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REVISITING THE JACOBAN WAR OF THE SEXES: RIGHTEOUS ANGER, PATRIARCHAL ANXIETY AND THE SWETNAM CONTROVERSY



he essay seeks to explore the Early Modern English *querelle des femmes* and how the role of women in Early Modern society was discussed through a new wave of pamphlets and plays during the reign of James I. It may be noticed that Jacobean patriarchy was a much less stable construct than is commonly thought, and that the overt misogyny of James I and his supporters was an anxious reaction to the possibility of women gaining more independence in the period of economic and political transition after Elizabeth I's death, which could pose a potential threat to the patriarchal family, a unit on which the reign of James was modelled. The Jacobean period is also the first time women responded personally to misogynistic pamphlets—most notably, Swetnam's *Arraignement of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Inconstant Women*—and responded with righteous anger, as evidenced by the pamphlets of Rachel Speght, Ester Sowernam and Constantia Munda. What is more, the debate entered the world of drama: Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Woman Hater* (published in 1607, before the Swetnam controversy yet mirroring the gender issues of the time) and the anonymous *Swetnam the Woman Hater Arraigned by Women* (1620) seem to redraw the boundaries for “just” female anger, what is more, they make the misogynistic characters appear angry in a petty and hysterical way, a behaviour hitherto attributed to the “weaker” sex.

Sociologists working under the power-status theory of emotions (Kemper 1987, 2011) consider anger to be a passion of domination, an expression of power, disparaged if expressed by inferiors. By putting women in more powerful positions, and defending their righteous anger, it is likely that the playwrights supported the women and not the misogynistic men. It may be argued that economic and political changes, as well as the legacy of Elizabeth I, influenced the sharper tone of the debates regarding a woman's place in society—and her emotions.

The *querelle des femmes* or “the woman question”—the debate on whether women are more prone to sin than men—was hardly a new topic when the Englishwomen Rachel Speght (1617), Ester Sowernam (1617) and Constantia Munda (1617) wrote their answers to one of the most famous misogynistic tracts of the English Renaissance, Swetnam's *Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Forward, and Unconstant Women* (1615). Indeed, Christine de Pizan, Marguerite de Navarre and Boccaccio published earlier defences of female virtue.

Rebellious women and the war of the sexes were popular Elizabethan and Jacobean topics, to which titles like *The Cruell Shrew*, *Hic Mulier*, *The Womens Sharpe Revenge* or the popularity of Swetnam's *Arraignment* (which went through ten editions) can attest. However, Early Modern English women pamphleteers are often embraced by modern feminist critics as the first who attempted to demonstrate that female anger could be of a virtuous nature, rather than proof of female weakness and proneness to sin, even if some state that aside from Speght, who gave her personal name and therefore could be identified, the “female defenders” may have been men “ventriloquising” women's voices.¹ Though the topic itself was not new, the Early Modern *querelle* can be seen as unique due to the increase of the number of discussions regarding female authority and independence in the Jacobean period. James's reign can be characterised by misogyny but also by frequent renegotiations of a woman's place in society, as well as by a certain masculine anxiety regarding female independence. The Swetnam controversy took place during a period “when the patriarchal system was transforming and reasserting its control within society [...] there was indeed the blurred line between theory and practice” (McClymont 1994, 35), and periods

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¹ Scholars who maintain the pamphlet writers were women include Henderson and Mc Manus (1985), Beilin (1987), Travitsky (1989) and Purkiss (1992), while those who negate that claim include Woodbridge (1984), Clarke (2001), Romack (2002) and Bellows (2004). However, even those who claim the writers were men do not negate the validity and the proto-feminism of those responses.

of transition often offered women a chance to gain more independence. Certain historians (Underdown, Thomas, MacFarlane) identify various economic and political factors as strongly influencing the matter of the misogynistic backlash but also the will to fight back on behalf of the women and men who supported them.

The way those Early Modern pamphlet writers, both the male accusers and the retaliating women, express and handle the emotion of anger is of special interest. Early Modern women were generally discouraged from openly showing they were angry, as anger was an emotion of the dominant side. However, the Swetnam retaliatory pamphlets and two ‘woman question’ plays see a departure from this approach, as the women often ridicule their opponents’ “choler” but justify their own strong emotions. As dominant emotions—like anger—are, according to the status and power theory, linked strongly to the idea of social hierarchy, the renegotiations of “the right to anger” can be seen as an attempt to imagine a different sort of status distribution in times of transition.

