

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Title: "And what my heart desir'd, mine eies had seene":
The Feminist Vision of Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus*
Rex Judaeorum

Abstract approved: Paul E. Cohee

This study examines the function of vision in Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* and the ways Lanyer manipulates vision, in all its possible forms, to create a poetic vision that embraces female power, intelligence, spirituality, and community. Specifically among the dedications and the country-house poem "The Description of Cooke-ham," there is a unified cohesion in which vision is consistently portrayed as liberating and empowering for women.

In part, the poems serve as a defense against misogynist charges that oppress women by insisting they are inherently evil creatures based on Eve's first sin of eating the forbidden fruit. *Salve Deus* is a feminist re-vision that interprets Eve's sin in the context of Christ's passion.

Lanyer argues that misogynist logic is flawed since Christ's crucifixion is a more horrendous crime, committed by men, than Eve's sin of eating the fruit. The re-vision of the poem seeks to exonerate Eve and all women and incorporate the power of female vision into every aspect of Lanyer's argument.

Salve Deus was published in 1611, and the mere fact of its publication distinguishes Lanyer from most, if not all, female English writers during that time. Interestingly, the dedications may comprise the first published effort of a British woman's attempt to attain patronage for her endeavors, and the fact that all the dedications are to women further reinforces the notion that Lanyer was seeking to create a poetic female community. Her poetry is spiritual, political, personal, and intellectual; she challenges the members of the female community to actively see their place in Christian society, not in a misogynist society. The re-vision of *Salve Deus* challenges every aspect of early modern British society, yet the poem manages to successfully integrate the ideals behind feminist theory within a truly spiritual poetics.

"And what my heart desir'd, mine eies had seene":

The Feminist Vision of Aemilia Lanyer's

Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum

A thesis

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Re-vision--the act of looking back, of seeing
with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from
a new critical direction--is for women more
than a chapter in cultural history: it is an
act of survival.

Adrienne Rich

"When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision"

Introduction

In 1978, A.L. Rowse released *The Poems of Shakespeare's Dark Lady: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. In its thirty-nine page introduction, Rowse explains that Aemilia Lanyer, the author of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (published in 1611), was the dark lady of whom Shakespeare spoke in his sonnets. Supporting his hypothesis, Rowse portrays Lanyer as aggressive, whorish, manipulative, and cruel. He bases his thesis entirely upon two sources: the Shakespearean sonnets themselves and Renaissance astrologer Simon Forman's case books of Lanyer's visits to him.¹ Rowse dismisses Lanyer's work as being "too facile and fluent," declares that "she wrote too much, she padded out what she had to say" (17), and accuses her of exhibiting "rampant feminism, like nothing else in the age" (20). He finally dismisses Lanyer with a petulant "Really, she might be a precursor of Women's Lib!" (28). Despite the fact that Rowse's scholarship has not been taken seriously for many years, Lanyer's *Salve Deus* suffered by its association with Rowse. He must be acknowledged for rescuing *Salve Deus* from obscurity, but his absurd criticism also kept other scholars from examining *Salve Deus* with the seriousness it deserves.

Not surprisingly, there is much more to *Salve Deus* than Rowse dared imagine. Scholars, primarily female scholars, of the early modern period have rediscovered *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, along with the works of other early women writers, and are actively re-reading them through a more sensitive

historical and cultural lens. These reconsiderations are crucial since, at first glance, it is easy to misread *Salve Deus* as nothing more than an overly pious poetical work with a minimal feminist agenda.² Because Lanyer's *Salve Deus* appears, on the surface, to be primarily religious in intent and because it works within very traditional early modern forms, critics of Lanyer have focused mainly on explicating *Salve Deus* in order to build a general foundation for legitimate scholarship. This study goes beyond a generalized explication, however, and instead examines the artistic and political effort of Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. Lanyer's poetic request for female sovereignty, and her request's groundbreaking re-vision, especially regarding religion and education, place *Salve Deus* in a category of its own among literature by early modern British women writers.

Salve Deus is divided into three main sections. The first section, comprising 934 lines, contains nine dedicatory poems to female contemporaries of Lanyer, including two dedications to female readers in general. Thus the first section has eleven separate sub-sections.³ The title poem, comprising 1840 lines, makes up the middle section, and the last poem, "The Description of Cooke-ham," comprising 210 lines, is a country-house poem. The dedicatory poems address women who could possibly have served as patrons for Lanyer, including Queen Anne of Denmark; Arbella Stuart; Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke; Lucie, Countess of Bedford; and the work's central dedicatee, Margaret Clifford, Dowager Countess

of Cumberland. The title poem retells, from a decidedly female perspective, the story of Christ's crucifixion and resurrection. Woven into the title poem are four subjects listed on the original title page: "The Passion of Christ," "Eves Apologie in defence of Women," "The Teares of the Daughters of Jerusalem," and "The Salutation and Sorrow of the Virgine Marie" (1). "The Description of Cooke-ham" is the first country-house poem published, and it describes Margaret Cumberland's beloved country residence, a place at which Lanyer apparently spent time.⁴

The three sections are interconnected by their relationship to the female audience Lanyer envisions for *Salve Deus*, an audience assembled by Lanyer to witness the story of Christ's Passion. Lanyer seems legitimately inspired by her religious devotion throughout all the poems, but she manipulates the intense religious devotion evident in *Salve Deus* by telling the dedicatees that by reading her poetry, they will come closer to Christ. The poems in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* also defy the misogynist rhetoric of the period by making female virtue a force that creates a radical reconstruction of gender stereotypes.

Lanyer unifies the dedications, the "Eves Apologie" section in the title poem, and "The Description of Cooke-ham" by creating a community of female gazers that will witness her re-vision of the story of Christ's crucifixion. In doing this, Lanyer focuses on the power of female vision in its various manifestations: she stresses the literal act of seeing

or being seen, the metaphorical sense of visioning Christ as female or feminine, the intellectual empowerment of vision, the religious re-visioning of standard Biblical interpretations, and the communal utopian vision of female companionship. Within the dedications, the women become a community of active gazers: they are asked to view the poem itself, and in the process of doing so, to view Lanyer's re-vision of Christ's Passion and what it means in terms of female sovereignty. Lanyer's intent is threefold: she consistently uses vision as a theme encompassing her political and spiritual agendas arguing for the innate goodness of women; she highlights women's obvious virtue; and she stresses the need for women to be educated. Her re-vision culminates in the country-house poem, "The Description of Cooke-ham," which realistically, but tragically, presents Cooke-ham as a lost paradise unable to support a community of intellectual women within a male-dominated society.

The Historical and Cultural Context

From a historical perspective, *Salve Deus* places Lanyer firmly in the midst of the period's controversy about the mental and spiritual worth of women, the *querrelle des femmes*. While many scholars credit Christine de Pizan with instigating the *querrelle des femmes*, Katherine Usher Henderson and Barbara F. McManus trace its roots to Greek and Roman male scholars centuries before the birth of Christ. Developing out of this misogynist tradition were works defending women, and such defenses became standard literary topics of the early modern period. Later in the seventeenth century amid the pamphlet wars, several authors (some women) take up the cause of female virtue and intelligence, but Lanyer predates many of these debate-like controversies, and she differs from them since she is not responding to any specific work.

Prior to Lanyer, the most well-known example of a British female response to anti-feminism is Jane Anger's 1589 pamphlet, "Jane Anger's Protection for Women To defend them against the Scandalous Reports of a late Surfeiting Lover."⁵ Anger was responding directly to the growing genre of male-authored literature about female worth, and in her response she reverses the misogynist mode of condemning women. She begins by scolding men for their arrogant, self-important misogynist writings: "they suppose that there is not one amongst us who can or dare reprove their slanders and false reproaches" (qtd. in Travitsky 175). Concerning the misogynist charge that women are intentionally contrary, Anger

defends women by declaring, "We are contrary to men because they are contrary to that which is good. . . . Our behaviors alter daily, because men's virtues decay hourly" (178-179). Anger goes on to defend women's various roles in society, including in domestic matters. In contrast, *Salve Deus* is not an obviously angry "talking-back." Rather, Lanyer repeatedly presents it as a work of purely religious devotion. Yet the two works are not dissimilar in intent even though they are not similar in style. Both defend women, but Lanyer's defense is more original and subtle than Anger's.

