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# Lanyer's Virtual Community: The Defense of Female Community in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*

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LANYER'S VIRTUAL COMMUNITY: THE DEFENSE OF FEMALE COMMUNITY  
IN *SALVE DEUS REX JUDAEORUM*

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Graduate School of  
Clemson University

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts  
English

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by  
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## ABSTRACT

This thesis discusses how Aemilia Lanyer's poem *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* represents a virtual space that allows for female community among women who share similar ideals. The three main areas of investigation are the dedications that serve as a structural community for her dedicatees, Christ and his disciples' community breaking down, and Eve's thwarted community in Eden. Christ is a feminized figure in Lanyer's poem who gives women a representative in the Bible, and his interactions with his disciples are something that scholars of Lanyer's work have not discussed. Lanyer's section on Eve is often dissected for its protofeminist, or non-protOfeminist, statements, but scholars have yet to view Eve's importance in Lanyer's argument for female community, which is another aim of this thesis.

The community built by writing to and for women begins with the dedications. These eleven introductory poems are the most critically commented on portion of Lanyer's work. Scholars discuss Lanyer's dedications in terms of seeking patronage, but I wish to add to that argument by explaining how the dedications are also a call for equality among the high-born women she directly addresses and a general female audience. The idea of eliminating class distinction also moves into the Christ section because of the notion that all who follow Christ are made one through his sacrifice. By feminizing Christ through the language she attributes to him, Lanyer shows a female figure unable to thrive in a masculine community, and once the disciples flee, the daughters of Jerusalem rise up in an attempt to support Christ during his final hours.

Like Christ, Eve is used to show the negative effects of denying women community; withholding knowledge and likeminded individuals from women forces them to seek community with men, who will ultimately betray them as Adam did to Eve. I will go into how Eve is denied community and knowledge by Adam, and how Lanyer's final poem, "The Description of Cooke-ham," attempts to bring women back a new Eden at Cooke-ham by providing them with knowledge to join with and thrive in Lanyer's virtual community, constructed through her text.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

The country-house poem “The Description of Cooke-ham,” acting as a type of epilogue to Aemilia Lanyer’s 1611 poem *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, provides the subjects of the poem as well as the reader with a physically structured space for female community to exist: the Cookham estate. Cookham, however, comes to an end, though Lanyer tells the Countess of Cumberland, her primary patron, that the idea of Cookham “in this [poem] may live” even though the physical Cookham is gone and decayed (206). The idea of female community lives on, with or without physical interaction by the members because Lanyer’s poem is set up to keep the community alive. Allowing female community to live on is one of the functions that the text of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* serves. To provide this safe space for women to gather to commune, Lanyer weaves together her own interpretations of Christ’s Passion and the Fall to prove why female community must be encouraged and protected. *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* is a clear defense of Biblically sanctioned community among individuals, complete with proof that women are included among those called to seek love, support, and most importantly, knowledge from one another.

While the idea of Lanyer creating a female community is a concept that has already partially found its way into the critical conversation, I believe a few important elements are missing from the current scholarship. In this thesis, I will focus on how the physical text of Lanyer’s poem becomes the argument for virtual community and a place for women to share their thoughts and commune with each other, extending beyond

individual neighborhoods in which women were encouraged to take part (Capp 27). Christ and Eve are representations of female figures with failed communities, and Lanyer's poem is arguing for the importance of allowing such community to exist among women; the dissolution of Christ's community of disciples and the purely patriarchal community that makes up Eve's society are Lanyer's proof that the only type of community that will benefit women is a purely female community. The three main areas of investigation will be the virtual community created through the dedications, the breakdown of Christ and his disciples, and the denial of Eve's community from the patriarchy in Eden. These three elements work together to emphasize the importance of a much needed female community and the breakdown of that community through the interference of masculine authority.

A strong community, more specifically a strong female community, is important to the intellectual and emotional growth of women. In *Female Communities 1600-1800: Literary Visions and Cultural Realities*, Rebecca D'Monte and Nicole Pohl explain that community is important because it brings a sense of "support networks ... friendships and companionship" to those involved (13). Through these support networks growth can occur both on an individual basis and within the group itself, making communal ties necessary for proper maturation. D'Monte and Pohl's explanation of community expands as they define a virtual community, which I believe Lanyer is searching for within her text: virtual communities are "imagined through common political, professional or social convictions and shared pursuits .... [They] are not spatially limited and are ... united through mass ceremonies, rituals and, on a deeper level, shared dialogics" (4). By

structuring her poem around Biblical stories, Lanyer invites women to come together through a shared understanding so they can begin building their convictions outside of the Bible. Lanyer provides a basis for virtual community by examining society through the lens of Christian narratives.

