

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Abstract approved:

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Traditionally, Renaissance studies have neglected or overlooked the contributions of early modern female poets, many of whom produced lively, engaging, and highly creative work despite the limitations imposed on them by a rigidly patriarchal society. In my thesis, I examine the life and work of Aemilia Lanyer, a 17th century poet whose work has recently gained substantial critical attention and limited inclusion into syllabi and anthologies. I argue that, in order to effectively bring the work of Lanyer, and women like her, to students, one must first understand the relationship between early modern women and the literary canon. In the first half of my thesis, I discuss Lanyer's life, work, and her canonical history, pinpointing exactly what her work offers to early modern studies. In the latter half, I propose a methodology for actually presenting Lanyer's work to students, which consists of pairing her work with that of a more canonical author, Edmund Spenser. By looking at under-represented texts in conjunction with canonical works, teachers provide opportunities for productive classroom discussions about gender, the canon, and the complexities of early modern authorship.

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Gender, Genre, and the Canon: Teaching Aemilia Lanyer

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

Jeremy Jurgens, Author

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GENDER, GENRE, AND THE CANNON: TEACHING AEMILIA LANYER

Introduction: Early Modern Women and the Power of the Pedagogical Canon

The representation of heretofore overlooked female authors is currently one of the most exciting developments in early modern studies. Changing attitudes about the literary canon and the technological advancements of the digital age have created opportunities for instructors to access texts by women whose work has not traditionally found meaningful representation within the academy. This project focuses on one of these women, Aemilia Lanyer, a Jacobean-era poet responsible for the first published volume of female-authored poetry in the English language, entitled *Salve Deus Rex Judeaorum*, who has, in recent years, gained some renown in early modern studies. Before discussing her life, her work, and – most importantly – ways to bring her poems into classrooms, I will discuss the literary canon itself, and what we stand to lose or gain by introducing women like Lanyer into our syllabi.

If one brings texts excluded or ignored by history, scholars, and even teachers to the attention of the academy, it is important to understand the terms of that exclusion. This knowledge, I argue, equips the instructor with essential context that they in turn can pass on to their students. For early modern female authors, this framework includes cultural conditions that tended to ignore, silence, and persecute them. By attending to the difficulties faced by early modern female authors, teachers prepare themselves to lead productive classroom discussions about exclusion, gender,

and the different ways that men and women approached authorship in the early modern period. However, it does not end here, at least not for the instructor.

Indeed, for teachers – contributors to what Susan Gallagher, taking her lead from John Guillory, has termed the “pedagogical canon” (Gallagher 54) – it remains especially exigent that we discern the complexities of canon-making processes in order that we may engage in the building of future canons with an understanding of what is at stake in our pedagogies. Guillory contends that the academy, by distributing texts to students and putting works into academic circulation where they become the subjects of scholarly and classroom attention, initiates a canon-making procedure that can take an author or work from obscurity to pedagogical relevancy. This relevancy, in turn, can enable wide-spread recognition within the academy that warrants the text or author consideration as canonical. Lanyer, in her movement from forgotten poet to an author widely taught¹ and on the fringe of canonicity, exemplifies Guillory’s argument and illustrates the power of pedagogy in altering the way we view the early modern period.

Canons: Pedagogic and Imaginary

Before we can see how Lanyer’s work embodies the *modus operandi* of pedagogical canons, we first must understand Guillory’s work on the canon itself, and exactly how Lanyer exemplifies this work so well. In his watershed *Cultural Capital: the Problem*

¹ That Lanyer is in fact taught is attested by numerous sources. McGrath writes that “*Salve Deus* is now fairly regularly taught and anthologized as one of the few extant example of Renaissance women’s poetry” (201). Additionally, the crucial text *Teaching Tudor and Stuart Women Writers* contains several testimonials from Professors who have in fact taught Lanyer. See pages 295-302.

of *Literary Canon Formation*, Guillory argues that the canon – that traditional body of works that teachers draw from to create their syllabi – is in fact imaginary. He writes:

It would be better to say that the canon is an imaginary totality of works. No one has access to the canon as a totality. This fact is true in the trivial sense that no one ever reads every canonical work; no one can, because the works invoked as canonical change continually according to many different occasions of judgment or contestation. What this means is that the canon is never other than an imaginary list; it never appears as a complete and uncontested list in any particular time and place . . . (30)

Thus, in order to affect change to the canon, one must first understand that no physical canon exists per se. This sounds like a somewhat obvious reality to concede, but when one holds an anthology of literary works and considers its heft, both physical and academic, the canon's fluidity can become difficult to envision. In part, this is because the *idea* of a concrete list of great books, plays, poems, and authors persists as a cultural illusion that carries great power over individuals, including the power to exclude.

In other words, the canon remains contingent on the actions of individuals within academic institutions.² Thus, Lanyer's rediscovery,³ rise to academic fame, and entry into syllabi cannot properly be considered a restructuring of the canon, as though her name were suddenly and magically added to a great list once enough she appeared in enough articles, books, and syllabi. Rather, the recent attention given to Lanyer represents the very *fluidity* of the canon. As Gallagher writes: "the literary canon is a loose, baggy monster, a fluid movement of ebbs and flows, ins and outs – imaginary,

² ". . . [I]t is only," Guillory writes, "by understanding the social function and institutional protocols of the school that we will understand how works are preserved, reproduced, and disseminated over successive generations and centuries" (vii)

³ See chapter 1

therefore, as opposed to concrete” (54). The canon, in fact, remains in a state of fluctuation, shifting and undulating, and as such we cannot define it absolutely; however, this does not mean that it does not exist. The canon is in fact imaginary in that it exists as a shared cultural illusion; however, it remains, at the end of the day, a cultural and academic illusion that dictates what new generations of students read, and which authors and texts will have – or not have – a voice in shaping the literary landscape of the future. Thus, *what* we read in institutional settings creates the canon anew every day.

However, not all canon scholars would agree with Guillory that we need to orient this discussion in terms of the continual evolution of canons. In fact, Paul Lauter argues that the very idea of a canon itself is the problem. In response to the idea that non-canonical voices need to be brought into classrooms and subsequently contribute to the re-making, re-shaping, or re-thinking of the canon, he writes:

For how can any canon be fully representative? Even if one ignores the problem of room at the inn – and I would be the last to deny that in anthologies, curricula, and literary histories this is a problem, though not always insuperable – do not the very processes of canonization necessarily reflect the structures of social and political power and thus embed in their product an unrepresentative, if widened, set of texts organized even at best along hierarchical lines? Does it not follow, then, that the goal must be to abolish canons altogether and to substitute, rather, the authority of various individuals or ethnic group experiences freed from the constraints of any official discipline? (158)

While Lauter makes a convincing point in that canons will always mirror certain sociopolitical viewpoints, and will thus always exclude *someone*, I would argue that Guillory’s notion of a constantly shifting, evolving, and fluid canon already

holds in tandem the idea that the canon per se does not exist, but rather consists simply of a group of works that have found representation in academia. Exclusion is, due both to the sheer amount of texts in circulation and the relatively small (by comparison) space allotted in anthologies and in syllabi, inherent to the idea of selection, as Lauter suggests. For no canon to exist, though, no texts would be taught on a large scale, which is simply impossible to conceive of. As Susan Gallagher points out:

[s]ome kind of pedagogical canon will always exist . . . As long as we continue to teach literature, pedagogical canons will exist, and as they change, so will the imaginary canon. Part of our pedagogy, then, includes our contribution to the ongoing construction of the imaginary canon” (56).

Thus, as we evaluate texts which add something to our respective fields, and then teach them, we contribute to the canon. We, through our positions as *professors* of literature (whether we hold a PhD or not), literally remake the canon.

Accordingly, Gallagher suggests that “the imaginary canon emerges from the operations of pedagogical canons” (Gallagher 56), and therefore the construction of syllabi – choosing what students will read and study - acts as the primary locus in canon formation.⁴ In this sense, Lanyer, who has found some representation in classrooms, and whose work has become a hotbed of critical attention by literary

⁴ Regarding the notion that syllabi have the power to overthrow the canon, Guillory notes: “When teachers believe they have in some way challenged or overthrown the canon and its evaluative principles, what they have always really done is devise or revise a particular syllabus, as it is only through the syllabus that they have any access to the imaginary list which is the canon. While this point is in some respects quite obvious, it nevertheless usefully exposes the fallacy of using a revision of the syllabus against the *principle* of the canon . . . Changing the syllabus cannot mean in any historical context overthrowing the canon, because every construction of a syllabus institutes once again the process of canon formation” (30-31).

Mark A. Eaton summarizes Guillory adeptly: “to become canonical a work must be *reproduced* by being taught over and over again.” Also: “Pedagogical canons are created whenever a professor chooses books for a course” (306).

feminists and early modern scholars (and those who are both), can in a very definable sense be declared to have “arrived” in the pedagogical canon, even if not in the actual (albeit imaginary) one. She, like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, functions today as a woman author whose identity, work, contributions, and voice has very little pull in the popular imagination, yet who has become quite identifiable within an academic context.⁵

Early Modern Women, the Canon, and the Classroom

As teachers, if we hope to broaden our students’ understanding of early modern culture and the texts that enriched that culture by bringing in marginalized voices not traditionally recognized as canonical,⁶ then it behooves us to understand the history of these voices within the canon (or, rather, outside it). I propose that we can think of the canonizing process in terms of a series of steps, with pedagogical canonicity acting as the desired landing at the top of these stairs. Now, it bears remarking that canonicity in and of itself is not *necessarily* something to be desired. However, for those texts that we as instructors feel contribute to an understanding of a genre, a time-period, or to literary studies in general, pedagogical canonicity is a desirable outcome by the very nature of what these texts offer. Getting to this metaphorical landing of canonicity, though, represents a long and uneasy journey for authors and texts, and is – fundamentally – an outcome that can only be reached with the aid of teachers willing to expose these authors and texts to students. The steps themselves consist of syllabus

⁵ Eaton notes: “Once a literary work gains enough critical recognition and is taught by more and more professors, it may become unavoidable in the field” (305).

⁶ And I recognize that not everyone will share this objective.

inclusion, scholarly attention, widespread recognition, textual reproduction, and finally significant pedagogical representation. At this point, a text would be considered part of the pedagogical canon – meaning that enough instructors are including it on their syllabi that it is widely recognized within the academy.

However, if one brings these texts to that first and necessary step without understanding the full complexity of the authors' relationship to the canon, the classroom, and to their own time-periods, one risks attaching that misrepresentation to the text or author, which could follow them all the way to the top of those stairs. This, in turn, obfuscates our reading(s) of the texts and hinders our ability to see them clearly or read them as productively as we might. For example, one tendency currently prevalent within early modern studies is to bring female authors onto the syllabus in an effort to provide fairer gender representation to certain periods or genres, rather than to actually understand how their work riffs on, hammers against, questions, probes, or simply addresses already canonized texts. By adding women to early modern studies without understanding their history of exclusion, and without comprehending fully how and why their work enriches our conception of early modern culture and early modern literature, we pass onto our students our own misconceptions and risk misreading their work or presenting it to students without crucial context.

