

Chapter Five The Epic

Tasso

While the recorded facts of Lanyer's existence produce only an impressionistic sketch of her life, some inferences might be drawn: that she was versant in Italian as well as Latin;¹ that she was educated and "high-minded" enough to run a school "for the education of noblemen and gentlemen's children of great worth";² and, from internal evidence in her own work, that she was familiar with the achievements of contemporary literati.

According to Mindelle Anne Treip, the literary works of Torquato Tasso, "the most significant theorist and practitioner of allegorical epic in the Italian Renaissance,"³ were known in England by the 1580's. *Discorsi dell'arte poetica* was published in 1560. A pirated version of *Gerusalemme Liberata* was published as early as 1579.⁴ The complete version, containing a translated "Allegoria," was published by Edward Fairfax in 1599.⁵ "The whole of *Gerusalemme* evidently is known to Spenser" during the 1580's claims Treip, "citing his letter to Raleigh prefacing the *Faerie Queen* and its mention of both Rinaldo and *Gerusalemme* written in 1589. Further, she indicates that Tasso's influence on Spenser's narrative art is evident in "Book Two" of the *Faerie Queen*, published in 1595.⁶ *Discorsi del poema eroica*, an expansion of *dell'arte poetica*, was published in 1594,⁷ sixteen years before Lanyer published the *Salve Deus*.⁸

When Lanyer wrote *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* in the first years of James Stuart's reign, Tasso's works, through her own library, the libraries of her would-be patrons, or merely through familiarity with the writings, to which she refers, of the Sidney/Herbert/Howard circle, would have acquainted Lanyer with Tasso's comprehensive epic theory, found in *Discorsi del poema eroica*, the preface to *Gerusalemme Liberata*, "Allegoria," and in their English derivatives, the requisites to which, for the most part, Lanyer adheres.

Treip's definition of the neoclassic epic approaches Tasso's assessment of the heroic poem:

an exemplary or literal demonstration of moral and Christian truths, convincingly amplified with fictive detail and set in a framework of Christian-historical fact and constructed on a unilateral plotline closely approximating to tragedy.⁹

She echos Tasso, for whom an epic is verisimilar imitation of an illustrious event in Hebrew or Christian scriptural history combined with allegory that figures human life, and which is written in a prescribed manner and style, in which praise and blame are attributed. Tasso's *Discorsi* addresses the preliminary considerations, or stages of composition, of the epic poet: *inventio*, *dispositio*, and *elocutio*.

Inventio

The epic poet's first concern, *inventio*, requires consideration be given to the nature and scope of a chosen subject, or theme, in its *materia nuda*. The appropriate subject

1. must be taken from the history of a religion held true by its audience; hence, for Christians, it must be drawn from the chronicles of Hebrew or Christian history
2. must be of the first rank of nobility, sacred and venerable, but not so sacred as to be unalterable
3. must concern a time not very distant from, nor very near to, the memory of those now living so that the poet may trick his reader with the appearance of truth
4. must be grand enough to accommodate appropriately magnificent *dispositio* and *elocutio*
5. must be verisimilar and wondrous at the same time; its discordant qualities must be skillfully joined
6. often addresses characters of royal state and supreme dignity, possessed of authority and reverence
7. must encompass a hero of the highest rank and excellence, not one midway between vice and virtue, but a noble, faithful, pious hero who, because his virtue is heroic, not moderate, to begin with, undergoes no character change and whose actions are courageous, grand, noble, magnanimous, and illustrious
8. must conform to epideictic convention: the characters' actions must be praiseworthy and blameworthy; the epic poet treats the heights of virtue and the excesses of vice
9. must be narration in which the person of the poet appears
10. must employ verse alone with scant consideration of rhythm or harmony, which, nonetheless, should be appropriate to the magnitude of the subject.¹⁰

Lanyer's choices concerning her subject, her *inventio*, strictly follow each of Tasso's guidelines. Her overt subject, Christ's passion, is taken from the history of the religion held true by its audience, Tudor England. In order to allow Protestants direct access to Scriptures, there were two new versions of the Bible in Elizabeth's lifetime, the Tyndale and the Geneva, and the sacred Scriptures were undergoing another translation with James. The passion not only fit within the

strictures imposed upon Lanyer as a woman writer, it was a topical choice. Her covert subject, the virtue and nobility of the descendants of Eve, was also a topical choice: Lanyer, through her art, responded to the arguments of *querelle* anti-female writers of tract and treatise.

It is important to note as Tasso does that the subject, or theme, of *The Iliad* is not the Trojan war but rather the wrath of Achilles in order to understand that the theme of *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* is women's virtue triumphing over the perfidy of men in the guise of an appropriately religious subject, not simply the death and resurrection of Christ. All that is said about the passion of Christ is then correlative and dependent upon the virtue of good women and, at length, merely constitutes episodes to enhance woman's virtue and the grandeur of that idea. The origin and extent of woman's virtue is told in Lanyer's dedications and, with a sustained purposefulness, woman's virtue and man's perfidy are drawn to conclusion through the resurrection of Christ and the salvation of mankind through the agency of women and the perpetuation of a community of women through Lanyer's immortalization of Margaret Russell and the female Eden of Cookeham.

While she alters the impact of Scripture in a deft shifting of emphasis in the story so sacred as to be, in the terms of Tasso's second requirement, unalterable, Lanyer does not change any overt scriptural "facts." The apostles betray Christ. Christ

dies. Humanity is saved. While the women who tried to ease the pain and save the corporeal life of Christ, like Pilate's wife, did not succeed, women did succeed in discovering and re-presenting the risen Christ, and so salvation through Christianity, to the world. The triumph is just as magnificent in the subtext wherein, once again united in the now fallen Eden of Cooke-ham through the agency of *anamnesis* and Lanyer's book, the community of womankind, in the image of Dowager Countess Margaret Clifford Russell, is immortalized.