Discussing religion can seem, for the modern-day critic, to be a way of excluding some women from reading and understanding Lanyer's work because Christianity would become the qualification to meet in order to unite in Lanyer's community. However, *Salve Deus* is not just a religious poem, but also critiques social issues; Christianity is the lens used to analyze society, but women need not be Christians to understand, relate to, and join Lanyer's community (Bowen 277). Throughout *Salve Deus*, Lanyer switches between Christian imagery and that of classical Greek and Roman mythology. In the first dedication, Lanyer compares Queen Anne to Juno, Pallas, and Venus, and five stanzas later she introduces God, "that mightie Monarch both of heav'n and earth" (3-5. 1-45). The technique of switching between traditional Protestant Christian imagery and classical mythology is a way for Lanyer to include women of various backgrounds in her work while also showing her education. There are also scholars who believe Lanyer may have been Jewish, which would make the Christian scripture more of a veil through which to discuss social issues (Woods 5-6). Regardless of Lanyer's religious beliefs, her purpose is to draw women from all areas of society together into her virtually constructed community.

The idea of a neighborhood is also an important element to consider when looking at community and how women interact with each other in early modern England. Women



during the early modern period had community within their neighborhoods, and while Lanyer does not seek to destroy the idea of a neighborhood, she does wish to expand the community women find themselves a part of. Bernard Capp explains that acting kind toward neighbors is a quality praised in women of the early modern period and he believes this interaction “gave women an active role in the wider community” (27). In this case, the wider community is the world outside of individual households. Capp effectively illustrates the importance of the neighborhood for women during the early modern period; however, there is a spatial limit to a neighborhood. A woman having close female friends is also frightening to men, so encouraging women to have a space in the neighborhood could serve to keep any community they form close to home for the purpose of monitoring their connections (Capp 50). Lanyer’s desire to correct this idea that women are only allowed to maintain their community within a neighborhood comes through when she invites others to take part in reading and discussing her work during her dedicatory poems, opening up a larger outside world in which women can commune.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LANYER'S DEDICATIONS: STRUCTURING FEMALE COMMUNITY

Eleven dedications to female patrons and general readers make up 934 lines at the beginning of the work. Lanyer does not limit her dedications to one specific class: “Lanyer’s audience was calculated to include both nobility and commoners,” so her dedications could reach a larger range of women (Tinkham 67). The first dedication is aimed at Queen Anne, the highest ranking of Lanyer’s addressees, but after the initial praise of the queen, the rest of her dedications cover women of all ranks, from countesses to all readers respectively. The range of these dedications illustrates that Lanyer was concerned with gathering these women together as representations of a larger community to take part in her writing and to experience her interpretation of the Passion and the Fall. Even though Lanyer does go out of her way to dedicate her work to specific individuals, she also has an address “To all vertuous Ladies in generall” which she ends by stating

Onely by name I will bid some of those,  
That in true Honors seate have long bin placed,  
Yea even such as thou hast chiefly chose,  
By whom my Muse may be the better graced;  
Therefore, unwilling longer time to lose,  
I will invite some Ladies that I know,  
But chiefly those as thou hast graced so. (16. 85-91)

Lanyer directly invites women of higher rank to read her work through the dedicatory material, but she also wants a much wider audience, which is evident when she says “Onely by name I will bid some,” indicating that though she will be calling out a few by name, her work is not limited to just these women (16. 85). Though some “have long bin placed” in a higher standing, she does not want to restrict other women from reading and

accepting her work; she does not want to restrict her audience. She mentions several times that she wishes for her poem to be passed down to a younger generation, so her text can be discovered by the daughters of her addressees (Lanyer 7. 91-96; 38. 49-50). Desire for continuation of her work shows that Lanyer is most concerned with her opinions and ideals existing beyond the confines of the women to whom she directly speaks. Calling on multiple women to read her poem and hoping for her text to find its way to future generations of women causes *Salve Deus* itself to become what men feared: women gathering to discuss their ideas about the world around them.

Categorizing all women under one definition creates tension in contemporary analysis of *Salve Deus*. Jonathan Goldberg cautions against clustering women into one category because the term “woman” is “complicated by other questions, other ways in which gendered subjects are positioned,” such as class, which he believes is parallel to gender, making them inseparable and therefore making community among women who possess different class standings nearly impossible (4, 20). While Goldberg’s concerns are not unfounded, I agree with D’Monte and Pohl who believe that communities “are characterized by internal diversity and incongruities,” making it entirely possible for women of different class standings to come together, and allowing individuals to maintain their singular identity within the company of others. Lanyer also fights against class distinctions with her dedication “To all vertuous Ladies in generall,” which implies a wider audience than just those with a title to their name. She does state in her dedication “To the Vertuous Reader” that some women “fall into so great an errour, as to speake unadvisedly against the rest of their sexe,” but nowhere does she say her book is not also

for those women (Lanyer 48. 14-15). Her poem is meant to bring women together, regardless of their past or standing. Lanyer is not attempting to ignore class divisions but instead break through class divisions and create a level of understanding across her readership. She tells her female readers that they are all brides of Christ, because they all achieve the same rank once they are united through Lanyer's idea of community, here represented by Christian values.

