

Pamphlet - Rachel Speght

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Primary Text: *A Mouzell for Melastomus, the Cynicall Bayter of, and Foule Mouthed Barker against Eva's Sex*

Supplementary Text(s):

- *Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Forward, and Unconstant Women* by Joseph Swetnam (Thomas Tell-Troth)
- Public reactions to Swetnam and Speght

Supplementary/Secondary Sources for Educators:

- <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uneedu/reader.action?docID=3030559&c=UERG&ppg=141>
- <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1685862693?pq-origsite=primo&searchKeywords=rachel%20speght&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>

Topics:

- Pen names
- The invention of the printing press
 - Imagining what it was like to live in a time where widespread access to information was not prominent
 - Impact of pamphlet - the effort that went into its circulation
 - What were pamphlet wars? Why were they a thing? Importance?
- Why is it important to consider gender when considering the time period that this was written?
 - Women insisting on being in the historical narrative despite the demonization they faced by cultural gender expectations

Commentary on the Original Journal

Challenging Misogyny Without the Cover of a Pen Name: Rachel Speght

While reading the introduction to Rachel Speght, a line caught my attention. It states, “Joseph Swetnam Published his *Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* under the pseudonym Thomas Tell-Troth, Spreght responded with *A Muzzle Melastomus, The Cynical Baiter of, and Foul-mouthed Barker against Eve's Sex*, which she **boldly published under her own name**” (Gilbert and Gubar 109). Pen names are a topic I have dug into in other literature classes in years prior, which is why I decided to write about Spreght. I found it interesting that a woman would – so valiantly – publish such a **scathing response under her name while a man would choose a pseudonym, knowing the time period**. One might think it

Commented [1]: Knowing this was during the middle ages/renaissance (1617) and gender expectations

Commented [2]: Touching on the use of pen name

What are the implications of using a pen name? Why do you think Swetnam chose to use a pen name? with examples from his text (if not the whole thing)

would be the opposite, but Speght proved everyone otherwise, despite its potential societal backlash. Speght expresses, “you for being greedy to botch up your mingle-mangle invective against women have not therein observed, in many places, so much as a grammar sense. But the emptiest barrel makes the loudest sound; and so we will **account of you.**” (110). Her caustic tone is woven throughout this piece and thus challenges the norm, as women of her time often **did not outwardly display their distaste or speak out about men's behavior** as she does here. Her deviation from the norm could be why I enjoyed Speght's writing, as she clearly **stood up for herself and all women**. Culturally, **women and their voices were oppressed**, in part for fear of social defamation. Gilbert and Gubar write, “**in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance alike even the most talented literary women were constrained by cultural strictures which implied that any intellectual ambition might mean they were evil**” (6). In Speght's text, she is clearly well-versed in her intellectual and literary ambitions, which, historically, might cause society to deem her evil if not for her directly calling Swetnam idiotic and pointing out his poor grammar. **A woman speaking ill of a man challenged the social order**; still, she decided to **publish her real name**. From the ensuing **praise for her pamphlet**, it appears she is applauded for her critique of Swetnam instead of facing public slander or a tarnished image. The reviewer writes, “Admire her much I may, both for her age, / and this her Muzzle for a black-mouth'd wight, ... **She is unto her sex a faithful friend**” (Anon, lines 13-14, 18). I agree; as a woman, I enjoyed Speght's text and internally cheered for her. Being able to *speak out against misogyny so openly and publicly* is brave and admirable. At the same time, it seems Swetnam's initial goal was somewhat *cowardly*: as if he knew his demeaning text would be unpopular, hence the usage of a pen name.

Commented [3]: love the word play - and again, emphasis on how this language is "out of line" for the time period (for women)

Commented [4]: useful context for this and how Speght is interrupting the historical narrative

Commented [5]: giving context about the time period and then asking what students might think the public's reaction to Speght's response letter might have been

Commented [6]: add supplementary text showing the actual reaction

Commented [7]: Needs more of a focus on genre for this revision project

Commented [8]: And more initial context of the time period