunderstood the style of the formal controversy, by repeating his arguments and utilizing aspects of
misogyny from literature outside of the formal controversy. ¹ Moreover, she claims "Swetnam is a football player who rushes to the fifty yard line with his arms full of shoulder pads, helmets, and shin guards, panting and eager, but who doesn't [sic] know a fair catch from a touchdown." ² Swetnam may not have realized that his pamphlet would cause such turmoil but the responses which *The Araignment* elicited illustrate that women were no longer willing to accept misogynistic humour. In her survey of the work from the literary genre, Woodbridge deduces that the Swetnam debate was the beginning of the end for misogynist jokes against women. "During the Swetnam controversy, the debate lost an important element of artistic dishonesty; while earlier defenses of Speght, Sowerman, and Munda actually did answer such an attack." ³ Unfortunately, the scope of Woodbridge's book does not enable her to advance this claim. Focusing primarily on the literary aspects of the genre, Woodbridge has left a considerable void in the historical background of the Swetnam controversy.

In her critique, Constance Jordan argues that Woodbridge has neglected the historical significance of the Swetnam controversy. By characterizing the formal controversy as a literary game undertaken as a rhetorical exercise, Woodbridge has learned nothing from social scientists. "Games," Jordan argues, "are serious matters, especially if they are played within a framework of cultural concerns." ⁴ Moreover, Jordan suggests that it is arguable whether


²Ibid.

³Ibid. , 110.

any socially communicative act should be dismissed as a rhetorical game. Regardless of Swetnam's role in a literary game, the place of his work in its historical context cannot be overlooked.

Whereas Woodbridge does not examine the historical significance of *The Araignment*, historians have failed to provide an analysis of the text itself and assume it is historically important while neglecting to provide evidence for their claims. Studies of early modern England, for example, works by Louis B. Wright and Lawrence Stone, concede that *The Araignment* was a crucial aspect of cultural dynamics, but they neglect the substance of the text. In *Middle Class Culture in Elizabethan England*, Wright contends "Swetnam hit upon the grievances that the average citizen, especially among the Puritans, regarded as the besetting sins of women." More recently, Lawrence Stone argues:

> it is highly significant of popular attitudes towards women in the early seventeenth century that Joseph Swetnam's *The Araignment of lewde, idle, froward and unconstant women* ... went through no less than ten editions between its first publication in 1616 and 1634.

Although Stone and Wright have attested to the importance of Swetnam's work, they argue its very existence illustrates misogynist attitudes towards women in the seventeenth century. This approach does little more to explain the debate's historical context than does Woodbridge's work. Both disregard

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5Ibid.


the evidence of the text in relation to the history of the period and subsequently provide two diametrically opposed views of the controversy.

In *Half Humankind*, their compilation of the texts and contexts of the controversy about women in England between 1540-1640, Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus attempt to redress many of the deficiencies of both the literary and historical analyses of the controversy. They conclude that the negative stereotypes of women found in the pamphlets reflect more about the fears and frustrations of Renaissance Englishmen than an actual description of Englishwomen themselves. The images that Swetnam presents in his work are both literary and historical; in cloaking his conceptions of popularly held fears about women, *The Araignment* embodies the subconscious anxieties of Renaissance Englishmen.

It is surprising, however, that Swetnam's work had an impact on his contemporaries. It is a repetitive and poorly written argument which, as Woodbridge remarks, is annoying to read. What it does present, however, is a view of women which is overtly misogynist. The tone of the pamphlet gives it a quality that is neither personal nor intellectual but rather jocular. This mood enables Swetnam to write a misogynist tract without directly attacking women for their actions. The issue of the importance of jokes has been discussed at length by many psychologists, most notably Sigmund Freud. Although a controversial figure, Freud's theory of jokes about women is most compelling in this context. He argues that many jokes are directed at women

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out of male sexual frustration: "a man makes a smutty joke when he finds his libidinal impulses inhibited by a woman."  

The place of jokes in an historical context has been examined by Robert Darnton, who argues that "when we cannot get a proverb, or a joke, or a ritual, or a poem, we know we are on to something. By picking at the document where it is most opaque, we may be able to unravel an alien system of meaning."  

Darnton believes it is possible for the historian to discover the social dimension of thought and to "tease meaning from documents by relating them to the surrounding world of significance, passing from text to context and back again until he has cleared a way through a foreign mental world."  

Another theoretical perspective on laughter in Jacobean England has been proposed by Keith Thomas. Jokes, in Thomas's view, reveal structural ambiguities in the society itself and the subject of jokes can reveal past anxieties and tensions. Seventeenth-century jokes about women and their proper place in society was a means of confronting the anomalies of insubordinate behaviour which were perceived as a threat to patriarchy. Consequently, the jokes directed against women by Swetnam bespeak profound truths and, as a means to better understand this concept, a close analysis of the text set against its historical context is necessary.

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12 Ibid., 6.


14 Ibid.
Joseph Swetnam claimed that he wrote *The Araignment of lewd, idle, froward and unconstant women* in 1615 because of "his idleness and being in a great choller against some women." 15 Indeed he may have set out to provide no more than a contribution to a literary game, but his work has contributed to a gender polemic which has yet to be resolved. Regardless of his place in the literary game, his historical importance deserves examination. Based on historian's evaluation of the period it is evident that Swetnam's work reflected Renaissance values and concerns. Swetnam provides three different insights into seventeenth-century society. First, he reveals opinions about women. Second, he discusses the relationship between men and women and finally, he provides advice to men about women, especially widows.

In the first chapter Swetnam describes what he feels to be women's proper rôle in society. He contends:

> most of them [women] degenerate from the use they were framed unto, by leading a proud, lasie and idle life, to the great hinderance of their poore Husbands. 16

Swetnam argues that women have deviated from their prescribed role in society. Women, he states, were made to be the helper of men, and "so they are indeede, for they helpeth to spend and consume that which man painefully getteth." 17 He maintains that women have brought about men's demise. He follows in a long line of misogynists in tracing this to the fall of Adam and Eve and he argues "for her aspiring minde and wanton will she quickly


16 Ibid., 1.

17 Ibid.
procured man's fall, and therefore ever since they are and have been a woe unto man, and follow the line of their first leader." 18 By placing blame for man's fall on woman, Swetnam is able to develop the theme throughout his tract, claiming that women are the cause of men's destruction. "Their beauties are baytes, their lookes are netts, and their wordes charmes, and all to bring man to ruin." 19

The theme of man's financial destruction is coupled with the image of sexual destruction as well. "Women lay out the foldes of their hare to entangle men into their love, betwixt their breasts is the vale of destruction, & in their beds is hell, sorrow & repentance."20 Moreover, he contends, "lust causeth you to doe such foule deedes, which makes your foreheads for ever afterwards seeme spotted with blacke shame and everlasting infamy, by which meanes your graves after death are closed up with time's scandall."21 These images of woman as temptress and the source of destruction suggests that women were the active agent in the demise of men. In a historical context Swetnam's aim becomes apparent; the issue of women's role in society was coming to the fore. Historians who have analyzed various aspects of the period reveal the timely nature of The Araignment.

D. E. Underdown has argued that court records of the time reveal "an intense preoccupation with women who are a visible threat to the patriarchal.

18Ibid., 3.
19Ibid., 4.
20Ibid., 10.
21Ibid., 26.
system." 22 The thrust of Underdown's argument centres on patriarchal authority within the family, as the cornerstone of Elizabethan and Jacobean political theory, the natural justification for obedience to the state: to reject either was to threaten the entire social and political order. 23 However, Underdown suggests that some women may have been capable of overtly overcoming prescribed roles. While many writers of the period termed England "a woman's paradise," Underdown believes this saying may be an indication that for some women there had been a slight enlargement of their roles in the household economy, leading to a greater sense of independence which men found threatening. 24 This fear was manifest in the persecution of scolds; women who rejected the ideal of patriarchal authority, much like the feminine qualities Swetnam condemns in his work.

Moreover, according to Swetnam, there are no means by which a man can control a woman. "All beasts," he observes, "by man are made tame, but a woman's tongue will never be tame, it is but a small thing and seldom seen, but it is often heard, to the terror and utter confusion of many a man." 25 Swetnam argues a woman's chief strength is in her tongue. Any man that confides his secrets to a woman is foolish because eventually even the most loyal wife will divulge her secrets to her one "especiall gossip." 26 Indeed,


23Ibid. , 117.

24Ibid. , 135.


26Ibid.
gossip held an important place in this society which was centered around parochial judgement. Martin Ingram has indicated the power of gossip in his work on sex and marriage in the ecclesiastical court records in England between 1570 and 1640. In one example, from Whiltshire, in 1619, it came to the court's attention that Edward Peinton had been frequenting the house of John Earle and was supposedly having sexual relations with Earle's wife, Agnes. The two alleged adulterers denied the accusation. Peinton eventually was overwhelmed with guilt and revealed his sins to the local minster. The minister forced the two to confess and they were presented to the court of the Bishop of Salisbury. A local shepherd commenting on the case said Peinton was "a wiseman to say that he had lain with Agnes Earle and to tell of it." 27 This example reveals the power of "public rumour" that could lead to the prosecution of wrong doing.

More often than not women were considered at the heart of this rumour mill. Ingram claims that "malicious talebearing was often done by local busy bodies who clearly took delight in spreading scandal and would go to considerable lengths to nose it out." 28 The examples Ingram cites all involve women. Cicly Goodwin of Draycot Cerne around 1626 often spied on her neighbours at night and then circulated spicy tales about what she saw. 29 Mary of Wroughton, in 1619, said that "James Spackman had one bastard in Oxford and another in every corner, and that she cared not who did hear her say


28 Ibid., 305.

29 W.R.O., B/DB 36, fols. 97v-8. as cited in Ingram, Church Courts, 305.
it." 30 In fact during this period women were often involved in court cases dealing with defamation more so than were men. Susan Amussen reveals that scolds were consistently punished for repudiating feminine meekness during the early seventeenth-century. 31 Scolding women, however, disappeared in the 1650's when social mobility halted, the population stabilized and the economy began to improve. 32 Thus as society changed, women's involvement in scolding ceased. This period of social unrest also afforded women the opportunity to voice their opinions.

Indeed an underlying theme in historian's work on women focuses on an measurable increase of their status during certain periods and their subsequent decline in others. For example, in her famous work "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" Joan Kelly challenges traditional periodization and argues that although the Renaissance has been characterized as a period of rebirth for men it was in fact one of decline for women. 33 She argues rather that the era of courtly love and the high Middle Ages was a golden age for women and that Renaissance ideals of love and marriage were an exclusively male construction which expressed patriarchal values. 34 Consequently, women's status declined as patriarchal values were reinforced and their subordinate role was reinstated.

30 Ibid., 306.


32 Ibid. , 123.


34 Ibid. , 47.
Another important article which discusses the rise and decline of women in the medieval and early modern England is Judith Bennett's "Misogyny, Popular Culture, and Women's Work." Bennett questions the commonly held notion that economic, political, and technical forces were responsible for the withdrawal of women from the brewing trade between 1300-1700. Citing misogyny as a major component in the lives of early modern English women, Bennett concludes that literary misogyny was a very real and horrible problem for women. In the popular culture of medieval and early modern England, female brewers and tipplers were represented as unpleasant, unrespectable and, untrustworthy. Public ridicule of such women seems to have been acceptable and commonplace. Bennett concludes that such images quite possibly could have undermined not only the desire of women to pursue commercial brewing, but also their ability to compete with men in this industry. This misogyny contributed to an overall decline in women's participation in the brewing industry and a subsequent decline in status throughout the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Bennett reveals that the misogynistic popular culture of early modern England had a real and detrimental effect on the lives of women.

What is crucial for understanding the context of seventeenth-century England is that complex social forces, such as the political, economic, and religious changes, as well as a popular culture interacted with, and shaped the lives of Jacobean people. The family itself, was shaped and transformed by exterior social changes. As Keith Wrightson argues, what undoubtedly

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36Ibid., 169.
changed in the course of this period was not so much the fundamental structure of the family, but the broader economic and social context within which it operated. 37 The instability of religion, exemplified by the changes from Catholicism under Mary Tudor, to Protestantism under Elizabeth I, created turmoil and spurred the growth of the Reformation. Such changes pitted neighbour against neighbour and sometimes husband against wife as people's beliefs did not always transform in accordance with those of their rulers. As well, evolving government institutions and consequent political changes plagued the minds of the English. Under the rule of James I there was popular discontent over absolutist government policy. The political order itself was explicitly challenged by the gentry who tried to regain control of royal policy and prevent the establishment of absolutism. 38 Coupled with this issue was the growth of merchant capitalism which also contributed to the tensions between the notables and the King. Amussen argues that the economy was transformed by demographic growth and inflation.

According to some historians, the rise of merchant capitalism had an adverse effect on the lives of women. In her ground breaking study, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, first published in 1919, Alice Clark argues that under the system of family industry men and women worked together against competing families to secure their own survival. Capitalism, however, destroyed this structure and men and women were pitted against one another for wages and work from the capitalist. This view maintains that the lives of upper class women were increasingly restricted to the home, while

lower class women were expected not only to maintain the home, but also to support the family economy where necessary. 39 Consequently, lower class women were required to maintain a covertly dual role as both housewife and wage earner, while their upper class sisters were subjected to their husband's rule.

Margaret Ezell's *The Patriarch's Wife* combines Clark's work with literary representations to develop a better understanding of the social dynamics of the period. Arguing from a similar position as Clark, Ezell contends that there was a distinct transformation in society which prohibited women's involvement in the social establishments. The traditional institutions of seventeenth-century England were patriarchal but, Ezell argues, the spirit that governed the domestic practice was different. "Domestic patriarchalism was a personal authority on the family level." 40 Women's position within this domestic patriarchalism could be one of either subordination or control and Ezell believes women could have held either position. The distinction between seventeenth-century theory and the effects of this theory on every day life is at the center of the contemporary debate over women's roles and rights. 41 The notion of patriarchal authority, coupled with fear of political usurpation, caused men to denounce women in society and reinforce their power. Ezell concludes that the satirists of seventeenth-century offer a more complex statement of contemporary views than simple hostility and fear of women.

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41 Ibid., 163.
Swetnam’s image of women, then, focussed on an issue which occupied the minds of men who were growing increasingly insecure in a society which was undergoing profound economic and political transformations. These transformations explain why Swetnam’s work attracted so much attention and warranted ten printings. Society, as Constance Jordan suggests, uses communicative acts to mediate its internal conflicts and to release or contain the disruptive forces within it. 42 In seventeenth-century England, as issues outside the family sparked insecurities and altered prescribed roles, people became increasingly conservative. One such conservative view, that had been held for centuries, concerned the role of women and contemporary polemicists ridiculed the notion of women’s domination over men.

Patriarchal authority facilitated the subordination of women and constructed the ideal relations between men and women, as presented in Swetnam’s discussion of gender relations. This other important component of Swetnam’s work exposes the growing tensions between the sexes found in society. Swetnam argues:

If God had not made them only to be a plague to men, he would never have called them necessarily evills, and what are they better? for what do they either get or gain, save or keepe? nay they doe rather spend and consume all that which man painfully getteth: a man must be at all the cost and yet live by the losse. 43

42 Jordan, Review. 253.

To empower his text, Swetnam repeats the commonplace that God named women necessary evils. Nevertheless, Swetnam makes it apparent that women are crucial to society as a whole; they are indeed necessary.

Swetnam portrays the relationship between men and women as one of enslavement. As had been argued for centuries, men are drawn to women because of their uncontrollable sexual urges:

Yet there are many young men which cudgell their witts and beare their braines and spend all their time in the love of women, and if they get a smile or but a favor at their love's hand, they straight way are so ravished with joy, yea so much that they thinke they have gotten God by the hand, but within a while after they find they have but the devil by the foote. 44

Women are portrayed as delightful but, eventually, when men come to their senses, they realize women are not what they appear to be initially. "Eagles eate not men till they are dead but women devour them alive." 45 For Swetnam, gender relations are inverted and women control men through their sexuality. He writes:

For a woman will pick thy pocket & empty thy purse, laugh in thy face and cutt thy throat, they are ungratefull, perjured, full of fraud, flouting and deceit, unconstant, waspish, toyish,light, sulen, proude, discourteous and cruell, and yet they were by God created, and by nature formed, and therefore by pollicy and wisedome to be avoyded. 46

44Ibid. , 4.
45Ibid. , 10.
46Ibid.
Men are depicted as weak and unable to resist the sexual power women exercise over them.

To further his point Swetnam cites examples of famous men in history who also fell victim to women's devices. "Sampson and Hercules for all their great strength and conquest of Giants and monsters, yet the one yecelded his club a Diaveras foote, and the other revealed his strength to Dalyla, and he paide his life for his folly." The follies of all men are women, regardless of their status in society. Thus the prevalent image of the manipulative woman sounded in seventeenth-century courts is repeated in *The Araignment*. As Underdown has noted, men were persecuted by their contemporaries for allowing women to dominate. The symbol of a cuckolded husband was horns, and the mere mention of them was enough to instigate a lawsuit. "Foulbrooke hath longer horns than my cow, dost thou know what I mean by it?" a countryman leered in the market place at Abingdon - and William Fulbrooke duly took him to court when he heard about it. This pejorative image of a cuckolded husband was enough to cause William Fulbrooke to take his neighbour to court; evidently it was an image which was abhorred by men. Swetnam plays on this ridicule of men who are controlled by their wives; a phenomenon of concern to seventeenth-century society.

Another crucial component in Swetnam's evaluation of gender relations is the impossibility of making a woman happy. Women can always find something to criticize in any man: "women will account thee a penny pinch if

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47 Ibid. , 22.

thou be not prodigall, and a dastard if thou be not ventrous. . . . if thou be cleane in thy apparrell they will terme thee proude, if meane they will terme thee sloven." 49 In this seventeenth-century war between the sexes an undercurrent of male frustration is evident: regardless of what a man does for a woman she is never satisfied.

The power struggle within marriage could be exacerbated depending on the appearance of the wife. A beautiful wife is nothing but trouble. Quoting proverbial authorities he argues:

there is an old saying goeth thus, that he which hath a faire wife and a white horse shall never be without troubles, for a woman that hath a fair face it is ever matched with a cruell heart, and hir heavenly lookes with hellish thoughtes, their modest countenance with mercilesse mindes. 50

This traditional view of a beautiful woman presents her as both despised yet coveted. Indeed, a man might want a beautiful and sexually appealing wife, but Swetnam associates beauty with cruelty, hellish thoughts, and a merciless mind. Power is equated with a woman's beauty and men have no control over a beautiful woman's power. Consequently, Swetnam warns men to avoid such women.

