

The Passion of a Female Literary Tradition: Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*

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As the first significant book of original poetry published by an Englishwoman, Aemilia Lanyer's 1611 volume of poems, *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*, bears a considerable burden. The volume self-consciously assumes the task of delivering to posterity a new literary tradition, a newly public, because published, tradition of poetry by women. Intimately tied to this unprecedented achievement is the stunning claim for her poetic vocation that Lanyer makes in that volume's title poem, a narration of the Passion, the events surrounding the crucifixion of Christ. Literary history has traditionally assumed Lanyer's younger contemporary, John Milton, to be the first English poet to ascribe his vocation to his fate at birth.¹ But we must ask Milton to relinquish that honor to Lanyer, who offered a bold incarnational narrative near the end of her long poem on Christ's Passion. Addressing the countess of Cumberland as either a real or presumed patron, she writes:

1. See Milton's "Ad Patrem" (1631–32), lines 61–62: "si me genuisse poetam / Contigeret." Abraham Cowley, in the lyric "Destinie," in the youthful volume *Poetical Blossomes* (1633), would likewise describe his poetic vocation in a nativity narrative:

Me from the womb the Midwife Muse did take:
She cut my Navel, washt me, and mine Head
With her own Hands she Fashioned;
She did a Covenant with me make,
And circumcis'ed my tender Soul, and thus she spake,
Thou of my Church shalt be,
Hate and renounce (said she)
Wealth, Honor, Pleasures, all the World for Me.
Thou neither great at Court, nor in the War,
Nor at th' Exchange shalt be, nor at the wrangling Bar.
Content thy self with the small Barren Praise,
That neglected Verse does raise.
She spake, and all my years to come
Took their unlucky Doom.

And knowe, when first into this world I came,
 This charge was giv'n me by th'Eternall powres,
 Th'everlasting Trophie of thy fame,
 To build.²

Given this book's status as an important literary-historical first, it is no surprise that nearly all of Lanyer's critics in the last ten years have attempted to understand the dynamics of this poet's extraordinary assumption of authority, the agential entitlement she assumes in order publicly to express the bold imaginative achievement that is the *Salve Deus*. What were the social or cultural conditions that enabled Lanyer to write and publish this work? To what extent are those conditions represented or otherwise made manifest in the text of *Salve Deus*?

The answers to these questions have been found in the picture of the virtuous community of learned, aristocratic women that Lanyer paints in the many dedicatory poems that preface the work on the Passion.³ The gathering of literary women portrayed in these poems includes Lanyer's presumed patron, Margaret, countess of Cumberland, and her daughter Anne Clifford, both of whom, as Lanyer repeatedly notes, were engaged in a protracted legal struggle to secure Anne's right to inherit the properties left by her late father. The most illustrious figure among the dedicatees is Mary Sidney, dowager countess of Pembroke, who had already established her literary reputation with her metrically experimental translations of the Psalms, lyrics widely circulated but not published in her lifetime. In one poem's dream-vision narrative of an encounter with Mary Sidney, Lanyer honors the countess as the greatest of the learned lady poets and, as Barbara Lewalski has noted, asks Sidney "to recognize Lanyer as her successor in a female poetic line."⁴ Conscious of the historical burden borne by the literary milestone that is the *Salve Deus*, Lanyer struggles to situate this in many ways unprecedented work in a "tradition" whose filiations—whose very existence, in fact—it is the obligation of the *Salve Deus* to call into being.

