

EARLY MODERN WOMEN WRITERS AND HUMILITY AS RHETORIC: AEMILIA
LANYER'S TABLE-TURNING USE OF MODESTY

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ABSTRACT

EARLY MODERN WOMEN WRITERS AND HUMILITY AS RHETORIC: AEMILIA LANYER'S TABLE-TURNING USE OF MODESTY

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16th and 17th century women's writing contains a pervasive language of self-effacement, which has been documented and analyzed by scholars, but the focus remains on the sincerity of the act, even though humility was often employed as a successful rhetorical tool by both classic orators and Renaissance male writers. Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* has been read in this tradition of sincere humility, and even when it has not, scholars have focused on the dedicatory paratext, thus minimizing Lanyer's poetic prowess. I argue that Lanyer's poem-proper employs modesty as a strategic rhetorical device, giving added credibility and importance to her work. By removing the lens of modesty as sincerity, I hope to encourage a reexamination of the texts of Renaissance women and remove them from their 'silent, chaste and obedient' allocation by/for the modern reader.

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INTRODUCTION

In 1611, Aemilia Lanyer published her poem on the Passion of Christ, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, framed by ten dedicatory poems and an elegy to the country estate of Cookeham. Lanyer's dedications were to noblewomen of the time, including Queen Anne, her daughter Princess Elizabeth, the Lady Arabella Stuart, Lady Susan Bertie and her daughter Elizabeth, and Mary Sidney, as well as Ladies Margaret and Anne Clifford. It is for the Cliffords that Lanyer wrote her closing poem "The Description of Cookeham", a countryside elegy for the estate the two women were denied on the basis of *primogeniture* laws and traditions governing the inheritance of property in England. Lanyer's collection of poetry and dedications was a foray into the realm of publication, a world fraught with scandalous overtones and expectations that were difficult to navigate regardless of gender.

The atmosphere within which Lanyer was writing in early modern England was one that made publication for women nearly impossible, but it was also one that inspired them to make distinctive choices regarding the writing that they did bring to the public sphere. One of these choices made by Lanyer is that of the use of humility—employing self-effacing language to introduce, frame and advance her poem. While critics have long seen female writers' humility as an admittance of authorial inferiority, I argue that this

choice of self-effacing language is a strategic rhetorical move on the part of Aemilia Lanyer (and indeed many of the women writing within the time period)—one she purposefully chooses, and one I suggest she uses as a way to empower not only her female dedicatees, but women in general. She employs this rhetorical strategy not only in her dedicatory statements, as some literary critics have pointed out, but I also claim that this usage is also effectively displayed within the title-poem of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (hereafter, referred to as *Salve Deus*). Lanyer's representation of the Passion of Christ has been little interrogated by critics considering Lanyer's modesty rhetoric, and this downplays the importance of the poem-proper. Through Lanyer's expansion of the speech by Pilate's wife entitled "Eve's Apologie", her depiction of Christ's suffering in feminizing terms, and her paradoxical comparison of humility and strength, she lays a foundation for considering the equality of men and women, as well as producing a divine example of female empowerment.

Women's Writing Genres and the Early Modern Rhetorical Atmosphere

The 16th and 17th centuries were a time of increased literacy and publication, producing some of the most enduring works in English literature; writers like Milton, Donne and Shakespeare are synonymous with the period, and have become the core of literary study in the West. These men's works are resplendent with allusion and symbolism, pulling rich history from poets and orators of the classical period of Rome and Greece. Because of their rhetorical strategies, these early modern male writers have been studied, emulated and canonized so often that they and their works have been immortalized¹. Although European male writers dominated the literary canon, many

¹ Such strategies include the blazon, the epic poem, satire, conceits, sonnets, etc.

women were publishing works, though their contributions were met with less enthusiasm than those of their male counterparts. Women who published were considered unseemly, promiscuous, sometimes even called witches. In her book *The Imprint of Gender*, Wendy Wall outlines many of the attitudes and obstacles that prevailed against women publishing during the period:

Women in early modern England faced tremendous obstacles in establishing themselves as public figures of any kind. Literary and historical scholars have dramatized these prohibitions quite glaringly in past years, as they have documented restrictions on female education; the link between public speech and harlotry; the definition of a woman's domain as that of domestic piety; the identification of silence as a feminine ideal; and the mastery of rhetoric as a male puberty rite. Constrained by the norms of acceptable feminine behavior, women were specifically discouraged from tapping into the newly popular channel of print; to do so threatened the cornerstone of their moral and social well-being. (279-280)

Still, many women, especially aristocrats, were accepted in print because they adhered to the genres of so-called "women's" writing; including mother's advice, translation, or polemic/divine inspiration literature. Mother's advice books came from a place where women were allowed to be the experts, especially since women were the ones to pass on knowledge within the home. Wendy Wall notes that the potential peril of childbirth was particularly effective in allowing a woman to speak publicly: "Renaissance women found that they could take advantage of these special circumstances by

constructing final legacies as pre-texts to the hazardous event of childbirth” (*Imprint of Gender*, 285). By speaking from their relegated places within society, the writers of mother’s advice books and pamphlets were accepted within early modern textual markets.

Another primary avenue for female publication occurred during the *querelle des femmes* controversy (“The Woman Question”), a pamphlet debate about the nature of women, in which women and their virtue as a sex were both attacked and defended by many writers. This “woman question” played a prominent role in the publication of women writers, as their pamphlet defenses were widely read and circulated (based on their many reprintings), creating a new space within which early modern women could speak². One of the most frequented subjects was defending a woman’s spiritual equality to a man, despite the condemnation women received based on Eve giving Adam the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Women were able to take up the interpretation of Scripture in these pamphlet defenses because of their increased Biblical literacy, which was fueled by Protestantism. Teague and De Haas point towards this access and acquisition of literacy in their article “Defences of Women” saying, “the movement towards having women learn to read was furthered by England’s Protestant leaning and the belief that individuals should read scripture for themselves. So women were increasingly taught to read to give them access to the scriptures” (249). Such learning was utilized by women publishing *querelle des femmes* debates to refute misogynistic

² Of particular note are Rachel Speght, Esther Sowernam, Jane Anger and Constanta Munda.

pamphlets, giving the women authors a platform of divine authority to speak from and a basis for logical argument against their inferior status to men.

Also tolerated were women who translated others' works, providing them with someone else's words to use as a shield, but also allowing them to demonstrate their intellectual abilities in the public arena.³ In her introduction to the book *Silent But for the Word*, Margaret Hannay notes the double-edgedness of this form of publication: "religious motivation, which permitted women to translate, could be used to force them out of original discourse and into translation" (9). This did not completely limit the expression of women choosing translation, as can be seen in the work of Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke. Hannay sees her work also as a political move, stating that she "managed to address public issues within the genres permitted her" (12). As Hannay goes on to explain, while Sidney's translations appear "in the appropriate feminine genres of epitaph and dedication", "the countess not only completed her brother's translation of the Psalms but also attempted to continue his involvement in Protestant politics" (12). In the same collection, Diane Bornstein also defends Mary Sidney's translation work of Philippe de Mornay's *Discours de la vie et de la mort* saying, "by this translation the countess identified herself with the intellectual avant garde of her day, demonstrated by her interest in classical Stoicism, and voiced personal concerns" (126). It seems clear that translation was more than simply the reiterating a work already written, but a genre available to women that they utilized to express their interest in political and spiritual

³ Even Queen Elizabeth I made forays into the realm of publication through her translations of works like *Miroir* by Marguerite de Navarre.

concerns of the period, while at the same time transmitting some of themselves into the works they were rendering into English.

Finally, a more controversial form of female publication was accomplished by those claiming to write under the impetus of a higher calling, whether via a dream vision from heaven or by directly channeling the Holy Spirit. However, as Frances James notes in the article “‘A Christal Glasse for Christian Women’: Meditations on Christ’s Passion in the Devotional Literature of Renaissance Women”, this genre was fraught with some issues as well:

Women’s relationship to the devotional work was complicated due to their dependence on a voice that was not ultimately theirs, but was given to them by God in order to speak publicly. The differentiation between an internal devotional experience, of which a woman could have complete possession, and the channeling of such an experience through the authorising voice of another, inherently male God whose word was most often transmitted through the patriarchal institution of the Church, can thus be seen as a source of anxiety in the writing of female Renaissance authors. (59)