Lanyer's *Salve Deus* appears to work within the social constraints of the period by incorporating an acceptable religious topic into her defense; she actually reworks the topic to suit her needs. In addition to choosing a religious framework, Lanyer also utilizes traditions surrounding another common convention of the period--the Petrarchan sonnet. Although she does not use the Petrarchan form itself, she transforms the masculine tradition of that form into something distinctly female. By the time *Salve Deus* was published, the Petrarchan sonnet had developed into a predominantly masculine poetic form in which a man is emotionally abused and forsaken by an unattainable woman. According to Gary Waller, the Petrarchan sonnet "sees love as a frustrating though inspiring experience, characterized by a melancholy yet obsessive balance between desire and hopelessness" (75). In this form, the objectified woman is described in very fixed terms, and "The predominance it affords sight, specifically to the male

gaze" becomes one of the chief characteristics of Petrarchanism (Waller 86). Waller further analyzes Petrarchanism as a systematized form by which men render women as passive objects. It is also significant that Petrarchan sonnets were rarely seen by women. Instead, the poems were passed among the poet's male friends, and a type of male bonding resulted from the pleasure of capturing so finitely the power women supposedly hold over men.⁶ In other words, women are completely absent in both the production and circulation of Petrarchan sonnets. They serve only as silent objects. Thus, the Petrarchan sonnet is the product of a completely male-oriented world, a world in which the men rarely considered the personal ramifications of their love poetry. Lanyer manipulates the conventions of the Petrarchan emphasis on male vision and breaks convention by allowing her female dedicatees the power to gaze.

A Female Community of Viewers: The Dedications

Although *Salve Deus* is dedicated primarily to the Countess of Cumberland, the individual dedications create an all-female audience that is vitally important to Lanyer's re-vision. Barbara Lewalski's "Imagining Female Community: Aemilia Lanyer's Poems" explores the concept of female community and how Lanyer creates a catalog of good women to contrast with the evil, masculine world. The community I envision for Lanyer's *Salve Deus* is much more than a system of contrast in this defense of women. By directing the poems so specifically to women, Lanyer makes them active participants in her own defense. She prepares her female audience to view her re-vision of the Fall as a challenge; they must see how misogyny permeates Biblical stories, and they must be able to combat such stereotypical rhetoric with the logic of Lanyer's feminist re-vision. In the dedications, Lanyer continually emphasizes female virtue and goodness. These women are "learned" (17) and "noble" (18); they possess "beauteous soule[s]," (28) and "cleare sight" (32), which will allow them to "take a perfit view / Of those great torments Patience [Christ] did indure" (38). The dedications challenge these women to see themselves in a new light, a light defined by feminine as opposed to masculine sensibilities. Lanyer's contemporary male poets all write of wise and virtuous women in their dedications, but one of the stereotypical conventions of masculine poetry in Lanyer's period was Petrarchan, not epideictic. Twice in the dedication "To the Ladie Anne,

Countesse of Dorcet," Lanyer asks Anne to read *Salve Deus*, "To view your virtues in this blessed Booke" (41); Bestowe your paines to reade, and pardon me" (47). Lanyer's concern for her message to be heard cannot be dismissed. Her continual emphasis upon innate female virtue allows the women to see their worthy attributes and unites them for the feminist re-vision of the title poem. Lanyer builds a framework in which women become more than objects; it also allows women to view Christ, and it demands that the similarities between women and Christ be acknowledged.

The literal act of seeing or being seen comprises the first significant thematic element Lanyer utilizes in support of her feminist re-vision. Unlike the masculine poetic forms best illustrated in Petrarchanism, Lanyer does not focus on the appearance of the women she addresses. Instead, she continually bestows the power of vision to the women, and she makes a similar request in each dedication: "cast your eyes upon this little Booke" (17). All of her addressees are asked to view her poem, and several women are asked to view directly Christ's suffering on the cross: "Loe here he coms all stucke with pale deaths arrows: / In whose most pretious wounds your soule may reade" (32), and "His death and passion here you may behold, / And view this Lambe" (46). This emphasis on a literal female vision places women in a position of power; their gaze upon Lanyer's poems and on the life and death of Christ grants them the ability to see, and subsequently, to judge what they have seen. In the dedications, this is a

significant first step in Lanyer's use of vision because it sets the foundation for the defense of women in the title poem.

The dedications employ vision to emphasize female worth, and the poems highlight examples of virtuous, intelligent, and pious women as a rebuttal to the misogynist sentiments of the time. *Salve Deus* begins with a dedication to Queen Anne of Scotland, James I's wife, perhaps because the Queen's royal status dictates that an author seeking patronage would place her first in a series of dedications.⁷ In the dedication "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie," Lanyer beseeches Anne to look upon Lanyer and her poetic effort favorably:

Apollo's beames doe comfort every creature,
And shines upon the meanest things that be;
Since in Estate and Virtue none is greater,
I humbly wish that yours may light on me:

That so these rude unpollisht lines of mine,
Graced by you, may seeme the more divine. (4)

In effect, Lanyer empowers the Queen to bless the poems by simply gazing upon them. By entreating the Queen to read her poetry, Lanyer seeks recognition and affirmation for her re-vision. The only way for Lanyer's poetry to achieve legitimacy was for influential women and possible patrons to read and appreciate it. Lanyer realized that unless women read *Salve Deus* and took her Biblical re-vision seriously, all the work was for nought. Whether or not Lanyer realistically expected patronage from Queen Anne, Lanyer's text definitely

implores the Queen (as well as the other dedicatees) to read the poem, not out of respect to Lanyer, but out of reverence to Christ and his sacrifice on the cross: "Here may your sacred Majestie behold / That mightie Monarch both of heav'n and earth" (5). Continually referring to the spiritual subject matter in *Salve Deus* allows Lanyer the artistic freedom to explore the Passion within her feminist framework.

In the dedication "To all vertuous Ladies in generall," Lanyer introduces what will become standard imagery throughout *Salve Deus*: depicting Christ as the bridegroom and the female readers as brides of Christ. The opening stanzas describe the wedding garments virtuous women should adorn themselves with (symbolically and otherwise) as they prepare to read Lanyer's poem: "Put on your wedding garments every one, / The Bridegroome stayes to entertaine you all; / Let Virtue be your guide. . . ." (12). The dedication to the Countess of Cumberland's daughter Anne Clifford employs similar imagery; she is asked to prepare, by reading the poems, "To enter with the Bridegroome to the feast" (41). In Catholicism, nuns are literally brides of Christ, and convents were, prior to the rise of Protestantism, the one place women could go to study and enjoy a true female community. Lanyer incorporates this element into a Protestant poem about Christ, reinforcing the viable spiritual and mental connection between women and Christ. By focusing on a viable relationship between women and Christ, Lanyer seeks to convince her readers that her

insistence on female goodness and intellectual ability correspond to true religious doctrines.

Given the Petrarchan tradition of men gazing upon the female body, such passages are particularly useful for analyzing the ways Lanyer envisioned her role as poet. Lanyer's purpose is not to objectify Christ as a bridegroom, but to bring her female readers together in a type of female community where women share a connection with Christ in intensely spiritual terms: this is a connection that men cannot share because they cannot become brides of Christ. She even takes the image so far as to suggest "Take this faire Bridegroome in your soules pure bed" (20). Such an image is directed entirely to women and based upon their extreme piety. By asking her female readers to look upon the body of Christ and consider what he represents, Lanyer assumes that women are not only worthy of such an endeavor, but that it is their duty as Christians to read *Salve Deus* and meditate upon Christ's Passion. Throughout the dedications, Lanyer emphasizes how the women will use the poem:

[They] will vouchsafe their borrowed time to spend
In meditating, and in contemplation

Of his rare parts, true honours faire prospect,
The perfect line that goodnesse doth direct.

(40)

Her assumption that the female gaze naturally leads to study and contemplation further legitimizes her thesis that women are virtuous and intellectual; it as well forges a bond

between all women through their love and respect for Christ. This manipulation of female vision in terms of personal power is not characteristic of the period. As David Norbrook says, "The crucial question was not just how the image of women was represented in poetry but how much chance women had of representing themselves" (43). Lanyer takes a remarkable step by finally escaping the limitations of enforced feminine complacency and claiming for her sex the power to represent themselves and defy the male gaze.

