

## Chapter Two What's a Girl to Do?

### Allegorical Transsexuals

When England's first female monarch, Mary Tudor, ascended the throne, an anxious Parliament met in order to legally clarify her gender. The problem was curious. Since William the Conqueror, England had been ruled by Kings, by virtue of their anatomy and of their portrayal in both the *body politique* and *body naturale*, male. The late Edward's counselors worried about Mary's ability, as a woman, to command the respect of her subjects and of her enemies, those who might not

think that her Highness could nor should have enjoy and use such like royal authority power pre-eminence prerogative and jurisdiction, nor privilege of the same, nor correct and punish offenders against her most royal person and the regality and dignity of the crown of this realm and the dominions thereof, as the kings of this realm her most noble progenitors have heretofore done enjoyed used and exercised.<sup>1</sup>

In 1554, by the Act Concerning Regal Power -- "an act declaring that the regal power of this realm is in the Queen's Majesty as fully and absolutely as ever it was in any of her most noble progenitors Kings of this realm"<sup>2</sup> -- Mary's first parliament invested the office of Queen with the powers of King.

But the House of Lords foresaw another problem, that of uxorial obedience. As a woman, England's sovereign, was

"commanded to be under obedience," forbidden "to usurp authority over man" by holy writ,<sup>3</sup> "for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body."<sup>4</sup> When she married, which an anointed head of state must do in order to produce a legitimate heir, Queen Mary, and so the monarchy, would by Scriptural edict be in the hands of her sovereign husband. Especially concerned about the likelihood of a marriage to Philip of Spain and the possible religious consequences, to preclude the eventuality of a Papist coup, Parliament in effect decreed that the queen was of two bodies, a male *body politique* and a female *body naturale*.<sup>5</sup> With this Parliamentary dispensation freeing her from her biological gender, Mary was optimistically given the right to rule as a man.

Shortly after Elizabeth's coronation, the gender problem again confronted Parliament. The Supremacy Act of 1533 ordained King Henry VIII "head" of the English church. Because Catholic Queen Mary had refused to accept such a heretic distinction, the exigency, moot, had not been addressed specifically in the Act of 1554. But "as a woman by birthe and nature," argued Nicholas Heath, Archbishop of York, Elizabeth could not be the "head" of a marriage, the church, or anything else. While he acknowledged that she was, by the appointment of God, "our sovaraigne lord and ladie, our kinge and quene, our emperor and empress," the

head of the church, as representative of Christ, was by nature male. For that reason, in the Supremacy Act of 1559, Elizabeth was named "governess" and not "head" of the English church. Marie Axton suggests that "by 1561," it was again

necessary to endow the queen with two bodies: a *body natural* and a *body politic* . . . . The body politic was supposed to be *contained within the natural body of the Queen* . . . . The Queen's natural body was subject to infancy, infirmity, error and old age; her body politic, created out of a combination of faith, ingenuity and practical expediency, was held to be unerring and immortal.<sup>6</sup>

Not indifferent to the prevailing winds, the virgin Queen managed to equivocate about her gender and to maintain the deference of her male subjects for forty-five years. Carole Levine observes that Elizabeth both fostered and exploited the notion of her two bodies, for

If a kingly body politic could be incorporated into a natural female body -- her natural self -- how much more natural right Elizabeth had to rule, and to rule alone.<sup>7</sup>

Levin cites numerous instances in which Elizabeth refers to herself as "prince" or "king," or to her behaviour as "kingly." Most notable for this study is the queen's speech at Tilbury, in which she claimed,

I know *I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king*, and of a king of England, too, and think foul scorn that Parma or Spain, or any prince of Europe should dare invade the borders of my realm; to which, rather than any Dishonour shall grow by me, I myself will take up Arms, I myself will be your *General*.<sup>8</sup>  
(my emphasis)

The problem Emilia Lanyer confronts when writing *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* is most evident in this stirring "heart and stomach of a king" speech. It may be described as one of *allegoric transsexualism*. Both of England's female queens, accepting what Tabeaux and Lay have called "the entrenched theological and social prejudice against women," perform in their positions of power as men rather than as women. Mary unhesitatingly accepts the House of Lords proclamation, so acknowledging the validity of *potestas patria*. Several outspoken critics of female rule published virulent treatises maligning Mary Tudor. Thomas Becon and John Knox are the most notable. In 1554 Becon chastised God:

Thou has set to rule over us a woman, whom Nature hath formed to be in subjection unto man, and whom thou by thine holy apostle commandest to keep silence and not to speak in the congregation. Ah, Lord! To take away the empire from a man, and to give it to a woman, seemeth to be an evident token of thine anger toward Englishmen.<sup>9</sup>

A few years later, Knox sounded the *First Blast of the Trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women*, arguing

that where women reigne or be in authoritie, that there must nedes vanitie be preferred to vertue, ambition and pride to temperancie and modestie, and finallie, that auarice the mother of all mischefe must nedes deuour equitie and *Aristotle's iustice*.<sup>10</sup>

But unlike her successor, Mary rules with scant self-reference to her gender.