As Tasso requires, Lanyer's story takes place in a time not too distant from, nor very near to, the memory of her contemporary audience. The narrative of Christ's passion, re-enacted yearly in Christian cultures, was familiar enough to Lanyer's readers for them to remember the generalities and far enough away for them to accept additional particulars. Most of Lanyer's readers, for example, would certainly remember Pilate's hand-washing, but few would remember the admonitions of Pilate's wife:¹¹

Yea, so thou mai'st these sinful people please,
Thou art content against all truth and right,
To seal this act, that may procure thine ease
With blood, and wrong, with tyrannie, and might;
The multitude thou seekest to appease,
By base dejection of this heavenly Light:
 Demanding which of these that thou should'st loose.
 Whether the Thiefe, or Christ King of the Jewes.¹²

The legend of Christ's passion and death, certainly, was grand enough to accommodate *dispositio* and *elocutio* appropriate to the heroic style. In *Gerusalemme Liberata*, Tasso had chosen a globally significant historical event for his own subject, the

first crusade, recreating in severe and restrained narrative the first crusaders' thirty-eight day siege of Jerusalem, and Pio Goffredo's, and, therefore, Christianity's, victory over the Saracens, and so over pagan sin. Lanyer's *materia nuda*, the fulfillment of Scripture's grandest prophecy, represents a cosmically significant event: God's victory over Satan, Heaven's triumph over Hell, the conquest of Death itself. The material of her "favola," the "true" story of mankind's fall from grace and the subsequent revisioning of Eve and her female progeny, had it been taken to heart by all of Renaissance humanity, was equally significant. It would have changed the world.

Lanyer artfully braided the wondrous with the verisimilar in her treatment, weaving the subtext, her larger idea, into Christ's passion through the catalogues of virtuous women from Scripture; the admonishments of Pilate's wife; the sorrow of the Virgin Mary; the tears of the daughters of Jerusalem; several addresses to Margaret Russell, including one in which the poet hands to her major dedicatee Peter's keys to heaven; and Eve's apology, which suggestively harks back to the revolutionary feminine subtext woven into Lanyer's dedications. Eve, and so woman, did not cause *this*; Adam, and his viperous descendants did. Eve, and so her daughters, are blameless and virtuous. Adam, and so "evill disposed men," after getting the race evicted from Eden, in further perfidy and despite the pleas and tears of women, betray humanity's savior, torture him, and crucify him.

Tasso's concern for verisimilitude refers to his requirement that the subject be taken from "true" history. Even though the poet may use both true and false *materia*, Tasso warns, he must base his work on some verifiable event for two reasons: first, an heroic poem is an imitation of life, not of falsity; that is, it must imitate truth, not fiction, in order to be an epic and second, "perciò ove è dissimilitudine, non può essere identità"¹³ - - *for where there is dissimilitude there cannot be identification* -- an audience must be able to identify with the events and characterizations it is asked to accept. Tasso indicates that in order to master the paradox of verisimilitude and wonder, a poet must rely on the probable, and as things may be naturally probable in themselves, or verisimilar, or probable through the permission and agency of God, such as angels, demons, saints, wizards, fairies, or some such other device allowing probability, the poet has means to do so.

For Lanyer's audience, the story of Christ's passion was true. Its wondrous elements -- the virgin birth, the rending of rocks upon Christ's death, the eclipse, His resurrection -- wonders scripturally true as well as probable through divine agency, lent credibility to Lanyer's descriptive, verisimilar amplifications, such as the Virgin Mary's inner thoughts and fainting spells:

Her griefes extreame, although but new begun,
To see his bleeding body oft she swounded;
How could shee choose but thinke her selfe undone,
He dying, with whose glory shee was crowned?

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Lanyer's incorporation of those wondrous yet "factual" elements clothed her interpretation, which emphasizes woman's role in the spiritual salvation of humankind, with that same Scriptural credibility.

Lanyer's incorporation of pagan deities would seem to violate Tasso's restriction, mentioned in "Book Two" of *arte poetica*, against the intrusion of pagan gods on the grounds that Christian audiences would not find their interference probable, but as he allows in "Book Four's" discussion of *elocutio*, reference to them as Lanyer has made, in *autonomasia* and other allegorical senses, she has not. And as Lanyer, at the same time she claims full credit for her work, has accredited her entire opus, in *oraculum*, to divine command given her in a dream, she has allowed herself free reign in selecting and combining figurative devices, for, according to Tasso, all dreams are fantasy and probable as they are related as dreams.¹⁴

Her characters are of royal state and supreme dignity, possessed of authority and reverence. The heroic figures previously mentioned are made majestic through Lanyer's use of the mirror metaphor, and are surrounded by persons of equally elevated state, including angels, apostles, Nymphs, Muses, Graces, Nature, Art, and Beauty.