The active female gaze is most powerful in the descriptions of Christ; he is portrayed as a figure to be analyzed, and the dedications assume that women are capable of analyzing Christ and all he represents. By creating instances where women are allowed the male privilege of gazing upon Christ, Lanyer elevates the female gaze to something truly religious; this contrasts with the male Petrarchan gaze which is pseudo-religious and primarily erotic. The dedication "To the Ladie Katherine Countesse of Suffolke" allows a woman to cast her gaze upon a man--Christ. Here, a male object is placed in "perfit view" for a woman's consideration, an image repeated in all the dedications. Lanyer claims that she has created a vision of Christ for the women to worship:

Here may they see him in a flood of teares,
 Crowned with thornes, and bathing in his blood;
 Here may they see his feares exceed all feares,

Yet through the sable Clowdes of Shame & Death,

His beauty shewes more clearer than

before. . . . (39)

This depiction of Christ becomes even more significant later in the title poem, but by initiating this concept in the dedications, Lanyer prepares her readers for the powerful scenes to come.

Lanyer weaves examples of literal female vision throughout the dedications in *Salve Deus*. By doing so, Lanyer takes an important first step in establishing women as powerful. Rather than defining women as silent objects as in Petrarchanism, or angry personae, as with Anger, Lanyer's women exhibit compassion and integrity, and they have the ability to see her poem, Christ, or the world, and understand. Implicit in her use of literal vision is the idea that women can be judgmental, active, and aware.

In the metaphorical sense, Lanyer sees into the hearts and souls of the women in the dedications. She sees their honesty, patience, suffering, chastity, and obedience to God's authority, and she aligns these attributes with Christ and Christian doctrine. Lanyer's re-vision invents and reinforces a viable idea that women are moral beings, portraying virtue as a feminine quality and, in the title poem, Christ as the embodiment of the female gender. Lanyer uses vision to emphasize the wondrous and incomprehensible virtue of all the women in the dedications. She bids Queen Anne to "Looke in this Mirroure of a worthy Mind, / Where some of your faire Virtues will appear" (5). Lanyer is careful to frame her

praise of Queen Anne metaphorically, and not physically; Lanyer does not praise the Queen for her beauty, but for her virtue. The Queen's moral superiority is heavily stressed and always in terms of inner beauty: "And sith all royall virtues are in you, / The Naturall, the Morall, and Divine" (6). This is a device used throughout the dedications. Although most poets used dedications to flatter their readers, Lanyer's dedications exhibit a sense of urgency as she tries to convince the women to read the poems. She uses flattery as another way to entice the women into reading the title poem; she needs that female audience in the title poem to understand her feminist re-vision.

As with Queen Anne's dedication, Lanyer usually does not comment on the dedicatees' actual physical appearance, and as she commends the Queen for her virtues, Lanyer commends all women in "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" inviting, "Each blessed Lady that in Virtue spends / Your pretious time to beautifie your soules; / Come wait on hir [virtue] whom winged Fame attends" (12). Because this dedication is to all women, the notion that they spend their time focusing on heavenly virtue instead of worldly beauty further defends their sex. The implication here is a recurring theme of *Salve Deus*: virtuous women are the norm, not the exception, and the misogynists that Lanyer answers, the "Vipers [that] deface the wombes wherein they were bred" (48) have not even attempted to seriously incorporate the implications of Lanyer's Biblical exegesis.⁸

The connection Lanyer envisions between women and virtue and the emphasized feminization of Christ dominates in the dedication "To the Ladie Katherine Countesse of Suffolke." Two stanzas in this dedication comprise one of two sections (the other being when Christ is described on the cross) in which Christ's actual or symbolic characteristics are described. Here the focus is on the symbolic:

In whom is all that Ladies can desire;
 If Beauty, who hath bin more faire than he?
 If Wisedome, doth not all the world admire
 The depth of his, that cannot searched be?
 If wealth, if honour, fame, or Kingdoms store,
 Who ever liv'd that was possest of more?
 If zeale, if grace, if love, if pietie,
 If constancie, if faith, if faire obedience,
 If valour, patience, or sobrietie;
 If chast behaviour, meekenesse, continence,
 If justice, mercie, bountie, charitie,
 Who can compare with his Divinitie? (40)

In particular, Lanyer stresses Christ's patience, obedience, and meekness in *Salve Deus*. These are also qualities she uses to describe the dedicatees. By stressing the attributes of the dedicatees in terms similar to the ones used to describe Christ, a community of virtuous women develops through Lanyer's repeated parallels between Christ and women. This feminine representation of Christ is not particularly unorthodox, but the attributes Lanyer chooses to emphasize are

significant because she has intentionally designed a system for comparison that places women in a position of explicit similarity to Christ and Christian virtue. Lanyer's rhetorical manipulation of Christ as feminine deviates slightly from the standard medieval and early modern notion of Christ as mother figure.⁹ He is clearly not a mother figure; he is literally a soul mate for the virtuous and pious women in the dedications.

Lanyer's dedication to the Countess's daughter, "To the Ladie Anne, Countess of Dorcet," contains Lanyer's often repeated appeal to "let your faire eyes looke, / To view your virtues in this blessed Booke" (41), as well as a unique discussion of Anne's beauty. Still, the discussion is framed within the context of inner beauty: "Virtue and Beautie both together run, / When you were borne, within your breast to stay" (45). Perhaps Anne's youth, or Lanyer's obvious admiration for the Countess accounts, in part, for Lanyer's only comment on a woman's physical beauty.

So far, I have identified two main themes in Lanyer's use of vision in *Salve Deus*: woman are worthy viewers and are thus allowed to gaze upon the body of Christ and the body of Lanyer's text; and they are viewed as Christ-like while Christ is described as feminine. The third manifestation of vision enables women to participate actively in a community of intellectuals, a community Lanyer creates in her dedications. Throughout *Salve Deus*, Lanyer associates vision with intellectual achievement and ability. Her request to Queen

Anne, "Vouchsafe to view that which is seldome seene, / A Womans writing of divinest things" (3) draws attention to Lanyer's intellectual endeavors and emphasizes that she breaks tradition because she is a woman entering a man's realm: "So craving pardon for this bold attempt, / I here present my mirrour to her view" (31), and "Yet these unlearned lines beeing my best" (31) illustrate Lanyer's awareness of the intellectual and creative boundaries her poetry crosses. Concern with the level of education necessary for women was a popular topic during the early modern period.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, devotional and practical guidebooks were the main literary choices for women. Such works focused on wifely duties and religious teachings. In 1523, Juan Luis Vives published *Instruction of a Christian Woman* in which he outlined what subjects were suitable (religious) and what subjects were unsuitable (everything else) for women to study. Many scholars agreed with Vives, and they all sought to confine women's intellectual endeavors to the small realm of devotional materials. Consequently, the controversy over women's intellectual abilities and educational rights became a standard issue for women in Lanyer's time, and Lanyer was not the only woman crossing boundaries with her intellectual endeavors.¹⁰

The power to see and understand is bestowed upon the Queen, and simultaneously, Lanyer discredits her own poem: "In the meane time, accept most gracious Queene / This holy worke,

Virtue presents to you, / In poore apparell, shaming to be seene" (6). Although such deprecation of one's artistic endeavors was standard for the period, there is an added incentive for Lanyer to discredit her abilities. Throughout the dedications, Lanyer laments her inability to pay proper homage to her divine subject matter; this inability is laden with references to her lack of skill, a standard lamentation in dedications. But more importantly, Lanyer stresses her lack of education. To a significant degree, Lanyer's re-vision cannot propose that women are worthy of education without addressing women's supposed inferior mental abilities.

The dedications represent the continuing tradition of defending women's intellectual abilities that Christine de Pizan used (and perhaps initiated) in *The Book of the City of Ladies*.¹¹ Christine uses a catalog of good women, pagan and Christian, to prove that men and women were more equal than not in terms of their virtue and intellect. Glenda McCloud's argument about Christine's primary purpose reinforces my discussion of Lanyer. McCloud suggests that Christine's *Book* sought to

Raise its readers' consciousness by making them aware of alternative viewpoints, of how authoritative misogyny can destroy women's self-images, and how misogyny introduces inequities into their cultures' most cherished ideals. (118)

To reiterate, in the dedications, Lanyer makes at least six direct requests that her book be read by the women she is

addressing. This insistence that women read her poetry suggests that she knew the profound effect her re-vision could have on women's lives; but this effect is lost, and her exegesis worthless, if women do not bother to take her seriously. *Salve Deus* contains a premise to change women's lives by helping them to see and understand their own spiritual and intellectual power, but it is their duty to study and accept that premise. The weight of Lanyer's request challenges her readers to consider the idea that women are virtuous and intelligent; an idea not prevalent in the larger culture of the period. Because of this, there is an urgency in her repeated requests.