Lanyer's fictive projection of the sororal scene of literary collaboration that enabled her venture into print is far more complex than critics have acknowledged. The nature of this tradition and the way in which Lanyer imagines herself the beneficiary of the women writers before her are matters to which this essay will turn later. But in order to appreciate Lanyer's rich sense of her place in

2. Aemilia Lanyer, *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer: Salve Deus Rex Judeorum*, ed. Susanne Woods (New York, 1993), 113, lines 1457–60. All quotations of Lanyer's verse are taken from this edition, cited subsequently by line number in the text.
3. The foremost treatment of this topic is Barbara Lewalski's, *Writing Women in Jacobean England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1993), 213–41.
4. *Ibid.*, 223.

a line of women poets, we must first consider seriously the subject matter of the volume's long title poem. The Passion is not, as critics have largely assumed, merely the topic on which Lanyer happened to exercise her poetic gifts or a topic chosen for no other reason than its unimpeachable cultural authority.⁵ Lanyer's published poetry is not simply *about* the crucifixion; the justification for its composition is founded on the deep cultural logic of Christianity's understanding of the crucifixion and especially on the theology of justification that necessarily accompanies any early modern consideration of the Passion of Christ.

There is much in the rich traditions of discourse concerning the crucifixion that might seem naturally to draw an early modern woman writer. The already feminized figure of the scriptural Christ offers itself perhaps too readily to a devotional poet seeking an identification with a redeemer whose obligation to chastity, silence, and obedience surpasses even her own. At least since Thomas Aquinas's official association of the crucifixion with the sacrament of matrimony, it has been possible to invoke the Passion as a means of figuring, and justifying, a woman's transition from virginity to marriage.⁶ Donne toyed with this image of the crucified bride in his parodic "Epithalamion Made at Lincoln's Inn" of 1592, in which the rewards of marriage were dependent on the virgin bride's horrific defloration: lying like a "paschal lamb" on the marriage bed, the bride in Donne's disturbing poem awaits her bridegroom-priest, who "comes on his knees t' embowel her" (lines 88–90)⁷. In her 1621 *Urania*, Lady Mary Wroth would offer a related image of marital crucifixion in order to subject the corruption of modern conjugality to a critique. The beautiful Limena confronts an armed man who binds her to a pillar with her long blond hair and fastens a cord around "her soft, dainty white hands . . . in manner of a cross, as testimony of her cruellest martyrdom."⁸ With these images of a figurative crucifixion, writers as diverse as Donne and Wroth could test, or question, the culture's assumption of the virgin's seemingly tragic but ultimately triumphant relinquishment of her bodily integrity, and her liberty, to her husband. But it is not the martyrdom of marriage that Lanyer emphasizes as she explores the social analogies of atonement in her own extended treatment of the crucifixion—a neglect of convention not

5. The exception to the general critical disregard for Lanyer's religious subject matter is the argument, distinct from my own, offered by Catherine Keohane in "'That Blindest Weakenesse Be Not Over-Bold': Aemilia Lanyer's Radical Unfolding of the Passion," *ELH* 64 (1997): 359–89.
6. See *The Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas*, vol. 3, *Supplement* (New York, 1948), Q. 42, A. 3.
7. *John Donne: The Complete English Poems*, ed. A. J. Smith (Harmondsworth, England, 1971), 135. Quotations from Donne's poetry are drawn from this edition, cited by line number in the text.
8. Mary Wroth, *Urania*, Book I, reprinted in *An Anthology of Seventeenth-Century Fiction*, ed. Paul Salzman (Oxford, 1991), 102.

surprising in light of the boldly feminist critique the *Salve Deus* launches against any patriarchal system designed to silence female voices or deny female rights.

Much more recently, and in a different vein, Gjertrud Schnackenberg has figured her own incarnation as a poet in an image of self-crucifixion in the 1985 lyric "Supernatural Love."⁹ In this extraordinary poem, which invokes the Passion throughout its sixty lines, the four-year-old Schnackenberg, though not herself able yet to read, attempts with needle and thread to embroider the word "Beloved," when

The needle strikes my finger to the bone,
I lift my hand, it is myself I've sewn,
The flesh laid bare, the threads of blood my own.

The atoning triumph Schnackenberg describes in this poem is an incarnation, one that mysteriously follows, rather than precedes, a crucifixion. And while her sacrifice is not figured here as a relinquishment of her body to a greater power, she imagines an incarnation that is also an initiation into language by trying her hand at the art of the needle, which had for centuries embodied the domestic sacrifices to which women are constrained in a patriarchal world.