The dedications invite the audience to read the work and then judge for themselves what they find within the lines. Many times, Lanyer refers to her work as a "wholesome feast" for her audience to take part in (11. 9). The idea of her poem becoming a feast for others to enjoy elicits a communal feel in the sense that her work is a space where others are invited to meet and achieve fellowship while taking part in intellectual conversation. Inviting them to the feast also turns her ideas into something non-threatening; her readers can choose whether or not to read and choose whether or not to take part in discussing what they find in the pages of Lanyer's work. Reaching out to specific women through her dedications is seen in a negative light by some critics who see her call for readership as an act of desperation. Su Fang Ng believes there is a "problematic status of the so-called community of good women [which] has much to do with Lanyer's negotiation of class hierarchy in the Stuart court system and her bid for patronage in a highly patriarchal world .... [and] Lanyer's need to play to a range of audiences" actually disrupts the sense of building a community (435). Rather than investigating the introductory material in such a dismissive way, I believe the dedications

demonstrate how far the community Lanyer is constructing can reach and that there are no qualifications needed in order to join.

The pursuit for patronage does need to factor into the investigation of *Salve Deus* in order to fully comprehend the intention behind the vast number of dedications, but patronage should not be the only motive attributed to Lanyer's dedicatory material. Lanyer is the first woman to write multiple dedications to other women, meaning she is the first woman attempting to take advantage of a wider pool of possible female patrons (Bowen 283). Tina Krontiris explains that this is a unique step by Lanyer because while patronage was "offered *by* women, patronage was not open *to* them," meaning women, usually of nobility, could offer money to writers, but women writers were not expected to ask for patronage (103). Because of this sexual double standard, Lanyer's work cannot simply be viewed as begging for patrons to legitimize her desire for authorship; it is likely she understood her dedications would not breed monetary success. Mary Ellen Lamb discusses a possibility behind Lanyer's many dedications when she states that Lanyer's main point with writing was to be paid, and her many dedications serve as a type of "celebrity endorsement" to make her work marketable (43). Beginning her dedications with the praise of Queen Anne supports the idea that Lanyer could be seeking some type of famous name to influence sales; however, in opposition to Lamb's theory of the celebrity endorsement is the fact that Lanyer's use of the dedication has no direct connection to whether or not these women actually paid Lanyer or even knew her personally. Though seeking patronage could be a possibility for the dedications, Lanyer's dedications' main purpose is to create her virtual community.

Female community is important enough to Lanyer that she uses virtual community to construct an alternative to marriage. There is very little discussion of marriage in Lanyer's poem, and when there is a description of a marital union, it is a coming together of Christ and women, not men and women. Kim Walker believes this shows women to be "the 'natural' recipients of Christ's love," but that this makes heterosexual marriage "the implicit ground for suggesting women's privileged access to Christ and his wisdom" (118). Walker's idea is challenged by a feminized Christ; if Christ represents women and becomes feminized through Lanyer's writing, women's marriage to Christ is no longer an act of heterosexual matrimony. Though some scholars legitimately argue the marriage of a feminized Christ to women is indicative of homosexual desire, I would suggest it could also be a way to depict a united female community free from the restrictions of the patriarchy (Greenstadt 68). Lanyer is attempting to prove through her explanation of Christ's Passion and Eve's betrayal that "the way for women to improve their happiness in life is not by collaborating with men, but by banding together with women" and replace the "pure flame" of marriage with "one growing from a spiritual sisterhood" (Ezell 108, 118). Eve is a tragic character in *Salve Deus* because she never had the chance to build female community, and her husband, Adam, essentially condemns Eve for the knowledge she shares after he realizes God is angry with them both: Adam's greed leads him to desire to taste the fruit in order to gain the knowledge Eve achieved before him, but "He never sought her weakenesse to reprove" until he realizes God is angry at their disobedience (Lanyer 85. 801-806). The knowledge Eve shares with Adam is taken away from her by the cruelty of man, and it is

this cruelty Lanyer turns away from in seeking community with other women as opposed to marital community.