Perhaps because Elizabeth was more astute than her half-sister, or perhaps because in the aftermath of her Mary's

rule, gender was more of an issue, the Virgin Queen frequently draws attention to her sex and her ability to allegorically alter it. When necessary, she becomes a mutant, a female aspect with a male essence, accepting in effect Aristotle's claim in *The History of Animals* that the female is a defective male, whose full development was crippled in the womb<sup>11</sup> and his belief that women possess virtue only as those who are subject, in contrast to men, who possess it as a figures of authority.<sup>12</sup> Her proviso, "*I have the body of a weak and feeble woman*" further implies that Elizabeth accepts also Thomas Aquinas's explanation of Aristotle's assessment and the patriarchy's approval of it:

Cuius ratio est quia propter molliciem. Nature ratio eius infirmiter inheret consiliatis, sed cito ab eis removet propter passiones aliquas.<sup>13</sup>

*The reason for this is the softness. By nature her reason inheres weakly, but it leaves her immediately when she is passionate.*

Because Elizabeth, as a woman, cannot function outside the hierarchy in which she holds a position inferior to that of man, the queen becomes the mannish woman Philip Stubb's describes in his *Anatomy of Abuses*, one of the "hermaphroditi, that is monsters of both kindes, halfe women, halfe men."<sup>14</sup>

These attitudes of queens to their *substances* reflects conventional wisdom of the day, namely, that women in their very natures were inferior, incapable of strength, of

courage, of wisdom. Women, by law and by custom, were not only physically different from men, but they were *characteristically* different from men. Born subject and silent, they were genetically predisposed to appreciate, rather than to be, heroes. The notable exceptions in contemporary British history, Queens Mary and Elizabeth, redefined by the House of Lords and and their discourse communities in their capacities to be heroes, were monsters, political transsexuals on the throne. As women, their performances in office said, they could not be valorous.

Christianized by church fathers, Aristotle's view of womankind governed Tudor/Jacobean thought. If women possessed "virtue" only in their silence and subjection, how then could Lanyer, a woman, write an epic -- a history of heroic virtue, about women?

Lanyer did not equivocate about her gender, nor did she rhetorically attempt to alter it. From line four of her opus, wherein she acknowledges the extraordinary nature of her business, until its last lines, in which she immortalizes the heroic virtues of women in the female body of Margaret Russell Clifford, Lanyer remains a woman writing with "the heart and stomach" of a woman about the hearts and stomachs of all women. In the intervening three thousand lines, she has defined the "virtue" of women, not merely as derivations of manly goodness or male valor, not as a function of

allegorical transsexualism, but by celebrating the excellence and courage *inherent* in the female gender. She disregards two thousand years of male doctrine, offering her female readers an image of woman, whole and entire, not defectively male, but a refined product of Adam's rib.

With the introduction of a "mirroure" metaphor in her first dedication, Lanyer asks the queen consort and, by extension, the community of women, to "Looke in this Mirroure of a worthy Mind," wherein she catalogues some, but not all, of womankind's "faire Virtues."<sup>15</sup> Referring four times in the opening of her work to this truthful reflection, her "little Booke," a "glasse" of "dim steele,"<sup>16</sup> Lanyer asks womankind to consider an array of feminine virtues that Anna, as representative of her sex, embodies: "the Naturall, the Morall, and Divine."<sup>17</sup> "Bright Bellona's" entry into "The Author's Dream," majestic in a fiery chariot, infuses womankind not only with "wisdome" but all the warlike attributes associated with male heroes as well. The gathered women emulate the war-goddess, says Lanyer, as "all humours unto hers did frame."<sup>18</sup>

Lanyer's education, her association with the feminine court coterie, and allusions in her work indicating that she was familiar with the works of Sir Philip Sidney, suggest that she probably had read "The Defense of Poesy," published in 1595.<sup>19</sup> According to Sidney, providing models of heroic

excellence is the poet's task, for it is only through poetry that the "learned . . . them that are already taught," may be instructed in the ways of moral perfection without offense or tedium. Wrapped in allegory of the past, the poet may present tales filled with honest exemplars to beguile the reader into the extraction of moral education. That moral education, claims Sidney, is the poet's aim. The poet, he explains,

pretending no more, doth intend the winning of the mind from wickedness to virtue: even as the child is often brought to take most wholesome things by hiding them in such other as have a pleasant taste: which, if one should begin to tell them the nature of the aloes or rhubarbarum they should receive, would sooner take their physic at their ears than at their mouth. So is it in men (most of which are childish in the best things, till they be cradled in their graves): glad they will be to hear the tales of Hercules, Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas; and, hearing them, must needs hear the right description of wisdom, valure, and justice; which, if they had been barely, that is to say philosophically, set out, they would swear they be brought to school again.<sup>20</sup>

In the "Defense," Sidney, examining the heroes of classic composition, determines how the poet defines "heroic virtue" through example:

If the poet do his part aright, he will shew you in Tantalus, Atreus, and such like...in Cyrus, Aeneas, Ulysses, each thing to be followed . . . .<sup>21</sup>

It is, indeed, the poet's duty to provide beautiful illustrations of the "heroical," men above reproach, whose greatness of soul not only inspires, but precludes criticism. "There rests the heroical, whose very name"

. . . should daunt all backbiters; for by what conceit can a tongue be directed to speak evil of that which draweth with him no less champions then Achilles, Cyrus, Aeneas, Turnus, Tydeus, Rinaldo? Who doth not only teach and move to a truth, but teacheth and moveth to the most high and excellent truth; who maketh magnanimity and justice shine through all misty fearfulness and foggy desires; who, if the saying of Plato and Tully be true, that who could see Virtue would be wonderfully ravished with the love of her beauty -- this man setteth her out to make her more lovely in her holiday apparal to the eye of any that will deign not to disdain until they understand.<sup>22</sup>