The quest for finding the true social origins of emotions may have yet not been completed, and sociologists have different approaches to the passions.² The power and status theory of emotions suggests that social structural relations—which determine the social hierarchy in a given society—are the basis of all emotion-evoking interactions. The concepts of power and status must, however, be clarified. Status is, in most general terms, the approval of reference groups (Kemper 2001: xi), freely given respect. Status may be ascribed or achieved. The definition of power used in this analysis will be the classical (and general) idea of Weber ([1922] 1965, 152), who claimed that power is “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability exists”.

Though this theory is often contrasted with social constructionism, which considers the origins of emotions to lie in culturally embedded social norms and standards, ingrained through socialisation, it can be merged with it to some extent, as sociologists are also concerned not only with how particular emotions arise but how they are managed and conveyed (Barbalet 2007, 1375). Anger may be subdued in order for the individual to conform to not only social standards but also if the individual’s position in the social structure does not allow for an open expression of rage.

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² Other theories pertaining to the study of emotions include ritual theory, affect control theory, the dramaturgical approach and exchange theories.

Clearly, the cultural norms that develop in a cultural system mirror the standard role relationships within that social group. If students are supposed to display deference (or even anxiety) in interacting with teachers in one culture, while showing lively, even combative, engagement in another, these patterns say volumes about the relative status and power of the two roles in those cultures. (Wisecup et al. 2007, 115)

Kemper (2011) considered the status/power theory to be universal, as power and status are concepts identified in every society, regardless of the stage of development. Every community, no matter how primitive, establishes certain margins of permissible behaviours and has some method of castigating transgressors. It must be established, then, what influences power and status (what determines an individual's position in the social structure of a particular society) as well as which norms apply to the expression of anger in the Early Modern period in England, and whether the two plays and the Swetnam controversy offer a new glimpse into those matters.

According to the power-status theory, anger is an emotion “directed toward the other” (Kemper 1978, 121), born out of the “felt undeservingness of status deprivation” (Kemper 2011, 245). The foundation of the power-status concept is that anger is an emotion of dominance, as it is an emotion related to aggression and the direct voicing of one's displeasure or opposition. If expressed openly, it may be threatening. A dominant emotion may be most safely conveyed by actors in power, or those with high status.³ In general, in Early Modern England, powerful and influential people were encouraged to show anger albeit in a civilised way if it served a regulating purpose (e. g. scolding servants or breaking an unruly child's will), though rage was generally discouraged, especially in relation to princes, gentlemen and “magistrates”, who were to give an example of temperance. However, a low status and/or low-power actor, even potentially displeased, was culturally trained to suppress anger.

The ideal of the “humble man” is also presented by religious pamphleteers:

He loves rather to give than take honour; not in a fashion of complimentary courtesy, but in simplicity of his judgment (...) his words are few and soft; never either peremptory or censorious (Hall [1608] 1837, 93)

The humble man, therefore, is an ideal when he is silent and submissive. Anger management is given ample attention in conduct literature for the lower

³ The term “actors” is used here in its sociological sense, denoting individuals engaged in social interaction.

classes—those able to read could consult manuals such as the *Boke of Nurture for Men, Servants and Children*, which offered more detailed advice on dealing with the passion. One of the suggestions is to keep clear of company when one is “in temper”, another—a comment probably directed at servants—to avoid “exciting” anyone already angry (Rhodes 1577, 36). Sometimes, this creates a paradox: “open expressions of anger are judged negatively and associated with low social status and overall unworthiness” (Kennedy 2000, 116). The lower-status individuals were often judged to be emotionally childish, lacking control over their impulses.