The overt hero of *Salve Deus*, Christ, is of the first rank of nobility, as none could be more sacred or venerable than the "Crowne and Crowner of all Kings." And so are Lanyer's covert

Lanyer first appears in the person of poet, addressing Queen Anne, in the first line of her book. She reappears frequently throughout her work in the *dehortatium*, "An Invective against outward beauty unaccompanied with virtue";¹⁷ in *threnum*, "So I that live clos'd up in Sorrowes Cell";¹⁸ in *paramythium*, "To thy sad Soule, plunged in waves of woe";¹⁹ in *cictros*, "Though I on earth doe live unfortunate";²⁰ and in *encomium*, as in "And sith all royall virtues are in you / The Natural, the Morall, and Divine."²¹

"Salve Deus" employs verse alone, with scant consideration of rhythm and harmony; nonetheless, what rhythm and harmony "Salve Deus" does employ is appropriate to the magnitude of its ideas. Written in masculine rhymed iambic pentameter lines, the title poem shows that Lanyer, did, in fact, pay some attention to rhythm and harmony, listening, perhaps, to her countryman, Samuel Daniel's *A Defense of Rhyme*, published in 1603, which recommended it for the sake of delight. But she adheres strictly to Tasso's dictum in her stanzaic choice. "Salve Deus" proper is one thousand, eight hundred, and forty lines, written, as were Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso* and Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*, in *ottava rima* stanzas of iambic pentameter -- which according to Tasso is the gravest and most perfect of stanzaic forms.²²

Dispositio

Secondly, the epic poet must be concerned with *dispositio*, the form and poetic arrangement of plot, which may be simple, as

is that of *The Iliad*, or double or composite, as is that of *The Odyssey*, as long as there is beauty in the proportion of its parts. The poet's main task regarding *dispositio* is to consider essentials, to distill the truth and singularity of plot to verisimilitude and universality, with particular regard for universal verisimilitude. Tasso uses the word "favola," tale or *fable*, throughout this discourse of arrangement to mean plot, or the narrative that arises from the arrangement of events, yet at the same time to mean something more than the current meaning of "plot":

Adunque, sì come in quelli l'anima e la forma loro è
la favola, così diremo che la forma in questi lirici
siano i concetti.²³

Therefore, just as in [epics and tragedies], their
spirit and form are the fable, likewise we say that
the form in these lyrics is the ideas.

Spirit and idea, then, for Tasso, unite to create plot, or *favola*, which supposes allegorical implications concerning distillation to essences to be the goal of the poet.²⁴ While the poet is not obliged to do so, he may alter and rearrange events, bend facts, or create fiction. He should guard against the fault of Lucan, however, who became so bound in the particulars of truth at the expense of the universal that he ceased to be a poet.²⁵

For Tasso, the *favola* must meet three requirements. Firstly, it must be whole or *entire*; that is, the plot must contain within itself everything necessary for understanding it, including a background of origins and causes and a conclusion that leaves

nothing unfinished or incompletely resolved. The sequence of events may be "natural" (chronological) or "artificial" (disordered, but thematically connected and made to seem natural by the art of the poet).²⁶ Secondly, the plot must be of a suitable size, limited by nature and art, which is greater than that of the tragic or the comic poem, but not immoderately so, for more than proportion, proper magnitude is necessary for beauty and perfection:

Ma visiosi senza dubbio sone quei poemi che sono simili a i corpi che non possono esser rimirati in un'occhiata, ed in buona part perduta è l'opera che vi si spende: ne' quali di poco ha il lettore passato il mezzo che del principio si è dimenticato: però che vi si perde quel diletto che dal poeta come principale perfezione, dee esser con ogni studio ricercato.²⁷

But without doubt those poems are faulty that are like bodies that cannot be taken in at a glance, and a good part of the work spent on them is lost: in the time it takes to pass the middle, the beginning is forgotten, and so is lost the delight that every study seeks as its principle perfection.

A reader, then, must be able to take in the whole *favola* at once in order to consider how two elements connect with each other and depend upon a third, and how the proportionate parts relate to each other and to the whole without losing the necessary or verisimilar succession of one event after another. A reader must be able to see how one thing is linked to another and inseparable from it. In sum, a reader must understand how a natural and verisimilar and startling outcome results from a skillful interweaving of connections.²⁸

Finally, an epic must be single; that is, the work must have unity of plot, carefully distinguished by Tasso from singleness of action, which is not desirable. The epic may be a composition of many actions if the composition creates a single story and a single theme. Variety delights up to the point of confusion, and so, up to that point, unity of plot is not violated by a multiplicity of action and event, which may (and should) include combinations of

adventures	jousts
boldness	kindness
conquests of cities	land and sea battles
courtesy	love
cruelty	mustering of armies
discord	prodigies
drought and starvation	sedition
enchantments	skirmishes and duels
fires	tempests
heavenly and hellish	wanderings
assemblies	

as long as the actions and events are interdependent and vital to coherence of plot.²⁹

Lanyer carefully concerned herself with *dispositio*, choosing a self-contained event that completes itself in the span of three days. The order of events is what Tasso would call "artificial," disordered, yet made by poetic art to seem natural. Through her dedications and narrative exhortations, Lanyer reaches back to Genesis, from which she draws the birth of humanity and the causes of its fall from grace. In "*The salutation of the virgin Marie*," she fills in all the details of Christ's birth and gives the reasons He must die to save humankind. The crucifixion completes

the story of man's redemption. In the subtext, the narrative return to a desolate Cooke-ham/Eden completes the repositioning of Eve in history, and indicates women's redemption in the eternized, and so risen, Margaret Russell Clifford.

The magnitude of Lanyer's stories, the salvation of humanity and the revisioning of womankind, speaks for itself, and has been addressed at some length in *inventio*. Tasso's inclusion of magnitude again in *dispositio*, however, merits further examination, for he emphasizes that heroic poetry must be large enough to contain the illustrious events and characters that will comprise it, but cannot be so large as to bore or confuse the reader. Although *Salve Deus*, like other literature, is increasingly satisfying upon successive readings, its story, like a proportionate body, can be taken in at a glance. Complicated as the interweavings of elements are, they are natural and verisimilar, and they produce a startling outcome.