Lanyer repeatedly deprecates her inability to do justice to her subject matter, whether that subject is Queen Anne, the Countess of Cumberland, or Christ himself, and she blames this inability on a lack of learning, of knowledge:

But in this triall of my slender skill,
I wanted knowledge to performe my will.
For even as they that doe behold the Starres,
Not with the eie of Learning, but of Sight,
To find their motions, want of knowledge barres
Although they see them in their brightest
light. . . . (9)

It is an injustice to the Queen, to Lanyer herself, and to Christ that she is unable to portray the glory and virtue of her subject matter, but her complaint goes beyond the traditional artistic complaint of inadequacy. It is Lanyer's

sex that makes her inadequacy real to her readers and not merely false modesty. In "To the Lady Elizabeths Grace," Lanyer again makes the typical artistic apology and adds gender to the self-disparagement: "Though your faire eyes farre better Bookes have seene; / Yet being the first fruits of a womans wit, / Vouchsafe you favor in accepting it" (11). Lanyer is almost distractingly aware that her book's subject matter is far more appealing than the feminist undercurrent. The religious nature of the poem grants Lanyer freedom to fall short of her intended purpose because no one can adequately capture the tragic beauty of Christ's death, and this is why she emphasizes *Salve Deus's* religious content in the dedications. But at the same time, she also knows her poem is much more than an exultation of Christ. The standard appeal that she is unable to write well, coupled with her sex, give Lanyer room to fail; her feminist agenda creates an opportunity to emphasize her lack of learning as a female, not just as a poet. Many poets of the period hold their own creative abilities in disdain in their poems, but Lanyer equates her inability with her sex, and females at that time were denied most educational opportunities. Her awareness and emphasis that she is a female author unable to write well imply reasons women should be educated; otherwise, the very Protestant notion that women, as well as men, should be sufficiently learned in order to worship and honour Christ is denied.

One of the most significant examples of Lanyer's rhetorical connection between vision and intellectual endeavors occurs in "The Authors Dreame to the Ladie Marie, the Countess Dowager of Pembroke." It is significant because this is the only dedication to an intellectual peer in the sense that both women write on religious topics.¹² Lanyer possibly expects more sympathy and understanding from a fellow woman writer, and Lanyer obviously holds Sidney in high esteem because she aspires to Sidney's talent. Sidney's is the longest of the dedications and the most creative; it illustrates Lanyer's knowledge of Greek and Roman mythology. The dedication is framed as a dream in which Mary Sidney's representation assumes god-like virtue and benevolence. Lanyer peoples the dream with mythological characters, mostly female, and creates a vibrant and harmonious community of women. Myth and reality intermix as Lanyer searches for "a Lady whom Minerva chose, / To live with her in height of all respect" (21); not surprisingly, this "Lady" is Mary Sidney, and she is seated upon a chariot "repleat with Majestie" (22). The Goddesses Bellona and Diana, along with their attendant entourages, seek the companionship of Sidney, and the entire party emerges suddenly upon "That sacred Spring where Art and Nature striv'd" (25).

The climax of the dream concerns the "antient quarrell" between art and nature, but the passage is somewhat difficult to follow, and an explanation of the origins of this quarrel is not given. It is interesting to note, however, that

throughout the poems, Lanyer aligns her creative impulses with nature, whereas men's creativity is aligned with art.¹³ The community of women in the dream holds the power to solve the quarrel between art and nature. This is accomplished with compassion and compromise:

And therefore will'd they should for ever dwell,
In perfit unity by this matchlesse Spring:

.....

But here in equall sov'raintie to live,
Equall in state, equall in dignitie. . . . (25)

Lanyer is making a subtle bid for female sovereignty by gendering nature and art, even though at this point she describes them both as feminine. The passage can be read three ways: first, at the literal level, it is merely a passage from the dream with little value; second, if we perceive nature as feminine and art as masculine (as Lanyer has depicted them previously), it presents a solution to the problems between the sexes; and third, if we assume that art and nature are both feminine, it can be seen as a model for women to live by. The dedications seek to unite women spiritually and mentally and suggest their equality with men intellectually; this scene in the dream emphasizes these ideas and depicts them as possibilities.

The dedication "To the Ladie Lucie, Countesse of Bedford" essentially equates female virtue with knowledge: "Me thinkes I see faire Virtue readie stand, / T'unlocke the closet of your lovely breast, / Holding the key of Knowledge in her

hand" (32). Like Mary Sidney, Lucie Bedford was a prominent patron, so there are several issues Lanyer works with in this dedication. By giving Knowledge to Virtue and encasing them both in Bedford's heart, Lanyer appropriates to her the power to see (to know) what is intrinsically valuable in Lanyer's poetry and what is crucial regarding women and knowledge. Instead of assuming that women are inferior intellectually, Lanyer assumes the opposite: women are more than capable of appreciating and understanding the relevance of important spiritual and intellectual matters. Lanyer is careful in the dedications not to overstep the boundaries of what were considered appropriate subjects for women. She wants the women to read the title poem so that they might come closer to Christ: "You whose cleare Judgement farre exceeds my skil, / Vouchsafe to entertaine this dying lover" (33). Within the dedications themselves, the feminist statements are tempered or masked by Lanyer's extreme piety and insistence that her poem will bring its readers closer spiritually to Christ. This theme is especially significant in the prose dedication "To the Ladie Margaret Countesse Dowager of Cumberland:"

Therefore good Madame, to the most perfect eyes of your understanding, I deliver the inestimable treasure of all elected soules, to bee perused at convenient times; as also, the mirrour of your most worthy mind, which may remaine in the world many yeares longer than your Hounour, or my self can

live, to be a light unto those that come after,
 desiring to tread in the narrow path of virtue, that
 leads the way to heaven. (35)

This passage includes all of Lanyer's main themes in a few sentences. Addressing the poem's central dedicatee, Lanyer incorporates the elements of vision, intelligence, faith, and virtue into an appeal that the poem be read. Unlike the traditional use of vision by male poets who focus on physical beauty or generic praise, Lanyer's vision is a new way of seeing, a way that is distinctly female, intelligent, virtuous, spiritual, and didactic.

Lanyer's concern with the intellectual endeavors of women seems to contradict our concept of the early modern period as a time characterized by an expansion of inquiry on all levels of European life: for the Englishmen, this is true. But Joan Kelly answered her now well-known question "Did Women Have a Renaissance?" with a definitive "no." Intellectual barriers were not swept away for Englishwomen for a number of reasons. The humanist view of education insisted that "training was to be related to social action, and since men's and women's spheres of activity sharply diverged, so should their learning" (Smith 40). Maids and wives were not expected to influence the world that lay beyond their front doors. Domestic order was the task for the early modern woman, and her education was severely limited to that task. A woman of Lanyer's time needed only sufficient education to allow her to

run the household smoothly and amuse her husband. Her silence was expected or demanded in all public realms.

The humanist emphasis on individualism only made the lives of early modern women more contradictory. Other female writers lament this paradox, including Lady Mary Wroth in a sonnet from *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*: "When others hunt, my thoughts I have in chase" (341). David Norbrook addresses the contradiction of early modern ideals by suggesting that "Women in the period often found their own individuality a burden rather than a liberation, a restriction to a domestic space in which they were not able to voice their feelings" (6). As Hilda Smith says, women who were cited as examples to prove that they did participate in the period's intellectualism were the exception, not the norm, and they were valued in their own time not for their wisdom but for the fact that they were female and exhibited any level of wisdom (40).¹⁴ *Salve Deus* elevates the female intellect and insists that women respond to the patriarchal superiority by seeing themselves and their spiritual and intellectual worth realistically from the vantage point of feminine sensibilities. Vision and re-vision become crucial to this response because the masculine ways of seeing are inadequate, especially since the masculine has little or no faith in the power of female intellect. Women in Lanyer's time were not actively participating in any "Renaissance," per se, but they were challenging the status quo, and Lanyer articulates that challenge throughout *Salve Deus* with vision as the guiding force.