These polemic works offered a similar outlet for women writers, providing a voice that was not necessarily their own, but rather from on high, so that they might warrant a reading without direct attacks on their opinions and public forwardness. Though many religious women were not immune from societal criticism, particularly those of religious sects, many of their works received additional printings based on their popularity. This

helped secure a place for these women within the world of literature, despite the traditional disdain for women speaking/writing publicly.⁴

The Uncomfortable Confusion of Sincere Humility

In conjunction with these acceptable forms of female publication, the texts that women published contained a pervasive language of self-effacement, ranging from straightforward religious subjection to complete disavowal of the role of author. These women often stated that they used an “unworthy pen”, they had “humble words”, or even that they were unfit to be writing. For instance, Aemilia Lanyer states in one of her dedications of *Salve Deus Judaeorum* to the Countess of Dorset, “Blest by our Saviours merits, not my skil,/Which I acknowledge to be very small;/Yet if the least part of his blessed Will/I have perform’d, I count I have done all” (lines 9-12). Nearly all scholars have seen this kind of language as an manifestation of the patriarchal world within which these women lived, as if the second-class status they were assigned permeated their thinking and then the page. Scholars like Valerie Wayne see works written by women, in particular mother’s advice books, as yet another way women of the early modern period fell into “self-erasure”, so that their publication was a contradiction. In her essay “Advice for Women from Mothers and Patriarchs”, Wayne states that “the mothers’ self-portraits, too, are predicated on their own erasure, and most Renaissance conduct literature constructed a radically contradictory subjectivity for women” (71). Wayne, like many others, refuses to develop a way to synthesize the desire for public printing with the language of self-effacement prevalent in early modern women’s work. She sees mothers

⁴ *Women’s Speaking Justified* by Margaret Fell and *Strange and Wonderful Newes from White-Hall* by Anna Trapnel were popular and controversial at the same time.

writing with piety and even admonition against transgressing cultural norms as confusing, as well as perpetuating female oppression: “But the origins of that advice were mediated by the cultural pressures surrounding their articulation, and the applications of the advice could be far from liberatory. In effect, texts such as this one were important agents in providing still more injunctions on female behaviour, most of which supported the ideological work performed in male-authored texts” (66). Wayne returns to the notion that society’s constraints on female writers permeated their texts instead of considering the possibility that rhetorical strategy was involved. In doing so, she reduces the act of publication back to idealized silence and chastity, when it could be seen as the ultimate act of defiance. When we look at the works of these women in this way, we lose their greater meaning, a meaning the author hoped would be recognized through her intentional use of these strategies. These works were meant to be seen, and even meant to be used, as a means of empowering both the author as well as the female reader.

Even feminist critics like Wendy Wall have seen this unassuming language as an outward expression of the internalized oppression of women during the Renaissance period. In her book, *The Imprint of Gender*, Wall devotes a chapter to women who sought to enter the world of print, focusing primarily on mother’s advice books. Citing the writing of Elizabeth Joceline, Dorothy Leigh and Elizabeth Grymeston in her explanation of how these women negotiated their way into the public sphere of print, Wall takes for granted the self-effacing language that each uses, insisting it was sincere. Of Grymeston’s work, she states, “Her claim to imminent death and her special maternal relationship with her son give Grymeston the ground for transforming her “fruitlesse braine” into a productive medium” (286). While Wall acknowledges that these women use the death-

bed trope to create a false sense of urgency for their writing, she overlooks the possibility that this type of calculated word choice is merely an aspect of the humility that each employs. By declaring her brain “fruitlesse” and within the same sentence quoting Latin, Grymeston is playing on more than just her potential death in childbirth. Wall even points to the fact that there is a sense the author is writing for more than just her child, further complicating her own idea that these women were simply writing out of their declared role of instruction: “these ostensibly private instructions from mother to child were often remarkably self-conscious about their public audience” (287). Wall points out that there is something of a public nature to these texts, but doesn’t acknowledge that the public audience may have been the point of the writing; the act of child instruction was a carefully constructed one that may perhaps have given advice to offspring, but also created the space from which a woman could speak to a wider audience instead of remaining silent.