Anger becomes rather a savage beast than a Gentleman [...] Nay, ‘tis a kind of baseness and pusillanimity, and so beneath a Gentleman. For we see such as are weak, sickly. Aged, or else children. Fools, and women most addicted to it. Men, especially Gentlemen, shall vent their Anger rather with scorn than fear, that they may seem to be rather above than below the injury. To get meekness, a calmness of spirit is an excellent Antidote, and directly opposite to it, and advances a Man’s Honour. (Ramesey 1672, 106)

People who could not handle their anger were deemed uncivilized, but the “handling” differed according to power and status. However, those with lower status—children, people of lower class, and, most importantly, women—had to be able to control their impulses and suppress their rage, as their anger could potentially destabilise the status quo. However, according to the status-power theory, when the lower-power individual wishes to renegotiate those power relations, especially when he or she deems them unfair, the situation may call for an exception. There is a margin of tolerance to “transgressive” behaviour if the anger is considered “righteous”, the individual expressing it seeking to correct an infraction that could destabilise the society in a far greater capacity than a temporary insubordination.

The Early Modern war of the sexes can be seen as a mirror of a certain social uncertainty of the time, a form of masculine anxiety caused by, among other factors, “excessive population growth, inflation, land shortage, poverty and vagrancy” (Underdown 1987, 116). Other historians mention the loosening of neighbourhood ties that came along with the spread of capitalism, as well as the redefinition of the concept of charity. Indeed, the growth of capitalism has also identified as an important factor in the discussions of female freedom by scholars such as Thomas (1971), Macfarlane (1970) or Boyer and Nissenbaum (1974) in their social studies of witchcraft. The conclusions that can be drawn from this rather unique situation offer a departure from the prevailing atti-

tude that the patriarchal order was an accepted and stable element of the time. The insecurity regarding the patriarchal structure of Early Modern England was a reflection—and was also reflected by—the uncertainty of James I and his followers at court. “The ambivalence about female independence which marks the debate over women’s roles during the reign of King James suggests the presence of deep-seated anxieties regarding women’s cultural authority, which can be traced, at least in part, to the double-edged politics of gender in the Jacobean court” (Miller 1996, 109). Allman (1999, 32) identifies the causes of the resurgence of misogynist discourse as the king’s antifeminism, the unclear issue of James’s sexuality as well as the attempts (some futile) to distance his wife, Queen Anne, from political life.

The legacy of a female monarch was also a problematic issue. Mullaney (1994, 139) argued that it was also the cult of the Virgin Queen that paradoxically enhanced misogyny after Elizabeth’s death—while she could put herself on a pedestal of purity, she distanced herself from other women whose virtue could potentially be challenged. The last years of her reign saw a return to misogyny that flourished during the initial stages of James’s reign. On the other hand, “if the anticipation of James had undermined Elizabeth’s authority in her last years, her haunting of James’s reign returned the favour” (Allman 1999, 33). By the 1620s, Elizabeth’s image was no longer tainted by the last (and less successful) years of her reign, but was referred to with a certain nostalgia (Wayne 1999, 236), which led many women to use the image of Elizabeth to further support their claims that women too can be respected and even followed as examples. It is interesting to note that even Elizabeth’s anger (socially permitted, yet discouraged on the part of a sovereign) was later regarded positively. “A female monarch who could display herself when the occasion arose as aggressively and confidently militaristic was a more satisfying Renaissance monarch than an indolent and pacifist king” (Allman 1999, 34). Her “angry frowne” could be viewed much more positively than James’s proudly patriarchal yet ultimately passive attitude if it was the female queen who was remembered as “the Phoenix of her time, our euer to bee renowned Queene, Elizabeth, at whose frowne Kings trembled” (Newstead 1620, C2).

The new king had to establish himself against the cult of Elizabeth I, but remain respectful to her memory. In his first address to Parliament, James I drew on the images of England as his wife, and him, the king, as the “head” of the marriage (Allman 1999, 30). While Elizabeth also drew on familial terms to describe her monarchy, James’s ideas were clearly more absolutist—and patriar-

chal. His positioning of himself as the head of the household could cause certain political discomfort, as it also placed the men in the position of the subordinate “wives”.⁴ James’s negative attitude towards women was well-known, he was especially critical of cross-dressers and was a fervent persecutor of witches—he was known to personally oversee their tortures (Keay and Keay 1994, 556). This speaks volumes about his uncomfortable feelings towards women who defy patriarchal norms. Interestingly, the French ambassador reported James I “piques himself on great contempt for women [...] the English ladies do not spare him but hold him in abhorrence and tear him to pieces with their tongues” (Willson 1956, 196). It is pertinent to note that the fact that “English ladies” had enough power to be even covertly angry with the king’s behaviour reveals a lot about the complexity of the situation at court.

