

With a title as scathing as *A Mouzell for Melastomus*, Speght's feminist polemic promises to deliver a blistering critique of Swetnam's misogynistic *Arraignment*, a promise she delivers on in this extract. Drawing heavily on Christian metaphors and references, Speght establishes that even though men do possess authority over women, they nonetheless ought to be dutiful and righteous masters. Subsequently, she directly criticises Swetnam's prejudiced attack on two grounds: that it reductively generalises about all women based on the deficiencies of some, and that it reflects a gross ingratitude for God's gift.

Speght begins by acknowledging the truth that "the Man is the woman's Head" and therefore holds "Supremacy" over women. Here, male dominance is bolstered by the use of capitalisation: not only does it connect the "Man" to the diction of authority, but it also visually reinforces his power over the uncapitalised and lesser "woman". However, while the metaphor of the "Head" ostensibly concedes the man's supremacy, Speght will use this same image to qualify male dominance and illustrate that men must exercise this power over women responsibly. First, she develops this metaphor to its logical conclusion by examining the physical function of a human head: while it is the "imaginer and contriver of projects", these projects must be "profitable to the safety of the whole body". While "imaginer" and "contriver" allude to the head's unique capacity for reason and planning, Speght simultaneously reminds us that this power is used to protect the body over which it rules. Thus, just as the literal head is a prudent and responsible master of the body, the "Husband" — a metaphorical 'head' — "must protect and defend his Wife from injuries". With the equal importance of the "Wife" vis-a-vis the "Husband" now reinforced by the previously-denied capitalisation, Speght underscores the obligation men have to shield women from "injuries", calling to mind attacks from writers like Swetnam injurious to women's reputations. In this way, she shows men that their patriarchal authority comes with responsibility as well.

Second, Speght further explicates the man's duties as a master by comparing his role as the woman's 'head' with Christ's role as the "Head of his Church", a familiar parallel that recalls Ephesians 5:22. She observes that Christ not only "entirely loveth" his people but also "gave his very life" to secure their salvation, underscoring his caring, protective nature as a master with intensifiers alongside a reminder of his ultimate sacrifice of crucifixion. Christ's benevolence is juxtaposed with the overbearing authority of some men, with their self-aggrandisement revealed through their attempt to inflate their stature by "tip-toe[ing]" and the absolute diction in their orders to "perform whatsoever they command, whether lawful or not".

By comparing them against the standard set by Christ, Speght reveals the essential hubris of men who lord over their wives, asserting even greater authority than the Lord himself. In so doing, she circumscribes male authority within the limits drawn by God: women should “submit themselves unto their husbands no other ways than as the Lord”, and men should only command “that which is right and good” as God does. Speght further elucidates this principle by way of a counterexample, reminding the reader of the capital punishment Ananias and Sapphira received when they respectively issued and obeyed the “evil command” of withholding their property. Thus, she illuminates the need for men to be dutiful and righteous, even as they take charge of their wives.

Next, Speght proceeds to criticise Swetnam for making a hasty generalisation, condemning all women on the basis of a few disreputable members. She starts by anticipating the possible critique that she is “too partial in praising women” before stating in her defence that all her praise is “warrant[ed] by Scripture”. By reminding the reader of the Biblical origins of her arguments, her parenthetical comment firmly situates her previous discussion upon the foundations of God’s supreme authority, dismissing this potential critique. Nonetheless, she takes care to qualify and nuance her presentation of women: she clarifies that not “all women are virtuous”, because “of men and of women” there are “good and bad”. The neatly symmetrical structure of the clause “of men and of women” reinforces the commonality that diversity of natures can be found in both sexes. Speght illustrates this fact with abundant Biblical references: she cites “Cain as well as Abel” and “Cham as well as Sem” as examples of wicked and virtuous men respectively, with the juxtaposition of good and bad made more striking by the fact that they are brothers born from the same womb. Similarly, Speght notes that women can be virtuous enough for the “Church [to be] called the Spouse of Christ” — with the female bride directly compatible with the perfect virtue Christ exemplifies — but also sinful enough for “wickedness [to be] called a woman”, with the sex alliteratively connected to depravity. In this way, she draws upon the Bible’s characters and verses — sources of authority in the Renaissance — to illustrate that both men and women are equally capable of good and evil.