While these women used “private” modes of writing as ways to enter the published sphere, many reached beyond these limited realms into other areas, but still used self-effacing language throughout their texts. Yet within the same work, these women announced a hope that their words would create a legacy for the subjects they took up—quite a confident claim for women supposedly inculcated with a spirit of humility. One prominent example of this is Aphra Behn in her significant work *Oroonoko*, which Behn closes with a few lines that contain this seemingly perplexing paradox: “thus died this great man, worthy of a better fate and *a more sublime wit than mine to write his praise*. Yet, I hope, the reputation of my pen is considerable enough *to make his glorious name to survive to all ages*, with that of the brave, the beautiful and the

constant Imoinda (76-77, emphasis mine). Behn simultaneously states that her subject is receiving a subpar literary treatment at her hand, while also stating that she hopes her success as an author might immortalize the African prince Oroonoko. If looking to give everlasting fame to her subject, why would Behn also disavow her own writing skills unless she was doing something beyond simply replicating the misogyny she experienced within society? As Aphra Behn shows, many of these same self-effacing women actually sought to get their work published—an act that in itself seeks recognition and intends to assert a sense of self in writing. How can this sense of true humility be reconciled with intentional demonstrations of pride?

Uses of Humility in the Early Modern Period

Perhaps in looking at the scholarship of their male contemporaries, we can see this use of humility for what it is—a strategic rhetorical trope. That is to say, women writing in these socially-prescribed ways were aware of the power of words, the tradition of rhetoric, and how these could function to their advantage. The language of humility is seen in a variety of forms throughout the early modern period, in works written by both men and women. One of the most common sources of literary humility was genuine religious piety, something seen in the many devotional works produced during the Renaissance, as the humanist education movement encouraged learning and reading of the Bible at all levels. Authors established their inferiority to the almighty Creator, as well as their unworthiness to write of divine and heavenly things. This kind of posturing closely follows Biblical prescriptions for humbling one before God in order that He might exalt one, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble” (*NIV*, James 4:6), that “for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself

will be exalted” (*NIV*, Luke 14:11), and in the Sermon on the Mount, “blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth” (*NIV*, Matt. 5:5). In addition to the Biblical instruction of humility, the book of Job is a testament to the humility of a believer before God, and a reminder of the awesomeness of the Lord compared to the temporal and limited existence of humanity, however righteous they may be. Many women and men found religious writing a more accepted avenue for publication (a particular saving grace for the often trivialized and feminized literary form, poetry), so this type of humility is often within their work, but is not the only source of authorial humility during the early modern period.

It was common to seek favor within the court of the reigning monarch as a means of upward social mobility and often patronage, especially for writers. The world of the court was a world of privilege that profited those who belonged to it, but it was fickle and often who (or what) was in favor at one moment was cast out the next. Therefore, it was important for a courtier/courtesan (here meaning both a member of a royal court, as well as someone who seeks to gain favor via flattery or charm) to use all strategies available in order to maintain his/her place, and many of these strategies involved the art of rhetoric. Becoming a successful courtier/courtesan meant being a successful orator, a subject expounded on by the classical wisdom of Cicero and Quintilian, as well as the contemporary Italian writer Baldesar Castiglione. His work, *Il Cortegiano*, contained a series of conversations that defined what the perfect member of court would be like: what kind of qualities he or she would possess, especially including the manner of speaking. The work was well-received not only in Italian, but spawned many other translations as well, including English by Thomas Hoby. William Amelia states that “its scores of

editions and translations - some 40 editions in the sixteenth century and 100 more by 1900 – exercised a profound influence on European sensibilities and *The Courtier* ranks today as one of the most representative books of the Renaissance” (582).

Based on the popularity of Castiglione’s ideas and their influence on the early modern period, it is easy to find the elements of the ideal courtier in the writings of the time, particularly the concept of *sprezzatura*. This concept called for grace or a kind of nonchalance to be used when a courtier is speaking, so that even if he or she is using prodigious skill, it does not appear that an effort is made to do so. Amelia describes it as “the easy nonchalance in which affectation should carefully be avoided. A gentleman’s learning ought to be carried easily and lightly; nothing should be done doggedly or with strain...grace was a kind of careless ease” (582). Many authors pulled off the look of ease by downplaying themselves within their writing, using language coated with humility while they went about composing literary masterpieces of devotion, commemoration, imagination and poetry. Men of the age, Sir Philip Sidney for example, also made claims of having an inferior ability to write about holy things or even to craft words expertly within their texts, but critics have never portrayed Sidney as a man who actually believed he was an unworthy writer. In his emotional sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*, Sidney grapples from the beginning of his first sonnet with what sounds like an inability to write:

I sought fit words to paint the blackest face of woe,

Studying inventions fine, her wits to entertain,

Oft turning others’ leaves, to see if thence would flow

Some fresh and fruitful showers upon my sunburned brain.