Therefore, before we can fairly and accurately represent texts by these women to students, we first must understand the absence of this work from the canon to begin with. The first way to represent the issue is to suggest that the exclusionary forces and

patriarchal structures of early modern England bear the brunt of the responsibility – that these women have never entered the academic conversation because they were silenced in their own time. Early modern misogyny, however, can only take us so far. Certainly early modern restrictions mattered and played a dominant (if not *the* dominant) role in silencing Jacobean women, but in order to understand what these women wrote, we must first understand as much of the nuance of the period as we can in order to understand why they wrote what they did, as well as determining the contexts in which they produced their work and how this work speaks to and against the dominant discourses of their time. Otherwise, we risk misreading these texts based on beliefs about the period that are overly condemnatory or simplistic. And, if we consider one of the goals of early modern studies the increased understanding of both early modern culture and the texts produced from within that culture, then we must first acknowledge the complexity inherent to that culture.

The early modern period is nothing if not fascinatingly, fundamentally intricate, rife with paradoxes not so different from those featured in the literature that would define it for subsequent centuries. Women in the early Jacobean period were positioned at the intersection of a recently deceased female monarch possessive of extensive influence and power and the rise of a powerfully patriarchal King. While still lacking in even the most basic human rights, and in large part still considered sexually-charged property at best and temptation incarnate at worst, noble women were granted at least some education, and faced newfound respect in certain circles

with the rise of the Puritan ideal of companionate marriage (Krontiris 102).⁷ Thus, when introducing these women to students, it remains essential that they understand the context of the period, and especially the limitations, along with the newfound liberties, that these authors encountered, challenged, and sometimes even worked to reinforce.

The second approach to the problem of the lack of canonical representation of early modern women dictates that history itself, not necessarily early modern conditions or exclusionary forces, acts as the primary silencing agent for these writers. For instance, Jonathan Goldberg contends that the recent advances in women's scholarship in the early modern period represent not a first-time recognition of these writers, but rather a rediscovery or reintroduction of them (9). Goldberg points out that early modern authors like Aemilia Lanyer, Aphra Behn, Margaret Cavendish, Mary Astell, and Katherine Phillips were all well-known in their time, and that their names and their works continued to have "currency" well into the middle of the eighteenth century:

[T]he recovery of women authors from the early modern period in many instances means nothing more than the belated recognition in the academy of texts that once were more widely known and the inclusion of writers that were once canonical

⁷ The Jacobean era specifically proves a particularly fascinating focal point for questions concerning early modern female authors, the challenges they faced, the world-views they encountered, embraced, and resisted, and the extent to which they were able to frame their ideas within a larger literary conversation. The period itself began with the death of a powerful matriarch (Queen Elizabeth) in 1603 and lasted through the reign of James, a monarch who worked diligently to instill (or re-instill) the notion of King as an authoritative, protecting father whose voice was an echo of the voice of God. As Barbara Lewalski puts it, "this era was a regressive period for women, as a culture dominated by a powerful Queen gave way to a court ethos shaped by the patriarchal ideology and homosexuality of James I" ("Writing Women" 2).

(By “canonical” I mean nothing more than that the names of these writers were recognizable on a list of early modern authors.) (9)

If we accept this as true, then we could also argue that the history of literary criticism, coupled with the formation of the canon, has played as large a role (if not larger) in silencing these voices as the constraints of their own time.

In short, we have a double-edged sword here, with both the conditions of the Jacobean period, to a certain extent, and the canonizing forces of later times such as the creation of tightly delineated genres and the formulation of anthologies based on those genres, relegating these women to a subordinate – if not entirely annihilated - position within literary studies, and in effect muting their voices.⁸ We can blame neither of these circumstances entirely for the predicament of female exclusion, and neither functions so simplistically that we can easily dismiss it. Thus, we would do well to check the tendency to ascribe the exclusion of early modern women from the canon and the classroom solely to problems faced by these women in their own time. This issue, in short, is trickier, more problematic, and harder to pin down than it may look at first, and by not recognizing this, the project of rediscovering and recovering the voices of Jacobean women writers may be undertaken in such a manner that enables a continued misunderstanding of their work, their exclusion, and their worth. In their own time these women were ignored and silenced (but not as much as we

⁸ Jennifer Summit notes that when “literary historians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries began to give form to an English literary history, they embodied it in a line of male authors of undisputed authority, from which the woman writer was excluded” (209).

might think) and later on they were lost as early modern poets were shoe-horned into “schools” like Metaphysical or Cavalier, where their work simply did not fit.

Yet, it warrants noting that these authors did indeed write in ways that often elude easy categorization, making it difficult for those who would give them a place in the classroom or an early modern anthology. Yes, Aemilia Lanyer wrote and published poetry, but her body of work, concerning female communities and the role of women as Christian disciples, naturally feels out of place next to the *carpe diem* catcalls of Herrick or the conceit-laden meditations on phallo-centric sexuality made famous by Donne. Women often wrote differently than men in the early modern period, modifying prevailing traditions, and sometimes appropriating male-established rhetorical methods to create literary endeavors that both echo the traditional canonical early modern works and transform their milieu into something distinctly feminine. As such, these poems, plays, novellas, and sermons comprise a body of work excluded, historically, from canonical status both by virtue of their authors’ gender(s) and the often hard-to-categorize, often misunderstood content of the texts themselves.

This, of course, does not clear the canonizers of charges of sexism or excuse contemporary scholars for continuing to ignore these women, but we have on hand a more complicated matter than misogyny alone can account for. In short, just as it is incumbent upon teachers of literature to draw from under-considered texts by women in an effort to better represent their subjects, it remains just as important to understand the reasons *why* these texts deserve canonical and classroom inclusion. I would be the last to argue that Aemilia Lanyer should be taught on the grounds that she happens to

have been a woman who wrote poetry in the early modern period, or even because she was the first woman to publish a body of poems in England.⁹ I argue in subsequent chapters, though, that we should teach Lanyer because she enriches our understanding of genres like the country-house poem with *Cookham*, because she exemplifies early modern proto-feminism in *Eve's Apologie*, and because her work offers us a look at the how female communities in the period operated. Too often, though, editors grant early modern women like Lanyer a space into anthologies (and, by extension, into the classroom) reluctantly or merely out of a duty to fairer gender representation, without considering their actual merits or attempting to understand their complex and nuanced work.¹⁰ These voices offer something *different* than their male contemporaries, and bring with them a fuller understanding of Jacobean culture – not just a feminine perspective (although they do bring that), but a more complete envisioning of early modern life.

As this project will cover in greater detail, Aemilia Lanyer exemplifies the power of pedagogy as a canon-making force. If A.L. Rowse had not “discovered” her in 1973, and had professors not started teaching her work in conjunction with Milton, Lanyer’s unique and engaging voice, and her powerfully expressed perspectives on women in Jacobean culture, would remain lost. Lanyer’s work, in short, shows us how

⁹ I acknowledge that there are those who would make this argument and, while I see the merits of its aims, I believe that a better reason should exist for teaching any author. Exclusion alone does not make an author worth studying; they must contribute something valuable to the understanding of a genre, a time-period, a culture, or a philosophy. Otherwise, we revise the canon for the sake of revision alone.

¹⁰ Of course, as Lanyer’s own history attests, good scholarship can emerge from early modern texts that are reintroduced to the world in problematic ways (see subsequent chapter). Furthermore, bringing texts into anthologies, no matter how this is done, represents an important first step in that makes the text available for critical reading. I would not argue for a halt to the practice of adding women to anthologies and syllabi, but I would argue for a greater understanding – a crucial understanding – of both the texts themselves and the contexts from which they emerged.

much we risk when we fail to give female authors the same kind of credit as their male peers, and exemplifies how much we stand to gain when we do take the risk of teaching texts we may not have been taught, or texts that may have been previously under-considered. As such, the next chapter will detail these gains by looking at a few key examples of Lanyer's poems.

Chapter 1: The Case for Aemilia Lanyer

Introduction: Why Lanyer?

In April, 2009, Carol Ann Duffy received the honor of becoming the first female poet laureate in Great Britain, a 341-year-old post also held by such luminaries as John Dryden, Alfred Tennyson, and William Wordsworth (Lyall). This occasion marked a significant milestone for women poets everywhere, but particularly for those in Great Britain, past and present. In England's long, varied, and exquisite literary history, both men and women have contributed greatly to its variegated landscape; however, women have historically remained absent in literary studies. This absence feels particularly noticeable in early modern studies, a field traditionally devoted to the forefathers of English poetry such as John Donne, William Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and John Milton.

However, since the advent of feminist scholarship and the emergence of new technologies such as online databases, the recovery, rediscovery, and recognition of women writers and the texts they produced has slowly begun to take place. This chapter will examine the life and work of Aemilia Lanyer, and explore her poetry as well as the fascinating and rapidly developing critical work it has generated. Lanyer, as a woman on the cusp of the twenty-first century pedagogical canon, provides a particularly powerful example of an early modern female poet whose work has gained momentum within critical discourse and classroom pedagogies. Her accidental discovery and subsequent rise to a well-known literary figure offers an example of the kind of relevant authors the traditional canon has overlooked for centuries, and makes

clear what we stand to gain by exploring the new, the marginal, and the heretofore unstudied women of the early modern period.

Furthermore, this chapter aims to demonstrate that Lanyer provides us with an opportunity to better understand the nuances of early modern English literature and culture, including the complexities of gender, patronage, and court and class hierarchies, within the classroom. By examining three sections from her book of poems, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, and the insights late twentieth- and early twenty-first century scholars have brought to bear on her and her work, we can better understand how early modern women writers enrich our conception of early modern life, culture, and literature. I would argue that Lanyer, perhaps more than any other woman author from her period, provides us with the answer to a basic question: why study early modern women writers at all? Specifically, in this chapter I argue that Lanyer's work provides opportunities to understand the ins and outs of early modern patronage, sheds light on the nature and function of what might be termed early modern feminism, and brings crucial insights to one of the early modern period's preeminent genres, the Country House poem.

A Woman's Limitations

While the early modern remains traditionally associated with canonical luminaries (Shakespeare first and foremost), the period also produced several powerful examples of fluent, fluid, and remarkable women writers, most of whom have remained absent from any modern canonical considerations until the past few decades. These under-appreciated figures wrote (and sometimes published) poetry, pamphlets, sermons,

tracts, translations, early novels, fantastical stories, plays, midwifery manuals, and cookbooks.¹¹ They sometimes subscribed to prevailing traditions, and other times challenged them; some questioned what it meant to be a woman in their time and place while others used their voices to uphold patriarchal authority; many endeavored to work within the frameworks set up by their male contemporaries, while others produced texts that elude easy categorization or classification into schools or traditions. Together, they comprise a diverse, powerful, and important group of writers whose work deserves study in the classroom and in scholarship.

Writing in the early modern period was considered, chiefly, a masculine activity. Thus, the risks of writing and publishing, for a woman, were myriad and multi-faceted, and included scandal, and sexual and gender defamation: “[m]aterial exclusions against women were daunting,” writes Jennifer Keith, “including illiteracy and the hazards to a woman’s sexual reputation if she entered the literary market place” (12). For a woman to write challenged assumptions about her very nature. Tina Krontiris explains: “Woman was seen in terms of her function as a wife and mother, not as a human being with needs and desires of her own. Voicing opinion in public or participating in male activities [including writing] was usually forbidden” (5-6).