Despite the fact that *Salve Deus* has undeniable political implications, the dedications continually refer to the spiritual importance of the title poem. Lanyer's manipulation of Biblical text to support her political views only makes the significance of *Salve Deus* more pronounced. The facade of piety which envelopes *Salve Deus* is designed to attract the intended female audience, and once the women are engaged in the tragic story of Christ's Passion, Lanyer's unorthodox re-vision of Biblical text surfaces without an acknowledgment of the controversial aspects of her interpretations. Yet, her faith is unquestionable. This faith leads to the next major theme incorporated into Lanyer's elaborate framework: spirituality and vision. They are connected in Queen Anne's dedication when Lanyer challenges the Queen to:

Behold, great Queene, faire Eves Apologie,
Which I have writ in honour of your sexe,
And doe referre unto your Majestie,
To judge if it agree not with the Text. (6)

Lanyer is well aware of her unorthodox interpretation of the Bible, but she desires the Queen, the most powerful woman in England, to look at the Bible from a woman's viewpoint, to struggle (as Lanyer has no doubt struggled) with the discrepancies between Christian ideology and feminine stereotypes. Queen Anne is asked to reconsider Eve, and by doing so, validate Lanyer's feminist re-vision.

The interpretation of Eve in Queen Anne's dedication is quite unorthodox. Queen Anne attains the power to gaze upon Lanyer's representation of Eve:

And this great Lady [Eve] I have here attired,
 In all her richest ornaments of Honour,
 That you faire Queen, of all the world admired,
 May take the more delight to looke upon

her. . . . (7)

The depiction of Eve undergoes a spiritual re-vision since this is not how Eve is usually portrayed. Later, in the title poem, Lanyer exonerates Eve for her sin against God. This is crucial for Lanyer's feminist re-vision because it is precisely the Biblical story of Eve that has served as evidence to the moral, mental, and spiritual inferiority of womankind. Lanyer's initial portrayal of Eve includes "ornaments of Honour," which could not have been the way most sixteenth and seventeenth-century men and women saw her. This initial reference to Eve is strongly expanded upon in the title poem.

For the most part, spirituality and vision in the dedications focus on Lanyer's continued request that women read the poem, and the poem's merits are never supposed (by the author) to be anything other than religious. In "To the Ladie Arabella" Lanyer says:

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. (17)

As mentioned previously, Lanyer articulates this request a number of times in the dedications, and each time, the request is made within the rhetorical context of vision and extreme piety. The intensity of spiritual devotion that Lanyer infuses into *Salve Deus* is consistent throughout. Yet feminist overtones of the poems place Lanyer in the unenviable position of trying to reconcile her Christian faith with her sense of injustice from a patriarchal world. This reconciliation takes place, in part, as Lanyer explores the power of female spirituality.

Vision and spirituality reinforce Lanyer's basic premise that women are not inherently evil and do not deserve to be oppressed and mistrusted by men. In the dedications, the women are transformed into a community as the brides of Christ; they are revered for their extreme faith and love of God. By equating their love of God with a need to read *Salve Deus*, Lanyer's spiritual re-vision in the dedications insists her readers cannot ignore this poem. In the dedication to Queen Anne, Lanyer's strategy of inducing the women to read the poems begins:

For here I have prepar'd my Paschal Lambe,
 The figure of that living Sacrifice;

Who dying, all th'Infernall powres orecame,
 That we with him t'Eternitie might rise:

This pretious Passeover feed upon, O Queene,
 Let your faire Virtues in my Glasse be seene.

(7)

She makes a similar statement in most of the dedications. In effect, Lanyer manipulates the faith of her readers by luring them into reading the poem, and at the same time, her basic assumption that her female readers are virtuous and faithful is reinforced. However, the crucial comparison between Lanyer's re-vision and spirituality takes place in the title poem.

Lanyer ends the dedications with the prose epistle "To the Vertuous Reader." In this section, she introduces for the first time the comparison of Eve's (female) sin to the greater (male) sin of crucifying Christ. The dedications have gradually led the female readers to this point, stressing Christ's extreme loyalty to his female followers and his disciples' betrayal:

As also in respect it pleased our Lord and Saviour
 Jesus Christ, without the assistance of man, beeing
 free from originall and all other sinnes, from the
 time of his conception, till the houre of his death,
 to be begotten of a woman, borne of a woman,
 nourished of a woman, obedient to a woman; and that
 he healed woman [sic], pardoned women, comforted
 women: yea, even when he was in his greatest agonie

and bloodie sweat, going to be crucified, and also in the last hour of his death, tooke care to dispose of a woman: after his resurrection, appeared first to a woman, sent a woman to declare his most glorious resurrection to the rest of his Disciples. (49-50)

This passage directly precedes the title poem, and its significance forms the basis of Lanyer's feminist re-writing. Noting that for too long, women have been oppressed and defamed because of Eve's sin and Adam's subsequent fall, Lanyer challenges the paradigm of Christian male supremacy, and she defends her challenge with the example of Christ's crucifixion. To her, Eve's transgression cannot be compared to the betrayal and murder of Christ; therefore, the argument that women are inferior to men based on Christian doctrine is invalid.

The dedications develop a supportive framework which provides the basis for Lanyer's Biblical re-vision in the title poem. The women in the dedications share the qualities of innate goodness, natural intelligence, and intense spirituality; they are asked to view the title poem in order to understand and contemplate Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Lanyer's argument in the title poem is that mankind can no longer boast of mental or spiritual superiority over women because, according to Lanyer, men are the weaker, more foolish sex. It was men who forsook Christ, and it was men who condemned Christ. In Lanyer's argument, their weakness far

outweighs Eve's sin. By viewing the facets of Lanyer's argument, the women in the dedications become the audience witnessing this monumental re-vision; these women must acknowledge the injustice of misogyny and challenge their oppressors.

Christ, Eve, and Pilate's Wife: The Biblical Re-vision

In the dedications, vision is used to introduce the concept of an active female gaze, reinforce a connection between women and Christ, affirm the idea of women's intelligence, and convince the female readers of the spiritual need to read the poems. The title poem itself, addressed entirely to the Countess of Cumberland, re-tells the story of Christ's betrayal and crucifixion. While relating the details of the Passion, Lanyer focuses on Eve's relative innocence in the Fall contrasted with the male guilt of those who falsely accused and condemned Christ. Lanyer begins the title poem with an apostrophe to the Countess which contains an elaborate exultation of Christ and an explicit comparison between the Countess's earthly troubles and Christ's promise of redemption:

[Christ's] all-reviving beautie, yeelds such joyes
 To thy sad Soule, plunged in waves of woe,
 That worldly pleasures seemes to thee as toyes,
 Onely thou seek'st Eternitie to know. . . . (52)

.....
 Tis He that doth behold thy inward cares,
 And will regard the sorrowes of thy Soule;
 Tis He that guides thy feet from Sathans snares,
 And in his Wisedome, doth thy waies controule:
 He through afflictions, still thy Minde prepares,
 And all thy glorious Trialls will

enroule. . . . (53)

She carries this image on for several pages, and the following stanzas are described by the marginalia as "An Invective against outward beauty unaccompanied with virtue" (59). Just as she did in the dedications, Lanyer stresses the need for women's inner beauty to match or supersede their outer beauty. Like many poets and theologians of her time, Lanyer believed that physical beauty led to sin. Unlike her contemporaries, however, Lanyer blames male weakness and not female vanity for the harm that befalls beautiful women. In the title poem, Lanyer warns:

That pride of Nature which adorne the faire,

 For greatest perills do attend the faire,
 When men do seeke, attempt, plot and devise,
 How they may overthrow the chastest Dame,
 Whose Beautie is the White whereat they aime.

(59-60)

Helen, Lucrece, Cleopatra, Rosamund, and Matilda are examples Lanyer uses to illustrate how women's beauty can cause great personal and political tragedy, despite the particular woman's intentions.

The title poem contains another section in which Lanyer deprecates her poetic ability entitled "A preamble of the Author before the Passion" (62). In it she expands the earlier connection between vision, female intelligence, and artistic ability:

These high deserts invites my lowely Muse

To write of Him, and pardon crave of thee,
 For Time so spent, I need make no excuse,
 Knowing it doth with thy faire Minde agree
 So well, as thou no Labour wilt refuse,
 That to thy holy Love may pleasing be:

His Death and Passion I desire to write,
 And thee to reade, the blessed Soules delight.