In fact, Speght goes on to observe that the need for salvation and judgement entails that sinful women must naturally exist. Referencing Luke 1:47, she notes that even the Virgin Mary — “a pattern of piety” — “rejoiced in God her Saviour”. Mary’s traditional status as a bastion of purity and faith is underscored by the emphatic plosive alliteration in “a pattern of piety”, yet her need for salvation points to the inescapable original sin that inheres in all of Eve’s descendants, making it inevitable that some women are “sinners”. Similarly, Speght repeatedly links the concept of divine judgement to the existence of sin: she calls virtuous and sinful individuals “Sheep and Goats” respectively, referencing a parable from Matthew 25 that

alludes to Christ's judgement of the saved and the damned. Subsequently, she declares that "Christ would not Purge his Floor if there were not Chaff among the Wheat" and gold should not "need to be fined" if there were no "dross" among it, with these images of "purg[ing]" impurities reminiscent of separating sinners before Christ. By using the double negative in each of these clauses, she highlights the way divine judgement is inextricably tied to the presence of sin, making the existence of sinful women not a fundamental failing of the sex but rather an intrinsic part of life. It is on this basis that Speght censures Swetnam for his misogynistic generalisation: she accuses him directly of condemning "good women with the bad", giving him the contemptuous epithet of "Baiter" that highlights the unprovoked, mean-spirited nature of his attacks. She then builds up to her criticism of Swetnam using the rule of three: she asserts that we cannot generalise about sheep, about men, and therefore, about women, using the parallel structure of "though..., we must not..." in her sentences to reinforce the similar unacceptability that connects these reductive generalisations. In this manner, Speght underscores the fact that while she is careful not to draw absolute conclusions about whether men or women are good or evil, Swetnam has made sweeping claims about all women's moral deficiencies based on the inevitable existence of some sinful women.

In the concluding paragraph, Speght mounts another critique of Swetnam, arguing that his *Arraignment* demonstrates a shameful lack of gratitude for God's gift of women. She first compares his attack on women with the "Pharaoh's Butler" from Genesis: while "great was the unthankfulness" of the butler who left Joseph to languish in his pit, "far greater is the ingratitude" of men who "dare presume" to criticise women "whom God did create for man's comfort". While the repeated use of syntactic inversion — to foreground the adjective "great" — emphasises the enormity of their respective thanklessness, the parallel construction of these clauses also draws attention to the intensifier "far" and comparative "greater" that denote the larger magnitude of men's omission. In fact, these men are guilty of not only ingratitude but also hubris, as underscored by the almost tautological "dare presume": they have spurned the gift of their very own Creator, since Eve was made to be a companion to Adam. Speght, therefore, accuses Swetnam of the sin of ungratefulness, defying the Christian imperative to give thanks for God's provision. To drive this point home, she once again concludes with a series of three comparisons, this time employing rhetorical questions connected by the anaphoric phrase "what greater" to underscore the unparalleled extent of this ingratitude. The immensity of men's unthankfulness is further reinforced in two ways: not only does she include "greater" in all three questions such that the intensifying adjective echoes throughout the entire paragraph, but she also repeatedly uses negative prefixes in "discredit", "discourtesy" and "ingratitude" such that their lack of appreciation is emphasised. In these rhetorical questions, Speght compares criticising women to rejecting a "workman[']s" creation or giving away a

“gift” that one has received, with these examples reminding the reader of the woman’s status as a divine creation and a God-bestowed gift. These parallels then culminate in Spreght’s final, blistering attack on Swetnam: she employs the censorious diction of “opprobrious” and “disgraceful” to describe his work, even declaring that “diabolical natures” have “frame[d]” these assaults on women’s morality. Beyond associating Swetnam’s character with the devil, she wittily plays on the word “frame” to convey his malicious intentions: while “frame” refers to his process of composition, it also implies that his writing is fabricated to be false and deceitful. In this way, Speght condemns Swetnam for attacking women, forgetting to thank God for creating and providing this gift to man.

Overall, Speght explicates the fact that even though men are masters of their wives, they ought to be the righteous and protective master that Christ was to his Church. Against this backdrop, she highlights how Swetnam’s ‘arraignment’ of women commits both the fallacy of hasty generalisation and the sin of shocking ingratitude, and in this manner, she hopes to ‘muzzle his black mouth’.