Indeed, by entering into the “male” sphere of writing and publishing, female early modern authors - and perhaps most especially in the rigidly patriarchal and overtly misogynist Jacobean period - opened themselves to slander and rumor, as written expression by women was in many ways viewed as an attempt to undermine

¹¹ For a comprehensive, albeit outdated, list of texts by 17th century women, see Smith and Cardinale.

male authority and challenge gender norms. Therefore, calling attention to one's status as a woman writer, outside of a few acceptable mediums, posed a significant risk to one's reputation and social standing.¹²

Still, despite these numerous limitations, female authors found ways to both compose and circulate their work. "A great many women," writes Paul Salzman, "wrote a great deal in the early modern period" (9). Furthermore, Salzman clarifies that these authors were keenly aware of their status: "while many women who wrote saw themselves as venturing into dangerous and uncharted territory, many were conscious of their predecessors and saw themselves as 'women writers'" (9). Often, women of rank would compose within a social or domestic setting, sharing their endeavors with one another and even assembling manuscripts full of such works (Salzman 15). Additionally, individuals would compile their own manuscripts, or contribute to a family or anthology manuscript (15). These loosely-bound volumes circulated within smaller circles, allowing these so-called secondarily-gendered individuals the chance to put their works before an audience (albeit a limited one), and receive feedback, praise, and the exchange of ideas.

However, with Lanyer and several of her contemporaries in mind, it is important to remember that some women both wrote and exposed themselves and their ideas to the world by publishing their compositions. In the past few decades, many of

¹² This taboo did not, apparently, extend to the translation of religious texts, as Woods notes: "women were increasingly free to translate religious works and write of their own religious experience, even to the extent of producing religious verse" ("Poems of Aemelia Lanyer" xxxi). Although, with that being said, the current critical climate articulates the early modern woman writer's struggle as a constant series of denials and subversions designed to mask the reality that they were in fact daring to take the pen in hand, as it were.

these writers have found inclusion in anthologies and in the canon at large: Mary Wroth, Mary Sidney, and Aemilia Lanyer all exemplify female writers from the Jacobean period with big ideas expressed powerfully and with skill, and have all been given a home in the most recent *Norton Anthology*.¹³

It may be surprising, then, to learn that this era saw many firsts for female authors, including many publications, as detailed by Lewalski: Aemilia Lanyer became, in 1611, “the first Englishwoman to publish a substantial volume of poems” in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*; Mary Wroth penned and published her 558-page romance, *the Countess of Montgomery’s Urania* (another first for an Englishwoman); Rachel Speight became, due to her “forthright claims of authorship” situated in the pamphlet wars, the “first English woman polemicist” (“Writing Women” 6); and the Queen of England herself, Anne of Denmark, ushered in a new era of English theater with her vibrant participation in the court Masque, a new and ornate arena of performance that saw Englishwomen take the stage for the first time in history.

This interesting cross-section of progressiveness and stark repression served as surprisingly fertile ground for women to enter the national conversation in new and interesting ways. “It is,” Lewalski emphasizes, “in the repressive Jacobean milieu that we first hear Englishwomen’s own voices in some numbers” (“Writing Women” 3). Perhaps Elizabeth’s reign served to instill in aristocratic, high-born women a newfound sense of self amidst a rigidly patriarchal landscape, or perhaps this was

¹³ Corio notes that “[t]he Norton Anthology is at once a commercially sensitive gauge of what will sell to changing populations of teachers and students and also a powerful shaping tool of the literary canon” (“Writing in Service” 333).

simply a case of the time being right. Or, somewhat more likely, the Jacobean period serves as a forceful reminder that, even in the midst of great repression and domination, subaltern groups will find a way to challenge the norms, restrictions, and ethos within which dominant ideologies situate them.

Aemelia Lanyer: An Overview

From this framework emerges Aemlia Lanyer, who not only produced a lengthy book of poems, but, in 1611, actually managed to get them published, “something extraordinary for a middle-class woman of the early seventeenth century” (Grossman “Introduction” 1). Furthermore, Susanne Woods, one of Lanyer’s chief contemporary champions, claims that Lanyer was quite probably the “first Englishwoman to publish a full edition of poems and to claim for herself a professional poetic voice” (“The Poems of Aemelia Lanyer” xv).

The information we have about Lanyer’s life comes to us in sketchy form at best, but the pieces we do have presents us with “an intelligent, attractive, strong-minded woman whose life on the fringes of Elizabethan and Jacobean court society gave her some opportunity for education and advancement, but whose ambitions outstripped her social class and financial resources” (Woods, “Poems of Aemilia Lanyer xv). Born Emilia Bassano to Venetian court musician Baptist Bassano and his common-law wife Margaret Johnson, the details of Lanyer’s early life remain largely obscure. She was christened in the church of St. Botolph’s Bishopgate on 27 January 1569, just outside the walls of London (Woods, “Lanyer” 3). Her father died when

Lanyer was seven, and her mother followed in 1587 (Woods, “The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer” xviii).

In *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, Lanyer dedicates a poem to the Lady Susan, Countess Dowager of Kent, describing her as “the Mistris of my youth./The noble guide of my ungovern’d days” (“To the Ladie Susan” lines 1-2), which has lead Wood and others to believe that she must have spent some time in this noble household obtaining an education, including, Woods posits, “some familiarity with the classical tradition and with the techniques of rhetoric” (“The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer” xvii). The details of her education, though, remain purely speculative, and while we have no confirmation of when she lived and learned under Lady Susan’s care, we also have no reason to doubt her story. Her lively, engaged poetry speaks to training in the classical humanist school.¹⁴

However long she studied, and with whom, are details that will probably remain uncovered; the vicissitudes of her adult life, though, are more readily accessible. At the age of eighteen she became the mistress of Henry Carey, Lord Hundson, a powerful figure in the Elizabethan court and the Queen’s Lord Chamberlain (Woods, “The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer” xviii). Carey, forty-five years her senior, kept his mistress in luxury, and apparently provided her some access to the high life. According to notes taken by the famous astrologer Simon Forman, whom Lanyer visited on several occasions, she confided that Lord Hundson “maintained [her] in great pride” and that he “kept her longue [and] maintained [her] in great pomp”

¹⁴ See Woods, “Lanyer” 8-14

(Woods, “The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer” xviii). At the age of twenty-three, Lanyer became pregnant with Carey’s child, and was married off to her second cousin Alfonso Lanyer, a court musician who held the same position in court that her father had before his death (Woods, “Lanyer” 19). At this point, most assume that her relationship with Hundson came to an end, although no proof exists of their break aside from her nuptials.¹⁵ Whatever the circumstances, she named her son Henry, after his presumed father, and we have no indications that her marriage to Lanyer provided her with much comfort or happiness. On that very point, Forman notes that “[Alfonso Lanyer] hath delte hardly with her and spent and consumed her goods and shes nowe very nedy and in debte” (qtd. in Woods, “Lanyer” 19).

Forman’s notes, in fact, serve as the primary source of details on Aemilia Bassano Lanyer’s life, appearance, and disposition. Chronicling several visits spanning from May to September 1597, along with one more correspondence in 1600, these reports fill in many of the blanks in Lanyer’s life story. At the same time, Forman cannot exactly be construed as a credible source, which problematizes any attempt to biograph the author of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* outside of the most basic facts. Forman’s case-notes, which he kept on all his clients, come to us rife with misogyny, self-aggrandizement, and detailed notes on his sexual conquests (Woods, “Lanyer” 19-28). In fact, Woods argues that sex is “*the* major preoccupation” (20) in

¹⁵ See Bevington: “Hundson may have kept Aemilia as his mistress after her marriage to Lanyer in 1593; such an arrangement was not uncommon, and Forman’s phrase, ‘The old Lord Chamberlain kept her longer,’ might seem to lend support to such an interpretation” (21). L. McGrath, on the other hand, views Lanyer’s marriage as an evidence of the merchandising of women in early modern patriarchy, and bases that claim on the supposition that Lanyer’s pregnancy served as her expulsion notice from high society, because “the paternal Law does not protect the mother unless she is also connected with the father through the Law of marriage” (336).

Forman's diaries, with his woman clients acting chiefly as characters in a tale revolving around his seemingly never ending-series of seductions. Thus, since most of his notations on Lanyer center on her potential as another bed-mate, and his disappointment and anger at her rejection, it becomes difficult to take his word at face value.

Although, had A.L. Rowse not taken Forman at his word while endeavoring to identify the "Dark Lady" of Shakespeare's sonnets, Lanyer might still have remained in the obscurity that has plagued her for almost four centuries. In 1973 Rowse¹⁶ claimed that the identification of this figure was a "Problem Solved" with Lanyer emerging as his primary candidate, a thesis that culminated with the 1978 republication of the entire text of *Salve Deus*, under the title, *The Poems of Shakespeare's Dark Lady*, with Rowse acting as editor. Using Forman's physical description of Lanyer and her proximity to Shakespeare through Lord Hundson (who was a patron of the playwright), Rowse identifies (or creates) a trail of evidence marking Lanyer as the mysterious figure haunting what he identifies as Shakespeare's wholly autobiographical work, the sonnets.

Since the publication of *Salve Deus* under these circumstances, critics have largely disproven Rowse's claims (as well as his methods). David Bevington, in his essay on Rowse's scholarship, writes:

The woman whom Rowse thus brought to scholarly notice as a woman of easy virtue has satisfied almost no one as a potential candidate for the "dark lady." Aemilia Lanyer has, however,

¹⁶ Janel Mueller tellingly notes that Rowse is "better known as a social rather than a literary historian" (106).

turned out to be a woman of considerable substance in her own right as author. Simply by discovering her, Rowse has done much more for her reputation than he could have imagined possible. (Bevington 10)

To put it lightly, Rowse's work relies on "problematic assumptions" (Bevington 11), not the least of which being that his "interpretation moves swiftly from plausible biographical links to his perceptions of the emotional states of the protagonists" (13).

Additionally, Rowse does rely heavily on a tenuous (at best) source to begin with, Simon Forman, basing his assumption that Lanyer was sexually promiscuous and spiteful entirely on Forman's observations that she "wold not halek" with him (Forman's slang term for intercourse), and that she "was a hore and delt evill" (qtd. in Rowse 12). Furthermore, Rowse also hinges his entire argument on the specious claim that "William Shakespeare was strongly heterosexual [and] deeply responsive to women" (Rowse 5). With that in mind, he attaches Lanyer, and the unproved connection between Lanyer and Shakespeare (it is likely that they met, but anything more than that remains nothing but mere speculation), to argue that she appears in his work not only as the "Dark Lady" of the sonnets, but as many of Shakespeare's characters, including Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra* (Rowse 16).

From there, Rowse moves from guesswork to barely-disguised contempt for Lanyer, conceding that she may represent "the best woman poet of the age" but then immediately qualifying that with a pithy aside: "This is not saying much" (17). The rest of his introduction to *Salve Deus* bounces back and forth between reserved praise and vitriolic: he calls her "too facile and fluent" (17) but then claims that she has "a gift for words" (18); her prose is "a piece of rampant feminism, like nothing else in her

age”, which he positions as a probable response to her portraiture in Shakespeare’s sonnets (20); she is “an egoist” and a self-promoter (21), and her moralizing feels like little more than “sour grapes” (24) stemming from her “vindictive and revengeful” (25), “aggressive and clamorous, independent, restless and tough”, “forever discontented”, and “querulous” (34) nature. In short, Rowse’s work on Lanyer is problematic.