Marriage to a man is only mentioned pointedly in two areas of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. On the title page to the poem, it is written that Lanyer is the wife of Captain Alfonso Lanyer, but there is no mention of Lanyer's husband within the poem itself, not even in the dedications (Lanyer 1). In her dedication to Lady Katherine, Lanyer does spend time praising Katherine's "most honorable Lord," Thomas Howard (37. 25). Three stanzas of praise for Katherine's late husband appear at the beginning of the dedication, and may suggest that Lanyer does not separate Katherine from her husband, making him the only link Katherine has to heaven and God. However, as soon as Lanyer brings up "the King of kings," all discussion of love shifts from that of love between husband and wife to love between God and women:

Yea, let those Ladies which do represent  
All beauty, wisdom, zeale, and love,  
Receive this jewell from *Jehova* sent,  
This spotlesse Lambe, this perfit patient Dove (38. 55-58)

She denounces the use of masculine authority as the only avenue to God, connecting female community directly to Christ; they are directly receiving Christ from God, "this jewell from *Jehova*," not receiving him through an interceding party (Lanyer 38. 57). The other ladies Lanyer mentions are Katherine's daughters, so this passage is not only a continuation of the trend of asking future generations to take up her ideas and carry them further, but also a connection of a mother to her daughters in a way that will nurture their identity as women. Saying that they are "All beauty, wisdom, zeale, and love" implies that they are complete in their existence and do not require any addition to make them

whole, including that of a husband. Through this avenue, Lanyer's poem exists to bring women and their daughters closer together without the presence of a paternal head.

Masculine authority reflects itself through more than just marriage, and during Lanyer's dedication to Mary Sidney, her brother, Sir Philip Sidney, receives an equal amount of praise. Lanyer's dedication to Lady Mary is told in the form of a dream, and the first time Mary is identified, she is referred to as "Sister to valiant *Sidney*, whose cleere light / Gives light to all that tread true paths of Fame .... That beeing dead, his fame doth him survive, / Still living in the hearts of worthy men" (Lanyer 28. 138-141). At first it appears that Mary only has value in relation to her brother's writing. However, looking into Mary Sidney's life and involvement with her brother's work proves that, without Mary, Philip's fame would not have reached its height. Ultimately, Mary is responsible for ensuring her brother's place in the literary world by overseeing the publication of his work after his death. She even continues his work, creating Psalms 43-150, finishing his project of translating the Psalms in a way that plays with how "to improve English letters" by changing the structure from basic songbook material to a poetic interpretation, manipulating "metre, imagery and lyric subjectivity" (Rienstra 112, 113). Because Mary essentially created her brother's fame, Lanyer's praise of Philip can be attributed to Mary, which Lanyer is conscious of when she writes "And farre before him [Mary] is to be esteemd / For virtue, wisdom, learning, dignity" (28. 151-152). Lanyer says Mary is esteemed before Philip which indicates that Philip is not a single entity in the literary world, and his sister is really the one who creates the image the



public saw of him, allowing Mary to become a forerunner in the community Lanyer responds to and builds upon.

There is an awareness of Mary Sidney's role in Philip's fame in Lanyer's dedication, and recognition of Mary's own work as well, mainly focusing on the *Psalms*, which Lanyer appears to have read and gained inspiration from. Lanyer acknowledges Mary's work on the *Psalms* when she commends "Those holy Sonnets" and describes Mary's writing as highly praised, indicating Mary was an established writer by 1611 when Lanyer published *Salve Deus* (27. 121-122, 30. 198). When examining Lanyer's text, it is obvious she took after Mary, not necessarily in content, but in having a female voice interpret scripture. Debra K. Rienstra states that Sidney provided the precedent for using "the prophetic 'I'" of a woman's voice in Biblical interpretation, something that Lanyer also provides with her poem (122). Sidney's *Psalm 45: Eructavit cor meum* demonstrates how Sidney expands on the Psalms without changing their meaning completely. Sidney's version of the Psalm is split into eight stanzas of eight lines each, creating a rhyme scheme, making it distinct from the original and establishing a new vision of the Psalm as a poem. Her version comforts and reassures the female figure:

Brought shall they be with mirth and marriage joy  
And enter so the Palace of the King  
Then let no grief Thy mind O Queen annoy  
Nor parents left Thy sadd remembrance sting  
Instead of Parents Children Thou shalt bring  
Of partag'd earth the King and Lords to be  
My self Thy name in lasting verse will sing  
The World shall make no end of thanks to Thee. (Sidney 55. 57-64)

Sidney adopts a motherly tone as she speaks directly to the young woman in the Psalm, acknowledging that there is a possibility the queen would feel grief on leaving her parents

and joining with a man in marriage, a possibility the original text does not recognize. The Bible does not comfort the queen, as Sidney does when she implores her not to cry, but rather just instructs the young woman to feel “joy and gladness” as she enters the house of her new husband (*The Geneva Bible* Psalm 45.15). Sidney’s promise from one woman to another that she will continue to praise her subject throughout the years holds significance because she promises to write not only to make the woman famous, but also to bolster female community by passing on the name of a woman in history who potentially had a great impact on her world. *Salve Deus* reflects Sidney’s example of female interjection in Biblical text, though Lanyer’s poem does go further with reinterpretation.