The image of gender relations in which men are controlled, manipulated, and oppressed by women is paramount in the pamphlet. From a historiographical perspective, few if any historical studies would support such a portrayal. Indeed, most argue that women were oppressed by men, not the opposite. Why, then, did Swetnam's image receive so much attention? One


50 Ibid., 4.
possible explanation lies in be the perceived or actual tensions existing between men and women. Historians have found evidence of a definitive decline in gender relations during this period. It was undeniably an age of transition, as James I ascended the throne after the death of Elizabeth I in 1603. The advent of James I occurred during what feminist historian Retha Warnicke argues was an era of outright hostility towards women. 51 As late in his reign as 1633, the story was circulating that when James had been introduced to a lady who could speak Greek and Latin, he had retorted, "But can she spin?" 52 As well, Johnathan Goldberg has argued that Stuart family images reflect the patriarchal temperament of James' rule. Society became an extended family in which the subjects were his children, his kingdom was his wife. 53 Subsequently, as James' rule began to stress male supremacy, the family reflected these views and women became increasingly subject to patriarchal authority.

The notion that the family became a microcosm of the state has been developed by Susan Amussen in her discussion of gender and class in early modern England. Amussen argues that the ordering of the household provided a model for the ordering of villages and counties, church and state. She contends that the literature of the period reiterates the equation of the hierarchy between families and the state - as the wife is subject to her husband.

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52Ibid.

so too are subjects to the King. In Amussen's view the assumptions made in the political and social theory about the family and sexuality were simple: a clear subordination of wives to husbands provided the model for all relationships between men and women. By examining court records, Amussen notes a distinct difference between the cases brought to court by men and those by women. Women, she argues, were more frequently the victims of sexual allegations but were more apt to take their neighbour to court for slander. The slight decline in the proportion of cases brought by men against women suggests that the social worlds of the two sexes were becoming more distinct. As previously suggested, Amussen concludes that, given this evidence, it appears that women had a smaller role in the world of men as this period progressed. The pamphlet controversy, according to Amussen, grew out of society's concern about the gender order. More than just relations between men and women, the gender order reflected the social order as well. Women who deviated from prescribed roles were to be chastised because they not only undermined gender authority but also threatened social order.

Another important aspect of gender relation to which Swetnam alludes is the sheer frustration men had with women. He suggests a man could never make a woman happy and women were never satisfied. A possible explanation for this view is proposed by Henderson and McManus, who argue that sexual repression was the cause of discontent among men in this period. Due to the

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54 Amussen, Ordered Society, 2.
55 Ibid., 95.
56 Ibid., 103.
57 Ibid., 95.
rather late age of marriage (twenty-eight for men and twenty-four for women), combined with strict prohibitions against premarital intercourse, young people were forced to suppress their desires or defy authority. The authors argue that to deny powerful feelings is often psychologically easier than confronting them. One of the most common ways to deny one's feelings is to project them onto someone else. Consequently, the frustrations which Swetnam outlines were a product of his society. Men were becoming increasingly unable to deal with their feelings towards women and Swetnam is once again playing on these male anxieties.

Having provoked some of men's most deep-seated fears, Swetnam then offers advice to his cohorts. In his third chapter he "sheweth a remedy against love, also many reasons not to be too hasty in choise of a wife." The first piece of advice he offers is to shun idleness:

for so long as thy minde or thy body is in labour the love of a woman is not remembered nor lust never thought upon, but if thou spend thy time idely amongst women, thou art like unto him which playeth with the Bee, who may sooner feel of her sting then taste of her honey.  

Swetnam suggests that it is better to keep oneself busy and separate from women in order to avoid their "sting." He realizes, however, that some men will marry and consequently presents several pieces of advice. He encourages men to choose the lesser of two evils. This directive does not necessarily mean one should choose a little woman "for the little women are as unhappy as the

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58 Henderson and McManus, Half Humankind, 56.


60 Ibid., 34.
greatest, for though their statures be little yet their heartes are big." 61 Swetnam is characterizing women and delineating the qualities of which men should be aware. He claims there are six kinds of women who must be avoided at all costs: "good nor bad, faire nor foule, rich nor poore." 62 But, even if a man were fortunate enough to find a woman free of these, she will nevertheless embody some imperfect quality. Swetnam's solution to this dilemma is to choose a young wife. A man of twenty-five, according to Swetnam, should marry a a girl of seventeen, or thereabouts. "A woman of tender years is flexible and bending, obedient and subject to doe anything, according to the will and pleasure of her husband."63 Thus, a young woman is perceived to be malleable, whereas an older woman's disposition cannot be changed. The image of young woman as inferior and submissive to authoritarian control is characteristic throughout the The Araignment.

Another option is for a man to run blindfolded through a crowd of maidens and grab the closest. This option is put forth because "thou must not trust thine owne eyes for they will deceive thee and be cause of thy woe." 64 Once a man has chosen a wife, moreover, he must be with her night and day. "Thou must stand to thy worde which thou madest before the whole Parish."65 Marriage is portrayed as an union which is serious and permanent.

61Ibid. , 36.
62Ibid.
63Ibid. , 46.
64Ibid. , 45.
65Ibid.
Once the marriage is completed Swetnam advises the husband to be wary of his actions. For example, the husband should not flatter his wife too much. "For women love to be accounted beautiful, and to be mistresses of many maides, & to live without controlement." 66 The most important aspect of the marriage is that the husband control the wife. In so doing the husband must not cavort with the wife in front of company: "those that play and dally with them before company, they doe thereby set other mens teeth an edge, and make their wives the lesse shamefaste." 67 Consequently, both play and correction are to be done in private. Husbands must teach their wives to be silent and obedient, but they should never beat their wives. Swetnam rebukes men who do so: "he [the husband] ought paciently to forbeare her then rigorously to beate her, for she is self of thy self & there is no man so foolish to hurt his owne flesh." 68 Morally it was considered reprehensible to seriously beat one's wife. A husband who abused his wife could be tried in the ecclesiastical courts. An example of such a case went before the court of Sussex in 1623. John Gray was presented by his parish for "living after an ungodly and wicked fashion in shamefull usage of his wife, beating and striking her outrageously, having bin heretofore often admonished by our minister and also presented." 69 Although the records do not abound with wife abuse charges, the mere fact that such cases exist reveal that in Puritan ideology it was not considered an acceptable way to treat one's wife.

66 Ibid., 50.
67 Ibid., 53.
68 Ibid., 56.
Swetnam ends this part of his discussion by reinforcing women's separate and distinct sphere into which men should not intrude. He is even willing to concede the pains that women endure during childbearing, "nay if a man had the tooth-ache, goute, chollick, nay if a man had all these at once, yet nothing comparable to a woman's pain in hir travaile with childe." 70 Thus Swetnam's advice is quite simple: try to choose the best wife possible, one that is controllable, and once this wife has been chosen make the best of the situation by understanding your separate roles.

Swetnam, however, does not end his polemic on such a positive note. He goes on to attack widows, the women whom he feels are the most uncontrollable of all. The conclusion of The Araisonment is entitled "The Bearbaiting or the vanity of Widowes: choose you whether," 71 and continues in an advisory tone. The man who marries a widow should be the most pitied "for a widowe will be the cause of a thousand woes." 72 The only endearing quality a widow may possess is her wealth, but even this does not redeem her. "She will hide her money to maintaine her pride: and if thou at any time art desirous to be merry in her company, she will say thou art merry because thou hast gotten a wife that is able to maintaine thee." 73 This image of an incorrigible widow abounds throughout Swetnam's conclusion. One possible explanation for Swetnam's characterization is suggested in Charles Carlton's study of the male myths and female realities of widowhood in sixteenth- and

70Ibid. , 57.
71Ibid. , 59.
72Ibid. , 60.
73Ibid.
seventeenth-century England. Referring to Freud, Carlton contends that people laugh at things of which they are consciously or unconsciously afraid, and towards which they feel a hostility that they cannot admit, not even to themselves. 74 Seventeenth-century men, Carlton theorizes, may have perceived the widow as a fearful figure because she was a constant reminder of their own mortality. 75

The fear that men had of widows extended beyond possible images widows may or may not have conveyed. More importantly, the widow posed a threat to the social order. Being unmarried, a widow, then as today, was forced to develop a certain degree of independence. Such independence was scorned and feared in a society which upheld patriarchal authority and male domination. Swetnam advises men who marry widows that "thy paines will be double in regard of him which marrieth with a maide, for thou must unlearne thy widowe, and make her forget her former corrupt and disordered behavior." 76 A widow is characterized as "so waspish, and so stubborn, that thou canst not rest them from their wills, and if thou thinke to make her good by stripes thou must beate her to death." 77 While Swetnam abhorred beating one's wife, nevertheless this passage indicates that he believed a widow could not be retrained even by force. Subsequently, the fears conveyed in Swetnam's images of maidens are compounded for widows. Young women, the reader is led to believe, are malleable, but widows are absolutely uncontrollable.


75Ibid.

76Swetnam, The Araignment, 59.

77Ibid.
Several historians have argued that the literary stereotypes surrounding widows indicate their perceived menace to society. Barbara Todd and Vivien Brodsky, in their studies of seventeenth-century widows, reveal the destitute and lonely life that a widow led. Few widows were rich and many were forced to rely on poor relief or familial support. Consequently, Brodsky notes that widows often remarried within nine months of their husbands' death. 78 A question which is posed by Todd, Brodsky, and Carlton is why men would have created a stereotype that contradicts the statistical evidence and mocks an obviously sad situation. Todd provides the best explanation, arguing that a married woman was legally and personally subject to her husband; a widow was free from such control. 79 Indeed, the very notion of a woman heading her own household contradicted patriarchal theory: the ungoverned woman was a threat to the social order. 80

Contradictory images of widows pervade the literature of the period. A woman was expected to be married and governed by her husband but, as Todd argues, men disliked the notion of being replaced after their deaths. As well Carlton also maintains that "sexual jealousy is inherent in the contemplation of widowhood." 81 When a man entertains the thought of his widow remarrying he is confronted not just with considering his own death, but with the image of


80 Ibid.

some other man making love to his wife - "in other words posthumous
cuckholdry." 82 Todd has discovered that seventeenth-century men, in order to
ensure their wives would not remarry, included in their wills a stipulation that
denied their wife a share of the estate or a smaller portion thereof, should she
remarry. 83 Although little research has been done on widows it is apparent
that society was becoming increasingly aware of their predicament as fewer
women remarried in this period. 84 Swetnam's tale of one man's plight plays
on the image of the widow as a burden to her second husband.

After having married with a widowe being one day at a sermon
heard the Preacher say, whosoever will be saved let him take up
his crosse and follow me, this mad fellow after the sermon was
ended tooke his wife upon his backe and came to the Preacher
and said, heere is my crosse, I am ready to follow thee whether
thou wilt. 85

In this story the unfortunate widow is seen as her husband's cross. Swetnam
advises a man not to marry a widow because she will be the bane of his
existence. In his summation, Swetnam states widows are "the sum of the seven
deadly sinnes, the Fiends of Sathan and the gates of Hell." 86 There is
something particularly offensive about a widow, not only does she threaten the
social order but she also represents "used goods" and is thus to be avoided.
This is by far Swetnam's most reprehensible and abusive discussion as he

82 Ibid.
83 Todd, "The Remarrying Widow," 73.
84 Todd claims that the numbers of widows who did not remarry grew in
the early seventeenth century. Please see Todd, "The Remarrying Widow," 83.
85 Swetnam, The Araignment, 63.
86 Ibid., 63-4.
fosters the stereotype of widows and plays on their negative image. Once again, however, he focuses on a social issue which was both prevalent and disconcerting. In spite of his sharp tongue and offensive comments, Swetnam is above all else aware of contemporary fears.

Although The Arafment is not a direct reflection of the lives of women in seventeenth-century England, it is, nevertheless, a reflection of the popular beliefs about women which were held by men. The image of women as waspish, evil, froward, and unconstant is reinforced throughout Swetnam's polemic. Why this image attracted so much attention has been explained by many historians. The social framework of England was undergoing several transitions. Religious, economic, and political changes threatened the social fabric. As a result men began to fear women and to restrict their position in society. In her theoretical article "Feminism and History," Judith Bennett posits that times of crises could have been beneficial to women. Once the crises ended, however, the clear subordination of women resumed.

Consequently, as the patriarchal structure transformed itself to adapt to the changes in society it then reinforced its authority. The years surrounding the Swetnam controversy fell directly in such a period, when the patriarchal system was transforming and reasserting its control within the society. Consequently, Swetnam's pamphlet must be understood in light of this transformation. The tension he depicts in gender relations was not imagined; there was indeed the blurred line between theory and practice that Ezell proposes in The Patriarch's Wife. Women may have been experiencing an increased status in society, but by the time Swetnam wrote his pamphlet the

87 Judith Bennett, "Feminism and History," Gender and History 3 (Autumn 1989) : 266.
patriarchal rule of James I was inhibiting this process and causing a decline in women's status. Thus, Swetnam's advice is reflective of the period at hand, wherein he reinforces the stereotype of a malleable and controllable wife. Seen in this light the widow was indeed a threat. She not only was a constant reminder of a man's mortality, but she was also a threat to the social order by living free of male control. Her threat to patriarchy was the most ardent and consequently she received Swetnam's most cruel assessment. Not only does the Swetnam controversy illuminate contemporary attitudes towards women, but it also reveals the possibilities afforded to women in seventeenth-century London. In fact women were not willing to idly sit by and accept Swetnam's defamations and it is to their work which we shall now turn.
Chapter 2: Responses to Misogyny

The women who responded to the Swetnam controversy were not the first to take up the pen and refuted misogynist attacks. In the fifteenth century, Christine de Pisan wrote the first known defense by a woman in response to critiques of women’s proper role. De Pisan’s *The Book of the City of Women* (1404), sparked the *querelle des femmes* and became the vehicle through which most early feminist philosophy evolved.\(^1\) The *querelle* spread to England during the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries and is central to the understanding of the Swetnam controversy. Kelly argues that the *querelle* grew out of the notion that women as women were devoid of power and authority by their very nature.\(^2\) The defences against misogyny were an attempt by the authors to assert women’s power in society. Swetnam’s respondents were infused with an understanding of women’s concerns. Whether or not these writings can be characterized as feminist, however, is yet to be seen. An analysis of the issues of authorship and feminism reveals something of the means by which women functioned within the constraints of patriarchy.

From the information provided in the primary sources, it is apparent that the authors of the pamphlets who responded to Swetnam were motivated by a sense of anger and injustice. They wrote their pamphlets outside the boundaries of the literary genre and attacked Swetnam for his generalizations. Ester Sowernam’s *Ester hath hang’d Haman* and Constantia Munda’s *The Worming of a mad Dogge* are aggressive and forthright responses, unlike

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\(^1\) Kelly, "Querelle," 66.

\(^2\) Ibid., 87.
Rachel Speght's timid *Mouzell for Melastomus*, which will be discussed in a subsequent chapter. The other powerful response to Swetnam's work, however, was not a direct reply. The author, Daniel Tuvil, must have been aware of *The Araignment* when he wrote *A Sanctuary for Ladies* in 1616. Coryl Crandall contends that Tuvil's *Asylum Veneris* was published the year following *The Araignment*, perhaps due in part to Tuvil's interest in women or as a means to capitalize on the controversy.³ With respect to Tuvil's identity, it appears that he was a man given he dedicated his work to Lady Alice Colville, perhaps his employer, and it is generally agreed that both individuals are historical.⁴ Tuvil's work brings a male perspective to the debate; a perspective which contradicts Swetnam's attack. Juxtaposed with the female writers, Tuvil's work aids, as well, in determining their identities.

Most scholars concur that the names Constantia Munda and Ester Sowernam are pseudonyms which could have been adopted by either men or women. The issue is not so much the gender of the writers but rather their motivations. For instance, historian Hilda Smith contends that the tone of Sowernam's work is facetious, like that of *The Araignment*, suggesting it may have been written by Swetnam himself, or a collaborator, in order to perpetuate a profitable controversy.⁵ As well, Smith suggest that the similarity of the pseudonyms Swetnam and Sowernam encourages such a


⁴Ibid.

conclusion.  The use of the prefixes Swet and Sower are considered to be the antithesis to each other and are evidence of a link between the authors. There is, however, no documentation to support this claim: it is mere speculation. Indeed, arguing that the pamphlets may not have been written by women suggests that women were not capable of such clever endeavors, or did not find Swetnam's work sufficiently annoying to provide a response. As we will see, the voices of these tracts were not only clever, but were also outraged; suggesting that the authors were motivated by principles as well as profit.

However well concealed the identities of the authors, there is no evidence to support the conclusion that they were not in fact women. Simon Shepherd has attempted to unearth the background of the publications but has concluded that such information is difficult to determine from the pamphlets alone. Much like Smith, Shepherd contends that in Munda's work "the author's mind seems almost too learned for a woman. Nevertheless, there are some very interesting ideas in this text - and if it is a man who has written it (which I half suspect) he is thinking some quite original thoughts." Once again the authors are assumed to be men simply on the basis of the originality of their thoughts or the depth of their learning. Shephard argues quite explicitly that women are incapable of producing original and interesting ideas. These assumptions reflect the views of the individual historian and are not substantiated by the text itself.

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6 Ibid.


8 Ibid.
An important aspect of the genre, which these historians fail to consider, is the extent to which women were involved in the *querelle*. As the foremost historian in this field, Joan Kelly, observes "although men continued to write in defense of women, what is novel about the *querelle des femmes* is that women seized upon it to rebut for themselves the misogynist voice of literate opinion." 9 Conceding that perhaps some men may have written under the names of women, she does not believe that Sowernam and Munda were men. "These pseudonymous authors," according to Kelly, "are clearly women." 10 Drawing on the texts themselves, Kelly illustrates that their sharp wit and enthusiasm were distinctly part of the women's *querelle* dating back some three centuries to Christine de Pisan.