Far more radical than Schnackenberg, I submit, Aemilia Lanyer does not simply narrate her authorization as a poet by means of an account of a crucifixion. Lanyer rather uses the *Salve Deus* as a sacramental means to enact her own poetic incarnation. In brooding on the crucifixion and the atonement, she explores the outlines of justification, that line of theological inquiry most concerned with the bounds and latitudes of human agency. For nearly all English Protestant theologians, the elect are justified—rendered just and redeemable in the eyes of God—only by means of a sacrificial substitution. An unworthy sacrifice himself, each individual Christian, incapable of triggering the mechanism of redemption on his own, must depend on a perfect substitute, Christ, who before his death assumes the individual's sinful nature, and whose own perfection and righteousness after his death can in turn be imputed back to the individual.¹⁰

The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries in England saw a great explosion of theoretical activity surrounding the question of justification, as the orthodox Calvinists among both the Puritan and the Anglican camps grew increasingly concerned to defend themselves against "Pelagian free-willers"—all

9. I am grateful to Langdon Hammer for bringing Schnackenberg's lyric to my attention.

10. The anxiety aroused by Protestantism's removal from the individual any agency in his own redemption finds its greatest poetic expression in George Herbert's lyric, "The Reprisall."

those, such as anabaptists and Roman Catholics, who retained a role in the scheme of salvation for human merit and godly works. The official theological community grew increasingly concerned to articulate the limits of human agency, and the perils of human action, from within an authoritative theological vocabulary.¹¹ Those arrogant individuals proud of their virtue, convinced of the value of their virtuous actions, were for the voluble orthodox Calvinist minister William Perkins, for example, not to be considered true Christians, but "Judaizing" Christians. Not "content with the death and passion of Christ," anyone convinced of the redemptive capacity of his own virtuous action is to be considered a Jew, a figure for whom repentance and simple obedience, rather than submission to the mystery of sacrificial substitution, are sufficient for justification.¹² Not virtuous action but faith in "Christ crucified," Perkins repeatedly insists, "is the onely thing that justifies a sinner."¹³

It is in this context of the attempts by the period's Calvinist ministry to limit the value of human action that Lanyer fashions her own account of the crucifixion and its atonement, anxiously aware that she writes this poem "in other Phrases than may well agree / With [Christ's] pure Doctrine, and most holy Writ" (lines 305–6). She claims, near the poem's outset, that she will "Write . . . of his glorious Merit, / If he vouchsafe to guide my Hand and Quill" (lines 323–24). But the remarkable representation of Christ in the moments preceding his crucifixion reveals nothing of his merit or perfection, nor even of the voluntary obedience for which she praises him elsewhere (line 529). So far is the Christ of Lanyer's Passion narrative from being capable of acting in any way that might merit his eventual glorification that he is nowhere represented as even willingly consenting to this sacrifice. Consent for Lanyer is a form of action associated exclusively with the privileges of men in the public sphere. Whereas the other men in this poem are entitled to exercise a positive power of consent—as in the case of Pontius Pilate, consenting to the Roman authorities' desire to execute Christ (line 859)—Lanyer's Christ is never seen to consent even to the Father's will in having him sacrificed. Stripped of the already limited power of consent, the Christ of *Salve Deus* resembles many of the poem's women, whose will exists, it often seems, only to be violated. The legendary Matilda, for example, was raped by King John, notwithstanding her refusal to "consent" (line 240); and a more

11. The intensified focus on human helplessness among both Elizabethan and Jacobean Calvinist theologians is discussed thoroughly in Dewey D. Wallace Jr., *Puritans and Predestination: Grace in English Protestant Theology, 1525–1695* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1982), 29–78.
12. William Perkins, *A Commentary on Galatians* (1604), ed. Gerald T. Sheppard (New York, 1989), 349. See also Perkins's *A Declaration of the True Manner of Knowing Christ Crucified* (London, 1611).
13. Perkins, *Commentary*, 538.

general disregard of the power of consent beset all women, who, Lanyer argues, “never gave consent” to their subjection to the sovereignty of men (line 833).