Lanyer chose well in selecting a composite plot, one which may be read in part through the proportion of its parts. Betty Travitsky, noting that the true subject of Lanyer's volume is the "commendable qualities of women," points out that 2500 of its 3000 lines are devoted to praise of women, the magnitude of which may be taken as an indication of its true subject.³⁰

The elements of Lanyer's plot -- consisting of her invitation to Queen Anne ("Looke into this Mirrour of a worthy Mind")³¹ and

into Lanyer's book (and through *antistasis*, into the "Mirrour" of Lanyer herself), the presentation of "Eves Apologie" ("Behold, great Queene, fair *Eves Apologie*, / Which I have writ in honour of your sexe"),³² and Eve's *entertainment* of Queen Anne to Lanyer's feast, the "Salve Deus," a feminine last supper ending in the immortalizations of Margaret Russell Clifford and the abandoned female Eden -- create the *favola* for which Tasso asks, which inheres in Lanyer's particular arrangement of events, the meaning of which is much grander than their sum. The spirit of *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* is undoubtedly feminist, in a modern sense of the word. It seems clear that Lanyer's vision of a female community of virtuous womankind, independent of man and misogyny, constitutes an argument that must indeed be read as intent.

Lynette McGrath suggests that the central positioning of the Christ image allows Lanyer to introduce her subversive messages, to sanction her writing function, and to validate the "self-definition to which she urges herself and the members of her feminine community."³³ She further cautions skepticism concerning "seemingly essential associations endorsed by ideology" and suggests scrutiny of the "levels of transgressive discourse concealed behind ideological matter-of-factness":

Like maternity, religious activity and even religious writing have been among the "few socially and interpersonally legitimated functions women are granted," and religion is "one of the few sites where women have some respite from the circuits of sexual, political, and social exchange."³⁴

Because, for Tasso, spirit and form inhere in plot, he prefers the double or mixed composite form chosen by Lanyer. This form includes in its elements *peripeteia*, a change of fortune as in a shift from happiness to misery or vice versa. In the *Salve Deus*, the entailment of Margaret Clifford Russell's ancestral lands, her husband's infidelity, and her departure from Cooke-ham serve this purpose.

Another element of Tasso's composite form is *anagnorisis*, a recognition or passage from ignorance to awareness that is simple, or reciprocal, between two characters,³⁵ such as Christ's prediction that Peter would betray him, Peter's adamant denial, and Peter's subsequent acknowledgment of his perfidy; and *perturbation* -- grievous, sorrowful actions, deaths, tortures, wounds -- that inspire cries and laments from the persons involved, such as the crucifixion of Christ.

Elocutio

Finally, Tasso discusses *elocutio*, the adornments appropriate to epic style. For Tasso, the responsibility of the epic poet is to stir and transport minds through the power of ideas, which give rise to style. Style, then, arises from the "idea," which dictates which quality (serious, magnificent, comedic) of style in which the poet will present that idea.³⁶ The "idea," according to Tasso, is "an underlying intellectual conception in the epic, its *hidden text*",³⁷ which "can be expressed either as exemplary Moral

(which does not mean merely idealized characters), or more specifically as allegory."³⁸ Ideas, for Tasso, drive the epic. Their power is greater than that of words or diction in that they give substance to the shapings of a reader's imagination.³⁹ The style emanating from the "idea" will manifest in *words*, which are images and imitators of ideas, whose nature they reflect. Words are images of images that represent ideas, and they are either simple, not composed of meaningful elements, or compound, composed of one or more meaningful elements; native or foreign, with foreign being sublime; metaphorical; decorative; coined; lengthened or contracted; or modified. They are subject to and ruled by the ideas that form them, and they must be effective, expressive, and appropriate to represent clearly the story before "corporeal eyes."⁴⁰

Style will manifest in diction, which concerns itself with the joining together of words, the combining of words into sentences, which have "magnificence if they are long," yet, which must remain in keeping with the magnitude of the ideas expressed.

Style, then, is the composite resulting from words and ideas as they are expressed in diction, and the "Heroic" style, lying between "the plainspoken seriousness of tragedy" and "the intricate loveliness of the lyric," surpasses "both in the majesty of its wonderful stateliness." This is, according to Tasso, because the epic poet may "think and speak in a different mind and a different tongue than his own" because he is "inspired and rapt

with divine furor." For that reason, the epic poet will sustain an elevated and lofty style which originates in his personality as spiritually inflamed poet.⁴¹

A brief examination of the correspondence between *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*, which has been characterized as having no genetic predecessor, and Tasso's critical principles reveals that characterization's error. In every consideration, the *Salve Deus*, in fact, reveals in its heroic nature that it does have genetic predecessors: they are epics. Its overt subject, the passion of Christ, is thoroughly grounded in scripturally true Hebrew and Christian history of an era neither too distant nor too near. Its narration presents action both verisimilar and wondrous; it is unified in its variety, with episodes of love, grief, villainy, heroism, and death woven into an indivisible whole on the warp of its style and diction, which contain devices, schemes, and tropes appropriate to the magnificent style that emanate from its most lofty subject and idea; and its characters embody paradigms of the most noble valor and most excessive vice.