As women in early modern England, Sidney and Lanyer most likely had daily interactions with the Bible. Living in Protestant England meant devotional books and commonplace books would be available to women to help them during their Bible study (Molekamp 3). Some of these books were written by women, and such companions helped encourage biblical female community. However, most of these biblical aids focused on private reading for women, so even though the texts were written with a type of community in mind, it is then up to women in isolation to take in the words and synthesize the material (Molekamp 84). Sidney takes reading the Bible and producing a devotional book a step further when she imagines the Psalms through a female voice; Lanyer then takes interpretation to another level when she invites others to read and then discuss her work with her. By opening up an avenue of communication from the reader back to the writer of the document, Lanyer extends virtual female community outside that

of private Bible study, or Bible study with multiple individuals, because she allows women to have the opportunity to talk back to her, not just read and absorb what she says without question.

The final dedication, “To the Vertuous Reader,” is a general address to all readers and is where Lanyer begins the argument that will take shape throughout her poem: “As also in respect it please our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, without the assistance of man, beeing free from originall and all other sinnes, from the time of his conception, till the houre of his death, to be begotten of a woman, borne of a woman, nourished of a woman, obedient to a woman” (Lanyer 48-49. 40-45). To argue that women deserve community that is not dictated by men, Lanyer highlights that the most iconic images for Christian faith are surrounded by women: the birth of Christ and his crucifixion. “To the Vertuous Reader” is not gendered specifically toward women, but Lanyer’s text is still seen “to be motivated by misogynist disparagement of women .... [presenting] a single-minded, fervent argument for the importance of women’s virtue” (Beilin 180). *Salve Deus* returns to this sentiment throughout the poem as Lanyer builds her argument that women were not ignored or persecuted by Christ, so women do not deserve to be denied community or suffer persecution by men in social and religious settings.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE BREAKDOWN OF CHRIST'S COMMUNITY

As she progresses into the main body of the poem, Lanyer begins out of the chronological order recorded in the Bible and first describes the Passion of Christ, not the Creation story. Beginning her interpretation with Jesus instead of Eve builds her credibility as a writer because of the authority Christ holds in religious circles as the Christian savior. She goes to great lengths to explain that the interpretation she delivers came to her through God so she will say nothing more than what he wills her to (64. 297-304). By qualifying that she received her information from God, she defends any radical views within her text: if God said the things she is writing, it makes her writing feel less threatening to readers. She now has the freedom to expand on how Christ takes on feminine traits in and embodies the struggle for female community. Lanyer combats the argument against women forming strong friendships by using Christ to represent a woman with access to a wide community.

The word choices Lanyer makes in her text specifically places patriarchal prescriptions for female virtues onto Christ, a technique used to transform Christ into a woman through language so he can become a representation of Lanyer's female readers. Throughout the Passion section, Lanyer uses terms to describe Christ's character that could very well be from a prescriptive text for women: "He plainely shewed that his own profession / Was virtue, patience, grace, love, piety" (Lanyer 92. 957-958). Using words that are generally associated with women to describe Christ is "a crucial element of the relationship between women and Christ, and ... it bears fruit in the special position Christ

afforded (and affords) women” (Hodgson 106). Lanyer illustrates a bond between Christ and women to show the parallel in suffering, a practice which goes as far back as the middle ages (Krontiris 117). Lanyer also uses the struggles of Christ in a way that renders them interchangeable with the struggles of women. When investigating Christ’s final hours, Lanyer ponders “what could comfort then thy troubled Minde, / When Heaven and Earth were both against thee bent? / And thou no hope, no ease, no rest could’st finde” (70. 433-435). Lanyer does not openly say at any point that women suffer as Christ suffered; however, her language implies that, just as women in her time struggled to have a place in a patriarchal society, Christ also suffered at the hands of men. Other stanzas go further with the idea that Christ represents women when Lanyer mentions that there was no comfort for Christ in religious leaders or lawmen (73. 489-496). An audience of women reading Lanyer does not have to stretch far to align themselves with the idea of being held back by men and religion in their own way. Lanyer takes the perfection classically attributed to Christ and subtly applies patriarchal language to his character to create a female savior, allowing women to have a representative in the Bible other than Eve. Such a technique opens a space for women in the Bible by reconstructing a well-known masculine presence into a symbol of female community that goes beyond that of a neighborhood because Christ’s power extends to unite, in the case of Lanyer’s poem, all women who choose to receive her message.

The very meek, feminine Christ Lanyer portrays is drastically different from the Christ seen around sixty years later in John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*. Milton’s Christ is more masculine and battle ready than Lanyer’s docile figure. The main difference in

depictions of Christ could stem from the fact that Lanyer is a woman writing a character, a savior who is loving and soft, to whom she wants women to relate themselves. As a man writing an epic poem, Milton depicts a Christ who is authoritative and overtly masculine, explaining how after the resurrection he will “ruin all [his] foes-- / Death last, and with his carcas glut the grave” (3. 258-259). Lanyer’s Christ is not shown so violently ending death, but taming it to save the souls of his believers (103. 1222). Another major difference is that Milton’s Christ is given room to speak for himself directly while Lanyer’s Christ never actually speaks in *Salve Deus* (Walker 121). Christ’s lack of voice in Lanyer’s poem is another way to communicate his meek, humble nature, and also speaks to the authority of Lanyer as a narrator; she never lets the story stray outside of her own control. As a representation of women, Christ in *Salve Deus* assumes a role that is not threatening to female readers.