At the same time, though, as Bevington notes, without Rowse’s “Dark Lady” obsession, *Salve Deus* and its author might still remain under the boot-heel of the canon.¹⁷ As things stand, scholarly interest in both Lanyer herself and her book in particular have flowered considerably in the three decades since *Salve Deus* was first republished as *The Poems of Shakespeare’s Dark Lady*. Owing largely to the work of Barbara Lewalski and Susanne Woods, Lanyer has gained notice as one of the preeminent Jacobean women writers, and has become a figure of considerable scholarly scrutiny and work. In 1993, Woods edited a new edition of *Salve Deus* under the title, *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer*, which includes extensive background notes, footnotes, and maps. This edition, critics agree, is “suitable for classroom use” (Woods “Lanyer” 1). Here, Lanyer herself and her remarkable book become the figures of note, not her supposed proximity to Shakespeare. The very fact that her name adorns the title, rather than Shakespeare’s, represents a considerable step forward.

¹⁷ More from Bevington: “Rowse’s case for Aemelia Lanyer as the ‘dark lady’ is not a strong one, and indeed would hardly be worth discussing if it were not for the ironical circumstance that he discovered for his own purposes a woman who has now assumed a significance her discoverer did not begin to grasp” (24).

Furthermore, several anthologies now include portions of *Salve Deus*, especially “Eve’s Apologie in Defense of Women”, and “the Description of Cookham,” widely considered as the first poem of the country-house genre, which would be made famous by Jonson’s “To Penshurst”, published five years later. Lanyer has additionally figured as the subject of several essay collections, including one published in 1998 and another in 2009, which she shares as subject of study with Anne Locke and Isabella Whitney. In all, this critical work on Lanyer represents a rediscovery of one of the English language’s most noteworthy woman poets, and more largely represents the kind of canon-busting reevaluation of early modern gender and genre that carries the potential to completely reshape and reconfigure our perception and understanding of the period at large.

The Patronage Poems

Here, we turn to Lanyer’s work itself. *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* begins, immediately after the title page, with a series of nine dedicatory poems and two general epistles. These pieces, largely designed to elicit patronage from the female Jacobean cultural elite, have traditionally figured as the most ignored and/or dismissed of the collection. Because patronage poems, most notably from Lanyer’s contemporaries like Ben Jonson, tend to rely on similar tropes and follow carefully delineated patterns, critics have tended to read Lanyer’s work from within these established frameworks, despite the fact they clearly do not fit the mold. As Kari Boyd McBride and Lewalski have extensively argued, one must read Lanyer’s work as a riff on the patronage work of male poets – an evolutionary series of poems positioned from within Lanyer’s female

topos, rather than a simple extension or imitation of the work of male authors. In short, while on the outset it might be easy to dismiss Lanyer's dedicatory poems to Queen Anne, Princess Elizabeth, and the Countess of Dorset, Suffolk, Cumberland, Bedford, Pembroke, and Kent as embarrassingly long, inappropriate, and "sycophantic" (McBride 60), that is only because her approach varies so widely from that of her male peers.

Within the patronage tradition, it was expected that the authors themselves would remain distant and ancillary to the patron under address within the poem. Lanyer's refusal to do this, or her deliberate choice not to, piques Rowse most considerably, and he concludes that she must be an "egoist" because "she herself stands in the forefront of every line" (21). However, Lewalski argues that Lanyer's role in the eleven dedicatory poems represents a celebration of "a community of learned and virtuous women with the poet Aemelia their associate and celebrant" (Lewalski, "Writing Women" 221). In fact, McBride sees Lanyer's function in the whole of *Salve Deus* as that of a priestess, a continuation of the line of biblical and apocryphal women Lanyer refers to, including Deborah, Jael, Esther, Judith, and Susanna (McBride 66). In essence, McBride argues that Lanyer transforms herself into a medium between Christ and the women she celebrates (contemporary and ancient):

And if Lanyer's poetry incarnates Christ to become a means of salvation for her readers (as she repeatedly suggests), then the banquet scene that adumbrates the hospitality topos of patronage becomes a Eucharistic meal with Lanyer its priestly celebrant. She, rather than a titled patron, is host – both provider of the feast and, in her identification with Christ, consecrated body. It is on these transgressive terms, I suggest, that Lanyer constructs the patronage relationship, combining traditional

social and generic forms with a radical theology to claim authority and poetic identity. (McBride 61)

This reinvention of the function and methodology of patronage poetry alone renders the opening eleven passages of *Salve Deus* worth considering for a classroom setting to be taught alongside and in addition to canonical patronage poems from men, as they express the versatility of poetic form and open up a relatively straightforward genre to new and intriguing possibilities. Lanyer's dedicatory work, while it may lack the refinement and polish of Jonson or Daniels, nevertheless exemplifies the range and possibilities of the form.

Additionally, Lanyer's position as a woman on the economic and cultural fringes enables her dedicatory poems to be viewed as more than a bid for financial support, but as a potential source for access (or re-access) to infrastructures of class and power.¹⁸ Lanyer uses her bold position as priestess and female-celebrant in the poems to "authorize [herself] in the poetic tradition apart from any lack of support (financial or otherwise) she might have hoped to receive from the powerful women whose names she invokes" (McBride 62). In other words, Lanyer positions herself as an advocate for and messenger to a larger body of female nobles, and thereby transforms herself, with their sanction or (as things actually turned out) without it, into a figure possessing considerably more capital than a person in her position would.

¹⁸ Krontiris notes part of the difficulty faced by Lanyer here by discussing the difference between poems of dedication, and poems designed to gain patronage. The former had been established by earlier female writers including a young Elizabeth Tudor, Catherine Parr, and Anne Locke. "Such precedents," writes Krontiris, "could legitimate Lanyer's use of dedication, but they could not likewise endorse her attempt to pose as a professional writer. Though offered by women, patronage was not open to them. Denied the right to authorship, a woman could not easily ask people to reward financially an activity that was considered rebellious in the first place" (104-105).

This is particularly worth noting considering Lanyer's status as a middle-class woman, who would face exclusion from literary happenings and cultural access not only because she was married to a poor musician, but also because of her gender.

Therefore, the patronage poems provide us with the unique viewpoint of a non-aristocratic poet, someone on the cultural and economic fringes trying to break through, and thereby add to the representations of early modern writers circulating within current academic discourse. As Leeds Barroll argues:

The proposition posed by Aemelia Lanyer's publication effort displays the heart, I think, of the early modern social situation as defined, if not by race, then certainly by gender and (this often not adequately stressed) by class. That is, Lanyer was obviously no male – no Samuel Daniel or Ben Jonson: she enjoyed neither the gendered privilege of wandering alone without thereby being called 'whore,' nor the social background of associations at public school or university that might be parlayed into access to male or female nobles who sponsored learning. (Barroll 29)

Hence, Lanyer's patronage poems offer teachers of the early modern period an opportunity to present an example of an early modern woman writing differently from within an established tradition, and then to discuss or explore *why* Lanyer's bids for patronage failed.

In fact, if one hopes to make patronage poems a component of an early modern course, then Lanyer's nine poems provide a fascinating insight into the early modern literary system. It can become terribly easy, living in the twenty-first century when anyone has access to publication per se through the internet, and when authors earn their income from publication companies via sales revenues and contracts, to misunderstand what patronage poems hoped to accomplish. For one thing, patronage

meant financial sponsorship of one's work, which entailed monetary rewards; additionally, the gaining of sponsors promised a kind of literary capital wherein the association between the sponsor and the sponsored enacted for the latter a validation of their work and a boost in respectability. Thus, for early modern poets, to write a dedicatory poem entailed a delicate process wherein their raw skill as a poet and their ability to please and appeal to the specific patron had to intermingle fluidly.¹⁹

For this reason – the professionalization component of patronage poems – alone, Lanyer's work comes across as odd. As noted before, Lanyer more often makes herself (however humbly, or not) and her book the epicenter of these poems, with the countesses and royal women under address acting as temporary muses and invitees, a methodology which almost appears to go out of its way to *avoid* the very kind of flattery patronage poems were known for. Furthermore, the very order of these poems acts against Lanyer's best interests, as she opts for thematic order over careful hierarchies. For example, the last poem in *Salve Deus*, "The Description of Cookham," while not a patronage poem per se, stitches the Dowager Countess of Cumberland and her daughter, Anne Clifford, into the fabric of its narrative (much like Robert Sidney is made the focus in Jonson's "To Penshurst") so completely, that, as Barroll says, it seems as though "Lanyer was, perhaps inadvertently, hierarchizing the

¹⁹ As Woods notes in her introduction to Lanyer's volume: "The dedicatory poems situate Lanyer among the increasing number of professional poets who sought support through patronage. It was still usual for high-born writers to avoid the self-advertising 'stigma of print,' but it was acceptable for middle-class writers to claim attention – and assistance – by blazoning their patrons' virtues in verse. The patronage system was an early step in the professionalization of literature, but its economic impetus received social and intellectual force by claiming to reflect classical models and ideals." ("The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer" xxxii-xxxiii)

other nobles whom she also solicited in this work” (39). Lanyer leaves “Cookham” at the end of the volume, though, perhaps due to the way it fuses the concerns of the entire body of *Salve Deus* into an elegiac musing. Here, she laments the loss of her own female community, not heeding (or not realizing) that placing the poem centered on Clifford and the Countess of Cumberland last privileges them over other women of higher rank within the volume.

Lanyer, because she did not have access to these avenues of power, or a female tradition on which to build, was left on her own to devise the architecture of the poems and determine the order. Jonson, on the other hand, privileged and part of a larger tradition, would not have made a similar mistake. Here, we see at once both the daring implicit in Lanyer’s patronage bids and the naiveté undergirding them. Or, somewhat more interestingly, we are faced with the notion that Lanyer’s audience, including these patrons, and even most contemporary readers, simply fail to get what she’s going for *because* she does things differently. Herein lies both the genius and the fascinating lack of foresight present in these poems.

Additionally, Barroll notes that “the pattern of dedications in her volume would have been ill-advised because it did not sufficiently weigh in with the influential circle of Anne of Denmark which operated as the cultural center at Court” (39). Barroll further details several other “missteps” in the prioritizing and order of the patronage poems, including putting the poems in the wrong hierarchical order, and the inclusion of Arabella Stuart, who had fallen out of the King’s good graces by the time *Salve Deus* hit the printing press (40). In all, the very fact that Lanyer’s poems failed to

bring her patronage illustrates an unconventional viewpoint useful for classrooms looking to expand their understanding of the Jacobean period, and allow for an opportunity to explore how the patronage system functioned to begin with, as well as the women who maintained the cultural status quo. Our next chapter will further discuss how to do this by suggesting a pairing of Lanyer's patronage poems with those written by Edmund Spenser for *The Faerie Queene*.

"Eve's Apologie" and Early Modern Protofeminism

After Lanyer's patronage poems comes the body proper of her book, the title poem itself, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (Latin for "Hail, God, King of the Jews"), a "truly original work" according to Woods, where Lanyer explores, celebrates, and details Christ's passion (Woods, "The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer" xxxiv). What makes this re-telling of the story found in Matthew 26:30-28:10 so compelling, though, is its women-centered positioning. Speaking largely through the voice of Pilate's wife, who warned her husband to have "nothing to do with that just man," Jesus (Matt 27:19), Lanyer constructs a version of the Christian Savior's final hours that focuses extensively on the women in his life and in the larger Judeo-Christian mythos. While the entire eighteen-hundred and forty lines of the poem warrant study and examination, "Eve's Apologie in Defense of Women," comprising lines 761-832, remains the most-celebrated, ground-breaking, and illustrative portion of the text.