The heroic poet may begin by stating his proposition for clarity's sake, directing the reader to pay attention to it, and invoking divine assistance. Those invocations must be repeated throughout the epic as a sign of the poet's piety and religion, or modesty, and in his beginning, the poet must pay attention to two things: order and syllabification. Order should proceed from an obscure beginning to a clear narrative or from a clear beginning

to a clear narrative, but never from an obscure beginning to an obscure narrative or from a clear beginning to an obscure narrative. The same holds true for levels of diction: low openings may proceed to elevated narration. Similarly, elevated openings that proceed to elevated narrations are commendable, but never low openings to low narrations or elevated openings to low narrations.⁴²

Lanyer begins her epic, stating her proposition with an elevated opening written in elevated diction "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie":

Renowned Empresse, and great Britaines Queene,
Most gracious Mother of succeeding Kings;
Vouchsafe to view that which is seldome seene,
A Womans writing of divinest things:
 Reade it faire Queene, though it defective be,
 Your Excellence can grace both It and Mee.⁴³

Lanyer continues her narrative, as Tasso recommends, in that elevated style, raising Queen Anne, who is attended by the Muses, above Juno, Pallas, and Venus from whom she has appropriated "State and Dignities," "Wisdome, Fortitude," and beauty, likening the monarch to Phoebe and Diana, until she is Apollo's equal.⁴⁴

Lanyer then invokes the divine aid of the *apotheosized* Queen Anne:

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 seem the more divine.⁴⁵

As Tasso instructs, Lanyer re-invokes often, exemplified in the second invocation, again to Queen Anne, "whose powre may raise

[Lanyer's] sad dejected Muse.⁴⁶ Thirdly, she invokes Nature, from whence Lanyer's inspiration and talent spring:

...since all Arts at first from Nature came,
That goodly Creature, Mother of Perfection,
Whom Joves almighty had at first did frame,
Taking both her and hers in his protection:
Why shuld not She now grace my barren Muse⁴⁷

She calls to grace her Muse "all vertuous Ladies in generall,"⁴⁸ enticing them to her feast and gathering with them by reference and by direct invitation, Daphne, Minerva, Venus, Cynthia, Esop, Pallas, the Titans, Age, Houres, Nights, Daies, Phoebus, and Christ. Her next invocation is to "the Virtues" of Susan Bertie, "The noble guide of [her] ungovern'd dayes":

And since no former gaine hath made me write,
Nor my desertless service could have wonne,
Only your noble Virtues do incite
My Pen, they are the ground I write upon;⁴⁹

The Countess of Kent's virtues serve as Lanyer's inspiration and as her palimpsest. As they "incite" Lanyer's pen, they constitute the principles upon which she bases her arguments.

In "The Author's Dream to the Ladie *Marie*," the god Morpheus leads Lanyer to that Pierian spring where an apotheosized Mary Sidney⁵⁰ is asked to grace the poem already graced by Christ:

So craving pardon for this bold attempt,
I here present my mirrour to her view,
Whose noble virtues cannot be exempt,
My Glasse beeing steele, declares them to be true.

And Madame, if you will vouchsafe that grace,
To grace those flowers that springs from virtues ground;
Though your faire mind on worthier workes is plac'd,
On workes that are more deepe, and more profound;

Yet is it no disparagement to you,
To see your Saviour in a Shepherds weed,
Unworthily presented in our viewe,
Whose worthiness will grace each line you reade.⁵¹

As in the previous invocation, Lanyer claims her work, her "mirrour," originates in the virtues of her dedicatee. By acknowledging the poem's veracity, Sidney admits as well her own virtuous worth. Christ, as overt subject of the *Salve Deus*, elevates Lanyer's epic to the level of Sidney's sonnets.

In "To the Ladie *Katherine* Countesse of Suffolke," Lanyer, destined to write, claims direct heavenly sanction for her work:

So we are subject to that fatall starre,
Under the which we were produc'd to breath,
That starre that guides us even untill our death.

And guided me to frame this work of grace,
Not of it selfe, but by celestiaall powres,
To which, both that and we must needs give place,
Since what we have, we cannot count it ours:
For health, wealth, honour, sicknesse, death and all,
Is in Gods powre, which makes us rise and fall.

And since his powre hath given me powre to write, (13)

At the close of her "little booke," in an address to the Countess of Cumberland, Lanyer claims that she was given the command to write the *Salve Deus* at the moment of her birth:

And knowe, when first into this world I came,
This charge was giv'n me by th'Eternall powres,
Th'everlasting Trophie of thy fame,
To build and decke it with the sweetest flowres
That virtue yeelds . . .

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The invocations, especially those like the last two noted, which attribute her work directly to the power of God, serve another purpose, as others have suggested, of relieving Lanyer of responsibility for her violations of rhetorical and ideological boundaries.

Tasso reduces diction to its component parts, into words in their various functions as parts of speech, into syllables, and into letters and discusses the weighting of sounds that invocations should stress, comparing the custom of Homer, who weighted the end of his invocative lines:

Dic mihi, Musa, virum captae post tempora Troiae:⁵²
Sing for me, Muses, the man who on the Fall of Troy:
(my emphasis)

To those of Horace, weighted at the beginning:

Fortunam Priami cantabo, et nobile bellum.⁵³
Of Priam's fate I will sing, and noble war.
(my emphasis)

Lanyer weights her invocative lines both at the end:

Heere I present to you the King of kings,⁵⁴
(my emphasis)

and at the beginning:

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:⁵⁵
(my emphasis)

The poet must next consider the metaphor, of which Tasso gives four types: those moving from genus to species, species to genus, species to species, and those that are proportional -- that is, those with a proportionate ratio, as in Dante's

che paia 'l giorno pianger che si more:
*That seems the day to mourn that dies.*⁵⁶