But words came halting forth, wanting Invention's stay;

Invention, Nature's child, fled step-dame Study's blows,

And others' feet still seemed but strangers in my way.

Thus great with child to speak, and helpless in my throes,

Biting my truant pen, beating myself for spite. (lines 5-13)

While this expression of humility might be read with complete sincerity, Sidney does not have the reputation as an unknown poet, shunned because of his self-proclaimed inability to write poetry. In fact, he follows up the first sonnet that is plagued by doubt with 93 more that prove quite the contrary, and writes an argument defending the practice of creating poetry, showing that his humility is simply a staged humble posturing as part of his poetic appeal.

Sidney is not alone in his rhetoric of humility; the same can be said of Edmund Spenser in his laud of both Sidney and Elizabeth I in *The Faerie Queen*. In his preface to the work, the dedication states that this work has been written by Elizabeth's "most humble servant...in all humility" (xviii). Spenser's opening lines go on to record his perceived unworthiness and inability to complete the task he has set out to do; yet, he still undertook it and had it published. Spenser's work has occupied a prominent spot in the canon and classroom throughout the intervening period, because it was a work of beauty and skill, despite Spenser's protest. The book's reception was not based on taking Spenser at his word of being an inferior writer, but rather because his self-effacing

language was becoming for his place as a courtier writing in celebration of his monarch. If religious piety and courtly posturing can be viewed as rhetorical strategies when applied to male authors, then the Renaissance was a time period where the language of humility was used in specific ways by an author to present his work to his audience. Why then does this same logic cease to apply when women are producing the text?

Much of the difference seems to be the argument that women did not have access to the type of education that would inspire and advocate these forms of rhetorical strategies. Many of the women writing during the early modern period were from the aristocracy, which gave them nearly the same kind of education as their male counterparts who were using these forms. For middle class women like Lanyer, the new emphasis on the Greek and Roman rhetoricians was not as available because, as Hilda Smith notes, “men were expected to remain true Christians, but they were to incorporate secular knowledge from the ancients with Christianity. Demands for morality and chastity constrained women and narrowed their existence” (12). Still, the spread of humanist education gave more attention to classic texts and languages, as well as the rhetorical strategies they taught and espoused, giving aristocratic women, and even middle class women, the opportunity to learn them. Evidence of this can be seen in early modern female authors who demonstrate proficiency in these forms throughout their works. Yet, the focus on protecting the virtue of women, combined with their inferior social class, limited middle class women’s education almost exclusively to works related to the Scriptures or sermons. However, both Scripture and sermons were influenced by the very literary forms denied these women, allowing early modern middle class women indirect access to classical forms. Still, some may argue that many of the women writing

during the Renaissance period were not privileged enough to receive any sort of education at the time, particularly those who published their writing as a means of monetary livelihood. While this may be true, those same women were still able to see models of classical rhetoric around them that they would be able to model, especially sermons and other devotional works that were used in home instruction for the moral grounding of children, regardless of their gender. Many of the writers who penned mother's advice books were not ladies of noble families, yet they showed their own intellectual aptitude with their writing. Elizabeth Grymeston, a middle class woman, frequently inserted Latin into her addresses to her son, while Dorothy Leigh's book of advice for her children has an intense theological focus, dipping into matters of high theology. The education received within the home, along with frequently occurring religious models of writing and expression, could clearly have given early modern women who were not aristocrats access to classical forms for their study and emulation. By navigating through these sophisticated forms with references to humility, middle class women produce a quandary for scholars and critics who are inclined to preserve their silence and invisibility.