Lanyer's dilemma, and the dilemma of "all virtuous Ladies in general," is that male poets have not provided exemplars of female heroism. The classic tales instruct men in the ways of magnanimity, but they instruct women in the ways of pettiness, praising and dispraising them only in terms of physical beauty, submission, and chastity. It mattered to Virgil that Helen's beauty sank a thousand ships. It mattered to Shakespeare and to Heywood that Lucrece maintained her honor by committing suicide.<sup>23</sup> It mattered to Shakespeare that Cleopatra's beauty and ill-placed lust for power destroyed two great men. But neither the bravery nor wit of women so mentioned in the classics is hidden in ill-chosen, male-defined feminine "holiday apparal." Those ancient tales of male heroism used to teach not only moral lessons, but also the more mundane necessities of aristocratic life, such as Latin and Greek and composition, constituted a repetitive barrage of misogyny. Educated Renaissance women, exposed since childhood to the treachery

and abnegation of literature's female characters, would have been hard-pressed to resist assimilation of self-loathing or to develop accurate and resilient self images. They are taught that power belongs to men, that female assumption of it is evil, dangerous, and unbecoming. Further, they are taught through female representations in the classics that total self-denial is proper feminine demeanor. Women are held, and hold themselves, to behavioral standards set by long-suffering Griselda and dead Lucrece. Heroic virtue, historically, does not belong to them. It is quite interesting, nonetheless, that Sidney personifies Virtue as feminine, a beauty to *ravish* men, so structuring the very relationship with Virtue as a male relationship characterized by enchantment and violence. Lanyer's dilemma, the dilemma of "all virtuous Ladies in general," is then, the dilemma of absent role-models.

One of Lanyer's tasks, as self-consciously female poet consciously writing the history of female heroism, is to exhume the body of womankind, to bathe it in a feminine version of the truth, to attire it in nobility, and so to "teach and move" women "to a truth" -- "the most high and excellent truth" -- about the "magnanimity and justice" of their sex.<sup>24</sup> She follows Sidney's instructions carefully, dressing Eve, the first woman, in "all her richest ornaments of Honour,"<sup>25</sup> so that she may "entertaine" her readers to

their lessons, and she authors images of the female hero as great male poets of the past have authored images of the male hero:

For as the image of each action stirreth and  
instructeth the mind, so the lofty image of such  
worthies most enflameth the mind with desire to be  
worthy, and enforms with counsail how to be worthy.  
Only let Aeneas be worn in the tablet of your  
memory . . . .<sup>26</sup>

In her female Eden, Lanyer presents worthies such as Juno, Pallas, and Venus to "enflameth" the minds of her fememine audience "with desire to be worthy." Lanyer not only presents classical images of female heroism to compare with the masculine images of heroic conduct Sidney suggests,

how he governeth himself in the ruin of his  
country, in the preserving his old father, and  
carrying away his religious ceremonies, in  
obeying God's comandment to leave Dido, though  
not only all passionate kindness, but even the  
humane consideration of virtuous gratefulness,  
would have craved other of him;<sup>27</sup>

but beginning with Eve, she presents Scriptural paradigms after which women may fashion themselves, imagining the Scythian women who conquered Darius; Deborah, who "judged Israel"; and Judith, who slew Holofernes.<sup>28</sup> Going one step further than Sidney, she incorporates references to contemporary heroic women in images of the late Queen Elizabeth, reigning Queen Anna, her dedicatees, and, significantly, herself. As Virgil uses the behavior of Aeneas in a myriad of trying situations,

how in storms, how in sports, how in war, how  
in peace, how a fugitive, how victorious, how  
beseiged, how beseiging, how to strangers, how

to allies, how to enemies, how to his own,  
lastly, how in his inward self, and how in his  
outward government, and . . . in a mind most  
prejudiced with prejudicating humor, he will be  
found in excellency fruitful . . . ,<sup>29</sup>

so Lanyer uses the actions of her catalogue of women in  
sundry moments of difficulty: Eve in the garden; Art and  
Nature arguing at the spring; valiant women of Scripture who  
conquer male oppressors; pious women who participate in  
Christ's suffering, death, and subsequent victory over sin;  
Margaret Russell Clifford in her lawsuit; Mary Sidney in her  
authorship. In her dedication "To the Ladie Katherine  
Countess of Suffolk," Lanyer clearly states the purpose of  
the characters she has chosen, advising her dedicatee to let  
her daughters read about "those Ladies which do represent /  
All beauty, wisdom, zeale, and love," and so to "feede"  
upon the "heavenly food" of Christ, the reward of all  
Christian heroes.<sup>30</sup>

The virtues in which Lanyer clothes Queen Anna, "the  
Naturall, the Morall, and Divine," and the catalogue of  
virtues Lanyer attributes to Christ in her dedication to  
Katherine Knevet Rich -- "zeale," "grace," "love," "pietie,"  
"constancie," "faith," "faire obedience," "valour,"  
"patience," and sobrietie," "chaste behavior," "meekness,"  
"continence," "justice," "mercie," "bountie," and "charitie" -  
- are the qualities of the epic hero, the "heroic" virtues

attributed by Sidney and his literary contemporaries to the heroes of traditional epics.<sup>31</sup>