Lanyer uses innumerable metaphors of all four types suggested by Tasso:

from genus to species,

Although the Spirit was willing to obey,

Yet what great weakenesse in the Flesh was found!⁵⁷

Yet Gods right Hand was unto thee a stay,⁵⁸

Was ever Creature in the World so kinde,⁵⁹

species to genus,

Most gracious Mother of succeeding Kings;⁶⁰

The Phoenix of her age, whose worth did bind
All worthy minds so long as they have breath,
In links of Admiration, love, and zeale,
To that deare Mother of our Common-weale.⁶¹

species to species,

The Heav'ns shall perish as a garment olde⁶²

How they may overthrow the chastest Dame,
Whose Beautie is the White whereat they aime⁶³

and proportional,

Being Scorpions bred in Adams mud,⁶⁴

Come like the morning Sunne new out of bed⁶⁵

[Men] doe like vipers deface the wombs wherein they
were bred,"⁶⁶

like unto a Bird that wants a wing,
And cannot flie, but warbles forth her paine:⁶⁷

Of significance, in reference to Lanyer, is Tasso's discussion of *metafora continuata* -- the extended metaphor -- in "Allegoria." Allegory, claims Tasso, is nothing more or less than the combination and extension of metaphors and is the soul of heroic poetry, as it concerns itself with inner essences understood only by the *cognoscenti*.⁶⁸ It is through allegory that the "epic truth," the epic's true *favola* unfolds.

The allegory of Lanyer's epic, most notably explored by Lynette McGrath in "Metaphoric Subversions: Feasts and Mirrours in *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*," is an intricate tapestry, woven in

the code of metaphor that allowed an interrogation of "the male ideology which invoked religion as a justification to silence women, bringing it into reluctant dialogue with [Lanyer's] challenging point of view." "The rhetorical device of metaphor," McGrath continues, "provides a strategy which reinforces Lanier's radical project to construct poetically within a female community a sense of self that subverts the public construction for women of an image not their own."⁶⁹ The two interwoven "metaphoric webs" upon which Lanyer plaits her subversive code are "embedded in the sacramental and didactic codes of medieval and Renaissance Christianity,"⁷⁰ yet serve Lanyer's purpose, undermining the "patriarchal sexual economy" described by Luce Irigaray in *This Sex Which is Not One*, wherein woman is defined as both the condition and the passive object of gendered rhetorical exchange,⁷¹ because Lanyer has excluded men from the exchange. The exchanges taking place in *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*, the reflections and the communions, do so between active mirror images, which reflect and become one another at the same time they refract and regard one another:

According to Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the metaphor is a figure of condensation and concealment, compressing terms on the basis of overt similarities, while other more threatening similarities remain covert. Metaphor relies on a relation of two terms, one of which represents while covering over or silencing another.⁷²

Lanyer has, McGrath suggests, reclothed Eve, who is the heroine of the *Salve Deus's* *favola* at the same time she is the *favola* itself:

And this great Lady I have here attired,

In all her richest ornaments of Honour,
That you faire Queene, of all the world admired,
May take the more delight to look upon her:
For she must entertaine you to this Feast,
To which your Highness is the welcom'st guest.⁷³

And as McGrath further notes, Lanyer does the same with Christ, who is the hero of her acceptable and appropriate scriptural narration:

For here I have prepared my Paschal Lambe,
The figure of that living Sacrifice
Who dying all th'Infernal 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.⁷⁴

It is through the generative power of metaphor that Eve, Christ, Lanyer's book, and so Lanyer herself, merge into Lanyer's "Glasse," wherein Queen Anne may see reflected a reconstructed vision of Eve, the deconstructed essence of herself.

In like manner, notes McGrath, Lanyer "exploits an association of the image of a spiritual feast with feminine nurturance to connect her role as poet-priest[ess] with the didactic and saving role of Christ".⁷⁵ Through the extended metaphor of the feast, Lanyer validates

her own role as provider of spiritual poetic food, and to substantiate this role as appropriate for women.... She revises the traditional representation of Eve as the progenitor of evil, justifying Eve's actions through the same metaphor of feeding that she uses to justify her own.... Eve has been vilified for disobeying the divine prohibition against knowledge, and women like Lanier have been held guilty of the same crimes of disobedience and immodesty for not heeding the Renaissance prohibition against women's writing and publication.⁷⁶

Eve and, by reflection and refraction, Lanyer, Queen Anne, "all vertuous Ladies in general," guilty only of beneficence and

nourishment, have been unjustly accused, censured by the patriarchy, and misrepresented by men. Through the use of *metafora continuata* such as her glass, Lanyer creates the *favola* that Tasso requires for the presentation of epic truth.

Equally important as the concept of Tasso's *metafora continuata* to a discussion of the *Salve Deus'* epic nature is his discussion of words as images of images in carefully selected figures, for it is Lanyer's repeated use of the rhetorical figure *antistasis* that creates the reticulation of metaphor from which her *favola* arises. Tasso holds that the quality of a poet's words derives from the magnitude of his subject and the power of his ideas, that an illustrious idea inhering in an illustrious subject will produce the illustrious diction required of an epic. Words themselves, singularly or in combination, that carry significant and complex meanings, comprise the body of rhetorical figures which a poet may multiply infinitely, as recommended by Cicero, interlacing them to create the whole of his *favola*, as long as the appropriate genres or the appropriate combination of genres -- truncated, elevated, ornate, or grave -- are used.⁷⁷

Lanyer's continuous employment of *antistasis*, the shifting of meaning in words as they are repeated, serves to tightly weave her text and subtext into the unified plot required by Tasso. She introduces the figure in her first stanza, manipulating the word "grace," used 110 times in the *Salve Deus*:

Renowned Empresse, and great Britaines Queene,

Most gratious Mother of succeeding Kings;
 Vouchsafe to view that which is seldome seene;
 A Woman's writing of divinest things:
 Reade it faire Queene, though it defective be,
 Your Excellence can grace both It and Mee,⁷⁸
 (my emphasis)

in subtle juxtaposition with the adjective "gratious," which means any number of things: kind, warm, merciful, compassionate fortunate, prosperous, or elegant, in line two and the verb "grace," which can mean to bestow honor, favor, beauty, elegance or charm, in line six.