Far from consenting, Lanyer’s feminized Christ, as she repeatedly insists throughout the narrative, is “*content*” to submit himself to the inexplicable will of the Father (lines 410, 475, 523, and 1124). Substituting the *s* of “consent” for a *t*, Lanyer strips her Christ of the capacity for even the passive agency exerted in the willed consent to follow the word of God. He wordlessly, will-lessly submits to the actions performed upon him, as if attempting to achieve the satisfaction that is atonement by means of the silent satisfaction of contentment. His senses confounded by the “pretious sweat [that] came trickling to the ground” (lines 407–8), her Christ walks through this passion play in a drugged stupor, “well content to have [his] Glory drown” (line 475), “content” as well “to stoope unto their Lure.” Most Protestant atonement theologies insisted that Christ’s glorification rested on his willed and knowing obedience to the Father’s law, an active desire to subject himself to the punishment the Father demanded. But the narrative here contains few representations of obedience, choice, or even consent to the will of the earthly and heavenly forces marshaled around him. He “forbears” (line 667), he “endures” (lines 609, 670), but he never acts in any way other than as a passive victim of his father’s wrath. Quite distinct from the Jesus of the Gospel narratives, Lanyer’s Christ in his acquiescence to the powers-that-be refuses even to speak, venturing no more over the course of the poem than the simple claim, “I am hee” (line 518).

Any exercise of agency—anything construable as purposeful motion or work, and even speech itself—is dismissed throughout the main narrative of the Passion as not only vain but also morally suspect. Christ’s enemies are all dismissed as “wicked Actors” (line 612), not simply because their particular actions are wicked but also because action itself, of any kind, in so many instances meets with the poem’s stern disapproval. The disciple Peter thinks to defend his Master by drawing his sword on one of the guards, assuming wrongly that performing a virtuous action, at least, is warranted.

But no actions in the poem are proven more fruitless than those of the story’s women, women who in spite of their virtue and courage are no less deluded than their male counterparts by a groundless faith in action’s value. Pilate’s wife, the poem’s most powerful speaker, fails, after her long exhortation, to change her husband’s mind. The heroic daughters of Jerusalem labor for several stanzas to dissuade the men from complying with the crucifixion, but their speech, Lanyer tells us, is “all in vaine” (line 1001). And while we might be tempted to think that Lanyer is criticizing the patriarchal social conditions that nullify the efficacy of female speech, the poem itself seems largely to question the assumption

that female speech—indeed, any original speech—might succeed in effecting positive change.

Surely we are justified in noting the irony of this emphasis on the futility of woman's speech in this long, ambitious poem written by a woman. How does Lanyer reconcile the action she has herself taken in composing and publishing the *Salve Deus* with her sweeping derogation of the verbal activity of those great scriptural women? The answer is simple: Lanyer does not. Or, at least, she does not until after the poem's narration of the crucifixion and resurrection. In the death of Lanyer's Christ, the will-less passivity that was his hallmark is buried, and in its place rises a new celebration of deliberate and effective speech and action. Lanyer praises a newly militaristic Christ, capable of conquering all of his enemies. She elevates her presumed patroness, the countess of Cumberland, to the role of the Messiah's new champion, capable of healing his wounds with her newly efficacious prayers. She celebrates the heroic women of the Old Testament—Susanna, Judith, Deborah, and Esther—whose feats of courage and strength can only now, in retrospect, be honored as worthy actions (lines 1465–1544). The entire category of verbal action—in fact, a category that the poem had labored to derogate as both Hebraic and feminine—is redeemed, implicitly redeeming the verbal agency of this woman of Jewish descent (if the biographical evidence can be trusted), Aemilia Lanyer.¹⁴