(62-63)

She goes on to lavish more praise upon the Countess, and finally, near line 330, the marginalia proclaims "Here begins the Passion of Christ" (65). As Susanne Woods points out, Lanyer's Passion follows Matthew 26:30-28:10, but she also incorporates references to women as they appeared in Mark, Luke, and John (Introduction xxxvi). Lanyer stresses Christ's isolation and fear in her retelling: "Sweet Lord, how couldst thou thus to flesh and blood / Communicate thy grief? tell of thy woes?" (67). She continues to describe Christ in feminine terms of "Pure Innocencie" and "faire Obedience" (74); he is "one siely, weake, unarmed man, / Who no resistance makes" (75). Lanyer is careful to emphasize that men were responsible for crucifying Christ, and his willingness to bear the pain and suffering of his crucifixion is highlighted: "For willingly he will endure this wrong" (77). This emphasis on male guilt is crucial to Lanyer's re-vision of Eve's Fall.

There is an emphasis on the blindness, ignorance, and evil of these male accusers which is contrasted with the positive representations of female vision in the dedications:

Why should unlawfull actions use the Light?

Inniquitie in Darkness seeks to dwell;

Sinne rides his circuit in the dead of

Night. . . . (75)

.....

Sinnes ugly mists, so blinded had their eyes,

That at Noone dayes they could discerne no Light;

These were those fooles, that thought themselves so

wise. . . . (81)

Despite the language of extreme reverence and piety, however, Lanyer is never far from her underlying intent: her poetry will exonerate women from the standard misogynist sentiment of the time. As many scholars, including Lynette McGrath, have pointed out, only about five-hundred of the title poem's 1844 lines are actually "devoted to the Passion of Christ" ("Metaphoric" 102). The four sub-sections listed on the title page of the original manuscript are artfully woven into the story, as are multiple apostrophes to the Countess. The focus throughout the title poem is upon the Countess's earthly sufferings, Eve's defense, and the Virgin Mary's devotion to Christ. In addition, the men in the New Testament receive a scathing portrayal: the disciples are chastised as severely as Pilate:

Those deare Disciples that he did most love,

And were attendant at his becke and call,

When triall of affliction came to prove,

They first left him, who now must leave them all:

.....
 Though they protest they never will forsake him,
 They do like men, when dangers overtake them. (78)

This stanza provides a critical contrast to the section in which Lanyer describes the loyalty and grief of the women who followed Christ as he carried the cross:

When spightfull men with torments did oppresse
 Th'afflicted body of this innocent Dove,
 Poore women seeing how much they did trangresse,
 By teares, by sighes, by cries intreat, may prove,
 What may be done among the thickest presse,
 They labor still these tyrants hearts to
 move. . . . (94)

By placing the men involved in Christ's death in a position of inherent guilt and weakness, the argument concerning Eve's relative innocence becomes plausible. The nontraditional concepts and assumptions about women in the dedications are given Biblical legitimacy in the title poem, and Lanyer's re-vision takes on its most important manifestation: Eve's sin is not reason enough to justify men's dominance over women.

While Lanyer had already introduced the concept of the active female gaze in the dedications, in the title poem she explores the full ramifications of this newly acquired female power. Although Lanyer briefly describes Christ in the dedications, his form is graphically described in the title poem as his disfigured body hangs on the cross. Keep in mind that Lanyer's central purpose in the title poem is to

exonerate Eve (thus defending all women against misogynist charges) and place critical blame upon the male disciples who forsook Christ and the male judges who condemned Christ. A graphic description of Christ's suffering on the cross is crucial to Lanyer's agenda, and her re-vision of the Bible emphasizes Christ's crucifixion as more tragic than Eve's fall:

His joynts dis-joynted, and his legges hang downe,
 His alablaster breast, his bloody side,
 His members torne, and on his head a Crowne
 Of sharpest Thorns, to satisfie for pride:
 Anguish and Paine doe all his Sences drowne,
 While they his holy garments do divided:

His bowells drie, his heart full fraught with
 grief,

Crying to him that yeelds him no reliefe.
 This with the eie of Faith thou maist behold,
 Deere Spouse of Christ, and more than I can write;
 And here both Griefe and Joy thou maist unfold,
 To view thy Love in this most heavy plight,
 Bowing his head, his bloodlesse body cold;
 Those eies waxe dimme that gave us all our light,
 His count'nance pale, yet still continues sweet,
 His blessed blood watring his pierced feet.

(101)

This passage derives its significance because Lanyer's ability to expand upon a Biblical scene illustrates the depth of her

re-vision, and although she was not unique for describing Christ on the cross, the elements she weaves into that description demand a close reading. Christ's body, skin, and facial expressions are displayed for all to see, and his suffering is relentless. By addressing the Countess directly in this passage, Lanyer reinforces the dominant connection that has been a crucial preoccupation in the poem: encouraging women to see the crucifixion in terms of masculine gender and betrayal so that women can defend themselves against Eve's sin. Accordingly, women are necessary participants in Lanyer's re-vision. This is why she continually asks women to read the poem, why the Countess is addressed throughout the title poem, and why Lanyer subverts the focus of a poem supposedly about Christ to a poem that demands, at least implicitly, a total restructuring of misogynist rhetoric. Lanyer may not have been aware of the universal ramifications of her poem and the hierarchies she questions, but the issues are undeniably present. Her physical description of Christ is another example of her unorthodox interpretation of a body of knowledge (the Bible) believed to be above reconsideration--by women at least.

In the dedications, Eve undergoes a spiritual re-vision and is described to Queen Anne "In all her richest ornaments of Honour" (7). Lanyer expands upon that imagery significantly in the title poem within the section "Eves Apologie." Without question, Lanyer's re-vision of Eve in the "Apologie" is the outstanding example of re-vision, and the

re-vision addresses the sacred, masculine Biblical interpretation that had dominated the misogynist rhetoric for sixteen-hundred years. Lanyer's re-vision throughout the poems sets a precedent that persuades the reader into accepting her logic; her examples are so numerous, and her language so unrelentingly pious, that the reader is convinced of the efficacy of her argument.

In standard Biblical interpretations, Eve symbolizes human frailty and error. In Lanyer's time, she was considered inherently flawed and solely responsible for human suffering, and Adam was portrayed as an innocent victim of her sexual cunning. Referring to Eve occasionally in the dedications in a favorable manner, Lanyer creates a link to "Eves Apologie" in the title poem. In the title poem, Lanyer's re-vision becomes the unifying element for the entire poem. Issues she addresses only briefly about women's education or virtue in the dedications actually foreshadow the radical opinions she expresses in the "Apologie." By far, the most unorthodox aspect of *Salve Deus* is the suggestion that Eve's sin is less horrendous than the male sin of Christ's crucifixion. The focus in this section is on Pilate's wife. A minor figure in the New Testament, she becomes a central figure in Lanyer's re-vision. Pilate's wife, who also asked Pilate to avoid passing judgment upon Christ, voices Lanyer's Biblical re-vision:

Let barb'rous crueltie farre depart from thee,
And in true Justice take afflictions part;

Open thine eies, that thou the truth mai'st see,
 Doe not the thing that goes against thy heart,
 Condemne not him that must thy Saviour be;
 But view his holy Life, his good desert.

Let not us Women glory in Mens fall,
 Who had power given to over-rule us all.
 Till now your indiscretion sets us free,
 And makes our former fault much lesse appeare;
 Our Mother Eve, who tasted of the Tree,
 Giving to Adam what shee held most deare,
 Was simply good, and had no powre to see,
 The after-comming harme did not appeare:

The subtile Serpent that our Sex betraide,
 Before our fall so sure a plot had laide. (84)

Eve's sin is defended at length, while Adam's guilt is emphasized. This re-vision has three main components: Eve's sin of giving the apple to Adam is counterbalanced by her virtuous motivations for sharing; Adam's culpability is stressed in accepting the apple; and mankind's transgression against the son of God exonerates Eve. Not surprisingly, these portions of the text, when Lanyer voices her most profound feminist sentiment, are uttered by Pilate's wife, not Lanyer. Within the passage, it becomes impossible to pinpoint exactly when Pilate's wife stops speaking and Lanyer begins. All the elements unite in the pages defending Eve's sin: women's spiritual and intellectual worth successfully refute any masculine attempt to castigate Eve or womankind.