Lanyer presents her argument for why community is Biblically sanctioned through the way she shows Christ interacting with his disciples, an aspect of the poem critics do not focus on. Lanyer’s initial descriptions of the apostles with their leader shows that there is communal support within their society. Lanyer describes Jesus pulling aside members of his disciples for the purpose of having council and “He gave them leave his sorrows to discusse, / His deepest griefes, he did not scorne to showe / These three deere friends, so much he did intrust” (67. 371-74). By showing Jesus seeking help from his closest friends, Lanyer is indicating that having community is something affirmed by God, and since he becomes the representation of women in her poem, Jesus is the proof that women deserve community. Christ is shown pulling aside select

members of his community to speak with them about his fears: “None were admitted with their Lord to goe, / But Peter, and the sonnes of Zebed’us” (Lanyer 67. 369-370). Lanyer uses Christ to show the freedom of confiding in a few while still having the option of a much larger group; she argues for the need of close interaction in a neighborhood while still having the access to a wider community.

The disciples are a masculine community gathered around the feminized Christ, but as Lanyer moves further into the story of the crucifixion, the disciples become an example of what happens when that type of community breaks down due to patriarchal authority. Christ, a feminine figure, cannot be sustained by a community that is dominantly male, even if Christ is at the head. The moment of betrayal and ultimate community upheaval comes when Judas hands Christ over. Here, the feminized Christ is betrayed by man, showing that even a community formed with men who are sympathetic to women leading community cannot overcome the outside force of the patriarchy.

Because *Salve Deus* focuses on the Passion, not the resurrection, the disciples are never able to re-form their community once it is destroyed. When Christ is removed as the head of his community the disciples fall into turmoil, and “do like men, when dangers overtake them,” and flee from the soldiers who come to take Christ away (Lanyer 78. 629-632). Within this confusion, Lanyer makes it clear that even though the disciples are an example of community, they are flawed as men because they do not stand with their leader. From this point on in the poem, the focus is no longer on Christ’s interaction with his male disciples. Lanyer shifts to discussing his final moments and the “Most blessed daughters of Jerusalem” who suffer while watching their savior die (Lanyer 93. 985).

These women are described by Lanyer as the only people who “Did moove their Lord [Christ] ... / To take compassion, turne about, and speake” when he would not speak to any of the men who questioned him (93. 981-982). The daughters of Jerusalem are mentioned in the Bible, and in her commentary for the Gospel of Mark, Elizabeth Struthers Malbon says that Mark emphasizes that the male followers were missing from the death of Christ while only the female followers remained, proving that the description of the scene in Lanyer’s work is taken directly from the source she interprets (491). Christ’s reaction to the women seems to lend them strength as they become the only ones who actively try to stop the crucifixion:

Poore women seeing how much [men] did transgresse,  
By teares, by sighes, by cries intreat, may prove,  
What may be done among the thickest presse,  
They labor still these tyrants hearts to move;  
In pitie and compassion to forebeare  
This whipping, spurning, tearing of his haire. (Lanyer 94. 993-1000)

These women who see Christ suffering take the place of the original disciples to attempt a rescue of Christ, while the disciples are absent from the crucifixion entirely. Lanyer’s point is to portray the strength of an actual female community after the disciples’ community breaks down. The daughters of Jerusalem stand as the example that Biblically it is women who step forward with their strong support system in an attempt to lend aid, unlike male community. Though the daughters of Jerusalem ultimately fail in trying to put a stop to the crucifixion, their presence in Lanyer’s poem argue that female community is the only form of community strong enough to withstand hardships.

One problematic element in Lanyer’s depiction of Christ advocating for women is that Jesus, no matter the type of language attributed to him, is biologically male, meaning



that it is not a woman that ultimately serves to argue for female community in the representation Lanyer creates because a woman would not have the same power. The idea that it must be someone from outside the minority group that steps in to save women, some believe, shows weakness in Lanyer because though she is “often adept in subverting patriarchal discourse about women, at times [Lanyer] becomes enmeshed in it” (Ng 440). However, though Christ as a man saves women in Lanyer’s poem, the adherence to patriarchal views does not mean Lanyer holds onto the idea of women needing to be subservient. Elaine Beilin suggests that these moments of returning to what may be perceived as patriarchal constraints and women “acknowledging [their] traditional place” are actually meant to suggest “a redefinition of the importance and domain of the feminine virtues. Thus, chastity and humility are not merely the attributes of a weak woman, but more precisely, those of a good Christian” (xv). There is also the idea that Christ was fully human and fully God, meaning that his human self is classified as male, but his godly self has gendered flexibility within the human ideas of sexuality. Though male by birth, Christ also has feminine attributes, allowing him the role of female advocate for Lanyer’s purpose.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### EVE'S THWARTED COMMUNITY