Lanyer asks Lady Rich and her female readership, "Who can compare with [Christ's] divinitie?"<sup>32</sup> as, throughout her work, she skillfully equates women, by attributing those same merits to her dedicatees and those women they represent, with the sanctioned hero of her epic, Christ. Thus, Lanyer expands the contemporary understanding of female "virtue" beyond its Renaissance meanings of "obedient," "chaste" and "silent," creating through juxtaposition of image and metaphor, a larger, more comprehending model of woman's character. Lynette McGrath, calling Lanyer's work a performance of "hieratic rites of female incantation," correctly notes that the feminist intent of *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* unfolds behind a screen of "appropriately feminine use of Christian praise."<sup>33</sup> Within the forty-two lines Lanyer writes *before* she announces her sacred Christian topic to Queen Anna, she introduces fifteen pagan dieties and refers to the apotheosized late Queen Elisabeth, all of whom she employs to extol the virtues of her intended patron. In fact, Lanyer apports only three stanzas -- eighteen lines -- to Christ, the "appropriate" subject of her poem. She devotes the remainder of her opening statement -- a total of one hundred and forty-four lines out of one hundred and sixty-two lines -- to the announcement of the true subject of

her work, heroic virtue in the community of women. Using Christ, the Paschal lamb prepared by Lanyer and served by her feast's hostess, Eve, as a vehicle for the sanctification and glorification of womankind, Lanyer elevates her gender --

*That we with him t'Eternitie might rise:  
This pretious Passeover feed upon, O Queene,  
Let your faire Virtues in my Glasse be seene.      90  
(emphasis mine)*

It is in this way that the "female incantation" emanating from Lanyer's refracted discourse of public and dominant doctrine circumvents the limited language in which women were permitted to communicate and the limited ways in which they were permitted to see themselves. Reflected in Lanyer's "glasse" -- her "little Booke" -- is the female "self-definition to which she urges herself and the members of her feminine community."<sup>34</sup>

Having discovered for her readers the heroic virtues inherent in women, Lanyer by inference and by report catalogues their performance of heroic deeds, opening with a reference to heroic Elizabeth I, in her persona of *Cynthia*, warrior goddess of the moon, who already abides in the isle of the blest -- "crown'd with everlasting Sov'raigntie; / Where Saints and Angells do attend her Throne," yet who, in the dedication to the princess Elizabeth, rises again, "the *Phoenix* of her age," by conflation, in the body of the reigning queen's daughter. Numerous references to the late Elizabeth, in her various *personae* throughout the work,

praise her as warrior; protector; mentor; and, like Christ, a nurturer, the hope and comfort of the downtrodden.

Elizabeth, like Eve, is an archetypal paradigm, a recurrent reflection in Lanyer's glass, a goal and a standard for woman's fulfillment.

So is Margaret Russell Clifford. Since the late queen's glory is already known and beyond mortal expression, announces the poet, she will record the "never dying fame" of the Countess of Cumberland, whose piety and zeale have withstood the continual attacks of Satan.<sup>35</sup> She extols Clifford as Christ's faithful bride, the husband from whom she "shalt never be estrang'd," and assures her hoped-for patron that her heroism -- her "patience, faith, long suffring, and . . . love" will be rewarded.<sup>36</sup>

Lanyer, like Sidney, genders Virtue, but unlike Sidney's beguiling and violent characterization of a Virtue that ravishes, Lanyer's female personification is the true bride of Christ, who is Virtue, and so is also Christ, the bridegroom.<sup>37</sup> Lanyer's collapse of female Virtue into the historically male Christ in the opening stanzas of "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" prefigures the voluptuous gender transposition of Christ in "Salve Deus," wherein the son of God becomes, by conflation, both seductive bridegroom celebrated in *Songs of Solomon* 5 and bride celebrated in *Songs of Solomon* 4. This androgynous picture of Christ

allows Lanyer to position God in the mirror of her poem, not as Saint Paul's patriarchal agent of misogyny, but as the feminized reflection of a woman's soul.

In the Old Testament, the descriptions of King Solomon and the rose of Sharon, presented almost in the form of a dialogue, are distinct. Attributing the effusions of both lovers to the figure of Christ, Lanyer illustrates the Scripturally male savior with both male and female attributes:

Bridegroome that appeares so faire,  
So sweet, so lovely in his Spouses sight,  
That unto Snowe we may his face compare,  
His cheekes like skarlet, and his eyes so bright  
As purest Doves that in the rivers are,<sup>38</sup>

She begins with an androgynous compliment, one used in Songs to describe both bride and bridegroom: *Your eyes behind your veil are doves*, Solomon tells his Lebanese bride in Songs four,<sup>39</sup> who, in Songs five, then describes Solomon's eyes to the daughters of Jerusalem: they "are like doves by the water streams."<sup>40</sup> Lanyer does not totally emasculate her hero, however. As the bridegroom's eyes are "washed in milk, mounted like jewels,"<sup>41</sup> Lanyer washes Christ's eyes "with milke, to give the more delight."<sup>42</sup> Like Solomon's head, which "*is purest gold raven*,"<sup>43</sup> Christ's head "is likened to the finest gold."<sup>44</sup> Solomon's "hair is wavy and black as a raven"<sup>45</sup> while Lanyer's Christ has "curled lockes so beauteous to behold; / Blacke as a Raven in her blackest hew."<sup>46</sup>

Solomon's "*cheeks are like beds of spice yielding perfume.*"<sup>47</sup>  
Christ's "*cheekes are beds of spices, flowers sweet,*"<sup>48</sup> and,  
as Israel's earthly king's lips "*are like lilies dripping  
with myrrh,*"<sup>49</sup> so are Christ's "*lips, like Lillies, dropping  
downe pure mirrhe.*"<sup>50</sup>