Aemilia Lanyer's Rhetoric of Modesty

As more scholarly work focuses on the women of the early modern period, some academics are beginning to question the notion of the Renaissance female author's sincere modesty. One of the most recent contributors to this work is Patricia Pender, who calls the use of humility by early modern women a "modesty trope" seeing it as "the very mark of literariness as it circulates among early modern protocols of textual modesty and authority" (3). In her thought-provoking work, *Early Modern Women's Writing and the*

Rhetoric of Modesty, Pender explores five very different female writers from the period, including Katherine Parr, Anne Bradstreet and Aemilia Lanyer. Drawing on classical rhetoricians who were idolized and emulated in the Renaissance period, Pender offers a solution to what other scholars have long seen as a disjunction between self-effacing language and the desire for publication and legacy: namely, that these women were calling on humility as a strategic way to appeal to their audience, in keeping with both Greek and Roman orators and contemporary male writers. While Pender's work is groundbreaking in looking at how these women were skillfully manipulating the language of modesty, her work on Aemilia Lanyer lacks some of the depth that the devotional poem deserves. Nearly all scholars of Lanyer, of which Pender is no exception, focus solely on *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*'s paratext—that is, the dedicatory poems that surround the central poem of Christ's suffering, as well as an elegy to the country estate of Cookeham—while neglecting the poem-proper.⁵

The dedications in *Salve Deus* have been simply seen as Lanyer's bid for patronage, which requires a performance of humility in order to ingratiate oneself to someone of a higher class and financial situation. This kind of thinking keeps the focus of the poem's scholarship on the immediate monetary gain that could be received from the work, rather than the long term gain of the literary merit and example found in the poem's skilled execution. Critics also limit Lanyer's work to speaking to the very specific group of women mentioned in her dedications. However, because of its continued look at a variety of women as they interact with Christ, her poem-proper seems to indicate that

⁵ These scholars include, but are not limited to Susanne Woods, Colleen Shea, and Lisa Schnell.

she is working on something bigger than the religious merit of the ten plus women she mentions in her dedicatory comments. In this way, the author's main work of poetry is continually devalued, as well as overlooked when addressing the idea of modesty as intentional rhetoric. Even Susanne Woods, a Lanyer scholar and editor of her work, excludes all mentions of the poem-proper in her essay, "Vocation and Authority: Born to Write", instead relying on the dedicatory pretext to develop her claims regarding Lanyer's authority to earn money as a poet. When such a prominent developer of current Lanyer scholarship is willing to overlook the main feature of Lanyer's work, it is evident that there is much to be done with regard to the analysis of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*.

The few critics who have interrogated Lanyer's poem only highlight the section of "Eve's Apologie", which has also begun to be included in some larger anthologies, along with "The Description of Cooke-ham." While these are both an important part of the poem, especially when analyzing gender concerns and even the humility trope, why is the rest of the poem then overlooked, when Lanyer addresses many other prominent women in Christian doctrine, including the Virgin Mary? In the hopes of furthering Lanyer scholarship, as well as building on this foundation of seeing modesty as a strategic form of rhetoric for women writers, I will analyze Lanyer's poem-proper (including "Eve's Apologie") by extrapolating her intentional use of humility as a rhetorical device. This kind of work is important to the rethinking of early modern women as exemplary writers worthy of further study by scholars, in an effort to bring them out of obscurity and into the same canon as their well-known masculine counterparts. In this way, we can see Lanyer's writing of modesty as a way of pointing to something strategic, something more poignant and imperative based on the role of humility and its meaning for women.