In "Eve," Lanyer tackles original sin, one of the supposed tenants of women's inferiority, head-on, casting Judeo-Christianity's mother of humankind as a sympathetic, wise figure enticed to eat the forbidden fruit not by intemperance,

ambition, and pride, but by a pure desire for knowledge. Indeed, in Lanyer's reckoning, Eve is not to blame for the fall so much as her husband:

But surely Adam cannot be excused;
Her fault though great, yet he was most to blame;
What weakness offered, strength might have refused,
Being lord of all, the greater was his shame.
Although the serpent's craft had her abused,
God's holy word ought all his actions frame,
For he was lord and king of all the earth
Before poor Eve had either life or breath (33-40)

In this construct, Lanyer challenges notions of femininity based on Eve's supposed impertinence, which extends to early modern notions of women being to blame for all sexual transgression (and, by extension, all sins that stem from sexual yearning, including jealousy and rage and crimes extending from them), and inverts the notion of woman as frail against misogynist-minded thinkers. Lanyer's accomplishment here remains a remarkable example of what we might call early modern protofeminism operating on just the right levels so as to keep her out of trouble: the poem is religious in nature, and it functions as an appeal to men (to Pontius Pilate, to be exact), which keeps the power in their hands. Thus, Lanyer finds a way to publish her treatise on the unfair treatment of women by navigating the landscape of Jacobean gender relations and power systems. If she cannot have a voice outside of religious meditation and translation, then why not *use* the religious genre to air her complaints about the treatment of women in western society and argue for a reevaluation of the basis for that treatment? By recasting Eve's story, Lanyer unearths the bedrock of Christendom's conception of gender, and asks her readers to reconsider their prejudices and attitudes. This navigation of Jacobean gender attitudes, and her quick

wit, gave Lanyer a voice in a world where she would not normally have one.²⁰ As

Helen Wilcox explains of the early modern period in general:

Women had no status whatsoever but were only daughters, wives or widows of men; according to the church they were to be silent and listen to the advice of husbands or pastors; in religious and cultural patterns of thought, they were daughters of Eve with a continuing proneness to temptation and a disproportionate burden of guilt. (4)

Lanyer questions this entire system, but does it in a way that grants her currency in a greater gender debate via transformative submission to and subversion of the fundamental assumptions concerning womanhood and scripture. Thus, Lanyer's work serves as an important example of an early modern woman questioning the gender roles and gendered assumptions assigned to her. As Barbara Lewalski deftly points out, the first step to revising prevailing orthodoxies (in this case, original sin and the extension of Eve's guilt to all women) lies not in outright rebellion but in "redefining or extending their terms or infusing them with new meaning" ("Writing Women" 4).

Accordingly, "Eve's Apologie in Defense of Women," a few brief lines in a much larger poem certainly worth exploring in its own right, becomes an essential early modern feminist text, and thus essential not only in early modern classrooms hoping to represent women, but in any course working to present a history of feminist thought. Of course, Lanyer's lack of a call for political change renders it difficult, in

²⁰ In "Eve", Lanyer demonstrates more savvy than she does in the patronage poems.

twenty-first century terms, to consider her a feminist per se,²¹ but this does not preclude her from serving as an example of burgeoning *early modern* feminism. As Tina Krontiris notes, the book's epistle, "To the Vertuous Reader," its first defense of women, is "basically conformist":

Women's problem is presented mainly as bad faith on the part of men, and the solution proposed is for women to refrain from provoking men's criticism. Implicitly, women are asked to comply with the rules that reproduce their subordination. Thus, not only from our point of view today but also from that of later seventeenth-century feminist tracts, like *Womens Sharpe Revenge*, Lanyer's statements here are basically conservative. (Krontiris 114)

However, Lanyer takes things considerably further in "Eve's Apologie" by addressing men, via the fictional dialogue between Pilate and Pilate's wife, directly, and outright challenging the prevailing orthodoxies underlying their very conceptions of womanhood and manhood.

Furthermore, Lynette McGrath argues that, as far as the label of "feminist" is concerned:

Feminisms are multiplistic, not ideologically unitary. Feminist critics of early women's texts, therefore, need to be cautious about seeking in the Renaissance the origins of our own political positioning . . . however, I still claim for Lanier's poem a point of view that can be described as 'feminist' both inside and outside its own historical context, recognizing that the term itself held no currency in Lanier's time. (332-33)

²¹ This despite Rowse's assertion that "To the Vertuous Reader" is "a piece of rampant feminism, like nothing else in the age – though a strong assertion of feminism runs all through the poems too, culminating in a passionate defense of Eve and putting the blame for eating the fatal apple of Adam!" (20). It should be noted, that Rowse goes on to describe Lanyer's entire position on women and men as stemming from nothing else than her supposed treatment as the "Dark Lady" in Shakespeare's sonnets. In this construct, Rowse sees the Sonnets and *Salve Deus* as two texts speaking to one another in a tête-à-tête lover's quarrel.

Primarily, McGrath's evidence for this claim consists of the fact that the entirety of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, including its dedications, is entirely woman-centered (324).²² The book argues for the strength of women, the versatility of women, the talent of women, the value of female communities, and even women's superiority over men within a Christian hierarchy, as evidenced in this passage:

If any Evill did in her (Eve) remaine,
 Beeing made of him (Adam), he was the ground of all;
 If one of many Worlds could lay a staine
 Upon our Sexe, and work so great a fall
 To wretched man, by Satans subtill traine;
 What will so fowle a fault amongst you all?
 Her weaknesse did the Serpents words obay;
 But you in malice Gods deare Sonne betray.
 Whom, if unjustly you condemne to die,
 Her sin was small, to what you doe commit;
 All mortal sinnes that doe for vengeance crie,
 Are not to be compared unto it:
 If many worlds would altogether trie,
 By all their sinnes the wrath of God to get;
 This sinne of yours surmounts them all as farre
 As doth the Sunne, another little starre. (809-824)

In short, "Eve's Apologie," while without the impetus for political change implicit in modern feminisms,²³ was nonetheless tenacious in its deconstruction of gender hierarchy and its privileging of women over men within spiritual systems.²⁴ By

²² Janel Mueller also tellingly points out that Lanyer goes so far as to transform Jesus Christ, the central figure of the Christian mythos, into a figure aligned with early modern ideals of feminine virtue: "Her Christ, like the ideal woman of the Puritan manuals, is silent except when induced to speak, and modest and taciturn when he does; he is gentle, mild, peaceable, and submissive to higher male authorities" (112).

²³ See McGrath: "Although [Lanyer's] protests against men's oppression of women imply a need for an altered male point of view, what is missing from Lanier's feminism is an agenda for political change, an element considered crucial in modern feminisms" (334).

²⁴ Janel Mueller offers some useful commentary on this matter: "[T]here is nothing explicitly feminist about this poetically striking juncture in Lanyer's narration of the Passion of Christ. Yet here and elsewhere for considerable stretches Lanyer skillfully predisposes her story, description, and commentary to feminist implications. . . Perhaps the most obvious of these predispositions . . . is the

comparing Eve's sin with those committed by the men responsible for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, Lanyer deftly undercuts the extant arguments for female inequality and devilishness. Furthermore, by contrasting women's "weaknesse" with men's "malice", she recasts the nature of male and female sin and does so while calling upon the one irrefutable authority of her culture: the Bible.

As McGrath notes: "although Lanier lacked the term to describe her politics, she forced the grounds of protest available in her culture to their most radical possible feminist expression" (345). This breakthrough, therefore, becomes essential to an understanding of the beginnings of early modern gender subversions, and renders "Eve's Apologie," and indeed all of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, well worth studying in conjunction with other protofeminist tracts, or even with more canonical texts like *Paradise Lost*.

Cookham: The (Real) Birth of the Country House Poem

Finally, we come to the last poem in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, a text already widely taught, especially in conjunction with a more canonical text (McGrath 201). When Jonson's *The Forrest* was published in 1616, it purportedly ushered in an entirely new genre of English poetry: the Country House Poem. Jonson's "To Penshurst" has become, over the centuries, a preeminent early modern text, wherein Jonson celebrates the country estate of the Sidney family, and the companionship and respite he finds

pattern of fundamental misprision exhibited by all of the males in the story, friends and foes alike, while the female poet unfailingly understands what and who Jesus is" (111).

See also Tina Krontiris: "Lanyer's case in support of Eve's innocence is skillfully linked to her argument about man's sin in crucifying Christ. She cleverly establishes a parallel between Adam and Eve on the one hand and Pontius Pilate and his wife on the other, in order to prove the similarity of the situations and man's position on the erring side in the latter pair" (115-16).

there. However, as many critics, including Lewalski and Ann Baynes Coiro, have pointed out in recent years, “To Penshurst,” that “bedrock of the English canon” (Coiro 364), is actually not the *first* country-house poem. Instead, that honorary designation lies with Lanyer’s closing poem of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*: “The Description of Cookham.”

Published five years earlier than “To Penshurst,”²⁵ Lanyer’s poem celebrates Cookham, the temporary abode of Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, her daughter Anne, and Lanyer herself, where she claims to have been introduced to Christian principles:

Farewell (sweet *Cooke-ham*) where I first obtain’d
 Grace from that Grace where perfit Grace remain’d;
 And where the muses gave their full consent,
 I should have power the virtuous to content:
 Where princely palace will’d me to indite,
 The sacred Storie of the Soules delight. (1-6)

Here, Lanyer laments the expulsion of the Countess and her coterie from the crown manor, near Windsor, where they had briefly taken up residence for an indeterminate amount of time around 1605 (Woods, “Lanyer” 117).²⁶ If we believe the poem’s portraiture of that time, Lanyer enjoyed there an “idealized order of exercise, conversation, and contemplation” (Woods, “Lanyer” 117).

²⁵ Indeed, Woods argues that Jonson may actually be indebted to Lanyer: “One might claim that ‘Cookham’ sets standards for this genre that Jonson borrows, transforms, and transmits to his literary descendants” (“Lanyer” 118).

²⁶ Says Coiro: “One of the striking things about this country-house poem is that Cooke-ham was not the ancient family seat of the Clifford family, but a temporary refuge loaned or rented to these women by the king while they persisted in their stubborn fight to be allowed, as women, to inherit land, an outrageous claim” (363-64).

However long Lanyer abided there, and whatever her function was, her narrative of the Countess's (and her own) expulsion from Cookham is naturally "not celebratory but elegiac" (Lewalski, "Seizing Discourses" 55). While Jonson's "To Penshurst" maintains a tone of almost-jovial lauding, "Cookham" represents a "poem of loss, the poet figure left behind in a ruptured Eden to memorialize paradise lost" (Coiro 371). For this reason alone, "Cookham" becomes an essential text for classes studying the country-house genre: it exemplifies the range implicit in the genre, and highlights the economic overtones present in other texts, like "To Penshurst," in different ways, specifically from the point of view of women.

Indeed, "Cookham" represents the ultimate embodiment of Lanyer's female-community ethos, where the values she ascribes to women in her patronage poems and in the massive "Salve Deus" poem (including "Eve's Apologie") come to fruition in the creation of a female community where class boundaries are erased in the face of Christian celebration and maternal/sisterly bonds of affection.²⁷ Thus, "The Description of Cookham" becomes yet another essential early feminist text, as Lanyer cries foul on the patriarchal, patrimonial system excluding Margaret and Anne Clifford from land ownership and does so in a way that yet again privileges women over men²⁸ in a Lanyerian hierarchy. Additionally, "Cookham" becomes, via its

²⁷ "To Cooke-ham must complicate the debate [raised in other country house-poems]: a poem by a forty-year-old woman with fading prospects of court preferment; a poem to women who are claiming their right to property inheritance in the face of the entire patriarchy, including the King; a poem on an estate which is not the family seat, but a temporary, rented or borrowed refuge" (Coiro 370). See also Woods, introduction to *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* p. xxvii

²⁸ Lewalski notes that, in the poem, "[t]here is no larger society: no extended family, no servants, no villagers, no visitors, no men at all. The only male presences are from nature or the Bible" ("Seizing Discourses" 56).

history as the first country-house poem, a powerful example of the way that women's texts have been overshadowed by canonical texts written by men, offering an impetus for a larger discussion that may lead to the discovery and inclusion of other voices, like Lanyer's, that have long gone un-noticed.