In the same vein Henderson and McManus also refute claims that Sowernam and Munda were in fact men. The authors argue that there is no compelling reason to discount their claims to be women. Women had the opportunity to be educated during this period. Moreover, the transitions to capitalism and protestantism during the English Renaissance may have prompted women to speak in their own defense. Secondly, it would not have benefitted a man to write under a woman's name. A woman's name on a defence treatise was an anomaly which would enhance neither the prestige nor the sales of the work. Plenty of men, like Tuvil, published works under their own name; there was no reason for them to do otherwise. Clearly, the passion and the tone of the works support the authors' claims to be women. It would be a difficult task for men to draw on personal experiences and gender

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9 Kelly, "Querelle," 73.

10 Ibid.
relations from a female perspective. Given the contempt for Swetnam and the vigour of their work it is little wonder that the women did not want to reveal their true identities to a society which would not have respected such pointed indignation.

While the issue of the authors' gender does not debase the works themselves, the question, however, has illuminated the underestimation historians have of women's capabilities. It is disturbing to think that scholars are unwilling to concede that women were capable of responding to misogyny given that women like Christine de Pisan were able and willing to do so centuries earlier. The texts themselves are evidence enough that the works were written by women. Sowernam and Munda undercut Swetnam's accusations. Munda threatens Swetnam:

Know therefore that wee will cancle your accusations, travers your bils, and come upon you for a false indictment, and thinke not tis our waspishnesse that shall sting you: no sir, untill we see your malapert sauciness reformed, which will not be till you do make a long letter to us.  

In demanding an apology, Munda makes it apparent that women are no longer willing to disregard misogyny. Sowernam, as well, makes her point quite clear: "I will not say that women are better then men, but I will say, men are not so wise as I should wish them to be, to wooe us in such fashion as they do, except they should hold and account of us as their betters." Men should be


12Constantia Munda, The Womring of a mad Dogge or, A Soppe for Cerbervs the Taylor of Hell. (London: Lawrence Hayes, 1617), 5.

more respectful of women, for it is men who are so concerned with pursuing a wife. These examples provide an enlightening perspective on the women's work, especially when considered alongside Tuvil's treatise. Tuvil is far more apologetic and claims, "it seemes to me that Women were erected of purpose for her to sojourne in; and that, by the hand of God himselfe, who built her, built her I say, ... to shew the absolutenesse of his skill, in the closing up his worke." The contrast between the works is telling; where the women respond angrily to Swetnam's accusations, Tuvil extols women's virtues. Consequently, the works differ substantially. Tuvil reveals one man's apology, while the works of Munda and Sowernam express the frustration of women at the oppression of their gender.

Whether or not this oppression was to manifest itself in a proto- or pre-feminist stance is an important issue that needs to be addressed. Can Munda, Sowernam, and Tuvil be classified as "feminists?" Central to this issue is the definition of feminism itself. A disparity exists amongst feminist historians as to whether or not views espousing what would be characterized as contemporary feminism may be utilized in a historical context. In her work on women in the querelle, Beatrice Gottlieb concludes that defining Christine de Pisan and Margaret of Navarre as feminist depends on the definition itself. If feminism means thinking about women and feeling that they deserve better, then Christine and Margaret were feminists. But if feminism means a belief in the equal capacities of men and women, a demand for equality, and a program to facilitate achieving equality in society, then feminism as such did not exist.

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before the nineteenth century. From this definition Gottlieb argues that to define women as feminist prior to the nineteenth century is anachronistic.

Karen Offen agrees that the practice of terming individuals feminist before the word itself was invented is problematic. Offen asks "how can one decide what is pre- and what is proto- let alone anti- or post-, without first setting forth what is feminist?" She does, however, concede there is a common thread between the arguments of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century women writers and their later sisters. These writers share with their successors an impetus to critique and improve the disadvantaged status of women relative to men within a particular cultural situation. As a working definition of feminism, Offen concludes that any person, male or female, whose ideas and actions recognize women's lived experiences as unique, exhibit frustration and anger over institutionalized injustice or inequality of women, and challenge the institutions which advocate male prerogatives, are feminists.

Moreover, these feminist responses to Swetnam emerged out of hierarchical gender oppression from patriarchal structures. As Joan Scott contends, the term "gender" is a "constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary


16Ibid., 361-2.


18Ibid.

19Ibid., 132.

20Ibid., 152.
way of signifying relationships of power."²¹ Within hierarchical structures gender is a crucial part of the organization of equality or inequality. These structures rely on generalized understandings of the so-called natural relationship between male and female in order to appropriate power. An example of this is the political foment of Jacobean England which excluded women on the basis of their perceived differences from men. Such ideology barred women from the male-dominated structures of society.

The notion of a gender ordered society and the effects of masculine structures is what Judith Bennett identifies as the foremost mandate of feminist historical studies. Bennett argues that feminist historians must bring the concept of patriarchy back into the mainstream of scholarship by studying its workings throughout history.²² By historicizing patriarchy we can identify its main mechanisms, as well as trace how it has managed to survive and endure. Encouraging the study of literature, Bennett argues it is here that much of the ideological power of patriarchy was and is manifest.²³ We have seen how Swetnam's work reinforces the patriarchal structures of Jacobean England. As such, the vigourous responses reveal feminist replies to the gendered constructions which composed patriarchy. These respondents in effect illustrate not only their feminism, but also the means through which feminists maneuvered within the constraints of these patriarchal structures. Thus utilizing Offen's definition of feminism, along with Scott's notion of gender and Bennett's historicization of patriarchy, it is possible to gain an


²²Bennett, "Feminism and History," 262.

²³Ibid., 267.
understanding of seventeenth-century feminism as well as how gender functions within a patriarchal structure.

Offen's definition is a means by which we can analyze the texts within a feminist framework. The first component of her definition rests with the recognition that women's lived experiences are unique. Beginning with Sowernam, it is evident she is conscious of the uniqueness of women's lived experiences. The substance of her text is a continual refutation of Swetnam's work. In her introduction she outlines her mandate:

The ends for which I undertooke this enterprise are these. First, to set out the glory of Almightye God, in so blessed a worke of his Creation. Secondly, to encourage all Noble, Honourable, and worthy Women, to expresse in their course of life and actions, that they are the same Creatures which they were designed to be by their Creator, and by their Redeemer: And to paralell those women whose virtuous examples are collected briefly out of the Olde and New Testament. Lastly, I write for the shame and confusion of such as degenerate from woman-hoode, and disappoint the ends of Creation and Redemption. 24

In critiquing Swetnam, Sowernam offers counterattacks to his claims and demonstrates the importance of women. In this introduction she encourages women to assert that they are in fact created from God's virtuous hand. To support her claims Sowernam uses examples of virtuous women from the Bible. In differentiating men and women, Sowernam contends:

that Eve, being the last worke, is therefore the most excellent worke of creation: yet Adam was not so absolutely perfect, but that in the sight of God, he wanted an Helper: Whereupon God created the woman his last worke, as to supply and make absolute that imperfect building which was unperfected in man, as all Divines

24Sowernam, Ester, a2.
do hold, till the happy creation of the woman.  

Thus Sowernam argues that women are the last work of God and are not as imperfect as Swetnam argues; women are the only means through which men can be complete or possibly even perfect. Using Biblical examples, Sowernam illustrates that women's lived experiences are different from those of men. Quoting from Judges 4, Sowernam uses the example of Deborah and Jael, two women who were pivotal in overthrowing Jabin, the oppressive King of Canaan. In Sowernam's view, "the one won the battle, and the other slew the general."  

Her last example of brave women is from Luke 23; the women who gather around Jesus and bewail and lament him.  

Sowernam concludes with this reference "that women have beeene chosen both to set out God's glory, and for the benefit of all mankinde, in more glorious and gratious impoyments then men have beeene."  

Women are characterized by Sowernam as "the life and delight of heart and soule to all mankinde."  

She chastises Swetnam for having so basely and shamefully railed against such a worthy and honest sex.  

Although she concedes that women's experiences are different from men, she argues that they are no less valuable. Indeed, in this respect Sowernam clearly adheres to Offen's first criteria of a feminist.

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25Ibid. , 3.  
26Ibid. , 12.  
27Ibid. , 14.  
28Ibid.  
29Ibid. , 15.  
30Ibid.
Munda also presents what could be termed a feminist perspective in her recognition that women's experiences were unique from men's. In her introduction she thanks her mother for having brought her into the world and pledges that she will repay her by prosecuting Swetnam with her pen. She asks Swetnam: "Could you be so mad as to deprave, nay to call that bad, which God calls good?" Munda believes that Swetnam thought he could attack women because:

poore illiterate women, we might fret and bite the lip at you, wee might repine to see ourselves 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.  

Women, however, in Munda's view, are not so weak that they cannot oppose their adversaries. Even though she realises "feminine modesty hath confin'd our rarest and ripest wits to silence, wee acknowledge it our greatest ornament, but when necessity compels us, tis as great a fault and folly." Munda acknowledges she is outside the confines of her feminine modesty, but she refuses to let Swetnam go unchecked. Munda offers little if any pure defense of women. The anger she conveys to her reader is frightening and she threatens Swetnam throughout the work. For Munda, woman's differing experience is not exalted, as in Sowernam's vision, but is oppressive. As Linda Woodbridge has commented, it is Munda who articulates most clearly the Jacobean sense that it was time women stopped smiling off misogynist

32 Ibid., 14.
33 Ibid., 5.
insult. 34

In a somewhat more convoluted fashion Daniel Tuvil also espouses feminist views. Taken within the context of Jacobean England, Tuvil refutes Swetnam's work but does not provide the antithesis to The Araignment. Although his final chapters fit with Offen's definition, the initial chapters are somewhat misogynistic. For example, in his chapter "Of their outward modestie," he discusses a Spanish Lasse who, having been gang raped, thanked God that once in her days she had her fill without sinning. 35 Tuvil goes on to say:

But herein the silly wretch, she deceived hir selfe : for howsoever Violence were Prologue to the fact, the delight shee tooke in the performance convinced hir of a fault . . . [and thus] though they consented not to the doing, they might be thought to bee well enough contented with the dece. 36

How this fits into Tuvil's analysis is questionable. Linda Woodbridge feels this story is bizarre and does not relate it to the seventeenth-century society. It cannot, however, be so easily dismissed. To simply argue that the example is bizarre does not do justice to the text. 37

What Tuvil reveals about seventeenth-century attitudes towards rape is critical to our understanding of that society. Women are portrayed here as overtly sexual and their desires are fulfilled by forced intercourse. The image is disturbing, to the say the least, but is symptomatic of wider social values.

34 Woodbridge, Women and the English Renaissance, 103.
35 Tuvil, Sanctuary, 40.
36 Ibid.
37 Woodbridge, Women and the English Renaissance, 104.
For example, Laura Gowing has examined Jacobean attitudes towards rape based on the records of the London Consistory courts. Gowing uses the case against Katherine Cocklyn and Isabel Burroughs to elucidate the difficulties in prosecuting men for rape. Burroughs was raped by her master William Gould. The mother, Katherine Cocklyn, suspected that Gould was abusing her daughter and consequently brought a midwife and other women friends to his house to examine Isabel. The midwife concluded that the girl was badly strained and bruised. When Isabel told her story to the Bridwell court she was sued by her master for defamation. Gowing concludes that the difficulties of enforcing male culpability for this kind of behaviour were amplified by the way that testimonies often prompted women to repent their sexual sins. Moreover, the language that women used to describe male sexual misconduct was limited and tenuous.

In his work *The Boundaries of Eros*, Guido Ruggiero argues that two characteristics set rape apart from most sex crimes: first it is violent as well as sexual, and second it has a more obvious victim than most other sex crimes. Ruggiero notes that in Renaissance Venice the language of rape prosecution often reflected these characteristics. Rape rhetoric was consistently more restrained and consequently made the conviction of a rapist more difficult. The issue of class was also a determining factor in the

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39 Ibid.

prosecution of a rapist because the rape of a noble by a non-noble was a most serious matter in the eyes of the judges.

This limited vocabulary and the issue of class is reflected in Tuvils' analysis of the Spanish Lasse. By portraying women as overtly sexual Tuvil does not place himself as a misogynist; his view is far more complex. Rather, Tuvil is working within the constraints of Jacobean sexual discourse which placed the blame on the woman and not the man. Women were viewed differently than men; they were considered overtly sexual and consequently are portrayed as men's temptresses. In realizing this difference, Tuvil cites examples of upper class women who killed themselves and their daughters so they would not be raped. He also considers Chiomara, the wife of Oriagontes, who killed the Centurion who raped her and then "caused his head to be cut off, and bringing it home in hir own lap, cast it for a present at her husbands feete . . . who said O woman, faith is an excellent thing." 41 Thus, Chiomara redeems her virtue by murdering the man who raped her. Tuvil illustrates that women were defined and controlled by their sexuality. A man could prove his power over a woman by raping her and her only recourse would have been to kill him because, as Gowing has shown, there were limited punishments for male sexual misconduct.

Tuvil also provides examples of women's unique life experiences. He admits that women are not all equal in terms of their virtue, but "have their imperfections and defects, as well as we . . . the Bee, as it hath Hony, so it hath a Sting." 42 In his poem at the end of his work, Tuvil best surmises his view of women's experiences:

41 Tuvil, Sanctuary, 42.

42 Ibid., 149.
They are the comfort of our lives. / That draw an equall yoake without debate; / A Play-fellow, that far of al griefe drives; A Steward, early that provides and late; / Both faithfull, chaste, and sober, milde, and trustie, / Nurse to weake Age, and pleasure to the Lustie.  

Thus Tuvil extolls women's virtues and reveals a man's conception of women's important yet contradictory role in society.

Whereas the first of Offen's criteria is quite simple, her second requirement draws more precisely on the issue of feminism. Exhibiting anger and frustration over institutionalized injustice or the inequality of women is the second and perhaps most-central issue in Offen's definition. One important component of Joan Kelly's analysis of women in the *querelle* ties in quite nicely with Offen's view. Kelly argued that the defenders focused on gender, that is they had a sense that the sexes are culturally constructed, not just biologically determined. They directed their ideas against the notions of an inherently defective sex that emerged from the misogynous side of the debate and against society's attempt to shape women to fit these notions.  

The theory that women differ from men biologically and are thus subordinate has existed since Aristotle and is an issue that has received much feminist scholarship. In her examination of work from the Italian Renaissance, Jacqueline Murray notes that "philosophers since the time of Plato associated women with the body and the material world, both inferior to the soul and the spiritual world." In order to conceptualize women's oppression in society,

43Ibid., 162.

44Kelly, "Querelle," 67.

feminists argue that women have been viewed as biologically weaker than men, and this argument has been used to substantiate their social subordination.

Sherry B. Ortner has argued that the universal devaluation of women can be explained by postulating that women are seen as closer to nature than men; men being seen as more unequivocally occupying the 'high ground' of culture.⁴⁶ Men create relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects, while women create only perishables—human beings through childbirth.⁴⁷ Consequently women are equated with nature whereas men are viewed as the inventors of culture; a more sustainable reality.

Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn have suggest that the oppression of women is both a material reality, originating in the material conditions, and a psychological phenomenon, a function of the way women and men perceive one another and themselves.⁴⁸ They also argue that it is generally true that gender is constructed in patriarchy to serve the interests of male supremacy, a point comparable to Joan Scott's analysis.⁴⁹ Scott posits that gender becomes a way of denoting "cultural constructions" - the entirely social creation of ideas about appropriate roles for men and women.⁵⁰


⁴⁷Ibid., 75.


⁴⁹Scott, "Gender," 1067.

⁵⁰Ibid., 1056.
This theory of gender, however, is not new. Central to the themes of both Munda and Sowernam's works is the idea that women are oppressed because of the social construction of gender. Constance Jordan argues that the efforts of early feminists expose what we today call the cultural construction of gender. Consequently, our authors exhibit anger and frustration with, among other issues, the social construction of gender.

In venting her outrage at Swetnam's tract, Sowernam provides the best example of a conscious understanding of gender construction. The basic tenant of Sowernam's work is that men are free from the social constraints to which women are subject. Basically, a woman is chastised for deeds which, if done by an man, would be praised. A woman is considered to be so pure and good that once a man marries he is "forthwith placed in the ranke of honest man, If question be asked, what is such a man ? It is presently resolved, he is an honest man: And the reason presently added, for hee hath a wife: shee is the sure signe and seale of honestie." Women are an indication of responsibility and in order to uphold his image a man must emulate his wife's level of purity. "It is usual," Sowernam writes:

amongst old and graue fathers, if they have a sonne giuen to spending and companie-keeping, who is of a wild and riotous disposition, such a father shall presently be counselled, helpe your sonne to a good wife, marry him, marry him, that is the onely way to bring him to be an honest man.

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51 Jordan, Renaissance Feminism, 309.
52 Sowernam, Ester, 23.
53 Ibid., 24.
Womens’ faults, Sowernam contends, are more noticeable because women are superior to men. It is, according to Sowernam, "an hateful thing to see a woman overcome with drinke, when as in men it is noted for a sign of goodfellowship: it is abhorred in women, and therefore they averd it: it is laughed at and made but as a jest amongst men, and therefore so many doe practice it." This social construction of values and conventions is thus gendered; men can and do drink but for a woman to drink is reprehensible.

Another important gender difference Sowernam notes is the acceptance of illicit sexual behaviour by men. If a woman, however, is sexually active, she could face economic, social, and emotional ruin from an unwanted pregnancy. "If a man abuse a Maide and get her with child no matter is made of it, but as a trick of youth; but it is made so hainous an offence in the maide she is disparaged and utterly undone by it." This testimony illustrates that while the vices of men are socially acceptable, a woman can be ruined by one sexually illicit act. Seventeenth-century court records from Wiltshire reflect this issue. Elizabeth Dalmer of Keevil, the daughter of a reasonably wealthy husbandman, bore a bastard in 1621; she did eventually marry, but not until 1640. Alice Silke was married two years after the birth of her illegitimate child in 1621; but her bridegroom was a much older widower. The responsibility of a child weighed

54Ibid.
55Ibid.
56Ibid.
57W.R.O., AS/ABO 13, 19/4/1621, as cited in Ingram, Church Courts, 310.
heavily on unmarried women and it was difficult to find a husband and integrate into the social norms of society.