Pilate's wife goes on to defend Eve's sin: "If Eve did erre, it was for knowledge sake" (86) whereas "We know right well he [Adam] did discretion lacke" (85), and man's sin is further magnified because "Men will boast of Knowledge, which he tooke / From Eves faire hand, as from a learned Booke" (86). Pilate's wife's final plea is the culmination of the entire poem:

Then Let us have our Libertie againe,
 And challenge to your selves no Sov'raigntie

 Your fault beeing greater, why should you disdain
 Our beeing your equals, free from tyranny?
 If one weake woman simply did offend,
 This sinne of yours, hath no excuse, nor end.
(87)

This is the conclusion Lanyer has reached after a careful re-vision of the Biblical arguments of female inferiority. She finds misogynist-based interpretations of the Fall flawed and without logical merit. She cannot conceive how any reasonable Christian could believe Eve's sin is more evil than what was done to Christ, and she believes she has the word of God to support her revolutionary assertion.

As far as Lanyer's feminist re-vision is concerned, the words of Pilate's wife form the climax of *Salve Deus*, but the story of Christ's Passion is far from over. Lanyer returns to the story of Christ's crucifixion, but she digresses frequently to emphasize the role of women in Christ's life.

These instances of Biblical re-vision are listed on the title page as "The Teares of the Daughters of Jerusalem," and "The Salutation and Sorrow of the Virgine Marie."

After Christ is crucified, the title poem goes on for another seven-hundred lines. One section briefly recounts Christ's resurrection, but for the most part, this final third of the title poem is directed toward the Countess. Woods succinctly summarizes this section as "a meditation on the relationship between the Christian soul, specifically represented by the Countess, and the crucified and risen Christ" (Introduction xxxvii). The language of religious devotion and zeale is unrelenting, as if Lanyer is overcompensating for her completely unorthodox view of the crucifixion and the masculine guilt inherent in the act. By continually referring to the Countess as the model Christian, the remainder of the title poem still reinforces the innate goodness of women and their intellectual abilities:

Thou beeing thus rich, no riches do'st respect,
 Nor do'st thou care for any outward showe;
 The proud that doe faire Virtues rules neglect,
 Desiring place, thou sittest them belowe:
 All wealth and honour thou do'st quite reject,
 If thou perceiv'st that once it prooves a foe
 To virtue, learning, and the powres divine,
 Thou mai'st convert, but never wilt

incline. . . . (110)

The Countess symbolizes the potential of all women, for she is not extraordinary because she is a virtuous woman. Rather, she is extraordinary because she challenges the masculine world of vice and remains unscathed spiritually.

Salve Deus successfully produces a unified vision of the female sex that incorporates the elements of intellectual and spiritual worth, reinforcing Lanyer's belief that women have been unjustly condemned for Eve's sin; Lanyer's re-vision continually renegotiates gender roles and hierarchical structures. Throughout both the dedications (all to women) and three of the four sub-sections in the title poem, female community is the only community that matters. The masculine world is an evil that unjustly accuses and condemns women of crimes for which it is guilty; masculine sensibilities are ignored or questioned. The female community suggested in the dedications and *Salve Deus* is the reality in "The Description of Cooke-ham."¹⁵ Cooke-ham becomes a female Eden: a place where women benefit from each other's company and spend their time studying and communing with nature and God. The feminist bid for sovereignty in *Salve Deus* leads to Cooke-ham; the existence Lanyer envisioned in the dedications is, for a short time, a reality.

Cooke-ham: The Reality of Female Community

The short country-house poem "The Description of Cooke-ham" is truly the culmination of Lanyer's re-vision in all its manifestations throughout the dedications and *Salve Deus*. Here, Lanyer focuses on what she has seen and experienced while spending time at the Countess's estate. Lanyer is saddened because she will never again see this place, and perhaps these women. Cooke-ham is the existence she cherishes above all else, and she laments that she can no longer share in the companionship of the Countess and her daughter Anne. Lanyer's manipulation of vision in "Cooke-ham" focuses on the community of the three women and how they managed quite well without the intrusion of the masculine, material world: "Therefore sweet Memorie doe thou retaine: / Those pleasures past, which will not turne againe" (135). Cooke-ham contained the necessary elements to be a female utopia; it was a place where these three women experienced a communal happiness, a vision of the full potential of female friendship.

Cooke-ham is described as rural, peaceful, and harmonious; it is a place of virtuous solitude that allows Lanyer, the Countess, and Anne to retreat from the evils of the patriarchal world. The poem suggests that in times past, the three women lived, worked, and played at Cooke-ham, finding in each others' company "fleeting worldly Joyes that could not last" (130). The overall tone of the poem is one of sadness; it is a place which Lanyer laments "Never shall my

sad eies againe behold" (130). The re-vision of the dedications and title poem, the feminist hope that women can lead lives of intellectual and spiritual freedom as men do, is ultimately unattainable in Cooke-ham. The vision of female paradise, the desire for a nurturing female community--the images that pervade *Salve Deus* are sadly destroyed in Cooke-ham.

The poem is an elegy: the women can no longer enjoy Cooke-ham's Edenic pleasures. The poem implies that legal matters and other financial responsibilities will prevent the three women from ever enjoying each others' company in such a carefree way again:

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 powre the virtuous to content:
 Where princely Palace will'd me to indite,
 The sacred Storie of the Soules delight.
 Farewell (sweet Place) where Virtue then did rest,
 And all delights did harbour in her
 breast. . . . (130)

Unlike Jonson's "To Penshurst," Lanyer's poem does not concern itself with domestic order or affluence; instead, the poem celebrates nature, solitary meditation, and female companionship. Significantly, Lanyer cannot escape the boundaries of the time, and although Cooke-ham is a paradise, it is a fallen utopia that can never be realized. The world

of patriarchal and material considerations infringes upon and destroys Lanyer's idyllic existence: "Whereof depriv'd, I evermore must grieve, / Hating blind Fortune, carelesse to relieve" (135), and "But your occasions call'd you so away, / That nothing there had power to make you stay" (136).¹⁶

Fittingly, the garden at Cooke-ham contains a "stately Tree" (132) which the Countess visited often to contemplate on worldly and spiritual matters, to "meditate what [she] therein did see" (133). The similarity between Eden's Tree of Knowledge and the tree in Cooke-ham is obvious, and by placing an actual tree in the garden of a female Eden, Lanyer once again subverts the traditional Christian doctrine by making the tree's connection to knowledge positive instead of negative:

Where beeing seated, you might plainely see,
 Hills, vales, and woods, as if on bended knee

 Europe could not affoord much more delight.
 What was there then but gave you all content,
 While you the time in meditation spent,
 Of their Creators powre, which there you saw,
 In all his Creatures held a perfit Law. . . . (133)

The tree becomes the focus of the poem. In the poem's only action, the Countess places a good-bye kiss upon the tree, which Lanyer promptly steals. Although few critics address this odd occurrence, I contend it is Lanyer's final, futile attempt to capture the Countess, the tranquillity of

Cooke-ham, and the symbolic knowledge the tree represents. There is a level of anger in her action, and Lanyer declares: "Yet this great wrong I never could repent" (137). This scene becomes the final instance of Lanyer's lost vision. Stealing the kiss does not bring Lanyer closer to the Countess, and their friendship at Cooke-ham is lost: "our last words, did now for sorrow die" (138).

Essentially, Cooke-ham is the existence Lanyer alludes to throughout the dedications and *Salve Deus* by her total emphasis on women and feminine attributes and her refusal to portray men in anything other than a negative light; but Lanyer is unable to escape the restraints of her time. Cooke-ham is a fallen paradise, and the masculine world invades and destroys what is a uniquely female Eden.

"The Description of Cooke-ham" provides a crucial link to one line in the dedication to Mary Sidney wherein Lanyer speaks of her dream of female community and says "And what my heart desir'd, mine eies had seene" (29). Lanyer desired a communal existence of women unmolested by the material and masculine world, and she had it for a very short time at Cooke-ham. But such a world could only exist in dreams for Lanyer, and this is why Cooke-ham's paradise is finally destroyed. Her extensive re-vision of Biblical interpretations and her demand for female equality in intellectual and spiritual matters throughout the dedications and *Salve Deus* culminate in a tragic vision of a perfect world to which she has no access: "Whereof depriv'd, I evermore must

grieve, / Hating blind Fortune, carelesse to relieve, / And
you sweet Cooke-ham, whom these Ladies leave" (135). Not only
is Lanyer unable to enjoy the companionship of her friends,
but they too must depart the estate and lose their connections
with one another. Cooke-ham cannot become a reality for women
despite Lanyer's re-vision.