Conclusion: Moving Forward

While this chapter has only briefly considered Aemilia Lanyer's life and achievements, and barely scratched the surface of the lively and intriguing scholarship currently centered on her, it has hopefully at least made a modest case for why Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* deserves a place in classrooms exploring the early modern period. Lanyer, with a prominent place in the *Norton Anthology*, and already gaining ground as a respected early modern poet (both in the classroom and without), represents exactly the kind of author that can and must be studied if we ever hope to understand early modern English literature and culture in all its complexity. The following chapter will, using Lanyer as a case-study, offer some suggestions and ideas for how to give early modern women like Aemilia Lanyer the consideration they deserve. Additionally, with an inundation of scholarship on Lanyer in early modern criticism, we can not only provide an answer to "why teach early modern women," but tackle an entirely different question: *how?*

Chapter 2: Pairing Poems – Lanyer and Spenser

The Next Step: Teaching Lanyer

In the previous chapter, I articulated the rich benefits a study of Lanyer lends to our conceptions of early modern gender, authorship, and culture. This knowledge – what Lanyer contributes – represents part of what an instructor planning on bringing Lanyer into the classroom should know. The other part, as indicated, is a methodology for introducing Lanyer’s work, and that of women like her, to students.

One approach which has gained popularity in classrooms in recent years consists of pairing marginalized, ignored, and non-canonical works by women with similar or contrasting texts already established in the early modern canon. While the idea that a male author has to symbolically open up the door for these women so that they too can enter into the classroom feels problematic, it nevertheless remains a useful and instructive mechanism for creating what Margaret P. Hannay and Susanne Woods term “a more fully realized past” (2) within academic discourse. There is, of course, a certain paradox in suggesting that early modern women need more attention, and then using a pairing with male-penned texts to bring about that attention; however, this remains a paradox that we can *use* in the classroom. The very act of coupling “Eve’s Apologie” with Book IX of “Paradise Lost” (in which Eve eats the forbidden fruit) creates an opportunity for a classroom discussion about the nature of that pairing, the nature of exclusion, and the messiness that is early modern gender representation.

This paradox ultimately aids in achieving the desired goal of such an undertaking in the first place: complicating our reading of early modern gender within the classroom by “provid[ing] a deeper understanding of both paired texts” (Hannay and Woods 2). This understanding can, in turn, result in productive classroom discussions about canonicity and gender that otherwise would not have carried as much weight. Indeed, Travitsky and Prescott argue that this problematic method is “a useful and dramatic method for encouraging students to think about a range of questions” (224). This entire project operates on the principle that we can learn from, and in turn teach, non-canonical texts effectively by studying them in conjunction with canonical ones. For example, in chapter 1, I suggested that “Eve’s Apologie” can be usefully paired with passages in “Paradise Lost,” and Lanyer’s “To Cookham” with Jonson’s “Penshurst.” In this chapter, I have chosen a similar pairing for Lanyer’s patronage poems, and argue that by looking at Lanyer’s eleven dedicatory poems from *Salve Deus Rex Judeaorum* alongside Edmund Spenser’s dedications in *The Faerie Queene*, we can better understand what it meant for both women and men, respectively, to claim for themselves a poetic identity in Renaissance England. This pairing is especially useful in that it provides the intriguing perspective of a non-canonical, female poet from the early 17th century, and also in that it sheds light on texts by a canonical poet (Spenser) that are rarely studied. Thus, even as we gain a greater understanding of the early modern period from the viewpoint of a non-canonical poet, we also reconsider an author whose work provides the bedrock of our conception of the period. This, in turn, remakes the canon in a way that brings new

voices into the discussion even while acknowledging the contributions of old ones, and reinfuses our reading of authors like Spenser with new invigoration.

The productive step to take here, as I see it, is to consider how early modern women subverted genre and gender constraints while attempting to legitimize their endeavors. And, to wit, fewer methods are more useful for this approach than this continually problematic, but instructive, measure of pairing their texts with the works of male authors. This allows us to see, by virtue of comparison, how women like Lanyer operated within a system that was already working against them, and also enables us to understand the male authors themselves as products of that same machinery. This approach, when brought into the classroom, contextualizes the mechanisms of power, patriarchy, and patronage that underscore all early modern texts, and has the potential to highlight for students the delicate balancing act that authors like Spenser and Lanyer had to perform. In other words, this method represents the complexity of early modern culture for students, and in turn allows them to read these texts with a greater sense of what was at stake for Lanyer, Spenser, and their contemporaries.

Spenser, the pre-eminent author of *The Faerie Queene*, appears to twenty-first century authors as a bold and forward-thinking literary pioneer, one who would forever change not only the English literary landscape, but also the very basic conception of what it was to *be* a poet. It is doubtful, however, that Spenser's Elizabethan audience would have been able to grasp just how fully Spenser's work and self-proclaimed identity as professional poet would alter the way people read and

wrote verse. Likewise, it appears that Lanyer's audience, just two decades later, failed to grasp how her legitimizing efforts fit into, or purposefully navigated around, what had now become the common practices for soliciting and gaining patrons. Indeed, while Spenser was at least appreciated and rewarded in his own time for his work via the success that *The Faerie Queene* enjoyed, Lanyer's work appears to have gone largely unnoticed.

Yet, I would argue that Lanyer's efforts were not so very different from Spenser's. In fact, the similarities between the two figures are in many cases striking, and at the very least warrant taking a closer look at their pairing for scholarly and, especially, pedagogical purposes. Both authors set out to carve for themselves poetic, professional, social, and cultural identities through their work. Spenser created the profession we now call "poet" through his own panache and wherewithal; Lanyer, similarly emboldened, endeavored to put Spenser's pioneering success to work by legitimizing this new profession for her own sex.

Additionally, class played a crucial role in both Lanyer's and Spenser's poetic efforts, especially as manifested in their patronage poems. This form of poetry, in the early modern period, functioned as a bid for protection, monetary rewards, and artistic sanction. For both Lanyer and Spenser, though, there was more at stake in these poems, as both had everything to gain if their poetic efforts succeeded. Richard Helgerson writes that "[u]nlike Sidney . . . Spenser was, whatever his connection with the Spencers of Althorp, a gentleman only by education. He attended Merchant Taylors' School as a 'poor scholar' and Cambridge as a sizar" (676). Lanyer, likewise,

hoped for upward mobility with the publication of *Salve Deus*, craving a return to the kind of lifestyle she had enjoyed while Lord Hundson's mistress, and which her husband's failed attempts at Knighthood were not producing.²⁹

Thus, we have here two poets: a man and a woman. Both set out, within a twenty-year span, to tell the world that it was acceptable for someone of their station and gender to claim poetic authority, and the two met with quite different results. Spenser has, for over four hundred years, been read, re-read, studied, criticized, scrutinized, and analyzed from every conceivable angle. Lanyer, on the other hand, remained in complete obscurity after the Jacobean era, and would have possibly remained forever consigned to London's literary closets had not A.L. Rowse come across her work while searching for the identity of Shakespeare's "Dark Lady."

Yet, however well-known she may be in certain circles now, we cannot escape the fact that Spenser succeeded at his claim for professional identity and success, while Lanyer did not.³⁰ Certainly, one can in large part credit the scope of Spenser's work and the magnitude of his accomplishments for this difference. *The Faerie Queene* functions as a very different piece of work than *Salve Deus*, and emerges from the early modern period as imminently impressive in terms of its ambition, length, and layering of religious theme and gendered discourse. Still, Lanyer's book remains a

²⁹ Su Fang Ng notes that "Aemilia Lanyer published her poem on the Passion of Christ to solicit patronage, not simply to celebrate it. We ought to keep in mind the financial distress Lanyer found herself in during the decades before and, indeed, after the 1611 publication of *Salve Rex Judearum*. Lanyer could not afford to alienate any potential patron" (434).

³⁰ In 1591, Spenser had already been awarded an annual pension of £50 (Oram 18). Later, after the publication of *The Faerie Queene*, he was recommended for the prestigious position of Sherriff of Cork (Oram 22). While he died in poverty, his work was well-known and mostly well-regarded, and he enjoyed the association of powerful courtiers such as Sir Walter Raleigh. Even if his success did not live up to his ambitions, Spenser achieved a degree of literary renown that Lanyer never came close to.

powerful, captivating, and daring venture in its own right, and while Spenser created something truly epic, Lanyer's work reads as infinitely more personal and intimate than Spenser's occasionally aloof, sometimes disparate allegory. Additionally, *Salve Deus* is nothing short of staggeringly bold in the face of apparent apathy on the part of Lanyer's readers, while Spenser's text works in more under-handed and veiled ways in its approach to praise and impress Elizabeth and her powerful circle of courtiers.

Thus, as twenty-first century readers we find ourselves faced with a question that we are also uniquely equipped to answer, in light of the fact that we have access to both authors whereas readers before the 1990s did not: why did Spenser attain limited success, fame, and eventually canonicity while Lanyer did not? Gender, naturally, plays a large role in answering this question, although it is not the only factor worth consideration. Spenser was male, and educated, and for him writing was considered an acceptable endeavor, even if to do so professionally was a new concept. On the other hand, as already discussed, as a woman Lanyer was not permitted, from a social perspective, to do the same thing without garnering a good measure of negative attention. However, I reject the notion that we can equate male success in the early modern period and women's lack thereof as totally reliant upon their genders.

Gender no doubt serves as the foregrounding agent, but to leave it at that, without qualifying the terms of what this *meant* for Lanyer, is to lead her to the metaphorical landing (mentioned in my introduction) of canonicity fallaciously. The logic must be taken a step further: because she was a woman, she had to claim her poetic identity in a different way. And, in the end, while she produced original,

stunning, and creative work, her decision to subscribe to tradition and work within the courtly system in her patronage poems acted to her detriment, and this in turn worked to silence her both within her own time and historically. Thus, her sex, coupled with her class, worked against her, but to miss *how* they did so is to miss the whole point of Lanyer's work, that crucial context that can prove so useful in textual analysis within the classroom. By attempting to navigate around the restrictions placed on women writers, Lanyer wandered too far from the accepted path; however, had she attempted a more straightforward grab at poetic identity, she most likely would have been similarly thwarted.

Of course, we must also articulate *why* we would want to teach Lanyer's patronage poems to begin with. One reason is that while Lanyer has to some degree entered the pedagogical canon with *Cookham* and *Eve*, these are only small sections of the much longer, thoroughly engaging *Salve Deus Rex Judearum*. Lanyer offers, I believe, so much more than what these two poems present, and her patronage poems are a wonderful first step towards bringing even more of *Salve Deus* to early modern classrooms and into the pedagogical canon. Her pairing with Spenser is thus an extension of the already-established pairings of Lanyer and Jonson, and Lanyer and Milton.