Keith Thomas has traced the history of this sexual inequality between genders and identifies it as the double standard. Stated simply, the double standard is the view that "unchastity, in the sense of sexual relations before marriage or outside marriage, is for a man, if an offense, none the less a mild and pardonable one, but for a woman a matter of the utmost gravity." 58 As well, Thomas argues that Puritan doctrine and material values encouraged the growing opposition to the double standard. Sexual promiscuity was condemned because it was incompatible with the high emotional values expected from marriage, because it was wasteful, and because it took time and money which would have been better spent in the pursuit of a gainful occupation. 59 This argument provides a possible explanation for Sowernam's disdain with the double standard.

Within the constraints of Puritan morality, male illicit sexual behaviour was becoming a concern for middle class moralists. Sowernam views religion as the root of this issue. In summarizing her assessment she writes:

So 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. 60


59 Ibid.

60 Ibid., 25.
Thus Sowernam accepts the subjection of women as inherent in seventeenth-century Christian ideology. She suggests that the Jacobean sisters of Eve are still paying for her sins. Although Sowernam does not argue that it is unfair that women should repent the sins of Eve, she exhibits anger and frustration with gender inequalities.

Anger and frustration, however, permeate *The Worming of a mad Dogge*, providing the most passionate critique of Swetnam. Each page of Munda's work attacks Swetnam for his insolence and disrespect. She threatens Swetnam with physical violence, railing: "I'll take the pains to worm the tongue of your madness and dash your rankling teeth down your throat." 61 Munda is disturbed that "woman the greatest part of the lesser world is generally become the subject of every pedanticall goose-quill." 62 Why is it that Swetnam has attacked all women rather than limiting himself to the ones who have so wronged him? By replacing Swetnam's universal woman with his mother, Munda illustrates that women are no longer willing to disregard misogyny. The pure absurdity of *The Araignment* is revealed through Munda's rhetoric. "Is it not a comely thing," she asks, "to heare as Sonne speak thus of his mother":

My mother in her furie was worse than a Lion being bitten with hunger...: if my father did but look after another woman, then she would be jealous: the more he loved her, the more shee would disdain him: if he threatened her, she would be angry: when he flattered her, she would be proud... 63

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62 Ibid., 3.
63 Ibid., 17.
The accusations Swetnam makes against women, according to Sowernam, are meant against each woman. Swetnam's universal attack applies to his mother as well and for a son to speak of his mother in such derogatory terms is intolerable.

Munda's example of male and female views on war and peace provides the greatest indication of the differences between men and women. Of all the defenders studied Munda is the only writer who addresses the issue of gender perceptions. Women are portrayed as peace makers and men as warriors:

What man soever maketh warres, is it not to this ende that hee might enjoy peace? Who marcheth among murdered carkasses, but to this end, that his enemies being subdued and slaine, he may securely enjoy peace? Man loves to heare the threatening of his Princes enemies, but woman weepes when shee heares of warres. 64

Thus male and female perceptions of war are comparable to Ortner's analysis wherein women create perishables, human beings and men create enduring culture. 65 In Munda's analysis women are passive and men are active agents; consequently they are diametrically opposed gender constructions.

In his response to Swetnam, Daniel Tuvil is also appalled and angered by the institutions which oppress women's on the basis of gender. In criticising the misogynists, Tuvil points out "But alas! it is the nature of sicke and crazie appetites, to thinke the meate which is set before them, is unsavourie, when indeede the fault proceedeth not, but from meere distemeperature in their own palates." 66 Unlike the women respondents, Tuvil metaphorically implies that

64Ibid., 32.
65Ortner, "Female to Male," 83.
66Tuvil, Sanctuary, 4.
men are too critical of women, suggesting that women are not to blame for the social tensions between the sexes. Indeed it was not a man who was chosen to "be the receptacle of God's glory." 67 If God himself choose women to be the receptacle of his glory then they should thus be exalted by men.

Tuvil argues that men are often in fact the catalysts of women's demise. The example of a man who forces his wife into prostitution, emphasizes this point: "Phado, a Philosopher, after desolation of his Countrie, made the prostitution of his wife, the substance of his Revenue." 68 Analyzing the cruelty of this husband, Tuvil is led to the conclusion that "if wee examine every thing but with indifferencie, we shall find, let women be what they will, they cannot possibly be so bad as Men." 69 Placing the blame for social ills upon men illustrates one man's understanding of the inequalities and injustices women face because of their gender.

Tuvil implores men to realize that women were not created by God to be oppressed. In conformity with the literary genre, Tuvil cites the ancient Greeks who placed the statues of Persuasion and the Graces near Venus to show, "that married people should by faire demeanour and soft entreaty, without brawling or contention obtaine their desires at each others hand." 70 A marriage, in this view, should be an equal partnership and Tuvil contends that God espouses this image of marriage. He maintains that "the woman was taken out of the side of man, to bee rankt in equall estimation with him; and

67 Ibid. , 7.
68 Ibid. , 47.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid. , 149.
not out of his foot, to become litier for his proud and insolent ambition to wallow on." 71 As such women's afflictions in society are portrayed as neither religious nor natural, but as a product of men's subjection of women, a socially constructed inequality.

In addition to acknowledging that the oppression of women is socially constructed, the authors also challenge institutions which advocate male prerogatives. For example, Sowernam directly criticizes the social institutions of marriage and prostitution. Marriage, for instance, was often used as a means to subdue a wilful young man. According to Sowernam, it then became the wife's responsibility to "reclame" him. 72 Through the use of biblical analysis, the first marriage, between Adam and Eve, is seen as setting the precedent for abusive husbands. Adam, the most despicable example of a husband, placed all the blame on his wife for having eaten the forbidden fruit. This example perpetuates itself throughout society, according to Sowernam, wherein men such as Swetnam continually accuse women of frowardness to excuse themselves of their own faults.

Inverting Swetnam's example, Sowernam argues that it is through men that women learn their faults. Eve was led astray by the serpent and Adam, claiming "for the woman whom thou gavest me, was the cause I did eate," 73 rejects his responsibility for their downfall. Men, Sowernam maintains, are the sons of Adam in that they are not willing to accept their role in social ills. For, indeed, Swetnam explains to men that they must train their wives and a

71 Ibid.
72 Sowernam, Ester, 24.
73 Ibid.
widow is thus framed to the conditions of her previous husband. Is it not then, Sowernam asks, the former husband's counsel that has created such intolerable behaviour? Indeed it is men who constantly corrupt women. Sowernam rails: "how many pounds will they spend in bawdie houses? but when will they bestowe a penny upon an honest maide or woman, except it to be to corrupt them?" Sowernam is disturbed that men are willing to pay for sexual favours, but do not spend money on honest women. She points to men's culpability in leading women astray and encouraging prostitution by frequenting brothels and disregarding the virtues of their wives. Perhaps Sowernam generalizes, as does Swetnam, weakening her argument, but there is an obvious social tension over the acknowledgement that men seek sexual favours through prostitution and bring women to their demise. Unfortunately, she does not provide any correctives for this behaviour, but she does reveal a sense of disdain and disgust with the unfairness of her world. By criticising these institutions that support male prerogatives, Sowernam may be defined as a feminist.

As well, Munda may also be characterized as an early feminist because she criticizes the whole genre of literary misogyny. Her attack against Swetnam illustrates that women were no longer willing to allow men to jest about their inferiority. She criticizes his whole approach and his examples. Often times calling him a liar, she asks:

How then durst you say that the philosophers that lived in the old time had an opinion of marriage, that they tooke no delight therein, seeing the chiefe of them were married themselves? I could be

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74 Ibid. 42.

75 Ibid. 46.
Infinite to produce examples and symboles to make you a liar in print. 76

In so doing she minimizes his authority and would make anyone reading this work question Swetnam's credibility. She invents her own words to describe Swetnam's base discourse: "you have heaped together the scraps, fragments, and reversions of divers English phrases, by scraping together the glanders and offals of abusive terms, and the refuse of idle headed Authord, and making a mingle-mangle gallimauphrie of them." 77 Thus, in ridiculing this genre, Munda illustrates the growing understanding women had of their oppression in society and the means by which they resisted such abuse. The Worming of a Mad Dogge is a truly misandrist antithesis to Swetnam's work: it is little wonder Munda published under its pseudonym.

As a direct challenge to patriarchy itself, Daniel Tuvil deprecates the ideology of separate spheres. Given the opportunity, Tuvil argues women can fulfill the same roles as men. The rationale for women's relegation to the home is socially constructed. For as Tuvil argues: "It hath bin our policie from the beginning to busie them in domestical affaires, thereby to divert them from more serious imployments, in which if they had not surmounted us, they would at least have showne themselves our equals, and our parallels." 78 Had women been given the opportunity they could have done anything a man could do. To further his point, Tuvil cites the example of Queen Elizabeth I:

76 Ibid., 29.
78 Tuvil, Sanctuary, 100.
Indeed the world cannot produce a fairer example out of all Antiquities Court roles, in which goodnes was evermore equally matched with greatnesse; honestie with Policie; mildenesse with severitie: liberality with frugalitie... such redienesse in rewarding, such discretion in promising, such religion in performing. 79

This example signifies Tuvil's view of women's abilities. Society has done a grave injustice by disallowing women more authority and power in the social institutions. The whole structure of patriarchy is thus debased as Tuvil suggests that, given the chance, women like Queen Elizabeth can rule as well as any man.

As we have seen, given the opportunity, women could and did confront misogyny. It is perfectly plausible that these authors were in fact women who were keenly aware of the patriarchal system which shaped and informed their place in society. In accordance with Karen Offen's definition, it is appropriate to characterize each of the authors as a feminist. Sowernam provides the best example of identifying women's lived experiences as unique. She is angered by the injustice of male dominance over women and views social inequalities as gender constructs. Munda is similar to Sowernam in this respect however, she attacks Swetnam directly and protests against his slanderous representation of women. It was not only women who responded to Swetnam but also Daniel Tuvil who recognized the oppression of women in patriarchal Jacobean society.

For some it may seem disappointing that these responses did not develop into a feminist movement. As Linda Woodbridge remarks; "the maddening thing about the history of feminism is that while the theory has been there

79Ibid. 105.
since Plato, the generality of womankind still awaits the man who wields a mop with a good will."  

It must be remembered, however, that early feminists were working within the social constraints and norms of their society constraints which actively inhibited the formation of any kind of feminism. Sowernam and Munda acknowledge that it is more respectful for women to remain silent, but Swetnam's work is simply too provocative. Consequently, the defenders of women wrote under pen names and espoused ideals that many still consider too sophisticated to have been written by women. What is important about these texts is that within the literary discourse of their era these writers were empowered to challenge the oppressive institutions which upheld patriarchy.

Chapter 3: A Mouzell for Melastomus: Women and Religion

Providing a feminist polemic was not the only means by which women responded to The Araignment. The first to respond to Swetnam was Rachel Speght, a twenty-one-year-old daughter of a preacher whose work was informed by her religious beliefs. While Speght does not fit with Offen's definition of feminist, she reveals how a woman's conception of her role in society was shaped and guided by her patriarchal religion. Using Scriptural references to refute misogyny, Speght's portrayal of women adheres to the dominant pattern of patriarchal subordination. While reinforcing adherence to male supremacy, A Mouzell for Melastomus provides the quintessential Puritan defense of feminine virtue. Speght's discussion of Eve, women's role in society, and the relations between men and women reveals how one woman interpreted the Bible as a positive authoritative voice for women.

Women's religious experience in seventeenth-century England has been considered either one of oppression or liberation by historians. Lawrence Stone argues that, for women, protestantism meant in practice that the husband and father became the spiritual as well as the secular head of the household. "The aggrieved or oppressed wife could no longer rely on the priest to provide a counterpoise to potential domestic tyranny arising from this new authority thrust upon her husband." Moreover, Stone claims that the most far-reaching consequence of the reformation in England was the new emphasis on the home and on domestic virtues. This emphasis on separate spheres for

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2 Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, 111.
men and women and the closed nuclear family replaced the communal support system. The place of women in this evolving structure was often one of subordination and repression. Stone cites various primary sources, such as legal and popular literature, to support his views. He considers the Swetnam controversy reflective of popular attitudes towards women. As one final note, however, he cautions that the degree of affective bonding and the distribution of power over decision making depended on the personal characteristics of the husband and wife. Essentially, Stone argues that it is difficult to document the actual practices of private life in the seventeenth century. Thus, unable to accurately recount the lives of English men and women, he draws generalisations based on a perfunctory analysis of selected primary sources.

The most serious criticism of Stone lies in the fact that he neglects to listen to the voice of seventeenth-century English women themselves. Rather than examining the sources produced by women such as Speght and Sowernam, Stone looks at women's lived experience only in relation to others, particularly men and children. Women are not portrayed as individuals; their lives can only be understood in the private sphere of the family. As Lois Schwoerer points out, women are different from men and their experiences vary. Certain legal, social, political, intellectual, and biological constraints on women's lives make their experiences and responses different from those of men. Schwoerer's main criticism of Stone is that he fails to recognize this

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3Ibid., 197.


5Ibid., 391.
uniqueness. On this level *The Family Sex and Marriage* is not a reliable source for presenting women's history. Another caution against the work is that the extensive use of eighteenth-century sources does not illuminate the situation of seventeenth-century women. 6 Because he surveys three centuries, Stone's overview is somewhat terse and his ability to delve into each individual era is at best limited. Moreover, Stone, ignores the uniqueness of seventeenth-century women's lives and considers the eighteenth century as indicative of the seventeenth. Such an approach limits the credibility of his work with respect to the specificity of seventeenth-century women.

Stone's argument concerning the growth of patriarchy is, however, compelling. Within the constraints of Jacobean society Puritanism played a crucial role. Through advocating male authority Puritanism encouraged male control over both wives and children. This religion emphasized the husband as the head of the household and the wife as his helpmate. Consequently, women became increasingly defined by their relationship to men and were expected to adhere to a Puritan moral ethic. Women's understanding of their role was subsequently shaped by this religious ideology.

As well, Keith Thomas points out that although the Puritans protested against wife beating, the double standard of sexual morality and their denunciation of the churching of women had done something to raise women's status, it was not substantially altered.7 Even if the wife were a partner she was still an inferior one. The family stood as a microcosm for society and the head of the household represented both king and priest as economic and

6Ibid. , 403.

spiritual leader. Order and unity were the essential components of both society and the family: to question the family, the place of women, or any other part of the social structure was to defy natural hierarchy and the will of God. 

Within this structure women were destined to marry early, weather the hazards of childbirth, busy themselves at home, and accept their exclusion from the affairs of church and state alike. In his article Thomas illustrates the oppressive nature of Puritanism and the appeal that the religious sects which emerged during the civil war years had for women. It was, of course, among Quakers that the spiritual rights of women attained their pinnacle. All the Friends were allowed to speak and prophesy on a basis of complete equality, for the Inner Light knew no barriers of sex. Fox and his followers declared that women's subjection, decreed at the Fall, would be eradicated by the resurrection of Christ. "Man and Woman were helps meet . . . before they fell; but after the Fall, in the transgression, the man was to rule over his Wife; but in the restoration by Christ . . . they are helps meet, Man and Woman, as they were before the Fall." In the early stages of development Quakers believed that the restoration was imminent and encouraged women's involvement in order to be prepared for the Second Coming. However, Thomas points out that it was completely in accordance with these sects' stated principles that as soon as they became an institution even the most radical sects became conservative regarding the organization and discipline of the family.

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8Ibid., 44.


acknowledged that the time of resurrection was not imminent and they began to adhere to the time of transgression which dictated women's subjection to men. Moreover, Eichinger acknowledges that Quakers were also influenced by the increasingly oppressive patriarchal structure of restoration society that relegated women to the domestic sphere. For the sects, as for the Presbyterians, equality was to remain strictly spiritual. The early seventeenth century, however, was still an era of development for the sects and women in the early 1600's were still enjoying the freedom such religions offered. Women's involvement in civil war sects points to their dissatisfaction with the patriarchal basis of Anglicanism and a desire to participate actively in organized religion.

Conversely, Edmund Leites has argued that Puritan marriage was considered a partnership based on mutual affection. The husband and wife were considered spiritually equal by Puritan doctrine. Puritans argued that marriage was instituted by God before the fall; Eve was more than the bearer of Adam's children, she was his companion. In Genesis 2.18 it is said that God stated "it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." The cure for Adam's loneliness, Leites writes, was to be love: his love for Eve and her love for him. Citing Richard Baxter's A Christian Directory (1678) and William Gouge's Of Domesticall Duties (1626), Leites concludes that the whole character of Puritan love required that spouses find

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11Ibid., 16.
12Ibid.
13Ibid., 55.
their mates to be the most special and delightful persons in their lives. Romance was a duty of married life. Although husbands must rule and wives must obey, wives were expected to restrain their expressions of anger and discontent as husbands were expected to be gentle and restrained in their authority. A Puritan marriage, in Leites interpretation, was bound by conjugal love and mutual respect.

A synthesizing view of these opposing historical perspectives is provided by Margo Todd in her discussion of Puritanism. Todd contends that the spiritualized household was a product of Christian humanism, not English Puritanism. The rational and spiritual equality of the sexes found in Puritan doctrine are humanist rather than Puritan propositions. Todd contends that if Protestant theology is the source of the idea of spiritual equality of women in Puritan thought, then one would expect Catholics writing about domestic conduct to be teaching spiritual inequality and female inferiority. This is, however, not the case; there is no evidence that Protestants were saying anything about women that Catholic humanists had not already said. Todd cites Vives and Erasmus as examples of advocates of education for women, who placed a positive evaluation on marriage and housewifery. In essence, humanism laid the foundations of the spiritualized household. The doctrines

15 Ibid., 389.


18 Ibid., 30.
that supported women were not derived from biblical hermeneutics, but rather from humanist ideology.

For women, Puritanism was neither a wholly liberating nor oppressive force. It is inappropriate to classify the impact of Puritanism on women's lives in absolutist terms. In theory, Puritanism advocated male domination, female subordination, and mutual respect. Although these characteristics may seem contradictory, Leites convincingly argues that such relationships depended on the subtleties of male authority and female submissiveness. For instance, Puritanism offered men the possibility to be wholly ungodly in their treatment of their wives and children. Consistent with Stone's view, however, is the conclusion that the degree to which the individual family complied with the religious, political, and social values depended on the personal characteristics of the family members. 19 We cannot simply claim that every woman's experience within a Puritan household was oppressive nor can we claim that women were liberated by Puritanism. For example, Speght's document reveals a woman who understood her religion to extoll and respect her gender. Analysing Speght's work from a historiographical perspective is difficult, because studies of women's interpretation of the Bible in seventeenth-century England simply do not exist. This chapter is thus a contribution to the scholarly work on women and religion in Jacobean England. As a case study, Speght's work illustrates that the Bible dictated that women were not to be oppressed by men; but should be guided and honoured as the weaker vessel.