Three stanzas later, Lanyer picks up the "grace" thread again in line twenty-eight, using it as a verb, and introduces the thread of "virtue" (and its many meanings), which appears seventy-nine times in *Salve Deus*, nominatively, as one of the three theological virtues:

From your bright spheare of greatnes where you sit,
 Reflecting light to all those glorious stars
 That wait upon your Throane; To virtue yet
 Vouchsafe that splendor which my meannesse bars:
 Be like faire *Phoebe*, who doth love to Grace
 The darkest night with her most beauteous face.⁷⁹
 (my emphasis)

She continues interlacing the skeins of both "grace" and "virtue" in the next two stanzas, wherein she also initiates her use of the mirror metaphor, which surfaces at least twelve times in the poem:

Apollo's beames doe comfort every creature,
 And shines upon the meanest things that be;
 Since in Estate and Virtuee 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.

Looke in this Mirroure of a worthy Mind,
 Where some of your faire Virtues will appeare;
 Though all it is impossible to find,

Unlesse my Glasse were chrystall, or more cleare:⁸⁰
(my emphasis)

The invitations to Lanyer's feast begin in stanza fourteen:

And this great Lady I have here attired,
In all her richest ornaments of Honour,
That you faire Queene, of all the world admired,
May take the more delight to looke upon her:
 For she must entertaine you to this Feast
 To which your Highnesse is the welcom'st guest.⁸¹
(my emphasis)

and end with the eternal female communion at a desolate Cooke-ham,
immortalized in Lanyer's book:

The house cast off each garment that might grace it,
Putting on Dust and Cobwebs to deface it.
All desolation then there did appeare,
When you were going whom they held so deare.
This last farewell to Cooke-ham here I give,
When I am dead thy name in this may live,
Wherein I have perform'd her noble hest,
Whose virtues lodge in my unworthy breast,
And ever shall, so long as life remaines,
Tying my heart to her by those rich chaines.⁸²
(my emphasis)

It is significant that "grace," appearing ten times in
"Description of Cooke-ham," and "virtue" five, end Lanyer's fable.
As the meanings of these words (*grace*, *virtue*, *Mirroure*, *glasse*,
and *comfort*, which appears twenty times) shift, the emphasis of
Lanyer's interpretations of Genesis and the passion of Christ also
shift, becoming the allegory, through the use of rhetorical
figures, that arises from the power of Lanyer's rather earth-
shaking ideology: Women are virtuous and full of grace, favored
and honored by God, and so should recognize and respect the divine
in each other. Notwithstanding the constraints of the reigning
patriarchal hegemony, which prohibited the likes of Lanyer from
doing what Lanyer did, women should, since they cannot influence

"evill disposed men," partaking in her feminine Eucharist and gaining therefrom a magnificent apperception⁸³ and interdependence, immortalize each other.

Another trope she uses with success is *metastasis*, moving rapidly, as "Salve Deus" begins, from the serenity of Cooke-ham to Armageddon. "And pardon (Madame)" Lanyer apologizes, "though I do not write"

Those praisefull lines of that delightful place,
As you commaunded me in that faire night,
When shining Phoebe gave so great a grace,
Presenting Paradice to your sweet sight,
Unfolding all the beauty of her face
 With pleasant groves, hills, walks and stately trees,
 Which pleasures with retired minds agrees.⁸⁴

The moonlit Edenic vista Lanyer describes is soon replaced by a vision of an angry God and the end of the world:

He of the watry Cloudes his Chariot frames,
And makes his blessed Angels powrefull Spirits,
Rewarding all according to their merits;
The Righteous for an heritage he claimes,
And registers the wrongs of humble spirits:
 Hills melt like wax, in presence of the Lord,
 So do all sinners, in his sight abhorr'd.

He in the waters laies his chamber beames,
And cloudes of darkenesse compasse him about,
Consuming fire shall goe before in streames,
And burne up all his en'mies round about:⁸⁵

Once again, it is obvious that Lanyer has achieved mastery of the rhetorical figures Tasso requires in *elecutio*, as she has mastered the elements of *inventio* and *dispositio*. Without violating the oft-repeated scripturally based injunctions about women leaving their prescribed writing places, Lanyer has quietly appropriated an historically male genre, the epic, closely followed the formula prescribed by "the most significant theorist

and practitioner of allegorical epic in the Italian Renaissance,"⁸⁶ and presented perceptions therein that directly confront accepted, practiced, and dominant Renaissance discourse. Staying within the rhetorical confines dictated by the existing discourse community, Lanyer suggests rather vociferously that women have other places in which to achieve their perfections, one of which is at the writing desk, where Lanyer put together her epic portfolio assuring the reigning female *literati*, in fact, "That [she] Would Compare with Any Man."