The Dedication Poems: Comparing Approaches

To the 1590 edition of *the Faerie Queene*, Spenser appended a series of seventeen short dedication poems. As Carol Stillman points out, these pieces “may not be deeply moving, but they are finely crafted poems” (146). Indeed, while they read as

somewhat bland and unimaginative when compared with the rest of *The Faerie Queene*, their Elizabeth-centered approach is in keeping with the rest of Spenser's magnum opus, and keeps them from jarring too much with the far more lively Spenser evidenced in the rest of the text.

In fact, David Lee Miller argues that the rhetorical structure of these seventeen poems "coincides with that of Spenserian allegory, since each is organized with reference to the political body of the sovereignty" (49). Allegorically, these poems shift away from the rest of *The Faerie Queene* in that they refer specifically, and by name, to real individuals; however, they also adhere to the rest of the text by referring to Elizabeth as the Faerie Queene.³¹ Other than that, they are rather less allegorical than simply laden with symbolism and metaphor, with Elizabeth serving as the focal point (even if unmentioned) for the gathering of the different dedicatees into one grouping. On this, Hamilton explains that eight of Spenser's seventeen dedicatees are members of the Queen's inner circle, and that the pieces as a whole make up a pageant to the Queen, with each of the dedicatees appearing in heraldic order (726). Thus, Spenser nicely aligns the poems with the whole of *The Faerie Queene*, continuing to defer to her authority by always keeping the Queen at the center of his work, even when the poems fail to mention her.

³¹ This happens in the sixth dedication (to the Earl of Essex, Robert Devereux), and in the ninth (to Lord Hundson, Aemilia Lanyer's lover), where Elizabeth is also referred to as "that Empresse/ The worlds sole glory and her sexes grace" (3-4). Additionally, in these seventeen short poems, Spenser refers to Elizabeth once as "her Highnesse" (Dedication 6), four times as "her Maiesty" (Dedications 8, 9, 11, 12, and 14), once as a "soveraine Goddess" (Dedication 14, line 2), and once as "beauties Queene, the worlds sole wonderment" (Dedication 17). In all, Spenser refers to the Queen herself no less than ten times, even though not a single poem is either dedicated to her or directly about her.

Lanyer, for her part, does not organize her dedicatory poems around King James, as Spenser did Elizabeth, but instead around Christ and around herself as a celebrant of the same. As discussed in chapter 1, in *Salve Deus Rex Judeaorum* Lanyer opens with a series of nine dedicatory poems and two general epistles. These pieces, unlike the uniform and delicately arranged dedications of Spenser, appear to have been ordered somewhat haphazardly and vary greatly in both length and breadth. Apart from beginning with Queen Anne and then moving on to Princess Elizabeth as dedicatees, these poems seem to have been written with more of an intent to genuinely engage with the hopeful patrons rather than creating, reinforcing, or playing off of any kind of hierarchy.

For example, while Spenser's seventeen dedicatory sonnets maintain a consistent tenor, relying on classical references while carefully navigating the politics of the Elizabethan court, Lanyer calls on her personal acquaintances and experiences with her dedicatees. Spenser, in his dedication to Sir Francis Walsingham, writes:

That Mantuane Poetes incompared spirit,
 Whose girland now is set in highest place,
 Had not Mecoenas for his worthy merit,
 It first advaunst to great Augustus grace,
 Might long perhaps have lien in silence
 Ne bene so much admir'd of later age.
 This lowly Muse, that learns like steps to trace,
 Flies for like aide unto your Patronage
 That are the great Mecenas of this age (1-9).

Here, Spenser calls on the relationship between Virgil (the Mantuane poet of the first line) and Mecoenas, Virgil's patron, to create a comparison between himself and

Walsingham in an effort to flatter the influential advisor to the Queen, and to solicit his patronage.

Lanyer, on the other hand, opts for an entirely different approach in her dedications. To Arabella Stuart, she writes: “Great learned Ladie, whom I have long knowne,/ And yet not knowne so much as I desired,” (1-2) immediately creating an intimacy within the text through the very act of pointing out their lack of intimacy in real life. Similarly, to the Lady Susan Bertie, Lanyer invokes their connection by calling her the “Mistris of [her] youth,” (1). These expressions of desire for closer connection are consistent in Lanyer’s dedicatory work, and speak both to her notion of an idealized female community (that celebrates and embraces her, of course) and also highlights how differently she approached this process than Spenser, who never mentions personal connections in his dedications (other than a hoped-for patron-client relationship), even with dedicatees he knew well, such as Sir Walter Raleigh.

Another key difference between the two sets of poems is that Spenser intended his dedicatory sonnets to be read as a sequence (Miller 50), while Lanyer opts for a more personalized approach with each dedicatee. Through this, Spenser creates and sustains a poem-to-poem narrative with Elizabeth at the center of the whole, the individual dedicatees the focus of each poem, and the whole group of sonnets manifesting a long, unwavering note of respectful praise and reverence. Lanyer’s overall focus, on the other hand, is on Christ, with herself as a mediator of sorts between her dedicatees and their mutual savior. Indeed, in several of these poems

Lanyer actually preaches to her addressees, beseeching them to look to her book for further illumination on Christ's sacrifice. She writes to Arabella Stuart:

Come like the morning Sunne new out of bed
 And cast your eyes upon this little Booke,
 Although you be so well accompan'ed
 with Pallas and the Muses, spare one looke
 Upon this humbled King, who all forsooke
 That in his dying armes he might imbrace
 Your beauteous Soule, and fill it with his grace. (8-14)

Here, Lanyer creates an altogether original effect in her dedicatory verses. By refusing to write herself in as ancillary or secondary to the women she celebrates, she opts for a rather bold positioning wherein she acts as a priestess mediating between these women and God. As Barbara Lewalski argues, throughout *Salve Deus*, Lanyer “represents herself as defender and celebrant of an imagined community of good women, sharply distinguished from male society and its evils, which reaches from Eve to the contemporary Jacobean patronesses she addresses” (7). The overall effect of this lack of center, other than Christ himself and possibly Lanyer herself, is disorienting when looked at in conjunction with the patronage work from other early modern poets, and particularly Spenser, who so carefully navigates between the dedicatees themselves and their position within Elizabeth's court.

Additionally, these series differ in their choice of dedicatees. Spenser's addressees consist of predominantly male, influential figures, with all but three of his dedicatees being high-ranking officials in Elizabeth's court. As Stillman notes, these seventeen sonnets follow “heraldic rules for precedence [where] the chief officials of the crown come first, then the peers, then the gentlemen, followed by the ladies, all

ranked by the dignity of their families, offices, and titles” (144). As such, the women must come last, and in turn are “placed among themselves according to the nobility of their husbands, or, if unmarried, of their fathers” (145). Here, Spenser navigates a minefield of ego and power by deferring to already-established status. Further, he positions his bids for patronage from within the overall subservient monarch-subject relationship established within the allegory of *the Faerie Queene* itself.

In all, Spenser appears to understand his position quite well. As Laurie Finke discusses:

The exchange relationships of patronage were the primary means by which those both within and without Elizabeth’s government constituted their relationship to it. Indeed, government was in a very real sense the *product* of patronage and could not function without it . . . [n]early everyone in Elizabethan England, whether he was located at the center of power at court or in the periphery, was dependent on a complex network of patron-client relations for advancement, profit, and power. (214)

Because he was reliant on these dedicatees for protection, financial support, and favors, Spenser cannot risk much *beyond* the semi-sycophantic sonnets he produces, and to order the dedications improperly or based on aesthetics would be equally disastrous.

Because, as Fritz Levy notes, the patronage system privileged “overly fulsome” praise rather than independence of mind (78), Lanyer’s bold self-positioning within these patronage poems was quite likely misread by its audience. Indeed, modern readers often struggle with Lanyer’s apparent self-concern, with Rowse calling her an “egoist” because “she herself stands in the forefront of every line” (21). However, a

more careful reading of these dedicatory poems, when read in conjunction with the whole of *Salve Deus*, shows that Lanyer is merely sustaining the position she has created for herself in the poem proper: a celebrant of Christ, the women who shaped his life, and the women who continue to embody his virtues as exemplified by her specific dedicatees. Just as Spenser extended his allegorical, Elizabeth-centered approach to his seventeen dedicatory sonnets, Lanyer maintains a through-line of her own, with herself at the center as servant and praise-giver.

For her part, Lanyer has little choice but to reinvent the patronage genre if she hopes to create a poetic identity for herself as a woman. The very act of proclaiming herself a poet requires a repositioning of the dedicatee-dicator foundation. Spenser, while he was doing something new in terms of his professional identity, needed to conform, to some degree, to classical modes of patronage rhetoric. Doing so allowed him to show how his position and profession spoke to order, tradition, and established custom. Lanyer is more or less forced, though, because of her gender, to shatter that pattern and replace it with one of her own making.

As someone who was already considered less than human because of her sex, it is likely that simply conforming to tradition or pattern wouldn't have legitimated her in any noticeable degree.³² It would have, in point of fact, further established the transgressive nature of her act by inviting comparisons to "legitimate" and sanctioned poets like Spenser, Jonson, or Donne. For Lanyer, and for other early modern women

³² There are very few patronage poems by early modern women in circulation today; however, those that we do have access to likewise evade convention. For a discussion of the patronage poems of Elizabeth Weston, a contemporary of Lanyer, see Schleiner 96-106.

writers like Mary Wroth and Katherine Philips, invention became a necessity of the highest order, where couching one's poetic ambitions within the context of religious devotion and sisterly camaraderie acted as an essential vehicle for even the most limited success. Thus, Lanyer's poems end up looking quite different from Spenser's, as we have already seen.

Thus, she instead needed to find a new way to achieve the same ends as those luminaries. Her solution, in this context, is actually quite brilliant. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the one area where women were permitted to write without inviting scurrilous labels or negative attention was in the religious sphere. Therefore, Lanyer fashions herself as a poet from within that framework, and in the process takes the opportunity to praise, extol, and defend the female sex. And, to further make this identity her own, she calls on a biblical and apocryphal tradition reaching back to Esther, Deborah, Jael, Judith, and Susanna and transforms herself into a prophetess of sorts.³³ This is evidenced in passages like the following in "To all virtuous Ladies in generall":

Put on your wedding garments every one,
The Bridegroome stayes to entertaine you all;
Let virtue be your guide, for she alone
Can leade you right that you can never fall;
And make no stay for feare he should be gone:
But fill your lamps with oyle of burning zeale,
That to your Faith he may his truth reveale (8-14).

What is particularly striking about this passage is that she not only presumes to admonish and counsel her dedicatees, but that she sees herself as qualified to deliver

³³ See "To the Vertuous Reader" lines 30-40

said admonishment. As a lower-class woman with no connections to the church, this unsolicited sermon comes across as rather bold; however, Lanyer's firm resolve at maintaining this tone throughout *Salve Deus* works to appropriate for her a textual-based spiritual authority, and lends her claim of association with Old Testament prophetesses a vibrant potency.³⁴

In fact, I would like to take a moment to compare Lanyer's general epistle to Christendom's women, "To all vertuous Ladies in generall", her third dedication in *Salve Deus*, with Spenser's "To all the gracious and beautifull Ladies in the Court." I believe that these two poems, both addressed specifically to a body of particular women, provide a useful illustration in how the two poets approached dedicatory poems differently.