Perhaps most important, Lanyer's representation of the Passion enables her retrospectively to assume for herself the right to have written this poem, enabling her to characterize, for the first time, the composition of this poem as *work*: the poem is now suddenly and unremittingly identified as a "holy work," as "this taske of Beauty which I tooke in hand" (line 1322). In a postscript she appends to *Salve Deus*, Lanyer goes so far with this celebration of her own poetic agency as to claim to have been divinely "Appointed to write this work." And, finally, it is only after the narrative of the Passion that Lanyer permits herself to make that staggering claim noted at this essay's beginning, that hers is a true poetic *vocation*: "And knowe, when first unto this world I came, / This charge was giv'n me by th'Eternall powres." So committed is she to the general logic of sacrificial substitution that the atonement has permitted her this final, and most outrageous, assumption of authority: she seizes from none other than Christ himself the presumably singular narrative of Incarnation, the story of Christ's unique journey from heaven to "this world" that she neglects utterly to mention in her narrative of his life but proudly applies to herself once she has secured her narrative of his death. It is as if the only words she had permitted Christ in the entirety of the

14. Lewalski notes the probable Jewish origins of Lanyer's Italian father's family in *Writing Women*, 214–15.

poem's eighteen hundred lines she were now able to utter herself: "*I am hee.*" If it is not exactly the case that Christ died so that Lanyer could write this poem, it may well be, I propose, that Lanyer narrates Christ's death in order to *effect* the sacrificial substitution whereby her womanly obligation to passivity could be traded for the glorious redemptive activity for which the Messiah is typically praised.

But nothing, as we learn from all of the Reformed theologians of atonement, is got for nothing. Much as man's redemption was dearly paid for by the Christian Messiah, so Lanyer's new seizure of active poetic authority is not without its cost. So endemic, in fact, is the logic of sacrificial substitution to the Lanyerian imagination that it structures nearly all of the accounts of her relations to the other figures in the community of virtuous women she imagines. In the generally secular pages of the dedicatory poems, the redeemer who died for the empowerment of Lanyer's contemporaries is not Christ but the late Queen Elizabeth. Lanyer honors the reigning Queen Anne in the volume's first dedication, but she takes care to remind her majesty that she reigns only because a greater queen, Elizabeth, laid down her life. Anne's daughter, the princess Elizabeth, must similarly resign the significance of her being to her royal Tudor namesake, now named by Lanyer as the "deare Mother of our Common-weale." And in a particularly peculiar dedicatory gesture, Lanyer begins her address to the countess of Cumberland at the opening of the *Salve Deus* with the suggestion that Lanyer will apply her pen to the never-dying fame of the countess only because the truly worthy honoree, the late Elizabeth, of course, has "ascended to that rest / Of endlesse joy and true Eternitie" (lines 1–2).

All of these accommodations of the rhetoric of dedication to the profounder logic of sacrificial atonement pale, however, in the face of the volume's most significant dedicatory address. This is "The Authors Dreame to the ladie *Marie*, the Countesse Dowager of *Pembrooke*," addressed to Mary Sidney, the poet whose translations of David's "holy sonnets" seized Lanyer in her sleep, songs she calls "the heavenli'st musicke . . . That ever earthly eares did entertaine" (lines 129–30). In attempting to figure the idea of a historical line of poets in which she enjoys a preeminent position, she refuses any approximation of the trope of tradition, the *traditio* whereby literary property would be handed down or surrendered from one poet to another. As Lanyer has occasion at many points to remind the beleaguered countess of Cumberland and her daughter, women have only the most tenuous relation to *traditio*, that process of authorization founded on the legal conveyance of property from one generation to the next. The form of literary authorization to which Lanyer reverts, therefore, is not the legal form of tradition but the far more mysterious process of substitutive sacrifice. Helpless to autho-