It appears that the Jacobean court itself was more multifaceted than is commonly thought, and, like Early Modern English society, could not be treated as a single unchanging entity. A clear example of certain subversive politics are the activities of Queen Anne and her circle of female confidantes, to whom she often lent support even if it meant challenging the king’s authority. This included Lady Anne Clifford, who refused to be ignored in the discussions over the territory she inherited, Westmoreland, even though the king explicitly stated that only her husband should be responsible for the sheriff’s office. Clifford even mentioned that she put the king “in a chaff” (Miller 1996, 116) over the matter, but still refused to quit her case. A subject who made the dominant side of the interaction angry and still held her ground was a bold subject indeed, and her “insolence” mirrored the righteous anger of the women pamphleteers, who did not fear anger if they knew they were acting out of the feeling of justice. Aemilia Lanyer may have challenged the king by dedicating her proto-feminist *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* to Queen Anne. By praising the Queen’s sex and appealing to her judgment, she excluded James I from the exchange concerning women (Miller 1996, 119).

It is likely, then, that the misogyny of James and “his” court was an attempt to reinstate the ideals that were being challenged far more often than it is thought.

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⁴ Furthermore, as James was also known to publicly demonstrate an affection for his male favourites that went beyond the permitted norms of the period (Goldberg 1989, 142), this could be further discussed considering James’s rumoured homosexuality, and Jordan (30) notes that “his behaviour blurred the sexual binary on which the theory of patriarchy rests”

Clearly, if status differences between men and women were as secure and inherent as Early Modern social theory argues, we would not find such a ubiquitous masculine concern over the fear of effeminacy [. . .] the overt misogyny of Joseph Swetnam's *Arraignment* is clearly a response to the same fear of emasculation. (Breitenberg 1996, 165)

The king's subjects were not all unanimously misogynistic. Dusinberre (1996, 5) argues that the entire Early Modern English culture of drama—influenced by the spread of humanism in the educational modes of the time, by certain Puritan ideals of equality as well as Elizabeth's reign—can be seen to have feminist sympathies, and that even Shakespeare's strong heroines are part of a certain common stock. It could also be argued that a reaction against overt misogyny in plays could be interpreted as criticism of the king's ethos and behaviour.

"James's rhetoric of fatherly authority can be viewed as disclosing the implicit instability of the domestic hierarchy it was concerned to invoke" (Miller 1996, 114). While it may be difficult to agree with the notion that the patriarchal family (and order) could no longer be taken for granted, as Underdown's study (1985) suggests, there is indeed evidence of an increased number of punishments meted out to scolds and unfaithful or domineering wives (according to local court records from 1560-1640 reviewed by Underdown), and an almost obsessive preoccupation with women who were considered to be threatening the patriarchal system (Underdown 1985, 119), from scolds through witches to cross-dressers, which points to a certain social anxiety often ignored by historians and literary critics. The image of the scolding woman, the most extreme example of female anger that the patriarchal society sought to dominate, shall be returned to.

It has already been hinted that female anger was often thought to be baseless, and, in the long run, a destructive expression of insubordination. In Early Modern England, judging from data collected from pamphlets, artistic output, letters, memoirs, laws, public speeches and advice manuals, the main variables regarding power and status were social class, gender and age, with race and religion playing an important part. Women were generally in a disadvantaged position. Even well-born "wives held a rank but not the command that usually went with it; correlatively, they possessed wealth but could not spend or manage it" (Jordan 1990, 298).

The sin of Eve was a constant reminder that women should follow, not take initiative. A Christian woman's social sphere was the house; outside she was often denied voice. "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men; she is to keep silent"

(I Timothy 2:8-15). The pamphleteer Rachel Speght, a member of the lower class and a daughter of a church minister, was most likely familiar with those teachings. However, Speght opposed the “norm” of female silence and openly voiced her discontent.