Much like Christ's community of disciples ultimately fails, Eve's attempt to build a substitute community with men results in disaster. The depiction of Eve is one of a tragic character who only wishes to give to her mate "what shee held most deare," which is the fruit she felt would bring knowledge (84. 764). Eve is trying to share the knowledge she gains from the fruit with Adam because this will bring them closer together in understanding their world and the ideas of God, creating intellectual community between herself and her husband. Eve becomes the bringer of truth as she offers her mate the ability to have access to a wider range of understanding; she wants Adam's knowledge to "become more cleare," but once he eats and understands that the two of them will be banned from Paradise, he turns on her immediately, placing all the blame on Eve (Lanyer 86. 804-806). Lanyer's anger with Adam becomes apparent when she states "Men will boast of Knowledge, which he tooke / From Eves faire hand, as from a learned Booke" (Lanyer 86. 807-808). This passage also functions as a hint about the purpose of her own book; Adam vilified Eve's knowledge, allowing future generations of men to interpret women learning as a negative practice, so Lanyer is using her book to reinstate the knowledge that Eve and all women have lost. Her movement from discussing Adam as an individual man to making him a representation of men as a whole is the connection between the Fall and Lanyer's own time. She presents a blatant condemnation of men who felt they had the right to place the blame of the Fall on Eve as well as hold onto the knowledge Adam symbolically took from Eve.

The way Lanyer handles the Eve debate creates discord among critics as to whether Lanyer is considered a protofeminist, and there is no consensus on her status. Lanyer's placement into the category of protofeminist is perhaps less important than her contribution to the female voice in biblical writing, but in terms of her ability to construct her argument and be understood in the patriarchal society she lived in, I do believe she falls within the boundaries of a protofeminist. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld defines feminism as "a contemporary prophetic movement that announces judgment on the patriarchy of contemporary culture and calls for repentance and change," and though feminism was not a movement that had life in Lanyer's time, if we apply a feminist lens to her work, it seems that she can be labeled a protofeminist (55). Lanyer announces her judgment on the patriarchy as she points out the way men "unjustly ... condemne [Eve] to die," much the same way she believes they condemn Christ to die, and she calls for a change as she demands that men "let [women] have ... Libertie againe / And challenge to your selves no Sov'raigtie" (86-87. 817, 825-826). If Sakenfeld's description of what it is to be a feminist is applied to *Salve Deus*, it is possible to see that Lanyer extends protofeminist views to biblical writing.

One reason critics have problems accepting Lanyer as a protofeminist is because, while still peppered with moments of disgust at the patriarchy, her apology of Eve is also laden with conventional discussion of women through patriarchal ideals. When Lanyer begins her defense of Eve, she tells women "Let not us Women glory in Men's fall, / Who had power given to over-rule us all" (84. 759-760). Her assertion that women are subject to men is a very patriarchal concept, and makes it seem like Lanyer completely

prescribes to the idea that women, being made second by God, are inferior; however, the past tense of men's power is indicative of Lanyer giving women power over their own lives through her writing and her community. She also makes reference to how Eve is "Weaknesse" while Adam is "Strength," which is why Adam should have the strength to refuse Eve's offer to eat the fruit (Lanyer 85. 779). Though Lanyer expresses that women are the weaker vessel, she still makes it clear that she believes Adam is more at fault for the breakdown of Paradise. The Fall Lanyer describes shows "a view of Eve at the moment of the Fall....[and] depicts Eve's fall such that Eve's culpability is offset by aspects of her goodness, casting Eve as less culpable because of her ignorance" (Miller 63). Adam is more at fault because the traditionally held opinion is that, as the man, Adam must be the voice of reason and prevent the Fall. Lanyer explains

Ye having powre to rule both Sea and Land,  
Yet with one Apple wonne to loose that breath  
Which God had breathed in his beauteous face,  
Bringing us all in danger and disgrace (85. 789-792)

Adam, the man given power to rule all, made the decision to eat the fruit, and it is after his action that the human race is ultimately doomed. The patriarchal language in the section about Eve is used to reflect the accepted ideals of the time, not necessarily the views Lanyer shared (Krontiris 106). While every line of Lanyer's work does not seek to chastise men for every fault they have committed, she does seek to hold them accountable for wrongs she believes they refuse to accept, making her a valuable voice in protofeminism.