Lanyer's Christ, nonetheless, does assume the features  
of the bride in the description of his mouth. The rose of  
Sharon's mouth is "*lovely; her lips are like a scarlet  
ribbon.*"<sup>51</sup> Solomon says to her, "*Your lips drop sweetness as  
the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your  
tongue.*"<sup>52</sup> Christ's lips, writes Lanyer, are "*like skarlet  
threeds, yet much more sweet / Than is the sweetest hony  
dropping dew, /Or hony combes, where all the Bees doe meet.*"<sup>53</sup>  
This feminine description of Christ's mouth, the mouth from  
which Christian virtue issues, is significant in that Lanyer  
immediately follows it with the pronouncement: "*his words  
are true.*"<sup>54</sup> The words of Christ, for Lanyer, the "*spiritual  
food*"<sup>55</sup> she provides at her feast, come from a feminized organ  
of speech.

That spiritual food, Lanyer affirms, is inherently  
feminine, for it is Christ who, like a mother, nurtures and  
comforts:

Tis He that dries all teares from Orphans eies,  
And heares from heav'n the wofull widdows cries.

Tis He that doth behold thy inward cares,  
And will regard the sorrowes of thy Soule....<sup>56</sup>

It is Christ who, like a mother, guides, protects, and encourages his children:

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:  
That when darke daies of terror shall appeare,  
Thou as the Sunne shalt shine; or much more cleare.<sup>57</sup>

Lanyer's androgynous portrait of Christ, a male embodiment of feminine Virtue, lover and beloved, so becomes the allegorical representation of the female hero -- beautiful, instructive, true, and nurturing.

In the dedication "To all vertuous Ladies in generall," Lanyer instructs womankind to

Annoynt [their] haire with Aarons pretious oyle,  
And bring [their] palmes of vict'ry in [their] hands,<sup>58</sup>

as Moses anointed his brother Aaron, the first priest of Israel. Lanyer enjoins her readers to "annoynt" themselves with "Aarons pretious oyle," requesting the community of women to rise up with "palmes of vict'ry" in their hands, not as veiled and silent communicants, but as sanctified priestesses. Inspired and accompanied by the Muses, the goddesses of the arts and learning, and by the Horae, goddesses of time and its divisions, they walk with, and as, Christ up the road to desolation *and salvation* at Calvary.

In the opening lines of this dedication, Lanyer clearly identifies "Virtue" as Eve, enjoining "all vertuous Ladies" to

Let this faire Queene not unattended bee,  
When in my Glasse she daines her selfe to see.

Eve, as the paradigm of female beauty in Lanyer's "glasse" and the hostess of Lanyer's feast, is to instruct the company -- "Let Virtue be your guide, for she alone / Can leade you right that you can never fall."<sup>59</sup> However, in the third stanza, Lanyer just as clearly identifies Virtue as Christ: "those perfit colours purest Virtue wore."<sup>60</sup>

Again, Lanyer surpasses Sidney's expectations for the poet of heroic verse by making her epic interactive. "Put on your wedding garments every one," she calls, inviting her female audience to put on the robes of Christ:<sup>61</sup>

The robes  
that Christ  
wore before  
his death.

Let all your robes be purple scarlet white,  
Those perfit colours purest Virtue wore,<sup>62</sup>

Not only will Lanyer's audience be guests, graciously entertained at her feast, they will be part of the entertainment, actors in the drama of the Passion and death of Christ, anointed priest/priestesses of the church, flower-decked chaste brides to Christ's robed bridegroom and enticing bridegrooms to Christ's bride:

Come deckt with Lillies that did so delight  
To be preferr'd in Beauty, farre before  
Wise Salomon in all his glory dight:  
Whose royall robes did no such pleasure yield,  
As did the beauteous Lilly of the field.<sup>63</sup>

In Lanyer's collapsed images, the guests become spiritual transvestites wearing both male and female attire. Dressed in the suffering garb of the Passion, "the robes Christ wore

before his death"<sup>64</sup> and adorned with lilies and Daphne's laurel crown, the image of "all vertuous ladies" fuses with that of the Savior. As they become one reflection in her "glasse," Lanyer has, literally, "transfigur'd all [vertuous Ladies] with our loving Lord."<sup>65</sup>

But the union of "all vertuous Ladies" and Christ, however sensuous, remains a chaste union because Lanyer has as well dressed us, her female readers, in Daphne's "token of Constancie," the symbol of our father's permission to remain virginal:

Adorne your temples with faire Daphnes crowne  
The never changing Laurel, alwaies greene;<sup>66</sup>

In token of  
Constancie

Lanyer's defiance against limiting, patriarchial definitions of women and womanhood does not cause her to deny all elements of those definitions. She strongly adheres throughout the *Salve Deus* to the belief that chastity is a requirement of virtue. Lanyer's conviction about its necessity, however, derives not from historically male reasoning that the unbridled carnality of women undermines an ordered universe; rather, her insistence upon chastity derives from a rational examination of societal and personal history. Simply put, women, in Lanyer's view, were better off without men.