In her pamphlet, she challenges Swetnam with her displeasure (though perhaps not open anger). Speght was certainly a transgressor, however, her response in emotional terms is not even comparable to that of “Jane Anger” of Elizabeth’s reign. Jane Anger ([1589] 2000, 4) openly flaunted her “cholloricke vaine” while Speght does her best to demonstrate tact and humility, as if to stand in opposition to Swetnam’s aggressive behaviour:

Worthy therefore of imitation is that example of *Seneca*[a], who when he was told that a certaine man did exclaime and raile against him, made this milde answer; [...] This I alleage as a paradigmaticall patterne for all women, noble & ignoble to follow, that they be not enflamed with choler against this our enraged aduersarie, but patiently consider of him according to the portraiture which he hath drawne of himselfe, his Writings being the very embleme of a monster. (Speght [1617] 1998)

Ester Sowernam and Constantia Munda are more critical than Speght, the former even apologizing that her stance may not mirror the natural sweetness of the ideal woman—yet claiming that such an approach is necessary in this case. Interestingly, Sowernam draws on the image of Elizabeth I and her more traditionally male attributes of valour and strength and presents her as a shining beacon of virtue, one that could be followed by both women and men. It was likely a daunting and potentially dangerous task to reply negatively to any praise regarding the Virgin Queen, and Sowernam made full use of that situation. “The mythology of Elizabeth [...] could attach itself to brave and virtuous women” (Allman 1999, 33).

Constantia Munda, on the other hand, provides probably the most direct critique of Swetnam, threatening him with physical violence. Her anger is apparent: “I’ll take pains to worm the tongue of your madness and dash your rankling teeth down your throat” (Munda 1617, 16). She is not afraid to state that she has been angered, and that Swetnam’s misogyny is harmful and unacceptable. In many ways, those female pamphleteers renegotiate the social boundaries of female behaviours, as they reply in their own voices, display irritation and displeasure, and openly demand to be treated better. “The voices of these tracts were not only clever, but were also outraged” (McClymont 1994, 39).

It is interesting to note that Swetnam expected a furious response from women (stating “I know women will bark more at me than Cerberus” (Swetnam [1615] 1985, 192)), but not rational arguments and a rhetorical battle featuring “just” anger—an emotion employed, surprisingly to Swetnam, by people he deemed inferior—and in order to reassert their status. His mentality reflects certain emotion ideologies of the period: ridiculous fury could be downplayed as comically out of place, but righteous anger was quite rarely a female domain, as this would mean that a woman could think herself more virtuous or more clever than a man, and consider herself to have the right to admonish men.

This was surprising, and this criticism from a socially inferior individual would most likely evoke anger in turn. To prove this point, a closer look should be taken at Lewalski’s analysis of an original copy of Speght’s pamphlet with annotations done by the girl’s contemporary, which Lewalski (1996, 91) considers to have been Swetnam himself. The notes on the margins contain “puns on female genitalia, rude references to body parts or to sexual intercourse, double entendres, and slurs on Rachel’s chastity—attacks which take on special force since they are directed against a known young unmarried woman” (Lewalski 1996, 92). One of the most controversial of his notes appears when Speght, in a commendatory poem included in the copy of her pamphlet, is likened to David fighting Goliath: “What? throwinge stones? Give mee her arse” (Lewalski 1996, 96). Breitenberg (1996, 154) notes the “excessive” rhetoric of the men’s texts and speeches, and states “if it were simply a question of stating agreed upon differences, surely we would not find the passion or virulence exhibited in the *Hic Mulier* tract or in Joseph Swetnam’s angry *Arraignment* [...] nor would we find James I ordering preachers to condemn cross-dressing women from the pulpits”. Swetnam’s crude and ireful remarks only underline that he was deeply uncomfortable by the fact that he has been judged in a constructive way, and admonished by an inferior.

An analysis of the female replies to Swetnam reveals that argument-wise the women use largely conventional means of attack, using logical arguments and biblical examples. Yet, the act of the reply itself and the naming of emotions is provoking—the surprise of the man who originated the controversy speaks volumes about the uniqueness of the women’s act: “his [Swetnam’s] comments reveal that he is deeply offended not just by what she [Speght] writes, but that she writes at all” (Bellows 2004, 191). “The greater the misogyny, the more is revealed about the anxiety of the masculinity that it seeks to defend—even Jane Anger notes that the men do indeed protest too much” (Breitenberg 1996, 154).