Given the limited secondary sources on seventeenth-century women and their religious experiences, it is important to consider feminist hermeneutics

19Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, 146.
in relation to Speght's work. One of the more recent studies on feminist interpretations of the Bible is Pamela J. Milne's. "The Patriarchal Stamp of Scripture." In her article Milne argues that "what a feminist poststructural approach can accomplish is a change in the way we relate to and understand the Bible but it cannot rescue the Bible from patriarchy." Implicit in the Bible is a patriarchal bias which, according to Milne, is integral to the very structure of biblical tradition. As the authoritative text in western Christian society the Bible supports and perpetuates sexist views. Milne proposes two options in feminist hermeneutics: "we can either accept the patriarchal biblical text as sacred and content ourselves with exposing its patriarchy or we can expose its patriarchy and reject it as sacred and authoritative. " The difficulty that modern feminist interpreters of the Bible face is in discovering sacred scripture that is not patriarchal. If contemporary feminists cannot find passages of the Bible that do not consider women as "other" then how could seventeenth-century women have done so ? Relying as heavily as she does on the Bible, it is inevitable that Speght's work concedes to patriarchal authority. Although Speght denies the accusations that women are lewd, idle, froward, and aggressive, she still maintains that women are inferior to men.

In order to ameliorate the reputation of all women, Speght focuses the beginning of her rejoinder on Eve. Created as a means to eradicate man's loneliness, woman is symbolic of God's love of man. "Thus the resplendent love of God toward man appeared, in taking care to provide him an helper

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21Ibid., 34.
before hee saw his owne want, and in providing him such an helper as should be meece for him." 22 Speght believes that women were initially created in order to be a partner to man, "hee created woman to bee a solace unto him, to participate of his sorowes, partake of his pleasures, and as a good yoke fellow beare part of his burthen." 23 Although women appear as virtuous in this view, Speght does not dismiss the criticisms levelled against her gender. She cites the most ardent denunciation against women as stemming from the accusation "that woman, though created good, yet by giving eare to Sathan's temptations, brought death & misery upon all her posterity." 24 Speght believes it was not Adam who was deceived, but rather Eve. She accepts the challenge of the misogynists by redeeming the woman who is said to have destroyed our time in Eden.

In her reply, Speght appeals to the patriarchal structure of society. "Sathan first assailed the woman, because where the hedge is lowest, most easie is it to get over, and she being the weaker vessell was the more facility to be seduced." 25 This interpretation asserts woman's inferiority and her inability to resist temptation.

In the fifteenth century a woman humanist in Renaissance Italy, Isotta Nogarola, came to the same conclusions as Speght. In her response to a Ventian nobleman, Ludovico Foscarini, Isotta argued that Eve could not be

22Rachel Speght, A Mouzell for Melastomus Mouzell for Melastomus, the Cynicall Bayer of, and foule mouthed Barker against Evahs Sex (London: Nicholas Okes for Thomas Archer, 1617), 2.

23Ibid., 3.

24Ibid.

25Ibid., 4.
more guilty of the fall than Adam because Eve was the weaker vessel. 26 "For where there is less intellect and less constancy, there is less sin; and Eve (lacked sin and constancy) and therefore sinned less. Knowing (her weakness) that crafty serpent began by tempting the woman, thinking the man perhaps invulnerable because of his constancy." 27 Isotta's interpretation reveals that she had accepted her culture's evaluation of the worth of women to the extent that she could not defend her sex without at the same time undermining its dignity. 28 The notion of Eve's innocence was argued by women as early as the fifteenth century based on their own conception of their gender's diminished worth.

In her argument, Speght concedes that woman sinned, "not by her infidelitie in not beleewing the Word of God, but giving credite to Sathans faire promises, that shee would not die; but so did the man too." 29 Crucial to Speght's argument is the insistence that Eve is not solely to blame for the fall of humankind. Inherent in seventeenth-century society's definition of women are the characteristics of subservience and passiveness. Eve was created as a helpmate to Adam, and according to this patriarchal doctrine he was to be her spiritual authority. Speght carefully manipulates this ideology to illustrate the contradiction in blaming Eve for the fall. Adam should never have allowed Eve to commit such a transgression and it is on him that we should place the


27 Ibid., 59.

28 Ibid.

29 Speght, A Mouzzel, 4.
blame, not Eve. This subtle criticism illustrates not only Speght's insightful understanding of her religion, but also her ability to covertly criticize patriarchy itself.

Given the superior intellect of Adam, he should have been capable of actively choosing to question Eve's offer. For example, Speght writes: "if a man burne his hand in the fire, the bellowes that blowed the fire are not to be blamed, but himselfe rather, for not being carefull to avoyde the danger." 30 Implicit in this proverbial metaphor is the notion that a nescient person cannot be responsible for the free choice of another. Consequently, Eve cannot simply be condemned for man's transgression. Before the fall, Speght argues, man enjoyed free will and was himself responsible for his actions. Had he used this attribute "hee may have avoyded, and beeene free from being burnt, or singed with that fire which was kindled by Sathan and blowne by Eve." 31 Undeniably Eve was corrupted by the snake and committed a grave sin, but it was Adam who betrayed both God and Eve by allowing her to commit this transgression.

God conceded that Adam was just as much at fault as Eve. They both were duly punished; Eve's punishment was particular to women but for the sin of Adam the whole earth was cursed. 32 Considered better able to resist temptation as the stronger vessel, Adam was first called to account; "to shew, that to whom much is given, of them much is required and that he who was the soveraigne of all creatures visible, should have yeelded greatest obedience

30Ibid. , 5.

31Ibid.

32Ibid.
Thus Spedgth reveals the complexity of the fall: Adam was the active agent who failed Eve. The severity of Adam's punishment is indicative of his role in the fall. Clearly, he was as much, if not more to blame, than Eve.

Moreover the fall of humankind did not occur until Adam ate the forbidden fruit. Once the man had sinned Adam and Eve's eyes were opened and they realized that they were naked. In Spedgth's view the fall happened when "they perceived themselves naked, that is, not only bereft of that integritie, which they originally had, but felt the rebellion & disobedience of their members in the disordered motions of their now corrupt nature, which made them for shame to cover their nakedness." 34 Adam and Eve were not only naked of clothing, but were also stripped of the innocence which God had given them. God proclaimed "behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil..." 35 Once man sinned against God his innocence was lost and humanity was forced to suffer for man's transgressions.

For her part in the fall, Eve was cursed with the pains of childbirth. Spedgth, however, does not consider this punishment altogether negative. The first promise that was made in Paradise, according to Spedgth, was that:

God makes to woman, that by her seede should the Serpents head be broken: ... that as the woman had beene an occasion of his sinne, so should woman bring foorth the Saviour from sinne, which was in the fullnesse of time accomplished. 36

33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 6.
35 Gen. 3.22.
36 Spedgth, A Mouzell, 5.
Speght notes a shift in the responsibility from Adam to Eve: women are now responsible for the propagation of humanity. The pains of childbirth are counterpoised with the power to create human beings. As well, Eve's name reflects this ability; "whereupon Adam calls her Hevah, life." 37 The possibility of bringing the saviour forth from sin affords to woman an integral part in humanity's redemption. Beginning with the most criticized woman, Speght argues from her view of the patriarchal structure of society to prove that Eve was not the evil temptress who forced man to sin. Eve's intentions in giving Adam the apple were not malicious. Her desire was "to make her husband partaker of that happiness, which she thought by their eating they should both have enjoyed." 38 Ultimately, Eve was merely fulfilling the prescribed role of a dutiful wife.

Throughout her analysis of Eve, Speght reveals her conception of women's virtues. Speght does not deny Eve's transgression, however, she refuses to accept the notion that Eve is wholly responsible for the fall. From her understanding of woman's role in society, Speght argues from a patriarchal perspective that defines women as passive. Given this consideration, Speght's rejoinder portrays Eve as naive. In offering Adam the fruit of the forbidden tree she was merely expressing her loyalty and love. The true transgressor is Adam, and Speght insists that he was the most severely punished for not only failing God, but Eve as well.

In her work on the Swetnam controversy, Elaine Beilin concurs that Speght redeems Eve by denying her responsibility for the fall. At the same

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37Ibid. 6.

38Ibid.
time, however. Speght's assumption is that women are weaker than men, physically and morally. 39 Like Munda and Sowernam, Speght portrays women as pious and virtuous, however, she does not possess a feminist outlook. What differentiates her work from that of her contemporaries is her Puritan faith. This religion dictates that women are inferior to men; weaker physically, intellectually, and morally. In her own subtle manner, Speght critiques the attacks levelled against Eve by imposing her own society's evaluation of women onto Eve. Through this analysis Speght is able to reveal that those who denounce Eve for fulfilling her role as the helpmate to man are not only assaulting the Bible but are also criticising their own society's prescribed role for women. Where she may not be as verbally aggressive as Munda and Sowernam, her subtle attack is far more intelligible and convincing.

The influence of her religion also provides Speght's work with an unique interpretation of women's proper role. Her central theme is that woman was created as the helpmate to man. In creating woman, God hoped to eradicate man's loneliness. "Thus the resplendent love of God toward man appeared, in taking care to provide him an helper before hee saw his owne want, and in providing him such an helper as should bee meete for him." 40 The end result was the creation, in God's image, "of the collaterall companion for man to glorifie God, in using her bodie, and all the parts, powers, and faculties thereof, as instruments for his honour." 41 For example, women often

39Elaine Beilin, Redeeming Eve, 254.
40Speght, A Mouzell, 2.
41Ibid., 12.
provide Godly advice to their husbands. The Bible provides numerous examples:

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 counselleed Jacob to do according to the word of the Lord: and Shunamite put her husband in mind of harbouring the Prophet Elisha. 42

These examples offer proof that women perform their duty as the collateral companion to assist man in glorifying God. More than a mere helpmate, women strive to further a moral conscience and Godly society. Indeed Speght believed that "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." 43 In the context of religion, women are portrayed by Speght as active participants in reaffirming God's will.

Another role afforded to women is as companion to her husband. Within the constraints of a relationship a wife's duties do not entail the sole responsibility for domestic affairs. "If she must be an helper, and but an helper, then are those husbands to be blamed, which lay the whole burthen of domesticall affaires and maintenance on the shoulders of their wives." 44 The marital partnership, which was so central to the Puritan ideal of a relationship, is thus espoused by Speght, who argues that men should help their wives.

42 Ibid., 11.
43 Ibid., 12.
44 Ibid.
Speght quotes Saint Paul. "who saith, That he that provideth not for his household is worse than an Infidel." 45

Using nature as her reference, Speght contends that even senseless creatures help one another. "The Male Pigeon, when his Hen is weary with sitting on her egges, and comes off from them, supplies her place, that in her absence they may receive no harm, untill such time as she is fully refreshed." 46 Moreover, man and woman, who are reasonable creatures, should be helpful to each other since they have the law of God to guide them. In order to further her analysis Speght considers the body as an analogy of the ideal relationship. "Neither the wife may say to her husband, nor the husband unto his wife, I have no need of thee, no more than the members of the body may so say to each other, between whom there is such a sympathie, that if one member suffer, all suffer with it." 47 As interconnected entities, Speght argues that man and woman cannot function independently of one another. Women's role is central to the survival of humankind; a man is incomplete without a woman.

The support that a woman provides to her husband is considered by Speght, a crucial component of her purpose in life. The home is portrayed as a haven in a heartless world; the wife is expected to devote herself to her husband's emotional needs. In Ecclesiastes 4.10, Solomon said "Woe to him that is alone." Any man who must endure the the pains of the world by

451 Tim. 5. 8. also cited in Speght, A Mouzell, 13.
46Ibid.
47Ibid.
himself is thus to be pitied. Women are expected to ease the emotional burdens men face:

for when thoughts of discomfort, troubles of this world, and fear of dangers do possesse him, he wants a companion to lift him up from the pit of perplexitie, into which he has fallen: for a good wife, saith Platapus is the wealth of the minde, and the welfare of the heart. 48

The emotional stability of the husband is the responsibility of the wife. The expectations placed upon her are to ensure his happiness by suppressing her own feelings. A wife, above all else, must possess the ability to lift the spirits of her husband regardless of her own emotional state. In pointing to Swetnam's contradictory nature, Speght reveals that he also conceived of women as emotionally supportive:

The husband ought (in signe of love) to impart his secrets and counsell unto his wife, for many have found much comfort and profite by taking their wives counsell; and if thou impart any ill happen to thy wife, shee lighteneth thy grief, either by comforting thee lovingly, or else, in bearing a part thereof patinetly. 49

Ultimately, Swetnam realises the extent of woman's importance in emotionally supporting her husband. Although she does not deny the inferior nature of women, Speght relies on the sacred text to illustrate women's importance. Far more than housekeepers, women are characterized as the perpetuators of humankind, the disseminators of God's will, and emotional healers. This view

48Ibid.

of women in a religious context extolls their virtues and redeems their purpose.

In her analysis Speght also considered relationships between men and women. Puritan ideology viewed marriage as a partnership. Adam, in Speght's view, was incomplete before Eve was created. The Lord created both male and female creatures; likewise he chose to make a helpmate for Adam. "Adam for this cause being cast into a heavy sleep, God extracting a rib from his side, thereof made, or built, Woman; shewing thereby, that man was an imperfect building afore woman was made; bringing her unto Adam, united and married them together." 50 Woman was made out of the side of man to be his partner, not his subordinate. Furthermore, Speght's conceives woman's creation:

... for man was created of the dust of the earth, but woman was made of a part of man, after that he was a living soule: yet was she was not produced from Adam's foote, to be his low inferiour: nor from his head to be his superior, but from his side, neare his heart, to be his equall: that where he is Lord, she may be his Lady: and therefore saith God concerning man and woman jointly, Let them rule over the fish of the Sea, and over the fowls of Heaven, and over every beast that moveth upon the earth. 51

Speght echoes twelfth-century theology in this passage and reminds her readers that women were created to be man's equal and to rule over the earth jointly. 52 Spiritually their bodies are considered as one. In Genesis 2.23 Adam spoke of Eve as "bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh."

Subsequently husbands are expected to love their wives as themselves, "so

50 Speght, A Mouzell, 2.

51 Ibid., 10.

ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself." 53 Although Speght concedes that women are the weaker vessel, she reveals that the Bible prescribes respect and love in marriage.

As an analogy, woman is compared to the crown of a king. "For a King doth not trample his Crowne under his feete, but highly esteemes of it, gently handles it, and carefully laies it up, as the evidence of his Kingdome." 54 From this perspective, women are a symbol of men's accomplishments, as is the crown of a King. In and of itself, the crown has no power, but it is respected and coveted by those who do not possess it. Women are characterized in a similar fashion; "so husbands should not account their wives as their vassals, but as those that are heires together of the grace of life." 55 As the crown is the King's symbol of his power and accomplishments so too is a man's wife the symbol of his power and accomplishments. Marriage is presented by Speght as the ultimate state for a man and a woman.

Although Speght extolls the virtues of marriage, she maintains that men are superior to women. In reconciling these somewhat opposing views, she argues:

that the Man is the Womans Head; by which title yet of Supremacie, no authoritie hath hee given him to domineere, or basely command and imploy his wife, as a servant; but hereby is he taught the duties which hee oweth unto her: For the head of a man is the imagination and contriver of projects profitable for the safety of his whole body; so the Husband must protect and defend his wife from injuries: for he is her Head, as Christ is the head of his Church. 56

53 Ephes. 5. 28.
54 Speght. A Mouzell, 15.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 16.
The structure of the family is seen as a microcosm of the church; where Christ is the head of the church, the husband is the head of the family. Men are expected to love their wives as Christ loved the church. In acknowledging women's inferiority, the husband must live with his wife "lovingly, and religiously, honouring her as the weaker vessel." 57 Despite her position on the equality of men and women, Speght abandons this notion and submits to patriarchal authority. Perhaps she did not realize the contradiction, or as Linda Woodbridge has remarked; "[The Mouzell] is not feminist, partly because any sallies Speght makes into the territory of equality come up against the wall of her own Christian beliefs." 58 In Speght's perspective women rule only as men's helpmates; her definition of equality encompasses only the realm of nature. As the quintessential Puritan defense, The Mouzell first and foremost supports the dogma of Puritanism and thus considers women as socially inferior to men.

A martial bond not only entails an unbalanced partnership, but also the education of the wife. As her superior, the husband is expected to provide the wife with religious teaching. "Hee is her Head, [and] he must, by instruction bring her to the knowledge of her Creator, that so she may be a fit stone for the Lord's building." 59 It implies that women are incapable to read and understand the Bible by themselves and their husbands must guide them in their learning. In his epistle to the Corinthians Paul said:

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57 Ibid., 17.

58 Woodbridge, Women and The English Renaissance, 92.

59 Speght, A Mouzell, 17.
Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law. And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home; for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.  

It is evident from this biblical passage that patriarchal subordination reinforces women's subjugation to male authority. Men were given the responsibility of educating their wives and the wives were not permitted to discuss religion while attending church.

The duty of teaching is not to be taken lightly by the husband. Men, according to Speght must take charge of their wives and not be afraid to do so. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the husbands to advise and direct their wives. "If men would remember the duties they are to perform in being heads, some would not stand a tip-toe as they doe."  

Speght appears to be referring to Swetnam who contends that women are assuming the role as head of the house. Speght, however, implies that men are neglecting their responsibilities and women are forced to assume this role. "They should consider," Speght argues in reference to Saint Paul, "that women are enjoined to submit themselves unto their husbands no otherwaies then as to the Lord." St. Paul thus explains that women are provided for the comfort of man and acknowledges this position as their purpose in life.