To begin with, Spenser limits his audience to women of the Court, which is in keeping with the pageantry of the "Faerie Queene" as a whole. Additionally, his sycophantism is evident in the phrases "gracious" and "beautifull", especially when viewed in conjunction with Lanyer's simplistic moniker "vertuous." In fact, the whole of Spenser's poem dotes on the beauty and grace of his audience, treating them as objects Spenser admires, praises, and even drew inspiration from in the crafting of his magnum opus:

A fairer crew yet no where could I see,
Then that brave court doth to mine eie present,
That the worlds pride seemes gathered there to bee.
Of each a part I stole by cunning thefte:
Forgive it me faire Dames, sith less ye have not lefte. (12-16)

³⁴ Lanyer's decision to reorient the dedicatee-dicator relationship within her patronage poems is also, of course, an artistic decision that coincides with her textual self-definition.

Lanyer, on the other hand, speaks to her audience as individual Christian women in need of instruction and encouragement, which she sees it as her task to provide. She encourages them to be wise (25), to avoid “worldly pleasures” (33), to come unto Christ (51-52) and to seek for beautification through righteousness rather than adornment (55-56).

As these examples attest, by looking at some of Spenser’s dedications and Lanyer’s side by side, we not only see and understand Lanyer’s self-fashioning act better, but we also see that Spenser’s apparent “impersonal and interchangeable” (Hamilton 726) approach in these seventeen sonnets may have something to do with his need to subscribe to tradition in terms of his poetic identity. This certainly adds something to our understanding of Spenser’s poetic self-creation, as well as explaining why these poems, which have been more or less ignored by Spenser criticism (Miller 49), look the way they do.

As England’s first professional poet, Spenser’s dedications – orderly, sycophantic, self-aggrandizing, and highly conventional – reflect his circumstances. He had to legitimate himself as much as Lanyer did twenty years later; however, for someone in his situation and of his gender, that legitimizing work required maintaining the same kind of ordered, convention-adhering writing that characterized the whole of *the Faerie Queene*. And, if the dedications attached to that magnum opus appear somewhat less interesting, less “literary” as Miller suggests (49), than the rest of *The Faerie Queene*, then the delicate situation posed by the very act of writing a patronage poem no doubt contributes to that issue.

This comparison also helps us to see why Lanyer failed to gain the patronage of all but one of her dedicatees, Anne Clifford of Dorset, whose support she had gained at some earlier point and which did not add up to an amount capable of sustaining her bid for status. While Lanyer's numinous subject matter would in some degree have legitimated her claim to authorship, her arrangement of the dedicatory poems subscribes to thematic order rather than the carefully delineated, heraldic hierarchy carefully produced by Spenser. Further, by displacing the courtly sphere used by Spenser and others as the backdrop of their patronage poems with a religious one, Lanyer takes a fairly big gamble.

For students, simply reading these two poems in class would open up a number of questions, allowing them to see both the versatility at work between the two authors and making room for discussions about the different ways men and women in the early modern period approached femininity, religion, and their poetic personae. Instructors might ask students to reflect on the differences between the two poems, with focus on the language of the title, the overall tone, the objectification of women, the appropriation of religious sentiments in the pursuit of patronage, and numerous other differences, depending on which direction the classroom discussion takes.

A Pairing-Poems Case Study: Dedications to Mary Sidney

One of the challenges facing a teacher who hopes to learn from and in turn teach this new coupling of Spenser's and Lanyer's dedicatory poems lies in the sheer amount of text. While Spenser's sonnets each contain precisely fourteen lines, Lanyer's dedications can be quite long. Also, there exists very little overlap as far as the

dedicatees go, thus their audiences are very different. Fortunately, some overlap does exist, which we can usefully turn to in order to illuminate the larger issues that all twenty-nine poems speak to. In addition to the useful pairing of “To all the gracious and beautifull Ladies in the Court” and “To all vertuous Ladies in generall”, both Lanyer and Spenser wrote dedicatory poems to Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke and well-known literary patron. Both of these poems highlight crucial aspects of their literary conundrums.

To her, Spenser writes:

REmembraunce of that most Heroicke spirit,
 The Hevens pride, the glory of our daies,
 Which now triumpheth through immortall merit
 Of his brave vertues, crownd with lasting baies
 Of hevenlie blis and everlasting praies;
 Who first my Muse did lift out of the Flore,
 To sing his sweet delights in lowlie laies;
 Bids me most noble Lady to adore
 His goodly image living evermore,
 In the divine resemblaunce of your face;
 Which with your vertues ye embellish more,
 And native deck with hevenlie grace:
 For his, and for your owne especial sake,
 Vouchsafe from him this token in good worth to take (1-14).

That “most Heroicke spirit” who more or less haunts every line of the piece is none other than the Countess’s brother, the famous poet Philip Sidney, who died in 1586. In her biography of the Countess, Margaret Hannay notes that “as a patron, the Countess of Pembroke encouraged the growth of the legend of Sir Philip Sidney long after the first commemorations were over” (78). Thus, it makes some sense that Spenser would play into that connection and craft the sonnet so as to capitalize on it as much as possible. What stands out most peculiarly, though, is just how little the sonnet seems

concerned with Mary Sidney at all. Spenser does mention that her “native beauty” and “vertues” embellish her resemblance to her brother, but other than that the piece functions more as a nod to her Sir Philip’s memory than a celebration of the Countess herself.

In comparison, Lanyer’s 1611 dedication to the same hopeful patron is an entirely different animal. Running two hundred and twenty-four lines, the poem presents a narrative wherein Lanyer recounts a dream or a vision in which she finds herself on a journey to locate the Renaissance equivalent of Minerva, Greek goddess of wisdom:

Me thought I pass’d through th’ Edalyan Groves,
And askt the Graces, if they could direct
Me to a Lady whom Minerva chose,
To live with her in height of all respect (1-4)

As the poem progresses, Lanyer is taken by Morpheus to the spring of Pergusa, where “Art and nature striv’d” for mastery (81-82). Here, she spies a woman sleeping on the ground, who Morpheus explains to be the Countess herself:

This nymph, quoth he, greak Penbrooke hight by name,
Sister to valiant Sidney, whose cleere light
Gives light to all that tread true paths of Fame,
Who in the globe of heav’n doth shine so bright;
That being dead, his fame doth him survive,
Still living in the hearts of worthy men;
Pale death is dead, but he remains alive,
Whose dying wounds restor’d him life agen.
And this faire earthly goddesse which you see,
Bellona and her virgins doe attend;
In virtuous studies of Divinitie,
Her pretious time continually doth spend.
So that a Sister well shee may be deemd,
To him that liv’d and di’d so nobly;

And farre before him is to be esteemd
For virtue, wissedome, learning, dignity (136-152)

At first, Lanyer aligns the Countess with her brother in a similar fashion as Spenser, focusing more on their connection than on Mary Sidney's own achievements. However, a shift occurs in line 145 that moves the poem away from Philip Sidney for good and focuses intently on the accomplishments of his sister. In fact, Lanyer riffs on the dedicatory work of Spenser and other authors who primarily focused on Sidney's connection to her brother, touching on him briefly but then redirecting the poem back to its focus, whom she goes so far as to claim as being "farre before" Philip Sidney in the provinces of "virtue, wissedome, learning, [and] dignity" (151-52). Additionally, she employs resurrection imagery from within the province of this decidedly pagan setting (something she may well have picked up on from Spenser), in order to tie the poem back into her Christian text as a whole.

The remainder of the work continues to praise Mary Sidney's accomplishments and graces, with Lanyer eventually waking from her dream and offering her recounting of it and the rest of *Salve Deus* as a gift to her hopeful patron. Partially, the differences between the focus in Spenser's poem, where Philip Sidney acts as the primary subject, and Lanyer's can be explained by the fact that, in 1590, Mary Sidney had yet to accomplish any significant literary endeavors of her own. This had changed, though, by the time Lanyer wrote her dedication, as the Countesses' 107 Psalms entered wide circulation in the early seventeenth century (Lanyer 21).

However, it also points to the fact that Lanyer had further to reach than Spenser did. She had, in short, more to risk and more to lose. In this position, simply

writing a poem in praise of Phillip Sidney in the hopes that his sister would reward the effort and recognize in Lanyer a talent worthy of attaining the title poet, despite her gender, was inconceivable.³⁵ Partially, Lanyer may also have been trying to wrest from this potential patron, this recognized religious psalmist herself, a measure of the good grace that the Countess had attained as a literary figure. Spenser does not and could not have played on a similar motif, as the Countess at that point was known only as her brother's mourner-in-chief, not an accomplished author herself.

In these two poems, and with the dedication poems of Lanyer and Spenser in general, we are offered a magnifying glass with which to view what it meant for a man and a woman in Renaissance England to stand up, declare themselves poets, and ask for financial rewards, protection, and renown in return for their work. For Spenser, this consisted of needing to turn to the court, deferring to its order, and maintaining a tight, rigid conventionality that played into his dedicatees' proclivities and stations. For Lanyer, as a woman, something more radical, unconventional, and overtly devotional was required.

Additionally, because patronage was in Spenser's age so connected to Elizabeth, and because Spenser's dedications are deliberately designed to take part in his overall ornate procession in her honor, this conversation can also help to illuminate how literature in general in the Elizabethan age reflected and relied on the monarch (Montrose 687). Lanyer's work provides a particularly useful contrast to this in that

³⁵ Furthermore, as briefly touched on in a previous note, Lanyer is also attempting to create something different from Spenser, and her artistic vision of herself, her audience, and the world itself is entirely different. As far as Mary Sidney is concerned, Lanyer is not only attempting to gain her patronage, but to include her in the textual female community that *Salve Deus* simultaneously creates and celebrates.

her poems have no female center other than herself, and this should enable students to better understand how the literary culture shifted once Elizabeth's reign came to an end.

From a teacher's perspective, this coupling works extremely well in the ways that it opens up the complexity of the early modern patronage system for students, and also enables them to look at how both a man and a woman responded to those challenges. By looking at Spenser's dedicatory sonnets in *The Faerie Queene* in conjunction with Lanyer's patronage poems in *Salve Deus Rex Judearum*, students will be better equipped to understand how patronage functioned both in Elizabethan and Jacobean England, what men and women had to accomplish in order to claim poetic identity, and how both of these brilliant, unique, and daring writers set out to do something no one had ever done before.

What makes this coupling particularly relevant in light of Aemelia Lanyer's status in the pedagogical canon is that it presents work from her that is not currently in academic circulation, and the same could even be said for Spenser, whose dedicatory sonnets seem to have been largely overlooked, even by Spenserians. Dedicatory poems, in general, represent incredibly useful texts for opening up discussions about writing in the early modern period, due to the way they express the stakes of early modern authorship, reveal societal and sociopolitical complexities, and pave the way for discussions about larger concerns.

Conclusion

As teachers of English literature, we possess the ability to open up the canon, via our pedagogical practices, for authors and texts that have been previously under-considered. Aemilia Lanyer acts as one example of an early modern female poet whose work has gained access to the pedagogical canon, and whose further study promises to reveal even more about Jacobean culture. By pairing her poems with those by canonical authors, like Spenser but not limited to him, we enable especially fruitful classroom discussions, even as we contribute to ongoing canon-making processes. In fact, this methodology – pairing poems – could be a very effective way of looking at poems by early modern women who are not as well-represented in anthologies or in classrooms as Lanyer. This, I would argue, is what her critical history over the past few decades exemplifies: that, when given an opportunity to contribute to classroom conversations about early modern culture, works by female writers open our eyes to heretofore under-considered aspects of early modern life, culture, gender, and genre.

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