It is interesting that the Jacobean debates as well as the character of this particular discourse (in the case of the later play) found their way into drama, namely, Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Woman Hater* (published in 1607) and the anonymously written *Swetnam the Woman Hater Arraigned by Women* (published in 1620). Though certain gender stereotypes remain in the two plays, one may wonder whether certain culturally expected anger presentations are not treated differently from what one would expect: the misogynists are the ones who are irrationally choleric, while the women's anger is shown to be excusable even if openly expressed (like the anger of "Atlanta" in *Swetnam the Woman Hater Arraigned by Women*) or channelled into a rational, though humorous, plan of just retribution (like the schemes of Oriana in *The Woman Hater*).

Therefore, if female anger was ideologically considered either comic rage, unnatural transgression or a nuisance, it is curious that angry women in two woman-hater plays are not punished for indecency, ridiculed or branded as scolds—they are the heroines of the play. It may be argued that this is because the image they present is that of righteous anger. It has been mentioned that according to the status and power theory, the inferior can occasionally be angry at a person with higher status if the anger is "just", and if s/he seeks to defend what is valuable to a given society. It is likely that the playwrights saw raging misogyny as harmful. Two elements contribute to making this situation work. The "enemies" of the women, the woman-haters Misogynos (an alias of Swetnam until his true name is finally revealed) and Gondarino, are presented as a raging, illogical and contemptible human beings—their anger is close to madness. It may be worth examining whether the dramatic world saw Swetnam and similar misogynists as mirrors of the indolent James I, or whether they simply thought that the "woman-hating" had gone too far (it should naturally be remembered that women constituted a large portion of the dramatists' audience). Of course, plays which can nowadays be seen as misogynistic also existed.

The action of the Swetnam plays may be contrasted with Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* scenario, with "Petruchio's cavalier dismissal of Kate's pseudo-righteous ire as nothing more than "a 'paltry cap'—a trifling matter" (Freeh 2002, 287). Yet, in Shakespeare's comedy, it is Kate who is originally the transgressor of norms—in the two "woman-hater" plays the blame rests on the ridiculous but harmful men. If the ridiculous Swetnam, who gloats over the fact that he has wreaked havoc in his native England, had managed to emerge victorious at the end of the play, the social system could be deemed faulty. Gondarino's invectives and accusations towards Oriana in *The Woman*

Hater are sins that must be paid for, as he is denying innocent, high-status women their right to be respected. Therefore, high-class dramatic heroines like Oriana and “Atlanta” could be allowed to help restore the social order by teaching the misogynists a lesson in humility, especially if the men cross so many social boundaries.

Angry men, if they are contemptible or unreasonable, are easier to rebel against. It is very likely that if that irrational anger was directed towards women, the retaliating ladies would receive social support for their “righteous” anger. In *Swetnam the Woman Hater Arraigned by Women*, the main plot is centred on two young people, who are faced with punishment for their love for violating the king’s command—however, as both the young lady and the man want to take the blame for their infraction, their case cannot be easily resolved. The king cannot distinguish between slander and truth—just like James I, “the archetypal patriarch lacks the foremost quality of an idealised ruler” (McClymont 1994, 110). The king decides that the best way to solve the problem is to have a debate on the question of whether men or women are the less virtuous sex. At the trial, Swetnam, naturally, defends the men and criticises the women. Swetnam’s opponent at the gender trial, speaking for the women, is actually the long-lost prince Lorenzo dressed as the Amazonian “Atlanta”. By choosing to participate in the trial, he gets a chance to defend the women, protect the lovers from their deadly fate and reinstate himself at court. Regardless of his motives, Lorenzo provides social support for the unjustly criticised women. Lorenzo/Atlanta delivers a very convincing defence of female virtue: women, even within the patriarchal structures, had a right to be honoured and respected, as the loss of reputation was synonymous with loss of status. In the play, Atlanta is especially angered at Swetnam’s (insincere) attempts to woo her. Swetnam is convinced that he will seduce the Amazonian woman, as—in his opinion—women are generally weak-minded and therefore easily charmed. Atlanta flies into a rage, and admonishes Swetnam violently:

Impudent slave
How dar’st thou looke a Woman in the face
Or commence love to any?
(*Swetnam the Woman Hater Arraigned by Women*, 5. 2. 110)⁵

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⁵ All references to the text of the play follow *Swetnam the Woman-Hater Arraigned by Women* [1620] (1969).