The most serious criticism Speght levels against men concerns their ingratitude towards women. Created from the love of God, woman should be considered a virtuous gift. Men like Swetnam are not only berating women,

60 Corinthians 1. 14. 34-35.

61 Speght, A Mouzell, 17.

62 Ephesians 5. 22. also cited in Speght, A Mouzell, 17.
but are also showing their ingratitude towards God. Speght asks, "What greater discredit can redound to a workman than to have the man for whom he hath it made say it is naught? Or what greater discourtesy can be showed unto God than the opprobrious speeches and disgraceful invectives which some diabolical natures do frame against women?" 63 It is viewed as utter blasphemy to rail against God's creation. The education of women is the responsibility of men and if women are not fulfilling their role in society then it is the fault of their husbands. For as Adam failed Eve in the Garden, seventeenth-century men have failed women by neglecting to provide the direction and support that is their obligation.

Speght denies Swetnam's accusations and illustrates the facetiousness of his examples. Like Sowernam, Speght can find no record of God referring to women as "necessary evils." The necessity of women was a consideration of medieval theologians. In her study on women in medieval theology, Eleanor McLaughlin discerns that both marriage and women were necessary for the preservation of the species, but no positive spiritual values other than biological necessity seem to be found in either. 64 The misogyny inherent in Swetnam's work was deeply rooted in medieval theology, which Speght has neglected to acknowledge. Undeniably, Swetnam has incorrectly attributed his quote but this attitude towards women had existed for centuries. Speght concludes that Swetnam has fabricated this quote to further his publication. His insolence is blasphemous, and Swetnam will suffer the consequences:

63Speght, A Mouzell, 20.

Whosoever affirms God to have called women necessary evils, fastens a lie upon God: For from the beginning of Genesis to the end of the Revelation is no such instance to be found . . . whosoever blasphemeth God, ought by his Law to die; The Bayter of Women hath blasphemous God, Ergo, he ought to die the death. 65

Although Speght claims to be a meek and mild young woman she is wholly intolerant of Swetnam's accusations. Illustrating another contradiction in The Araignment, Speght points out that Swetnam said women were sprung from the devil. 66 The whole basis of the book of Genesis, however, supports the theory that woman was made by God. Arguing that women are a product of the devil is profane. Furthermore, Swetnam claims on the following page that "women were created by God, and thus formed by nature and therefore by policie and wisdome to be avoyded." 67 This proclamation is dismissed by Speght as an intolerable absurdity. 68 Given Speght's insightful comprehension of her religion it is understandable that she would find The Araignment offensive. The juxtaposition of Swetnam's accusations to Puritan ideology are so diametrically opposed that even if one were to consider his work as an aspect of a literary game it is evident that Speght did not consider misogyny a game.

Undeniably, Rachel Speght was not a feminist. Her work has no hidden feminist agenda, nor does she hope to transform her society by replying to Swetnam. The Mouzell for Melastomus is, however, a pious reflection of the

65Ibid., 34.


67Swetnam, The Araignment, 16, as cited in Ibid.

68Ibid.
importance of women in society. Swetnam's work is disturbing when considered from a Puritan perspective. Indeed historians provide a variety of interpretations of Puritanism, but Speght reveals its dogma from a female perspective. There were probably men who abused the privileges Puritanism afforded them; the Bible, however, did not promote such abuse. As Speght argues, women were not created to be vassals for their husbands: they were created by God to eradicate man's loneliness and be his partner. The definition of partner is somewhat vague and perpetuates women's inferiority. Central to Speght's view, however, is the assumption that men could not survive without women. Where Eve may be accused of destroying paradise, Speght convincingly argues that Adam was to blame for the fall. Woman was created as the helpmate to man, and as the weaker vessel it was his responsibility to guide her. From this premise, Speght implies that if misogynists want to blame someone for lewd, idle, froward, and aggressive women, they should look no further than themselves.
Chapter 4:

Swetnam the Woman-hater: Prescription in Jacobean Drama.

The play, Swetnam the Woman-hater, Arraigned By Women, which characterizes the crucial elements of the woman debate, emerged out of the Swetnam controversy. Conforming to Jacobean style, the play dramatizes the issues discussed by Swetnam, Speght, Sowernam, Tuvil, and Munda. The play thus provides an important synthesis of the overall effect the debate had on society. Set in early seventeenth-century Sicilia, the main characters are the royal family of the region. This focus is somewhat surprising because it would be logical to assume that a play in which Swetnam is arraigned would be set in England. What the play does, however, is relocate Swetnam to reveal how his insolence functions within virtually any society. When the virtue of the King's daughter is called into question, Swetnam, who has renamed himself Misogynos, speaks in defense of the male sex.

Although the play is not set in England, it is the essential dramatization of the English debate about women. It questions which gender is responsible for initiating love and examines relations between husbands and wives, fathers and daughters, rulers and subjects, and lovers and enemies in order to reveal the complexities of social relations. It is within this context that the play provides a conclusion to the Swetnam controversy. The primary purpose of the play is to discern the basis of patriarchal prejudice against women and to provide a corrective for
misogynist assumptions. To further this mandate, the playwright employs various methods to demonstrate patriarchy. In order to debase his misogyny, both internal and external, the play defames Swetnam and presents him as a fool. As well, Jacobean social stereotypes and dichotomies, such as lewd women in opposition to virtuous men, are conversely portrayed. In the final act, Swetnam the Woman-Hater advocates an egalitarian society which accepts and extolls the virtues of both genders.

The background to the play itself will lead to a better understanding of its structure. Literary critics Coryl Crandall and Linda Woodbridge concur that the play must have been written in either 1618 or 1619, following the publication of Munda's pamphlet. It was originally performed at the Red Bull theater by Queen Anne's players. Crandall argues that since the title page cites the actors as the "late Queen Anne's servants" and considering that the play was licensed on October 17, 1619, it must have been performed between the Queen's death on March 2, 1619 and October 17.

The authorship, however, is not as easily discernable. Woodbridge and Crandall both argue that the author was probably Thomas Heywood. Heywood was a contemporary associate of the Queen's players and

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2 Coryl Crandall, Swetnam the Woman-hater: the Controversy and The Play (Purdue: Purdue University, 1969), 27 and Woodbridge, Women and the English Renaissance, 320.

3 Crandall, Swetnam the Woman-hater, 27.
apparently had an interest in the feminist controversy. 4 Woodbridge cites two defenses of women written by Heywood. *Gunaikeion: or Nine Booke of Various History Concerninge Women* (1624) and *The Exemplary Lives and Memorable Acts of Nine of the Most Worthy Women of the World* (1640) and she argues that these works point to Heywood’s interest in the debate about women. 5 Given this interest in the controversy and his involvement in the theater, Woodbridge claims that Heywood is the most likely author of the play. It is unusual, however, that Heywood would not be willing to sign his name to a work that presented some of the most compelling issues of the day and in which he himself had previously exhibited an interest. Once again it is possible that the play may have been the effort of a learned woman or indeed a group of women who may have believed that the theater was the best place to arraign Swetnam. If women were capable of composing pamphlets in their defense, is it not equally conceivable that they could write plays? It is unfounded to claim that the play is the obvious work of a male playwright. Women were willing and capable of writing in their own defense and a play would be the most fitting means by which to condemn Swetnam.

Whoever the playwright was, she/he was apparently inspired by the Spanish novel *Grisel y Mirabella*, a tale of two young lovers who are in much the same predicament as the young lovers in *The Woman-hater*. The Spanish novel, however, is a tragedy whereas this play is a comedy. Crandall contends that perhaps the English did not take Swetnam as

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seriously as the Spanish took his counterpart. A comical version, however, seems more appropriate given the nature of the debate and the audience: a comical Swetnam provides a more disdainful character than would a pitiful villain.

The Red Bull's audience was attracted far more by comedies than tragedies. It was a theater for the commoner, middling class audience and *The Woman-hater* was designed to please this crowd. Consequently, scenes which characterize Swetnam as a fool were written with such an audience in mind. As well, the Swetnam controversy would have been known in this circle. The fact that women were part of this audience seems to indicate that the play would have been well received. In her study of Jacobean tragi-comedy, Woodbridge notes the occurrence of "the stage misogynist" in a number of plays and argues that this character seems to have been designed to appeal to women. Another possible explanation for this character's presence is to initiate comment amongst the viewers, pro and con, on the nature of women. As a central character in *The Woman-hater*, Misogynos accomplishes these purposes as well as being central to the main plot.

In *The Woman-hater* Misogynos provides the defense of men against women in the war of the sexes. A crisis occurs in the opening scene because the heir to the throne of Sicilia does not return from the war.

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6 Crandall, 26.
7 Ibid., 26.
9 Ibid.
against Spain. The only surviving child is Princess Leonida who is in love
with Lisandro, Prince of Naples. A union between the the lovers, however,
is forbidden by King Atticus because he is at odds with Lisandro's father.
Consequently, Atticus dictates who is permitted to visit Leonida; only
eligible and appropriate suitors are acceptable. Aside from this main plot,
Joseph Swetnam appears after having escaped from England fearing the
disdain which accompanied the publication of his pamphlet. Prince Lorenzo
returns from war and disguises himself as Atlanta the Amazon in order to
observe the court. These stories converge when Lisandro is discovered in
Leonida's chamber. Both Lisandro and Leonida attest to the other's
innocence in the breech of conduct but it was in fact Lisandro who
disguised himself as the Friar to gain entrance into Leonida's chamber.
Atticus then decides to hold a trial to decide who is responsible for
tempting the heart; the man or the woman. Serving as the defender of men,
Swetnam refutes the claims of the womens' advocate, the disguised
Lorenzo. The judges decide in the men's favour and despite the objections
of the women, Leonida is sentenced to be executed.

Overwrought when he views his beloved's corpse, Lisandro attempts
to takes his own life and thus both of the lovers are presumed dead at the
end of act four. Swetnam / Misogynos, is congratulated for his efforts by
several of the gentlemen. Iago, the King's loyal servant, is not so easily
impressed. His recollection of the Princess' death is painful for Atticus to
bear, and the King begins to feel remorse for his harshness. Meanwhile
Swetnam / Misogynos has decided that he is in love with Atlanta who is
actually Prince Lorenzo. Atlanta and a band of women conduct their own
trial of Misogynos through violent and aggressive scratching and beating.
Swetnam, having received his due punishment, disappears from the action.
The family is then able to regain peace. Disguised as shepherds and a nymph, Lorenzo, Lisandro, and Leonida reveal that they are miraculously alive and well. In the epilogue Swetnam echoes Speght's pamphlet and appears muzzled by women and begs forgiveness. The final resolution denies Swetnam any authority on the "woman question."

Throughout the play Swetnam is portrayed as an outlandish fool who threatens the social order. In both literal and metaphorical terms the playwright has convincingly undermined Swetnam's diatribe against women. Swetnam first appears with his aide Swash, dressed as a clown. This initial characterization makes it difficult to take Swetnam's words seriously. He decides to change his name and pretend he is a fencer in order to avoid persecution. Metaphorically the playwright gives him the name Misogynos and the obvious bias of the author against Swetnam is revealed. Swash assures Swetnam that they are sure to face the wrath of the women of Italy; they are more intolerant than the English. Nicanor, a servant of the court, enters the scene and Swetnam immediately begins to dissuade him from marrying his betrothed. "A woman!" Swetnam proclaims, "she's an Angell at ten, a Saint at fifteene, / A Devill at fortie, and a Witch at fourscore./ If you will marry, marry none of these: / Neither the faire nor the foule; the rich, nor the poore; / The good, nor the bad." Thus in his first appearance Swetnam's reputation is perpetuated and the image he portrays is consistent with his writing.

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The reasonable men of the play also find Misogynos' ravings offensive. In Act III Scene ii, Iago, who is aware of Lorenzo's presence, explains who Misogynos is:

I ne'r had conversation with him yet; / But (by report) I'll tell you, He's a man. / Who's breeding upon the excrement of the time; / And being swollen with poysoneous vapors. He breakes wind in publique, to blast the / Reputacion of all Women ; His acquaintance / Has bin altogether amongst Whores and Bawds, / And therefore speakes but in's owne clement. His owne unworthie soule deformitiie, / Because no Female can affect the same, / Begets in him despaire : and despaire, envie. / He cares not to defame their very soules, / But that he's of the Turkes opinion : They have none. / He is the viper, that not only gnawes / Upon his mothers fame, but seekes to eat / Thorow all Womens reputations. 11

Swetnam is considered a reprehensible debaser of women and his authority is dismissed when he is judged by Iago, a kind and virtuous character. Iago contends that Swetnam's dislike of women is due to the fact that his own soul is unworthy and he is thus envious of the kindness that most women possess. Judging women as a whole based on the Whores and Bawds with whom he is acquainted, are the source of Swetnam's opinions. Lorenzo and Iago consider Swetnam's opinion as impious because his sources are not credible. 12

Misogynos, however, is redeemed by the judges in the play when he wins the case of the first tempter in love. "Man," Misogynos concludes, "tempts not woman, woman doth him delude." 13 The attitudes of the

11 Ibid., 3.2.31-42.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., 3.3.198.
judges and the men in the audience favour Misogynos. Similar to the
controversy, the positive response to Swetnam's slander against women
illustrates how men are easily deluded, not by women but by men like
Swetnam. Given Swetnam's initial appearances he is clearly not to be
trusted.

Indeed Swetnam contradicts his own claims when he announces to
Swash that he is in love with Atlanta. Not only is this pledge of love
hypocritical, it reasserts Misogynos' preposterousness. In his letter to
Atlanta, Swetnam says "In so much, I vow hereafter, to spend all my
dayes./ Devouted to your service, it shall be / To expiate my former
blasphemies: My desire is shortly to visit you." 14 When Atlanta accepts this
invitation Swetnam does not suspect his ensuing arraignment. The women
finally fulfill their revenge and attack Swetnam but his punishment does not
end there. Atlanta delivers her final judgement:

First, he shall weare this Mouzell, to expresse / His barking
humour against women-kind. And he shall be led, and publike
showne. / In every Street i'the Citie, and be bound /In certaine
places to a Post or Stake, And bayted by all the honest women /
in the Parish. 15

Such use of public defamation was common to early modern Europe. In
France and England the charivari, as such displays were termed, was a
noisy, masked demonstration used to humiliate some wrongdoer in the
community. 16 The targets were often men who were abused by their wives

14Ibid. , 4.5.153.

15Ibid. , 5.2.328-33.

16Natalie Davis, Society and Culture in Early Modern France (Stanford :
Stanford University Press, 1975) , 100.
or widows who lived outside the prescribed norms of society. D.E. Underdown notes the occurrence of charivaris in England as an attack against abusive wives. Often men were forced to ride a horse backward to receive public disapproval for allowing their wives to abuse them. Atlanta threatens Swetnam with this popular form of judgement but he does not realize the severity of his predicament. In response he cries out: "Is that the worst? there will not one be found / In all the Citie." The audience, however, was quite aware that such form of justice was common and Swetnam's rebuttal perpetuates his negative image as a veritable clown.

The role of Swetnam, however, is not to be underestimated; his archetypal character is central to the main plot. As Constance Jordan argues, Misogynos represents the hatred and fear of women that underlay seventeenth-century patriarchy. His opinions and actions are so extreme as to be unnatural and destructive of the whole social order. Whereas the playwright characterizes Misogynos as comical, his role is to reveal the foolishness of Swetnam's and all misogynists' attacks in general. Crandall maintains that it is the implicit assumption of the play that only a fool would suggest one extreme or the other and that is finally the most important element of the story. Moreover, the play provides a window

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17 Ibid.
18 Underdown, "Taming," 121.
19 Davis, Society and Culture, figure 7.
20 Ibid., 5.2.334.
22 Crandall, Woman-hater, 19.
into the dangers of Swetnam's views. A young woman and man could have lost their lives to such ignorance; clearly there is no one gender that is to blame for sexual incontinence.

There are numerous suggestions throughout the play as to why Swetnam held women in such disregard. Misogynos argues that his opinions were formed:

Since I had wisdome. When I was a Foole./ I doted on such Follies, but now I have left um./ And Doc vow to be the everlasting Scourage/ To all their Sex: What the reason is, / Ile tell you, Sir, hereafter: reade but that,/ I have arraign'd um all, and painted forht/ Those furies to the life, / That all the World may know that doth it read, I was a true Mysogenist indeed."23

In this respect, Swetnam acts like a rejected lover who is embittered by his loss. This is one conceivable rationale for his actions.

Perhaps Swetnam / Misogynos felt inadequate in his personal relations with women. Woodbridge claims that the misogyny that must be overcome may represent adolescent fears: fear of sex, fear of women and their mysterious ways, fear of adulthood and the rites of passage to adulthood.24 Moreover, she cites the example of matches of verbal abuse between choruses of men and women as a ritual aspect of ancient fertility rites. Ultimately, it was not the opposite sex that was driven away by such rituals, but rather sterility. 25 Woodbridge concludes that the persistence of

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23Woman-hater, 1.3.173-181.

24Woodbridge, Women and the English Renaissance, 291.

such patterns, from the rites of preclassical Greece through to the comedies of the High Renaissance, to modern sexual tensions, implies that something in the psychological makeup of human beings renders hostility to the opposite sex as a logical first step toward sexual consummation and fertility. 26

With respect to Swetnam, this point is of great importance. Not only are his intellectual abilities undermined throughout the play, but his sexual prowess is also questioned. Before facing Atlanta he becomes intoxicated and is quite impatient while awaiting her arrival: "I would she would come away once: Now, methinks / I could performe. And see! but wish and have." 27 The use of the word "could" in and of itself makes it seem as though Swetnam is unsure of his ability to perform. The implication is obvious: Swetnam is sexually impotent and his inability to perform has led to his disdain for women. 28 As in Woodbridge's example, perhaps Swetnam is sexually inexperienced or he suffers from sexual dysfunction. Woodbridge's evidence for such an argument is, however, questionable. 29 Swetnam's drunkeness in and of itself would render him unable to sexually preform. It is evident, nevertheless, that the playwright ridicules Swetnam's sexual abilities; an insinuation that was probably not well received by Swetnam and his supporters.

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26Ibid.

27Woman-hater, 5.2.38-9.

28Woodbridge and Jordan have both considered this passage as indicative of Swetnam's impotency please see: Woodbridge, Women and the English Renaissance, 314, and Jordan, "Woman-hater," 163.

29Ibid.
Not only does the playwright ridicule Swetnam's sexual capacity but she/he also questions Swetnam's sexual orientation. As Constance Jordan argues, subtler modes of analysis could reveal that what passed for male hatred of women was in effect veiled homosexuality.  