rise herself, to establish her own right to *act* authoritatively, the woman poet for Lanyer receives her authority by means of what a theologian would call imputation; it must be imputed to her by means of the substitutive process of an atoning sacrifice. The greatness of Mary Sidney, we learn, was imputed to *her* by her late brother Philip, whose sacrificial death functioned, in Lanyer's disturbing figuration, to glorify his sister (lines 141–56), who as a result is now "farre before him . . . to be esteemd / For virtue, wisdom, learning, dignity" (lines 151–52). Mary Sidney, of course, was still alive and well when Lanyer wrote her poem, and Lanyer properly refrains from stating outright that she is planning to profit poetically from the countess of Pembroke's own final sacrifice. But the dream vision concludes with Lanyer's request that Sidney contemplate the Christian sacrifice recounted in the *Salve Deus*; and in asking Sidney to "vouchsafe" her "grace" on Lanyer's faulty Passion poem, she is seeking not only the worldly remuneration this wealthy patron might proffer in this life but also the far more valuable imputation of poetic agency that Sidney might one day be content to relinquish at her death.

Lanyer's passionate theologization of her relation to Mary Sidney may seem all the more strained when we consider that Lanyer's suggestion of any poetic kinship with Sidney may be the most extravagant of this volume's fictions. Lanyer's literary filiation is surely not to the countess of Pembroke, whose psalmic lyricism and metrical virtuosity left no discernable impact on Lanyer's own verse. Even Lanyer's own pastiche of a few triumphant Psalms in lines 73–144 of the *Salve Deus* bears no trace of the influence of Sidney, whose then unpublished translations of the Psalms it is quite possible Lanyer never read; the long psalmic digression of Lanyer's own poem is in fact an often transparently versified version of Psalms 11, 64, 97, 103, and 104 as they were translated into English for the Henrician "Great Bible" and broadly disseminated through the Book of Common Prayer. Her true poetic forebears are not Mary Sidney and the other literary women addressed in the prefatory poems of the *Salve Deus* volume. Rather they are the "Great Bible" translator Miles Coverdale, and, more consequentially, as Barbara Lewalski and Janel Mueller have suggested, the male narrative poets she never names, Robert Southwell and especially Giles Fletcher, whose long narrative on the Passion, in an *ottava rima* stanza close to Lanyer's own, appeared the year before the *Salve Deus*.¹⁵ For a poet as sensitive as Lanyer to the social obstacles barring a woman's inheritance of implicitly male property,

15. See Lewalski, *Writing Women*, 227; and Janel Mueller, "The Feminist Poetics of Aemilia Lanyer's 'Salve Deus Rex Judæorum,'" in Lynn Keller and Christianne Miller, eds., *Feminist Measures: Soundings in Poetry and Theory* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1993), 208–36; revised and reprinted in Marshall Grossman, ed., *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon* (Lexington, 1998), 234–54.

it is not surprising that she refrains from seizing a place in the tradition of devotional narrative poets to which she has a justifiable claim. She invokes instead a fiction of a literary matrilineage whose crucial, if symbolic, value for her she figures obliquely as a form of sacrificial replacement.

If Mary Sidney emerges in the imaginative world of Lanyer's "Dreame to the ladie *Marie*" as a woman poet whose strength might be sacrificed for the public success of Lanyer's own poetry, her sacrificial role is founded on an existent identification of the Psalm-translator as a "Hebrew" poet. Donne had already aligned Mary Sidney with the literary achievement of the Old Testament; in his verses "Upon the translation of the Psalms by Sir Philip Sidney, and the Countess of Pembroke his sister," he had named the gifted sister of Philip Sidney "this Miriam," the sister of Moses. For Donne in that tribute, the Sidneyan Psalms take their place in a successive line of specifically Hebrew instances of poetic inspiration:

The songs are these, which heaven's high holy Muse
Whispered to David, David to the Jews:
And David's successors, in holy zeal,
In forms of joy and art do re-reveal.

(Lines 31–34)

Going further even than Donne in Judaizing Mary Sidney, Lanyer associates her with the Old Testament David himself, pointing her reader, in one of her marginal subheadings, to the "Psalms written newly by the Countesse Dowager of Penbrooke." Sidney's Psalms, for Lanyer, are the effects of poetic action and labor that qualify them as "workes": "your faire mind on worthier workes is plac'd," she tells Sidney, "On workes that are more deepe, and more profound" (lines 25–16) than the poetic efforts of Lanyer herself. Lanyer carefully identifies Sidney, whose own Calvinism would have led her to recoil from such praise, with that self-willed, merit-based mode of redemption her Calvinist contemporaries would denounce as "Judaizing."