As the Eve section continues, the blame for disruption of community in Eden is heavily placed on Adam. Though Lanyer concedes that there may be fault in Eve, it is

men who are really responsible for the destruction of female community, not only with Eve, but also with Christ:

If any Evill did in [Eve] remaine,  
Beeing made of [Adam], he was the ground of all;  
.....  
Her weakenesse did the Serpents words obey;  
But you in malice Gods deare Sonne betray. (86. 809-816)

Here we see two betrayals of women that work toward the breakdown of community: men placed the blame for the Fall on Eve after stealing her knowledge, and men convict and murder Christ, causing his community to crumble. Both betrayals work to debilitate community because a masculine presence removes examples of women seeking interaction and intellectual growth.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

Lanyer's personal depiction of community through "The Description of Cooke-ham," also shows female community as something fragile and easily lost. After the main text, this shorter poem provides a more current picture of a self-destructing female community, one outside of the antiquated biblical setting. As the first country-house poem written in England in the 1600s, "Cooke-ham" is written specifically for the Countess of Cumberland, hinting toward the fact that Cumberland was Lanyer's primary, perhaps only, patron (Lanyer xxxix-xl). When "Cooke-ham" begins, the reader is aware that Cookham, and the community shared there, is part of "pleasures past," something that is no longer alive (Lanyer 130. 13). Lanyer insists that this place is paradise: it has "Trees with leaves, with fruits, with flowers clad, / ... cristall Streames with silver spangles graced, / ... [and] little Birds chirping notes" (Lanyer 131. 23, 27, 29). From Lanyer's description, Cookham is only occupied by herself, the Countess of Cumberland, and Cumberland's daughter, making the estate an insulated female Eden. As a new Eden, Cookham's community is heavily based on acquiring knowledge, and "many a learned Booke was read and skand" by these women within the confines of their community (Lanyer 136. 161). The inclusion of a quest for knowledge shows that women will not cease their attempts to take back the knowledge Adam stole from Eve before the Fall. However, like Eden, Cookham comes to an end. Perhaps a reason for the breakdown of the community is that the land on which Cookham resides is owned by Cumberland's brother, not Cumberland herself, much like Eden was a land created by a god considered

male and cultivated by Adam (Lanyer 130). As the poem comes to a close, Lanyer says one last goodbye to Cooke-ham:

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 remains,  
Tying my heart to her by those rich chaines. (Lanyer 138. 205-210)

Though it seems void of hope, Lanyer and Cumberland's community can live on through the virtual community created through Lanyer's work. The poem will keep Cooke-ham alive just as the entirety of Lanyer's work will be the place for women to seek virtual community with a wide range of others who wish to commune about their ideas.

There is no evidence to suggest the way Lanyer's work was received in her time, so speculating about how many women read her poem is difficult. Whether or not Lanyer achieved her idea of female community, her poem dictates the standards women begin to expand on as time progresses, continuing into the modern day. Eve becomes a figure to redeem and fight for, not condemn and shun, while Christ is no longer solely for men. By breaking through the expected ideas and creating a community around her own interpretation of the Bible, Lanyer provides an early female reading of scripture that projects progressive thoughts, such as the idea of Christ as a feminine figure.

The female community Lanyer advocates for could also be a benefit to men during the early modern period. Her emphasis on knowledge cultivates the desire to surround herself with women who are intelligent, which would, in theory, allow women to expand their conversation beyond idle gossip, something men feared (Capp 50).

Women obtaining such knowledge may potentially intimidate men, which is why the

connection between knowledge and virtue is expressed in Lanyer's text: the more a woman learns, the more virtuous she can be, which serves to "[enhance] her womanliness" (Beilin xxii). By structuring her poems to her dedicatees in a way that emphasizes their "fresh Beauty ... [and] farre greater Grace" while also praising great works by women, such as Mary Sidney's Psalms translations, Lanyer is providing women with community and men with a non-threatening view of community (25. 84). Allowing men to see female community as something positive and ordained through scripture, Lanyer's ideas in *Salve Deus* have a better chance of being heard without offending those with different views.

Her dedications, Passion story, and discussion of Eve work together as one text to structure the not virtual female community where women have access to a larger pool of thought outside of a neighborhood, marriage, or individual Bible study. The story of Christ and Eve provide a glimpse of the consequences of women building community outside others of their sex, but Lanyer shows all the ways female community can be broken not to prove it is unimportant, but rather to show that it is because of its fragility that it must be protected and encouraged by women. Her poem speaks to the idea that women are not to be bound by literal, traditional Biblical standards through Eve, and that Christ is the great unifier among women through his feminine traits. Declaring women innocent through Eve and justifying their right to commune through Christ, Lanyer's poem turns negative views about women around into positive reasoning for why women require a place to express their ideas to each other. *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* begins a deeper conversation about women, providing room for others to take up the discussion



and continue to create a more global community for women. While her words may not spark revolution among her contemporaries, the goal of interpreting the Bible with a female voice is achieved, and her place as an early advocate for women reading and discussing the Bible on a large scale is secure.

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