Notes

- ¹ Lewalski Writing Women 214.
- ² Forman .
- ³ Treip, Mindele Anne. *Allegorical Poets & the Epic: The Renaissance Tradition to Paradise Lost*. (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1994) 53.
- ⁴ Treip 272.
- ⁵ Lea and Gang 67.
- ⁶ Treip 273-4.
- ⁷ Treip 274.
- ⁸ Tasso's work synthesizes, and, on occasion, reinterprets, poetic and rhetorical maxims from Aristotle's *Poetics*, Horace's *Ars Poetica*, Plato's *Sophist*, Cicero's *Oratorio*, and from his Italian contemporaries, most notably Castlevetro's *Poetica d'Aristotle Vulgarizzata et Sposta*, published in 1570 and 1576.
- ⁹ Treip 108.
- ¹⁰ Tasso 489-655.
- ¹¹ Matt. 27.19.
- ¹² "Salve Deus" 848.
- ¹³ Tasso 524.
- ¹⁴ Tasso .
- ¹⁵ "Salve Deus" 825.
- ¹⁶ "Salve Deus" 831-2.
- ¹⁷ "Salve Deus" 185.
- ¹⁸ "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 109.
- ¹⁹ "Salve Deus" 34.
- ²⁰ "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 59.
- ²¹ "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 68.
- ²² Tasso? (102-106).
- ²³ Tasso 404.
- ²⁴ Tasso 574.
- ²⁵ Tasso 562-8.
- ²⁶ Tasso 568-70. Tasso slightly alters Aristotle's requirement, dispensing with his beginning-middle-end chronology: "It should have for its subject a single action, whole and complete, with a beginning, a middle, and an end" (*Poetics* XXIII).
- ²⁷ Tasso 572. This discussion of proportion seems to be taken directly from Aristotle: "Again, a beautiful object, whether it be a living organism or any whole composed of parts, must not only have an orderly arrangement of parts, but must also be of a certain magnitude; for beauty depends on magnitude and order. Hence a very small animal organism cannot be beautiful; for the view of it is confused, the object being seen in an almost imperceptible moment of time. Nor, again, can one of vast size be beautiful; for as the eye cannot take it all in at once, the unity and sense of the whole is lost for the spectator; as for instance if there were one a thousand miles long. As,

therefore, in the case of animate bodies and organisms a certain magnitude is necessary, and a magnitude which may be easily embraced in one view; so in the plot, a certain length is necessary, and a length which can be easily embraced by the memory" (*Poetics* VII).

²⁸ Tasso 570-2. Again, Tasso seems to have borrowed from Aristotle: "And to define the matter roughly, we may say that the proper magnitude is comprised within such limits, that the sequence of events, according to the law of probability or necessity, will admit of a change from bad fortune to good, or from good fortune to bad" (*Poetics* VII).

²⁹ Tasso 573-89. Plato's version of "unity of plot" is slightly different from Tasso's, but the difference seems to be one of semantics. A single action, for Aristotle, is Odysseus' attempt to return home; for Tasso, each adventure would be an action: "As therefore, in the other imitative arts, the imitation is one when the object imitated is one, so the plot, being an imitation of an action, must imitate one action and that a whole, the structural union of the parts being such that, if any one of them is displaced or removed, the whole will be disjointed and disturbed. For a thing whose presence or absence makes no visible difference, is not an organic part of the whole" (*Poetics* VIII).

³⁰ Travitsky, *The Paradise of Women*. (N.Y.: Columbia University Press, 1981), 97. See also Aristotle: "Plots are either Simple or Complex, for the actions in real life, of which the plots are an imitation, obviously show a similar distinction. An action which is one and continuous in the sense above defined, I call Simple, when the change of fortune takes place without Reversal of the Situation and without Recognition. A Complex action is one in which the change is accompanied by such Reversal, or by Recognition, or by both. These last should arise from the internal structure of the plot, so that what follows should be the necessary or probable result of the preceding action. It makes all the difference whether any given event is a case of *propter hoc* or *post hoc*" (*Poetics* X).

³¹ "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 37.

³² "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 73.

³³ McGrath 102.

³⁴ McGrath 102.

³⁵ See Aristotle: "A Complex action is one in which the change is accompanied by such Reversal, or by Recognition, or by both" (*Poetics* X). "Recognition, as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing love or hate between the persons" (*Poetics* XI).

³⁶ Treip 138.

³⁷ Treip 109.

³⁸ Treip 110.

³⁹ Treip 134-7.

⁴⁰ *Gerusalemme Liberata* 144.

⁴¹ Tasso 625-630.

⁴² Tasso 629-30.

⁴³ "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 6.

⁴⁴ "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 6-33.

⁴⁵ "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 36.

⁴⁶ "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 127.

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- 47 "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 127.
48 "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" 22-91.
49 Susan Bertie 46.
50 "The Author's Dream to the Ladie *Marie*" 156.
51 "The Author's Dream to the Ladie *Marie*" 220.
52 Tasso 629.
53 Tasso 629.
54 "To the Ladie Katherine Countess of Suffolke" 42.
55 "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 36.
56 Tasso 635.
57 "Salve Deus" 425.
58 "Salve Deus" 429.
59 "Salve Deus" 437.
60 "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 2.
61 "To the Lady Elizabeth's Grace" 7.
62 "Salve Deus" 57.
63 "Salve Deus" 208.
64 "Salve Deus" 67.
65 "To the Ladie Arbella 8.
66 "To all vertuous Readers" 23.
67 "To the Queens most Excellent Majestie" 105.
68 Lawrence F Rhu. *The Genesis of Tasso's Narrative Theory: English Translations of the Early Poetics and a Comparative Study of Their Significance*. (Detroit: Wayne State University, 1993) 155.
69 McGrath 102.
70 McGrath 102.
71 Luce Irigaray 170-97.
72 McGrath 103.
73 "To the queenes most Excellent Majestie" 84.
74 "To the queenes most Excellent Majestie" 90.
75 McGrath 104.
76 McGrath 105.
77 Tasso 641-7.
78 "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 6.
79 "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 30.
80 "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 40.
81 "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 84.
82 "The Description of Cooke-ham" 210.
83 Conscious perception with full awareness.
84 "The Description of Cooke-ham" 24.
85 "The Description of Cooke-ham" 100.
86 Treip 53.