As a poetic agent implicitly being asked to make room for Lanyer's own emergence as a working poet, Mary Sidney cannot, for Lanyer, function simply as a supportive female contemporary or model for imitation. The right to author her own poetic *work* can be Lanyer's, it would seem, only once Sidney herself has been transumed, perhaps even sacrificed. The implicit model Lanyer calls on to structure this fantasized process of historical transumption is the biblical hermeneutics of typology, whereby the shadowy "types" of the Old Testament give way to the truth, or the Christian "antitypes," of the New. Lanyer's consistent characterization of Sidney's texts and ideas as "workes" clearly finds the older

poet an unenlightened type within the rigorously diachronic scheme of Lanyer's typological reading of literary history. As a "Hebrew" poet, Sidney is tied to a literary period prior to the Christian dispensation whose atoning origins Lanyer's *Salve Deus* represents: the "rare sweet songs" framed by "Israel's King" and translated by Sidney are shoved back to that benighted point in time "Before [God's] holy wisdom tooke the name / Of great *Messias*, Lord of unitie" (lines 199–20). This deliberately extreme backdating of Mary Sidney's literary achievement allows Lanyer to emerge not, as Donne might have suggested, as Sidney's poetic successor but to arise, as the "Dreame to the ladie Marie" suggests, as the Christian typological fulfillment of Mary Sidney's Hebraic achievement.

I have suggested that Lanyer gives pride of place to Mary Sidney, whose verse may have been known to her only by reputation, in part to imagine herself subsuming Sidney, much as the Christian antitype necessarily subsumes its chronologically prior but spiritually inferior Jewish type. To argue, as I have, that Mary Sidney functions for Aemilia Lanyer as little more than a symbolic element in a complex typological scheme of literary self-authorization, is of course only to hint at the difficult birth of the trope of a female literary tradition. But it is the work of the *Salve Deus* volume as a whole, with its derogating praise of Sidney's Old Testament poetic and its own extended narrative of the New Testament Passion, to effect this typological transumption. And it is in light of Lanyer's use of the atonement narrative as the means to authorize her verse as the work of a new woman poet that we can best understand the astonishing title Lanyer bestowed on this first volume of original poems published by a woman. Her title, *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*, recalls, of course, the Bible's account of the soldier who crowned Christ with a wreath of thorns and mocked him, crying, "Hail the king of the Jews." So strange is this title, which invites the reader's identification of the poet not with Christ or his champions but with his crucifiers, that Lanyer herself felt compelled to apologize for it in an appended postscript, "To the doubtful Reader":

Gentle Reader, if thou desire to be resolved, why I give this Title, *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*, know for certaine; that it was delivered unto me in sleepe many yeares before I had any intent to write in this maner, and was quite out of my memory, untill I had written the Passion of Christ, when immediately it came into my remembrance, what I had dreamed long before; and thinking it a significant token, that I was appointed to performe this Worke, I gave the very same words I received in sleep as the fittest Title I could devise for this Booke.

Surely the title is strange, whatever its visionary origin, in the context of this poem's devotional engagement with its religious subject. But it is at the same time a title almost perfectly suited to a poem that uses a reenactment of the crucifixion as a means of a retroactive authorization of its composition and publication. Lanyer, according to this account, only recalled her dream of the mocking phrase after she had already written her "Passion of Christ." And it was not until after that composition, and after remembering the dream of the crucifier's cry, that she was able to identify herself as "appointed," presumably by God, "to performe this Worke." Shedding any affiliation with the resigned femininity of her text's Christ and appropriating the activity of poetic work associated with Mary Sidney, Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum* works to enact, by means of the alchemy of a loosely typological paradigm of literary history, her appointment as a poet.

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