“Atlanta” sees his behaviour as offensive and disrespectful. The public trials, however, offer even more interplays of emotions. Swetnam tries to deride Atlanta, patronising her and labelling her a scold (“O doe not scold, good woman!” (*SWHAW*, 3. 3. 216)). After many perturbations Atlanta is finally righteously victorious, but s/he leaves the “punishment” of Swetnam to the town womenfolk, who have long wanted to take revenge for all the insults Swetnam directed at womankind. Those townswomen mention wanting to tear him apart (“let’s teare his limes in pieces, ioynt from ioynt” (*SWHAW*, 5. 2. 159)). Atlanta finally reveals “herself” to be the prince Lorenzo. The play ends with the women falling to their knees before the prince to thank him for the defence: “And on our knees we muft this dutie tender / To you our Patron, and our Fames Defender” (*SWHAW*, 5. 3. 196-197). Though ultimately it is male authority that restores order, the title page’s woodcut is an image of the court where the “arraignment” of Swetnam is held it is dominated by the Chief Judge, a woman with queenly attributes, one very similar to the Virgin Queen. “The image of a woman on a throne opposing a misogynist would recall the authority and the advocacy of the old Queen [...] it may also be read as a confrontation between the misogynist James I and a revived Elizabeth I” (Wayne 1999, 236).

The anonymous play cannot be called “feminist”, but it still allows for female anger—Swetnam’s rage is petty and ridiculous, yet must be confined as it is a threat to social stability. Spontaneous female ire is likened to that of the mythical Furies—but the premise of anger is seen as valid. The defender of women is a man, but the members of the court do not realize this until the trial’s over. What is more, they applaud the brave Amazon Atlanta and do not react against “her” strong, public expressions of anger, even when s/he utters lines which are designed to offend: “Base snarling Dogge, bite out thy slanderous tongue/And spit it in the face of Innocence” (*SWHAW*, 3. 3. 207-208). After all, she defends not only “her” good name, but the honour of all women—certain lines cannot be crossed, even in patriarchal structures: female anger is seen as permissible if a woman’s reputation is at stake.

Similarly, Beaumont and Fletcher’s play *The Woman Hater* cannot be called a feminist milestone, however, it delivers a directly empowering message. Oriana, as has been mentioned, is a noblewoman, probably of higher social standing than her adversary, Gondarino, and is very polite and charming, yet the man offends her in a despicable, even irrational way—so irrational that Oriana starts laughing at his insults.

Gondarino: Doe you commend me? Why doe you commend me?
I give you no such cause: thou are a filthy impudent whore
A woman, a very woman
Oriana: Ha, ha, ha (*The Woman Hater*, 2. 1. 145-48)⁶

This behaviour only proves the fact that Gondarino, like many misogynists falling back on old and absurd “arguments”, is ridiculous, and transgresses all norms of politeness and courtesy. Gondarino, on the other hand, believes himself to be superior, which only makes him more comic—when women irritate him, at one point he remarks:

Dare they incense me still, I
Will make them feare as much to be ignorant of mee and my moodes
As men are to bee ignorant of the lawe they live under (*WH*, 4. 1. 121-123)

He rages on about how severely he will punish women and how much they deserve punishment, yet to the audience his exclamations were probably more amusing than truly threatening. However, there is a moment of danger in the play—a moment which demonstrates that even the status of high-born women could be fragile. Gondarino defames the chaste Oriana, and she is accused of dishonesty.

Of course, the moral “test” of Oriana exists for dramatic appeal—a typical comedic turn of events where the accused are eventually cleared of blame, the accuser faces punishment, and peace and joy are restored—yet it mirrors the fear that even women of valour could have their chastity or honesty questioned. Oriana’s own anger at Gondarino is generally subdued. It is perhaps because she had to be presented as a believably chaste and “civilised” noblewoman, familiar with the models of courtly behaviour that demanded mildness and elegance, yet a light-hearted attitude towards the madness of Gondarino only proves that Oriana’s status is high enough to allow her not take the man completely seriously.