Although Lorenzo is disguised as Atlanta, the audience realises that he is in fact a man. When Misogynos falls in love with him/her, he not only reinforces his own negative and hypocritical stereotype but also calls into question the motivations of misogynists. The woman hater may not openly or even consciously hate women, he may, in fact, be suppressing his love of men and in the process courts women. This homoerotic undercurrent is evident in Swetnam's response to Swash's questioning of his love interest:

Swash. Who, the Amazonian Dame, your Advocate, / A Masculine Feminine?
Misog. I, Swash; / She must be more then Female, has the power /To mollifie the temper of my Loue.

It is implied in this response that a woman is unable to fulfill the temper of Swetnam's love, he requires a woman who exhibits manly qualities; a Masculine Feminine. The woman hater's desire of a manly woman accounts for the gender tensions apparent in the play and reflective of the society as a whole. The play denies the distinction of the two genders and affirms that a complete person has both male and female qualities.

In her work on the Hic Mulier pamphlet debate that emerged in 1620, Valerie Lucas examines the issue of manish-women and womanish-

31 Ibid.
32 Woman-hater, 4.3.64-8.
men in early modern England. Transvestitism and the reversal of sex roles functioned as a kind of licensed misrule during carnivals and festivals but was unacceptable during other times of the year. Lucas notes that the concern with cross dressing in Jacobean England developed into a pamphlet debate similar to the Swetnam controversy. When the womanish-man and the manish-woman confront one another in the literary arena Hic-Mulier, argues that traditions of attire are established by custom and social customs differ from place to place, suggesting that gender roles are also a product of culture rather than nature. A famous English poem is quoted by Hic Mulier to illustrate her point: "Round-headed Custom th'apoplexy is / Of bedrid Nature, and lives led amiss, / And takes away all feeling of offense." Thus gender role and stereotypes are viewed by the writers of Hic-Mulier and Swetnam the Woman-hater as a product of culture. In the world of drama these social constructs are inverted to illustrate alternatives to prescribed behaviour. In the play it is shown that positive characteristics cannot be dichotomized and assigned to one gender or the other alone. This dichotomy is true of society as a whole. Society cannot function with two distinct spheres, whether they be public and private, or male and female. What Swetnam the Woman-hater demands is a society which contains the best components of both male and female.

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34 Ibid., 73.

Perhaps this theme is reflective of the notion of separate spheres that many historians contend developed in this period. The strongest proponent of this theory, Lawrence Stone, argues that the advent of capitalism, coupled with Protestantism, developed and reinforced the separation of public and private life. Other scholars concur with Stone's view. For example, Mary Beth Rose, who argues that Puritanism idealized the married state which constituted a coherent, elaborate, and self-conscious effort to construct a new ideology of private life. Considering this prevalent Protestant ideology within the context of *The Woman-hater*, it is apparent that the playwright denies this notion of separate spheres and argues in favour of a more androgynous society. Throughout the play, dualistic stereotypes are revealed and then subsequently dismissed, and thus provide an overall corrective for seventeenth-century society as a whole.

The playwright sets out to undermine stereotypes of men and women in order to establish the society's conception of these images and subsequently illustrates their inconsistency. Whereas Swetnam's pamphlet contends that women are lewd, idle, froward, and aggressive, *The Woman-hater* depicts women as just, courageous, and virtuous. Within seventeenth-century patriarchal hierarchies the King represents justice and is a paragon of manhood. As Jonathan Goldberg has argued, fatherly authority predominated Jacobean images. Examining artifacts from King James' rule, Goldberg identifies society as an extended family. The King was to society

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36 Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 146.

as the husband was to the family: the supreme and just ruler. The Woman-hater, however, presents a dramatic contrast to this image, depicting patriarchal authority as explicitly tyrannical. As well, the notion of public and private spheres as distinct components in society is shown to be erroneous. The elements of public and private life intersect and reveal the importance and necessity of the relation between these two distinct sectors.

The ideology of separate and distinct spheres as put forth in seventeenth-century behaviour manuals, assigns the private sphere to women and the public sphere to men. The principle theorist of this ideology is considered to be Aristotle, who, as Ian MacLean contends, developed the distinction of male and female in which one is superior while the other is inferior. The male principle in nature is associated with active, formative, and perfected characteristics, while the female is passive, material, and deprived. As well, Sherry Ortner has shown that the distinction between men and women has developed to the extent that women are equated with nature and men with culture. Ortner concludes that "the culture/nature distinction is itself a product of culture, culture being minimally defined as the transcendence, by means of systems of thought and technology, of the natural givens of existence." Within this dichotomy women are considered as inferior to men because of their perceived natural inferiority. What The Woman-hater shows the audience,

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40Sherry B. Ortner, "Is Female to Male?" 83.
however, is that women are not necessarily defined by their role in private life, in as much as women's lives do not function in a vacuum. The notion that a woman's life is predominantly centered around the home is presented as absurd. The women of the play, for example, illustrate the active role women take in the public realm. Leonida is supposedly locked away from Lisandro, but somehow her life becomes of critical importance to the plot. It would seem as though the playwright is positing that regardless of how women are subjected their importance is paramount. Leonida's importance is even more pronounced because she is the heir apparent to the throne; her father is forced to consider her a part of the public sphere.

The controversy which Leonida and Lisandro's indiscretion causes brings all the women in the cast into the public realm when the trial proceeds. Loretta, lady in waiting to princess Leonida, publicly announces the need for a woman to defend the female sex:

> there is a / question to be decided in publike disputation before an / Honourable Assembly of both parts, that is, whether the man or the woman in love commit the greatest offence, by giving the first and principall occasion of sinning: therefore / know, that if any woman will undertake to defend/ the innocency of women, against the false imputations of detracting men, let her require to the Court, shee shall bee honourably entertyn, graciously admitted, and well rewarded.\(^4\)

Women's opinions are afforded a certain degree of respect by the King as they are asked to participate in the events of the court and are promised a reward for their services. Such a request, juxtaposed to the King's request for a male advocate empowers the female characters by placing them in the

\(^4\)The Woman-hater. 3.3.121-30.
public realm of the court. Clearly, this important issue is not to be decided exclusively by men.

Although known by the audience to be a man, Atlanta nevertheless, embodies the intellectual capabilities of women. His convincing argument regarding lusty men illustrates his sensitivity: men "vent the smoke of their affections, / Radie to blind poore women . and put out / The Eye of Reason." 42 Ultimately, the playwright adheres to society's oppressive view of women. Throughout the play there is the prevalent conception that women are weaker than men, for example, when Leonida is being questioned by the guards she contends: "Here upon me; the guilt alone is mine: / Twas this alluring face, and tempting smiles, / That drew on his affections. "43 Leonida appears as the stereotypical temptress whose powers over men force them to sin. This stereotype, however, is disproven by contrast to Atlanta who possesses aggressive and argumentive abilities. At court Atlanta presents a case equal to that of Misogynos'. Her rage at some points overcomes her:

Base snarling Dogge, bite out thy slanderous tongue / And spit it in the face of Innocence, / That at once all thy rancour may have end : And doe not still opprobriously condemne / Woman that bred thee, who in nothing more / Is guiltie of dishonour to her Sex: / But that she hath brought forth so base a Viper, / To tearé her reputation in his teeth, / As thou hast done. 44

42Ibid. , 3.3.107-9.

43Ibid. , 3.1.74-5.

44Ibid. , 3.3.207-15.
Atlanta presents an image of women active in the public domain and capable of realizing that Swetnam's actions are not the fault of his mother who gave him life. Indeed Swetnam must take responsibility for his own insolence and his unruly nature is because of his personal dislike of women. Atlanta is thus portrayed as a powerful and insightful woman, capable of exposing Swetnam’s true character.

Another issue the playwright calls into question is the division between public and private life. Within the structure of the play, the boundaries between these two spheres is indistinct. The private life of the royal family is of public interest revealing to the audience that constant intermingling exists between the private and public worlds. This situation can be observed in the public trial concerning the private sexual acts between men and women. Ultimately, Princess Leonida's private life with Lisandro is made public through this trial. The separation of these spheres is not only questioned, but the relegation of women to the private and men to the public sphere is also transformed. Women, as Atlanta illustrates, are not necessarily solely involved in the home, but are involved in the important issues of the court. The King illustrates how men are involved in the private sector, representing the tyrannical absolutism of patriarchy. Although this tyranny exists, women do not need to accept a passive voice in this suppression.

Indeed, the playwright conveys how women can be as tyrannical as the men when they arraign Swetnam by attacking him vehemently. Such violent women dispel the notion of women as passive and submissive. Misogynos begs them to let him speak, but he is denied:

Lor. No Not a syllable. / You have spoken to match alreadie, / you damn’d Rogue. / But weele reward you for’t. Skrew his jawes.
Mis. Oh. oh. oh.
Aur. Now, thou inhumane wretch, what punishment / Shall we
invent sufficient to inflict / According to the height of our
revenge?
Omnes. Let's teare his limmes in pieces, joynt from joynt. 45

Thus within the public realm women are empowered and fulfill the
mandate of justice: a role which the King has disregarded. This form of
violent justice, however, is a sharp contrast to contemporary judicial
procedures. The church courts, for example, would often force an
individual to pay a stipend for having defamed a person. In Elgin, Scotland
in 1621, Isobell Smith was order to remove herself from the town because
she called her neighbour, Isobell Sutherland, "in filthy sklanderous words
as Spyced harlat, drunkin harlat, wyle harlat as the Egiptians
knavis . . . " 46 Her punishment for insolent behaviour is public
banishment, but violence is not mentioned in the sentence. In the charivari,
it was not uncommon for the community to take matters into its own hands.
Generally, however, it was men and women together who publicly defamed
an individual. 47 The women of the play, however, are unjust and violent,
and independent of men. Qualities that are commonly attributed to men,
such as violence and aggression are attributed to women, and the
stereotypical view of women is further destroyed.

As with the differences between public and private, the playwright
also illustrates that the stereotypical distinctions between men and women
are also tenuous. Many scholars argue that the prescriptive literature of the

46 Before the Bawdy Court, 146.
47 Underdown, "Taming," 121-3.
seventeenth-century dictated that a woman remain chaste, silent, and obedient. Laura Gowing, for example, in her study of defamation cases suggests that the advice manuals informed the social perception of honest women which also dictated acceptable sexual behaviour. 48 In her careful examination of Puritan marriage tracts, Mary Beth Rose concludes that the increasing moral prestige of love and marriage in the Renaissance was accompanied by a wider acknowledgement of the social, emotional, and spiritual dignity of women, whose freedom of action and influence were nevertheless explicitly and severely limited. 49 Thus, while women were afforded a certain degree of importance as a marriage partner, this role was defined by popular manuals which dictated acceptable behaviour.

Coupled with this literature, however, is a notable concern with scolds; women who posed a direct threat to the social order. In defying the prescribed role as a silent and submissive woman, the scold often brawled with her neighbours, beat her husband, and disregarded society's expectations. D. E. Underdown notes that local court records between 1560-1640 reveal an intense preoccupation with such women which is more prevalent than in the preceding or subsequent periods. 50 The scold was also a prominent literary character, for example, Shakespeare's Katherine in The Taming of the Shrew. That such images of scolds and obedient women were prominent stereotypes in seventeenth-century England is indisputable. What The Woman-hater prescribes, however, is women in

\[48\text{Gowing, "Gender," 9.}\]
\[49\text{Rose, Expense of Spirit, 39.}\]
\[50\text{Underdown, "Taming," 119.}\]
direct opposition to these stereotypes. The playwright presents women who are in direct opposition to the social order but who are not portrayed as scolds.

As well, the play challenges the common view of men as the unquestionable authority of the household. Margaret Ezell cites the example of the good husband presented in literature and contends that he is accountable to the family in the same way as the good wife, but his sphere is the commercial and hers is the domestic. Woodbridge contends that these commonly held stereotypes also characterize women as merciful and men as just. Such images, however, are denied in The Woman-hater where men are characterized as not especially just and women are not particularly merciful.  

Ultimately, Atticus represents tyranny and injustice when he forbids his daughter to marry the man she truly loves and then sentences her to death. However, Iago initially describes Atticus as the just King:

His state is full of majestie and grace, / Whose basis is true Pietie and Vertue, / Where, underneath a rich triumphant Arch, / That does resemble the Tribunall Seat, / Garded with Angels, borne / upon two Columnes, / Justice and Clemencie, he sits inthron'd. / His subjects serve him freely, not perforce, ...  

The following scene illustrates that the King is not always just. His daughter Leonida is locked away in her chamber, forbidden to see her beloved Lisandro. Loretta, describes her as "a distressed Prisoner, whose

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51 Ezell, Patriarch's Wife, 104.

52 Woodbridge, Women and the English Renaissance, 309.

53 Woman-hater, 1.3.15-21.
hard fate / Hath bard her from all joy in losing you [Lisandro], / A
torment which she counts insufferable." 54 Albeit a father may know what
is best for his daughter, but Leonida's predicament is seen as torment.
However much a father thought he knew what was best for his daughter, as
Iago later explains, "It is not fit affection should be forced." 55 Indeed since
the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), canon law had required that men and
women could freely choose their marriage partner. 56 Charles Donahue
argues that marriages of love as opposed to marriages of convenience,
however, were not common until well into the eighteenth century. 57
Nevertheless, the English church law held that a man and woman were free
to choose their partners. Under this law, Atticus' charges against the couple
are completely unfounded. 58

Moreover, Atticus does not appear to love his daughter because he is
willing to have her executed. His concern with public honour has caused
him to disregard his personal feelings. Queen Aurelia begs him for justice:
"You have alwayes bin just / In other causes; Will you in your owne / Be
so unjust, severe, and tyrannous?" 59 Atticus' responds that "A King is like
a Starre, / By which each Subject, as a Mariner, / Must steere his course.

54Ibid. 2.2.6-8.

55Ibid. 4.1.87.

56Charles Donahue, "The Canon Law on the Formation of Marriage and
144-58 and Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, 189.

57Ibid. 157.

58Stone, Family, Sex and Marriage, 189.

59Woman-hater, 3.3.270-3.
Justice in us is ample. / From whom inferiors will derive example."  

As Atticus argues, the King should provide an example of justice for his subjects to follow and respect but this form of justice is pure tyranny. When he discovers the King's judgement, Iago says "'Twas cruel in a King, for such a fact; / But in a Father, it is tyranny." "Justice," as Iago defines it, is "like lightening ever should appeare / To few mens ruine, but to all mens feare." In this context, justice should be feared by all men and yet protect the innocent. The respect that justice commands has been devalued by Misogynos' attacks against virtuous women, and the King's inability to distinguish between slander and truth. Thus, the archetypal patriarch lacks the foremost quality of an idealized ruler. Known to his subjects as "The just King Atticus" this image is later disproven when he becomes a tyrant, sentencing his own daughter to death.

The nature of justice itself is questioned by the play because the trial between men and women is biased towards men. Iago's contention that justice is an equal scale, and the fact that seventeenth-century laws upheld this principle illustrates this point. However, as the play and examples from the society reveal, justice was not always equitable between men and women. Whereas Atlanta presents an equally persuasive argument, Misogynos is the unquestioned victor. The jury is comprised completely of men, and as Atlanta pleads: "you are all men, and in this weightie

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60Ibid., 3.3.276-8.
61Ibid., 4.1.31-2.
62Ibid., 4.1.89-90.
63Ibid., 1.3.5.
business, / graue Women should have sate as judges with you." 64 Nevertheless, the verdict is sustained and women are blamed for sexual offenses.

The question of who initiated sexual actions was one that was common to seventeenth-century courtrooms and perhaps even more prevalent in present day cases. Gowing has shown that women were often blamed for men's sexual misconduct. Citing the example of the case between Isabel Burroughs and her master William Gould, Gowing illustrates that in cases where men were the perpetrators of a sexual offense women were frequently assigned the blame. Having been examined by a midwife, Burroughs was found to be severely bruised and strained; she said that Gould had forced her to have sex with him. In the end, however, Gould was able to sue Isabel for defamation and was completely absolved of any charges. 65 The image of the women in the play's court scene is comparable to the Burroughs case. In the play, the women go to court to seek justice, only to encounter a laughing opponent. As Linda Woodbridge comments, this is an image of the frustration of the women's movement's throughout history: "seeking human justice, we confront the inhumane face of the jester." 66 Justice is denied by the playwright as she / he reveals that true justice is merely an ideal; even in the world of drama justice has little if any accountability.

64 ibid. , 3.3.265-6.
66 Woodbridge, Women and the English Renaissance , 319.
Another stereotype which the play rejects is the image of tenderhearted and passive woman. Leonida appears to be one such woman, but the audience quickly discovers that she is brave and courageous in the face of death. She abides by her father's wishes, her maid explains to Lisandro:

Shee prayes you, henceforth to desist, / Respecting your own saftie: Worthie Prince, / The times are troublesome and dangerous: / As for her selfe, she's arm'd to undergo / All malice that for you they can inflict. 67

Not only is Leonida willing to respect her father, she is also courageously willing to defend Lisandro's reputation.

The Queen is a woman who possesses compassion. When the verdict against women is determined, Aurelia begs her husband to be merciful, "let your Aurelia kneele, / And for the Offspring of your loynes and nine, / Begge favour." 68 Atticus ignores her pleas and Aurelia vows to seek revenge against Misogynos, "that monster was the cause of this, / That bloudie, cruell, and inhumane wretch, / That slanderous Dectractor of our Sex, / That Misogynos, that blasphemous slave, / I will be so reveng'd." 69 In many respects Aurelia is compassionate but in her disdain for Misogynos she shows no mercy.

The Queen, along with some of her female companions, seeks revenge upon Swetnam. Their trial of the woman-hater is not merciful; but it is viewed by the women as justice. It is charged that Swetnam:

67Woman-hater, 16.
68Ibid., 3.3.267-8.
69Ibid., 4.5.115-20.
Contrary to nature, and the peace of this Land, / Hast wickedly and maliciously slandered, / Maligned, and opprobriously defamed the civill societie / Of the whole Sex of women: therefore speake, / Guiltie, or not guiltie? 70

Swetnam's not so loyal servant Swash attests to his guilt and Swetnam is thus charged with Woman-slander and defamation. 71 The judgement the women determine is merciless; Swetnam is gagged, led about town, and eventually he is to be shipped off to live amongst the infidels. 72 Whereas initially the women appear merciful, they become enraged by injustice and are transformed into violent and merciless adjudicators of Swetnam, the woman-hater. In attacking Swetnam and disregarding mercy the woman take on qualities customarily attributed to men.