Lanyer's own illicit liaison and subsequent marriage, and the marriages of several of her dedicatees, were

unsatisfying in varying degrees. Most of the unions were nonsexual by the time Lanyer wrote *Salve Deus*. Queen Anna was living at her own palace by 1607. Arbella Stuart was either in prison or on her way to prison for marrying William Seymour. Lucy Harington Russell seems to have had little congress with her husband, even in the earliest days of her marriage. Mary Sidney was a widow. Margaret Russell Clifford and her husband were famously estranged. Lanyer colors celibacy, a reality in her circle, with the hues of her particular beliefs that "evill disposed men"<sup>67</sup> are predators who abuse women: "men do seeke," she warns, "attempt, plot and devise, / How they may overthrow the chastest Dame . . . ,"<sup>68</sup> and that congress with them should be avoided for that reason. Her depictions of the communities of women at her Pierian spring and at Cooke-ham, the feminine Utopia described at the end of her work, sustain Lanyer's conviction that women not only do not need men, but that without men, women may "fore ever / dwell, in perfit unity."<sup>69</sup>

### Female Heroes

Lanyer begins her exposition of female heroism with a preliminary discussion of female beauty and its consequences for Helen, Lucrece, Octavia, Cleopatra, Rosamund, and Matilda. Rather than pride or lack of faith, she illustrates

the female hero's source of frailty as a physical attractiveness that betrays her, that challenges the male sex to assault feminine virtue. "Evile men," Paris, Sextus Tarquinius, Marc Antony, Henry II, and King John, rapacious in pursuit of corporeal charm, worked the downfall of these beautiful women. Even "Holy *Matilda*," who chose to "die with Honour, not to live in Shame," in the end, is ravished by her own physical beauty.<sup>70</sup>

It is, maintains Lanyer, spiritual beauty imbued by God's grace that defines and protects the female hero rather than physical beauty. Margaret Russell Clifford, for example, her marital position usurped by her husband's mistress and her estate embroiled in hereditary lawsuits, is beautified and beatified, and so raised above the world tainted with Adam and Judas' sins, heroic and radiant in the eyes of God and those who follow him, by virtue of the grace merited by her service to God. Clifford, gone "from the Court to the Countrie," has retired to the paradise of Cooke-ham, "Leaving the world, before the world"<sup>71</sup> leaves her. She,

. . . the wonder of our wanton age  
Leav'st all delights to serve a heav'nly King:  
Who is more wise? or who can be more sage,  
Than she that doth Affection subject bring;  
Not forcing for the world, or Satans rage,  
But shrowding under the Almightyes wing;  
    Spending her yeares, moneths, daies, minutes, howres,  
    In doing service to the heav'nly powres.<sup>72</sup>

Like heroic Matilda who "did scorne the base subjection,"  
resisting worldly inducements and so the advances of  
"lustfull King John,"<sup>73</sup> Clifford resists all earthly  
inducements, scorning the base subjection of a corrupt world,  
and so is recipient of God's grace:

*To the  
Ladie of  
Cumberland  
the Intro-  
duction to  
the passion  
of Christ*

This Grace great Lady, doth possesse thy Soule,  
And makes thee pleasing in thy Makers sight;  
This Grace doth all imperfect Thoughts controule,  
Directing thee to serve thy God aright;  
Still reckoning him, the Husband of thy Soule,  
Which is most pretious in his glorious sight:  
Because the Worlds delights shee doth denie  
For him, who for her sake vouchsaf'd to die.<sup>74</sup>

Withdrawn from court to Cooke-ham, Clifford is the rightful  
inheritor of the kingdom of God; she is "Dowager of all; /  
Nay more, Co-heire of that eternall blisse / That Angels  
lost, and We by Adams fall."<sup>75</sup>

Pilate's wife, who implores her spouse to spare Christ,  
cajoling him, telling him that sparing this innocent will  
prevent a moral triumph for women, begins Lanyer's catalogue of  
virtuous, heroic women.

Let not us Women glory in Mens fall  
Who had power given to over-rule us  
all.<sup>76</sup>

The Governor's "worthy wife," to no avail, petitions her  
husband to reconsider:

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 . . . .<sup>77</sup>

Her unheeded lament is followed by "Eves Apology," Lanyer's poetic argument in defense of the first woman and all of womankind.<sup>78</sup> It is the "daughters of Jerusalem," however, who,

By their pitious cries  
Did move their Lover and their King  
To take compassion, turne about, and speake  
To them whose hearts were ready now to breake,<sup>79</sup>

whom Lanyer in empathetic conflation ennobles to Sidney's "magnificence in particular" status. Accompanying Christ to Golgatha, their

. . . Faith and love unto such grace did clime,  
To have reflection from his Heav'nly Light.<sup>80</sup>

They, in their emotional identification, bear his suffering and cross. His mother, "Her griefes extreame, although but new begun,"<sup>81</sup> swooning and weeping, humbles herself, on her knees in the open street, washing her son's blood from the stones, so that it might not be trampled by passersby, and it is she, Christ's mother, who has been called by God's emissary "blessed among women." And it is she, the Virgin Mary, whose "Virtue's worth" the angel has proclaimed.<sup>82</sup>

Again, conflating the trials of Margaret Russell Clifford with those of the mother of Christ, Lanyer repositions her mentor, placing her in the procession to Calvary at the same time as a bride of Christ, to share in both Christ's "joyes and grieffe,"<sup>83</sup> as she, through the agency

of Lanyer's "booke," prepares to participate in her Saviour's noblest of acts, the giving of his life to save humanity.