During their first meeting, Oriana manages to conceal her disgust, but in private, she schemes to get back at Gondarino—not with rage, but with what he expects least—feminine charm.

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⁶ All references to the text of the play follow Beaumont, Francis and John Fletcher 2008 [1607] *The Woman Hater*.

I must not leave this fellow, I will torment him to madness,
To teach his passions against kind to move
The more he hates, the more Ile seem to love (WH, 2. 1. 397-399)

However, a later turn of events allows Oriana to express her anger at men.

When she is falsely accused and sentenced to death, she is in fact being manipulated by the Duke himself—his test rests on whether she is willing to sleep with her executioner, Arrigo, if he promises to spare her. When Arrigo suggests this, she reacts with wrath:

Villaine, I will not; Murderer, do the worst
Thy base unnobel thoughts dare prompt thee to!
I am above thee, slave (WH, 5. 4. 60-62)

Oriana is aware of her social standing, where her dominant anger is righteous also because her class status may take precedence over her gender. She suggests that even if the executioner forces himself upon her, she will not lose status—a surprising approach considering the times—as she knows she is pure and deserving of honour. Indeed, it is by this action that Oriana proves herself to be the high-status lady that she was considered before her defamation and the attention of the men turns to the one who had slandered her in the first place.

The punishment of the misogynist is decreed, and it is Oriana who delivers an admonishing statement.

Lord Gondarino, you have wrong'd me highly; yet since it
Sprung from no peculiar hate to me, but from a general dislike
Unto all women, you shall thus suffer for it (WH, 5. 4. 108-110)

It is interesting that Oriana sides with all women, regardless of status, while, considering the social rules of the time, she had a right to retaliate personally for the slight against her personal integrity. At the end, a group of women “attack” Gondarino with charms and kisses, knowing the man will be embarrassed by the situation. He is “forced” to accept femininity, whether he likes it or not, just as many Early Modern English men were—both men and women were created by God, and this order should not be challenged. In the play, therefore, a chaste noblewoman can be seen to have the right to defend not only her virtue, but the virtue of all women, even if it means expressing theoretically unfeminine anger, what is more, the authorities recognise that right and (though after a “test” of moral purity) punish the slanderer for his baseless rage.

The pamphlets and plays of the Jacobean period present the readers with flashes of female moral superiority towards misogynists. The women pamphleteers seem to have the moral high ground, and demand justice, at times angrily, but constructively. The female characters (or posing as female) of the two woman question plays, *Atlanta* and *Oriana*, possess status which appears to be equal or higher than the misogynists', which allows them to be righteously angry, but even the lower-class women who deal out the punishments at the end of both plays are empowered enough for their anger to be justifiable in this situation. It may be an exaggeration to speak of "milestones" in the case of the two plays. There are also moments of justified and non-destructive female anger in other Renaissance plays, what is more, comedies could sometimes allow for situations outside the realm of permitted behaviours, especially if they served a moralising purpose. Yet, the women's anger in the two plays was used to show that women should be treated with respect, and all women should be innocent until proven guilty. The anger of the plays' female characters as well as the anger of the pamphleteers is valid and righteous, and it presents a departure from the general social attitude towards female emotions of the time. Scholars such as McClymont (1994, 121) remark that James's I reign, especially the first years, were a transitional stage for male-female relations, where certain groups, attempting to adapt to a changing economic reality, reinforced ideas of patriarchal rule over women. On the other hand, it is also acknowledged that certain periods of transformation could be beneficial to women, and that many tried to fight back, at least within the realm of public, literary works. Additionally, though the system of Elizabethan and Jacobean England was male-controlled, it was not unanimously misogynistic.

Though the woman question pamphlets failed to inaugurate real political change (Jordan 1990, 298), they were perhaps one of the first examples of women publicly demonstrating their displeasure with misogyny and not being unanimously slandered or rejected for it, as evidenced by the support the angry female characters receive in the controversy-based plays. "By the time that Swetnam wrote *The Arraignment* in 1615 the game had run its course and women were no longer willing to tolerate misogyny" (McClymont 1994, 119). Both Beaumont and Fletcher's play and the Swetnam play support the fighting women rather than the angry men, as the women are shown to have much nobler and socially healthy goals than the irrational, contemptible male antagonists.