

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT (Crossing the Borders of History: Eve in Modern Women's Poetry)

For centuries women have been haunted by conscious or unconscious thoughts of the mythic figure known as Eve: her secondariness, her gullibility (or was it pride?), her culpability for the world's wrongs, the gravity of her punitive consignment to maternity, materiality, mortality. As the late great American feminist poet Adrienne Rich once noted, though Eve's is "the second sex," she is "the first offender, the polluted one, the polluter." But as we know, women thinkers contemplating these points have talked back. In this paper I'll explore the many ways in which writers from Christine di Pizan and Aemilia Lanyer, in the early modern world, to such contemporary artists as Marianne Moore, Stevie Smith and Sylvia Plath have tried to answer the question powerfully posed by Anne Finch, the Countess of Winchilsea, in the eighteenth century: "How are we fall'n, fall'n by mistaken rules,/And education's more than Nature's fools?"