The Countess of Cumberland, in fact, has undergone a total transfiguration. Faithful and constant, her beauty shines "brighter than the Sunne." Her honor is "more than ever Monarke gaind." Her wealth is greater than the wealth of "he that Kingdomes wonne."<sup>84</sup> By reason of her "faire virtues" -- "faith . . . prayers, his special grace" -- Margaret Russell Clifford is recipient of "a Spiritual powre," which enables her to "heale the souls of those that doe transgress." She has been given the power to restore sight to the blind, to make the deaf hear, and to make the lame walk. She can cast out devils. She can cure madness.<sup>85</sup> The "transfigur'd" countess has, in effect, become Christ.

Lanyer, conflating the balms brought by "The *Maries*," Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mary, who have come to the tomb to anoint the corpse with the "pretious oyntments [Christ] desires,"

those brought unto him by his faithful Wife  
The holy Church; who in those rich attires,  
of Patience, Love, Long Suffering, Voide of strife,  
Humbly presents those oyntments he requires:  
the oyles of Mercie, Charitie, and Faith,<sup>86</sup>

collapses the *Maries* into "the holy Church." Again, ministering and ministered to, the female heroes of Lanyer's epic are "transfigur'd"; bride and bridegroom, savior and saved at once, they tend the wounded and radiant body of

Christ. Like a mirror in a Mannerist painting, Lanyer's images refract and reflect: the *Maries* -- in the collapsed figures of bride/bridegroom, savior/saved, Christ/Margaret Russell Clifford /church, Margaret Russell Clifford/womankind -- both follow and become the paradigm of Lanyer's female hero.

In another address to Clifford in the title poem, "Salve Deus," Lanyer identifies the countess with heroic women of Scripture, "whose worth, though writ in lines of blood and fire / is not to be compared unto [Clifford's]."<sup>87</sup> Because of her ongoing battle with "that many headed monster Sinne,"<sup>88</sup> Clifford is more heroic than the Scythian women, to whom Lanyer credits the fall of Persia in 331.<sup>89</sup> She is more brave and wise than the prophetess Deborah, who judged Israel and rode with Barak to victorious battle with Sisera.<sup>90</sup> She is more powerful than beautiful and pious Judith, who chastised the Judaens for testing God and who beheaded Holofernes with his own sword.<sup>91</sup> These worthy women of Scripture, says Lanyer, each performed only one heroic deed. They do not compare to the deeds of the Countess of Cumberland, who "hast performed many in [her] time," not the least of which is "the Conquest of all Conquests" over Hell.<sup>92</sup> Even Hester, who wore sack cloth and ashes, and who fasted three days, "needs give place" to Clifford, "who hath continu'd dayes, weekes,

months, yeares / In Gods true service."<sup>93</sup> Clifford, "fasting from sinne," wears the "sack-cloth" of "worldly troubles" "both night and day" and the "ashes" of "mourning" fantasies, the torturing mental images of her cares.<sup>94</sup> And even though the biblical Susanna's opposition to "old doting Lust" deserves to be immortalized "in holy Writ," her glory pales beside the glory of the countess's "chaste breast, guarded with strength of mind," which resists all lust whether it be "old or yong."<sup>95</sup> Even the Queen of Sheba, who came from afar to witness the wisdom of King Solomon, does not measure up to Clifford, who has come to see the Christ Lanyer pictures in her "little booke"<sup>96</sup> because as wise as "this rare Phoenix of that worne-out age," was, "this great majesticke Queene comes short of" the Countess, who, rather than an "earthly prince," has chosen to venerate "A King, a God," the "Monarke of heav'n, earth, and sea."<sup>97</sup>

Carefully comparing Margaret Russell Clifford to acknowledged good women of the Bible serves a double purpose. It places half a dozen noble role models in the mirror of Lanyer's book, providing her readers with heroic reflections. At the same time it centers the reflection of the Countess of Cumberland within the reflection of a feminized Christ. So placed in Lanyer's glass, the reflections of Christ and Clifford merge into an image of valour with which women can

identify, godly, chaste, brave, and victorious, surrounded by  
a host of heroic women from the past.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Statute of the Realm. IV, I, 222. Williams, C.H., ed. *English Historical Documents V, 1485-1558*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967) 44.

<sup>2</sup> Constance Jordan, "Representing Political Androgeny: More on the Siena Portrait of Queen Elizabeth I" in *The Renaissance Englishwoman in Print*, Hazlekorn and Travitsky, eds. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990) and Williams, *EHD V* 44. See also *Acta Regia: or An Account of the Treatise, Letters, and Instruments Between the Monarchs of England and Foreign Powers vol. 3* (London, 1728), 407-8.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 14

34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

35 And if they will learn anything, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.

1 Timothy 2

11 Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection.

12 But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over man, but to be in silence.

13 For Adam was first formed; then Eve.

14 And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived.

Genesis 3

Unto the woman He said, thy husband...shall rule over thee.

<sup>4</sup> Ephesians 5:23.

<sup>5</sup> Jordan 158.

<sup>6</sup> Axton, Marie. *The Queen's Two Bodies: Drama and the Elizabethan Succession*. (London: Royal Historical Society, 1977), 12.

<sup>7</sup> Levin, Carole. "*The Heart and Stomach of a King*": *Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 123. Levin here refers to the adjudication of the *Duchy of Lancaster Case*.

<sup>8</sup> Levin 144.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Becon 1554.

<sup>10</sup> John Knox. *First Blast of the Trumpet against the monstrous regiment of women, 1558* in *The English Experience: It's Record in Early Printed Books Published in Facsimile*, Number 471. (New York: Da Capo Press Inc, 1972) 11.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle, E. H. Warmington, ed. *The Politics*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972), 1.5.2, 1259b, pp. 58-59. In the sixteenth century the most frequently published Latin translation of the *Politics* was Aretino's; F. Edward Cranz counts forty-two separate editions.