The playwright further explores this notion of male and female stereotypes and reveals that gender differences are not absolute. Qualities that are termed feminine are often attributed to men and masculine characteristics can be possessed by women. When either gender exhibits the characteristics of the opposite sex this does not indicate a weakness or character flaw, but rather it presents a more balanced person of either gender. Iago, for example, is a virtuous and wise counsellor who, as the King contends:

is a froward Lord, / Honest, but lenative, ore swaid too much / With pittie against Justice, that's not good: / Indeed it is not in a Counsellor. / And he has too much woman, otherwise / He might be Ruler of a Monarchie, / For polcie

70 Ibid., 5.2.259-64.
71 Ibid., 5.2.289.
72 Ibid., 5.2.339.
and wisdome. 73

In spite of the fact that Iago "has too much woman" his advice is superior to that of the other aids. Indeed he is honest and makes every attempt possible to save the crown from the villainous Nicanor. Moreover, Iago's opinion on the question of the first tempter in love seems to summarize the playwright's overall theme, "to say the truth. / Both Sexes equally should beare the blame; / For both offend alike." 74 As well, Iago is a major force in the final resolution of the plot. He assists the two Princes and the Princess to disguise themselves and to feign death in order that the King might realize his injustice. Thus, in possessing the best qualities of both genders, Iago is the hero of the play.

Scanfardo, however, is the ultimate antithesis to Iago. He possesses some of the most disdained of gendered qualities. His inability to keep secrets was a quality that Swetnam's pamphlet claimed was attributable to women,"if thou unfoldeth any thing of secret to a woman the more thou chargest her to keep it close the more she will seeme as it were to be with childe till she have revealed it amongst her gossips." 75 Scanfardo illustrates that men are unable to keep the secrets of their lovers. He begs Loretta to tell him why she is happy, but she insists that since he is a man he cannot be trusted; in the same way that Swetnam contends women are untrustworthy. Finally, Loretta discloses that Lisandro has crept into Leonida's chamber and Scanfardo immediately reveals to this information

73Ibid. , 5.3.40-46.

74Ibid. , 4.1.10-13.

75Swetnam, The Araignment, 41.
to his master, Nicanor. As the only individual who reveals the secret of a lover, Scanfardo exhibits a most cruel characteristic which Swetnam attributed to women.

Another characteristic Swetnam attributes to women is an inability to keep silent. *The Arraignment* claims, "all beasts by man are made tame, but a woman's tongue will never be tame, it is but a small thing and seldom seen, but it is often heard, to the terror and utter confusion of many a man." 76 Throughout the play, however, it is Swetnam who cannot be silenced, he is even present in the epilogue giving the last and final word. Obviously, the playwright does not believe that women cannot control their tongues; it is men like Swetnam who are in fact party to this disorder.

Leonida restores the reversal of gendered characteristics, illustrating how women are brave and courageous. Although it was Lisandro who initiated the secret meeting Leonida takes full responsibility and contends, "say that Hee / Did first commence the suit; the fault was mine / In yeelding to it; 'Tis a greater shame / For women to consent then men to aske . . ." 77 She is thus willing to take the indiscretions of her lover as her own, a quality that Puritan ideology contended was the male's responsibility as the head of the woman. 78 Moreover, when her impending death is announced, Leonida exhibits overwhelming bravery when she says, "Welcome, sweet death." 79 Ultimately, bravery was a quality most notably attributable to men, but Leonida reveals such characteristics are also possible in women.

76 Ibid., 40.

77 Woman-hater, 3.1.77-80.

78 Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, 111.

79 Woman-hater, 2.3.303.
The character who embodies the most distinct qualities of male and female characteristics is Lorenzo, and it is this character that suggests the possible corrective for society as a whole. Disguised as a woman, Lorenzo reveals that those possessing male and female qualities are the most complete human beings. However, the prominent Aristotelian view of men and women considered man as a the superior human being. Indeed Aristotle argued that women were the inferior and incomplete version of the male and required masculine qualities in order to become complete.\(^{80}\)

Although the playwright acknowledges the differences between men and women, she / he gives examples of stereotypical gender qualities and portrays these stereotypes as negative.

The characters who are the most complete human beings possess neither exclusively male nor female qualities. For example, Lorenzo is the integrated human being who embodies the union of male and female, which should be the goal of civilized humanity. \(^{81}\) Lorenzo is just and merciful: without his efforts the play would have no resolution. He reveals to the audience that men are deeply concerned with the woman issue. If the playwright was a man he undoubtedly wished he could have masked himself and been the champion of women; perhaps that is what the play is meant to do. Regardless of the author's objective, it is apparent that this androgynous character enables the fusion of public and private, justice and mercy, male and female.

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Constance Jordan has argued that the embodiment of male and female qualities in Lorenzo serves as the basis for a new and androgynous form of justice. The purpose of this form of justice is the reinstitution on feminist rather than patriarchal principles of the two mysterious bodies that compromise the two principal modes of relation in human society: the union of man and woman in marriage, and the union of the monarch and people in the state. In this respect, Swetnam the Woman-hater dispels the views espoused by the seventeenth-century misogynists in the play and more importantly, in society itself. Prevalent seventeenth-century stereotypes are brought to the stage and then shown to be inconsistent and untrue. The play demands the viewer to reconsider these roles and incorporate the best qualities of femininity and masculinity into their own lives.

As a work of dramatic art, Swetnam the Woman-hater, Arraigned by Women is a vibrant and energetic example of Jacobean tragi-comedy. It illuminates commonly held views of men and women and provides a renewed sense of gender relations. As a historical source, The Woman-hater presents numerous possibilities for unearthing the private life and values of seventeenth-century men and women. In her study of dramatic works and Puritan manuals, Mary Beth Rose argues that drama is a force that not only illuminates the inner life of the surrounding culture but plays a significant part in creating that culture. From Rose's perspective, drama is not only shaped by society, but society is also shaped and

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83 Rose, Expense of Spirit, 11.
informed by drama. Thus, *The Woman-hater* emerges from the Swetnam controversy as reflective of the gender tensions in society and informs Jacobean men and women that socially constructed gender roles are detrimental. A complete man or woman possesses the best qualities of both genders. As a distinct component of the Swetnam controversy, *The Woman-hater* provides a rejoinder to the debate as a whole, by dramatizing possibilities for men and women in public and private life. Although it is not historically accurate to argue that the play's characters are evidence of living people, the images it engenders provide an understanding of the means through which the internal conflicts of the society were mediated. There are in effect no absolutes in the play, men are neither wholly good nor wholly bad; nor are women. The final act reveals that a complete person maintains the elements of both femininity and masculinity. Such an ideal, prescribed as early as the seventeenth-century, has not yet been realized; it is an ideal society must still struggle towards. This struggle is the legacy that the seventeenth-century debate about women has left for us today.
Conclusion:
Literature as History

The debate about women in seventeenth-century England may well have began as no more than a literary game, as Linda Woodbridge argues, but its place in Jacobean society is significant. By the time that Swetnam wrote *The Araignment of lewd, idle and froward women* in 1615 the game had run its course and women were no longer willing to tolerate misogyny. The challenge that the Swetnam controversy has left for historians is to place it in the broader social dynamics of the period.

It is important to understand that the Swetnam controversy grew out of the larger *querelle des femmes* which occurred throughout Europe between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries. The place of the texts within this larger literary genre has been evaluated by literary critics extensively. What set the Swetnam controversy apart from this larger literary discourse, however, was the responses it elicited. Linda Woodbridge concedes that during the Jacobean period the formal controversy was losing its consistency and was beginning to show signs that women were no longer willing to take literary misogyny humorously. ¹ Swetnam had, as Louis Wright argues, "hit upon the grievances that the average citizen regarded as the besetting sins:of women." ²

Throughout the evaluation of *The Araignment* it becomes evident that Swetnam was recreating negative stereotypes of women held by seventeenth-century men. The context of seventeenth-century England that

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²Wright, *Middle Class Culture*, 487.
has been examined by historians assists in placing *The Araignment* in its social milieu. From a theoretical perspective, Constance Jordan, Robert Darnton, and Keith Thomas have shown that jokes are an important aspect of society. As Darnton argues, "when we cannot get a proverb, or a joke, or a ritual, or a poem, we know we are on to something. By picking at the document where it is most opaque, we may be able to unravel an alien system of meaning." 3 Swetnam's jokes against women assist our understanding of Jacobean attitudes towards women. Indeed Swetnam provides three different insights into seventeenth-century society. He provides opinions about women, he discusses the relationship between men and women and he provides advice, especially regarding widows. He follows a long tradition of misogyny in arguing that Eve has brought about humanity's demise. Women, in Swetnam's view, are the cause of men's destruction because they manipulate and charm men into financial ruin. This image of men being dominated and controlled by women was most abhorred in seventeenth-century society. D.E. Underdown and Susan Amussen have shown that there was an intense preoccupation with women who were a visible threat to the patriarchal system. 4 The growing concern with scolds during the seventeenth-century, is an issue that Swetnam reflects throughout his work.

The gender tensions that Swetnam depicts in *The Araignment* were evident in society as a whole. As Retha Wanicke illustrates the advent of James I to the throne ushered in an era of outright hostility towards

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women. The period was a transitional stage as women were no longer afforded the place they had once enjoyed. Such eras of transition have been explored by Judith Bennett, who contends that periods of transformation could have been beneficial to women but once the patriarchal structure transformed to meet the changes in society the clear subordination of women resumed. The Swetnam controversy falls in the years when the patriarchal structure was transforming and beginning to exhibit a backlash against women who challenged its hegenomy.

Swetnam's work reflects the traditional conceptions of women that dominated society. This explains why his poorly written polemic against women received so much attention in Jacobean London. The gender tensions that Swetnam depicts were a very real aspect of relationships between men and women. James' rule was overtly patriarchal and stressed male supremacy. Amussen has shown that the family became a microcosm for the state; the ordering of the household provided a model for the ordering of villages and counties, church and state. The literature of the period reiterates this hierarchy between families and the state - as the wife is subject to her husband so too are subjects to the King. This hierarchical structure placed women at the bottom of society. As part of both literature and culture, Swetnam's work assisted in furthering women's subordination by depicting negative stereotypes of women that were perceived as threatening to the patriarchal hierarchy.

5Warnike, Women of the English Renaissance, 194.

6Bennett, "Feminism and History," 266.

7Amussen, Ordered Society, 2.
As shown in the second chapter, however, women worked within the constraints of these changes to reassert their position in society. Joan Kelly believes that "the contents of early feminist theory reflect the declining power of women of rank and the enforced domestication of middle class women." 8 The feminist responses to Swetnam emerged out of this transforming society which was beginning to persecute women who posed an obvious threat to the social fabric. Swetnam's pamphlet was an obvious target for women who wanted to address the oppressive nature of society. The haphazardly written and contradictory Araignment had plundered much of the formal controversy and was easily criticized for both its poor style and poor evaluation of women. Swetnam's adversaries depict the struggles women face in society and easily undermine Swetnam's work, making it possible to reveal the importance and credibility of women's issues. In Joan Kelly's words, "women seized upon the querelle des femmes to rebut for themselves the misogynist voice of literate opinion." 9 By attacking Swetnam venomously or subtly, women attempted to dispel both his and society's negative views of women.

In Munda's and Sowernam's works Swetnam's images are countered with ardent and strong criticisms. Although some scholars argue that these authors were not women, the tone of their work seems to suggest otherwise. In contrast to Daniel Tuvil, the authors express outrage at Swetnam's tracts, whereas Tuvil provides an apologia. Clearly, the passion and the tone of the works support the authors' claims to be women. It

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8Kelly, "Querelle," 67.

9Ibid. , 73.
would be a difficult task for men to draw on personal experiences and gender relations from a female perspective. Given the contempt for Swetnam and the vigour of their work, it is little wonder that the women did not want to reveal their true identities to a society which would not have respected such pointed indignation.

The views these two women espoused can be termed feminist because they opposed gender constructed roles of men and women, and explicitly challenged the institutions that supported male prerogatives. The use of the term feminist in an historical context has been considered problematic by some historians. In Beatrice Gottlieb's assessment, the use of the term is dependent on the definition of the term itself. If feminism means a belief in the equal capacities of men and women, a demand for equality, and a program to facilitate achieving equality in society, then feminism as such did not exist before the nineteenth century. From this definition Gottlieb argues that to define women as feminist prior to the nineteenth century is anachronistic. Karen Offen's definition of feminism provides a theoretical framework that assists in understanding Sowernam's and Munda's views. Offen argues that anyone whose ideas and actions recognize women's lived experiences as unique, exhibit frustration and anger over institutionalized injustice or inequality of women, and challenge the institutions which advocate male prerogatives, are feminist. Moreover,


12 Ibid., 361-2.

13 Ibid., 152.
the notion of a gender ordered society in which women are barred from the male-dominated structures of society is what Judith Bennett identifies as the foremost focus of feminist historical studies. In her article on "Feminism and History," Bennett argues that feminist historians must study the workings of patriarchy throughout history in order to understand how it has survived and endured. The examination of the texts from these two theoretical perspectives, reveals that the replies to Swetnam were feminist responses to the gender constructions which compromised patriarchy. What Sowernam and Munda reveal about some seventeenth-century women was that they abhorred the institutions that enforced women's inferiority. They took up their pens to counter the attacks levelled against them and to illustrate that women were no longer willing to ignore misogyny.

Men also acknowledged that women were oppressed in Jacobean England. Daniel Tuvil espoused feminist views and argued that women were equally valuable and could perform the same tasks as men if they were given the chance. He realized that women were often blamed for men's indiscretions and suggested that "if wee examine every thing but with indifferencie, we shall find, let women be what they will, they cannot possibly be so bad as Men." 14

In his example of the Spanish Lasse who was raped, Tuvil indicates seventeenth-century attitudes towards sexual misconduct. Women were often blamed for sexual crimes regardless of the evidence in their favour. In her example from "Gender and the Language of Insult in Early Modern England," Laura Gowing uses the case against Katherine Cocklyn and

14Tuvil, Sanctuary, 47.
Isabel Burroughs to elucidate the difficulties in prosecuting men for rape. Burroughs was raped by her master William Gould but regardless of the evidence against Gould it was Burroughs who was sued for defamation. 15 This example, considered alongside Tuvil's tale, indicates that women were often blamed for illicit sexual behaviour based upon their perceived sexual overtiness. Tuvil's awareness of the problems women faced in society indicates that the early feminists were not alone in their quest and some men agreed that society had constructed gender inequalities.

Aside from attacking obvious gender inequalities, there were other means by which Swetnam's work could be criticized. Rachel Speght took up her pen because Swetnam railed against the entire notion of woman as man's helpmate; the very basis of Puritan marriage. 16 Speght's argument is based on Puritan doctrine. She debases Swetnam's work by using examples from the Bible to prove that women are created by God and should be held in high esteem. Moreover, Speght reveals that one did not have to hold feminist beliefs or rebel against the hierarchical social order to find The Araignment offensive. Speght's work in fact appeals to the patriarchal structure of society and argues that men cannot survive without women. "Neither the wife may say to her husband, nor the husband unto his wife, I have no need of thee, no more than the members of the body may so say to each other, between whom there is such a sympathie, that if one member suffer, all suffer with it." 17 As well, she points out that man

15Laura Gowing, "Gender," 8.
16Leites, "Duty," 387.
17Ibid.
is expected to guide woman as the weaker vessel. "Hee is her Head. [and] he must, by instruction bring her to the knowledge of her Creator, that so she may be a fit stone for the Lord's building." 18 Subsequently, if men want to blame someone for lewd, idle, froward, and aggressive women, they should look no further than themselves. Her attack is subtle, but telling: once again Swetnam's work, and the beliefs of all misogynists, are refuted.

The synthesis of the Swetnam controversy, however, appears in Swetnam the Woman-hater, which reveals the ludicrousness of Swetnam's views and provides a corrective for misogynist assumptions. Although the play is set in early seventeenth-century Sicilia and the main characters are the royal family, the play is the essential dramatization of the English querelle des femmes. The importance of the play to the overall controversy is in the ideals that it offers to society as a whole. By depicting negative stereotypes of men and women alongside individuals who possess the best qualities of masculinity and femininity, the play prescribes that a complete person maintains the elements of both genders. The play echoes seventeenth-century society with examples of scolding; women abusing Swetnam through public defamation. The play itself is an outright venue for ridiculing Swetnam who falls in love with a man dressed as a woman and is finally tried by the women on their own terms.

Overall, however, the play denies stereotyping and reveals that the most complete human beings are those that possess the best of both genders. Whereas Swetnam's pamphlet contends that women are lewd, idle, froward, and aggressive, The Woman-hater depicts women as just,

18Speght, A Mouzell, 17.
courageous, and virtuous. The examples of Iago and Scarfordo indicate how stereotypes are often incorrect. Iago, the King claims, "has too much woman," but his character is the most virtuous and wise. Scarfordo, however, tells the secrets of a lover, a quality that Swetnam had originally attributed to women. Indeed, Scarfordo is the catalyst of the problems of the play and shows that it is not women who are to be blamed for their inability to keep secrets. As Coryl Crandall suggests, it is the implicit assumption of the play that only a fool would suggest extreme characters as Swetnam had done in The Araignment. 19 Thus reflective of the concerns and traditions of the Jacobean world, the play emerges from the Swetnam controversy to inform men and women that socially constructed gender roles are dangerous. The ideal the play prescribes for society as a whole is that an ideal person combines the qualities of both male and female. Such an ideal, however, is one that we ourselves still struggle to achieve in the twentieth century.

The texts of the Swetnam controversy are an important contribution to understanding how Jacobean society mediated the internal conflicts which plagued it as it transformed itself. To ignore the value of these texts as history ignores how women resisted patriarchy and worked to lay the foundations of modern feminism. The voices of the controversy have a life outside literary discourse. They reflect the contemporary climate of society and the historical experiences of women. How can we rectify the problems women face in our own society if we are unwilling to listen to our

19Crandall, Swetnam the Woman-hater, 19.
Jacobean sisters? It is only through understanding and contextualizing their problems that we may find a solution to our own.
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