Conclusion

Lanyer ends her single volume of published poetry with a peculiar "To the doubtfull Reader" which stands as the final disclaimer to a collection of poems that defies all conventional religious and social beliefs. In effect, Lanyer claims that her creation, in its entirety, is divinely inspired. The coda explains how the title, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, came to her in a dream many years before she had even thought to write the poem. Then, after the poems were written, the phrase popped back into her mind, and she saw fit to name her work thus. Lanyer concludes with one final disclaimer:

when immediately it [the title] came into my remembrance, what I had dreamed long before; and thinking it a significant token, that I was appointed to performe this Worke, I have the very same words I received in sleepe as the fittest Title I could devise for this Booke. (139)

The coda provides the final example of Lanyer's awareness of her poem's extraordinary re-vision. Otherwise, she would not deem it necessary to claim divine inspiration for a poem about Christ's Passion. It is because Lanyer knows *Salve Deus* is a controversial re-vision of the Passion that she defends her work again.

As Adrienne Rich suggests in the quotation I use as an epigraph to this study, re-vision is a way for women to re-read old texts with new eyes. Lanyer's *Salve Deus*

incorporates re-vision into an argument for women's equality by responding to the widely-held belief that Eve's sins of eating the apple and convincing Adam to do the same were the only evidence needed to prove that women were naturally evil; therefore, it was God's will that men subjugate and control women in all social, political, and physical matters.

Salve Deus proposes a radical new vision for female potential; Lanyer assumes and illustrates the spiritual and intellectual power of women. She dares to question Biblical interpretation; she argues convincingly for a feminist version of the Fall. But, more than anything, Lanyer reaches out to her female audience; she needs them to read her poetry and understand her vision. *Salve Deus* unites women by accepting them and granting them all the power and potential granted to men. Despite the fact that the poem delivers itself as spiritual, and Lanyer does continue her thematic exploration of vision in spiritual terms, her task of re-visioning the masculine-interpreted Bible creates conflicts which she could not resolve. The dedications create a community of virtuous female viewers, and the realization of that community ultimately fails in "Cooke-ham." Her faith in Christ is unquestionable, but her faith in mankind is suspect.

Although a small passage from Lanyer's *Salve Deus* has been in the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* since the fifth edition, critics are still in the earliest stages of examining *Salve Deus*. Her feminist, spiritual, and social re-visions have yet to be fully understood or appreciated.

Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum has been virtually ignored for nearly four-hundred years, but now it is time for Aemilia Lanyer's voice and vision to be acknowledged. Much work remains to be done in order to understand how Lanyer's and other early modern works, written by women from the margins of society, provide clues concerning the on-going struggle for women's equality.

Notes

¹ In 1597, Lanyer visited Forman over a several month period inquiring about such matters as her husband's political career and her chances of becoming a "lady." According to Susanne Woods and other Lanyer scholars, Rowse misreads many of Forman's entries, erroneously assumes that Forman and Lanyer slept together, and selectively omits important references (Woods Introduction xix). For complete biographical information on Lanyer (1569-1645), see Susanne Woods's "Introduction" in *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer*, xv-xxx.

² Not everyone agrees that Lanyer's *Salve Deus* is feminist. Barbara Lewalski and Elaine Beilin view Lanyer's emphasis on feminist-oriented issues in contrasting ways: Lewalski believes that Lanyer's *Salve Deus* is a "work devised as a comprehensive Book of Good Women, fusing religious devotion and feminism so as to assert the essential harmony of those two impulses" ("Imagining" 218). Beilin says that Lanyer is not a feminist because "she assumes that men control society, art, and the worldly destiny of women, including herself" (320 note 11). Beilin is right that Lanyer does assume all those things, but her assumptions are grounded in her actual experiences.

Regarding the use of "feminism" in this study, I realize the term had no meaning for Lanyer. I have appropriated Janel Mueller's definition and how she applies it to Lanyer from her article "The Feminist Poetics of Aemilia Lanyer's 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum'":

[feminist writers] explicitly confront misogyny and the injustices of male domination and prerogative in their writings, working to counter these with alternative, women-centered constructions. (212)

³ Among the nine existing copies of the entire work, only five contain all the dedicatory poems (Woods Introduction xlvi).

⁴ According to Lewalski, Lanyer and the Countess of Cumberland may represent the first example of female poet and patron, and much evidence exists to suggest that Lanyer's primary goal for writing *Salve Deus* was economic. See Lewalski, "Re-writing Patriarchy and Patronage: Margaret Clifford, Anne Clifford, and Aemilia Lanyer." Unfortunately, little is known about the relationship between Lanyer and the Countess. From the text, it appears as if Lanyer spent time with the Countess and her daughter Anne, and that Lanyer felt indebted to the Countess for inspiring her to become a virtuous Christian and encouraging her to write. Throughout the title poem, Lanyer addresses the Countess and continually lavishes praise upon her and Anne.

Ben Jonson's country-house poem "To Penshurst" was usually believed to have been published first, but it was not published until 1616, while Lanyer's was published in 1611. See Woods's Introduction page xxxix and Barbara Lewalski's "Re-Writing Patriarchy and Patronage: Margaret Clifford, Anne Clifford, and Aemilia Lanyer" page 104.

⁵ Jane Anger's true identity is unknown, but she is widely assumed to be female. See Henderson and McManus *Half*

Humankind, pages 20-24.

⁶ See Waller, pages 83-90.

⁷ Most Lanyer scholars believe she may have been the first British woman to publish, motivated, in part, by the desire for patronage.

⁸ See Janel Mueller's "The Feminist Poetics of Aemilia Lanyer's 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum' in *Feminist Measures* pages 208-236.

⁹ Janel Mueller points out that Lanyer, unlike writers in the medieval tradition (as illustrated by Julian of Norwich), portrays Christ as feminine, but not as maternal. Instead, Christ's characterization is that of "the cultivated graces and virtuous bearing associated with marriageable women of rank in the Renaissance" (235 n.7). I think this is an important distinction because it reaffirms my belief that Lanyer's work was truly a pioneering effort in terms of her visual symbolism and creative impulses.

¹⁰ In 1578, Margaret Tyler translated Diego Ortunez de Calahorra's *A mirrour of princely deedes and knighthood*. Although translation was one of the few endeavors considered appropriate for women, Tyler voices her own views about female intelligence in the preface. Like Lanyer, Tyler begs the reader to forgive her for her inadequacies as a female, however, Tyler defends her choice of subject matter skillfully and comments on the masculine domains of learning and creativity:

But to retourn whatsomever the truth is, whether

that women may not at al discourse in learning, for men lay in their claim to be sole possessioners of knowledge, or whether they may in some maner that is by limitation or appointment in some kinde of learning, my perswasion hath bene thus, that it is all one for a woman to pen a story, as for a man to addresse his story to a woman. (145-146)

Tyler claims women should be able to "pen a story," but she only translates; Lanyer claims that she cannot accurately describe Christ, but she expends all her effort to do just that. Tyler's paradoxical preface illustrates the evolution of female authorship. First, women must claim they can create as men do (without creating), and gradually women can create (as long as they claim inferiority) based on their sex.

¹¹ For a discussion of the similarities between Christine de Pizan and Lanyer, see Mueller's "The Feminist Poetics of Aemilia Lanyer's 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum'" in *Feminist Measures* 208-236.

¹² Mary Sidney was considered "the foremost patron of the age," as well as a writer of considerable fame. After Philip Sidney's death, Mary took his forty-three poems based on the Psalms and finished the work by writing poems based on the remaining 107 Psalms (Woods 21).

¹³ By making nature a positive and aligning women with nature over art, Lanyer skillfully subverts the masculine "parallel between nature and woman as objects to be possessed" (Norbrook 5).

¹⁴ Lanyer and Wroth are subversive examples because they crossed the most limiting aspect of early modern decorum: they published.

¹⁵ Based on information in the text, the Countess of Cumberland asked Lanyer to write this poem, and it seems likely that Lanyer did spend time with the Countess and her daughter Anne Clifford at the estate. See Woods's Introduction page xl.

¹⁶ The Countess struggled with her deceased husband's relatives until her death to secure Anne Clifford's inheritance from her father's estate. Clifford continued her mother's legal battles and finally received her inheritance only after she outlived all her father's relatives.

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"And what my heart desir'd, mine
eyes had seene": The Feminist
Vision of Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve
Deus Rex Judaeorum*

Title of Thesis

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