<sup>12</sup> *Politics*. 1.5.8, 1260a, pp. 62-63.

<sup>13</sup> *Politics* ff. 22v, 23.

<sup>14</sup> Stubbs, Philip. *Anatomie of Abuses* (1583), ed. William B.D.D. Turnbull (London: W. Pickering, 1863), 68.

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- <sup>15</sup> "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie," 37-9.
- <sup>16</sup> "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie," 40-1. For an excellent exegesis of the Lanyer's use of the mirror metaphor, see Lynette McGrath, "Metaphoric Subversions: Feasts and Mirrors in Aemilia Lanier's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*," (U.S.: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers S.A., 1991), 107-8.
- <sup>17</sup> "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 68.
- <sup>18</sup> "The Author's Dream" 44.
- <sup>19</sup> "Defense of Poesy" was available in manuscript for several years before its publication in 1595.
- <sup>20</sup> "The Defense of Poesy" in Rollins and Baker, *The Renaissance in England: Non-dramatic Prose and Verse of the Sixteenth Century*. (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1992) 613.
- <sup>21</sup> "The Defense of Poesy" 611.
- <sup>22</sup> "The Defense of Poesy" 613.
- <sup>23</sup> See also Stephanie Jed. *Chaste Thinking: The Rape of Lucrece and the Birth of Humanism*. (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1989).
- <sup>24</sup> "The Defense of Poesy" 615.
- <sup>25</sup> "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 80.
- <sup>26</sup> "The Defense of Poesy" 615.
- <sup>27</sup> "The Defense of Poesy" 615.
- <sup>28</sup> "Salve Deus" 1465-89.
- <sup>29</sup> "The Defense of Poesy" 615.
- <sup>30</sup> "To the Ladie Katherine Countess of Suffolk" 51-6.
- <sup>31</sup> Including Wisdome, Justice, Prudence, Fortitude, Temperence, Faith, Hope, and Charity. See also Sidney's "The Defense of Poesy."
- <sup>32</sup> "To the Ladie Katherine Countesse of Suffolke" 91-6.
- <sup>33</sup> McGrath 102.
- <sup>34</sup> McGrath 102.
- <sup>35</sup> "Salve Deus" 9-40. Very possibly an equation of Clifford's male relatives, and the male legal system tying up her daughter's inheritance, and the devil.
- <sup>36</sup> "Salve Deus" 71-2.
- <sup>37</sup> "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" 1-16.
- <sup>38</sup> "Salve Deus" 1309.
- <sup>39</sup> *Songs of Solomon* 4.1.
- <sup>40</sup> *SS* 5.12.
- <sup>41</sup> *SS* 5.12.
- <sup>42</sup> "Salve Deus" 1310.
- <sup>43</sup> *SS* 5.11.

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44 "Salve Deus" 1311.  
45 *SS* 5.11  
46 "Salve Deus" 1312-3.  
47 *SS* 5.13.  
48 "Salve Deus" 1318.  
49 *SS* 5.13.  
50 "Salve Deus" 1319.  
51 *SS* 4.3.  
52 *SS* 4.11.  
53 "Salve Deus" 1313-6.  
54 "Salve Deus" 1317.  
55 I am indebted to Lynette McGrath, who speaks of Lanyer as provider of  
"spiritual poetic food" in "Metaphoric Subversions" 105.  
56 "Salve Deus" 47-50.  
57 "Salve Deus" 51-6.  
58 "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" 36-7  
59 "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" 10-1.  
60 "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" 15-6.  
61 "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" 8.  
62 "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" 15-7.  
63 "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" 21.  
64 "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" 15 margin.  
65 "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" 51.  
66 "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" 23.  
67 "To the Vertuous Reader" 19.  
68 "Salve Deus" 206-7.  
69 "The Authors Dreame" 89.  
70 "Salve Deus" 185-248.  
71 "Salve Deus" 161-2.  
72 "Salve Deus" 169-76.  
73 "Salve Deus" 233-43.  
74 "Salve Deus" 249-264.  
75 "Salve Deus" 249-264.  
76 "Salve Deus" 759-60.  
77 "Salve Deus" 753-7.  
78 Cf. 73.  
79 "Salve Deus" 981-4.

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- <sup>80</sup> "Salve Deus" 989-90.  
<sup>81</sup> "Salve Deus" 1011  
<sup>82</sup> "Salve Deus" 1046-7  
<sup>83</sup> "Salve Deus" 154.  
<sup>84</sup> "Salve Deus" 1401-1405.  
<sup>85</sup> "Salve Deus" 1369-84.  
<sup>86</sup> "Salve Deus" 1287-1296.  
<sup>87</sup> "Salve Deus" 1473-4.  
<sup>88</sup> "Salve Deus" 1490.  
<sup>89</sup> Woods note 114.  
<sup>90</sup> Judges 5 (English-NIV).  
<sup>91</sup> *The Book of Judith* (National Council of Churches of Christ in America).  
<sup>92</sup> "Salve Deus" 1498, 1501-2.  
<sup>93</sup> "Salve Deus" 1514-6.  
<sup>94</sup> "Salve Deus" 1523-7.  
<sup>95</sup> "Salve Deus" 1543-1550.  
<sup>96</sup> "Salve Deus" 1569-76, 1673-1700.  
<sup>97</sup> "Salve Deus" 1706-11.