Aemilia Lanyer repeatedly provides evidence of her confidence in the work that she has written but she artfully chooses to refer to it in a subtle way, under the cover of the modesty trope. For instance, in her numerous dedications, she compares her “little Book” to communion, the holy banquet of the Christian: “And let your noble daughters likewise read/This little Booke that I present to you;/On heavenly food let them vouchsafe to feede” (lines 49-51). She also compares her work even to Christ himself, offering her description of his bodily suffering as a token for her audience to cling to: “Therefore to you (good Madame) I present/His lovely love, more worth than purest gold,/Who for your sake his pretious blood hath spent,/His death and passion here you may behold,/And view this Lambe, that to the world was sent,/Whom your faire soule may in her armes infold:/Loving his love, that did ensure such paine,/That you in heaven a worthy place might gaine (lines 113-120). This continues in the poem-proper, where I argue that the speech by Pilate’s wife in *Salve Deus* is another example of Lanyer’s use of the rhetoric of modesty. This speech, titled as an “apologie”, should not be read as an admission that Lanyer needs to apologize for her writing or even her gender. Rather, in early modern England, the word “apologie” was also used interchangeably with “defense”, as is seen in Sir Philip Sidney’s work, which was published under two titles, “The Defense of Poesie” and “The Apologie of Poesie”. Sidney was not apologizing in his work for writing poetry, but rather creating a defense of the genre itself, as well as his ability to write within it. From the beginning he states that, “as I have just cause to make a pitiful defence of poor Poetry, which from almost the highest estimation of learning is fallen to be the laughing-stock of children, so have I need to bring some more available proofs, since the former is by no man barred of his deserved credit, the silly latter hath

had even the names of philosophers used to the defacing of it, with great danger of civil war among the Muses” (82). Sidney then begins to lay out his case for the esteem of poetry, citing the great ancient civilizations and their forms of poetry, as well as the poetics of the Bible, in an effort of effective persuasion.

“Eve’s Apologie” in *Salve Deus* has been upheld as a famous feminist defense, often used to include Lanyer as a participant in the *querelle des femmes* movement of the time period. In her article on Lanyer’s feminist voice, Lynette McGrath states that “Lanier’s text must have added fuel of its own to the nervousness about gender that was expressed in the heated debate of the ‘woman question’ at the beginning of the 17th century” (333), and that “Lanier is not, however, simply ‘writing of divinest things’—though in 1611 that would have been novel enough; she is audaciously reconstructing and resituating them” (340).

Part of what appears to be a very clearly feminist agenda set forth by Lanyer in this section of *Salve Deus* is the construction of rhetorical humility as voiced by Pilate’s wife. Lanyer significantly expands the voice of Pilate’s wife from the account of her found in the gospel of Matthew, where she is only listed in one verse; one that does not include a direct depiction of speech. In *Salve Deus*, the speech comes during the Christ’s trial, while Pilate deliberates Christ’s innocence, giving it the sense of presenting a lawyer’s case before the judge, but his wife’s defense is not that of Christ’s innocence alone, but how it is linked to the innocence of women. Rather than extolling the praises of women in a more outright method, Pilate’s wife (for we have no name to give her) plays on the customary concept of women as the weaker vessel to paradoxically give women the advantage: “But surely *Adam* can not be excused,/Her fault though great, yet hee was

most too blame;/What Weaknesse offerd, Strength might have refusde./Being Lord of all,
the greater was his shame:/Although the Serpents craft has her abusde,/Gods holy word
ought all his actions frame,/For he was Lord and King of all the earth./Before poore *Eve*
had either life or breath” (lines 777-784)⁶. Here Lanyer actually has Adam and Eve
personify the terms of ‘weakness’ and ‘strength’, as indicated by their capitalization,
having Eve embody and embrace the status of weakness, which would ultimately
exculpate her from origin sin. She also further describes Eve as “poore” and “abusde”,
rather than acting completely of her own agency, which would mean that she would have
some hand in the guilt of the action of sin. Meanwhile, Adam embodies strength, is
continually referred to as “Lord”, and as existing and knowing God’s command before
Eve was even created. He therefore receives a generous portion of responsibility in
addition to all his power and gifts, something that readers can easily relate to their
experience with earthly sovereigns.

While Lanyer’s words might be taken as devaluing women with her explicit
description of Eve’s weakness, it seems evident that she is taking the established roles of
women’s weakness and men’s superiority and playing them out rhetorically—causing
their implications to be switched from what many male readers might have traditionally
been taught to think. For, why would Lanyer write a defense of Eve to other women?
Would not the need to address the “woman question” indicate that she would have
imagined a male readership, instead of the prevailing notion that Lanyer’s dedications
were solely about creating a community of sympathetic women into which she might

⁶ Susanne Woods’ edition of *Salve Deus* preserves Lanyer’s original spelling, and I
maintain the spelling from her publication.

speaking freely? By looking at her carefully laid-out strategy, more of the “apologie” can be seen as conveying Lanyer’s ulterior meaning. Even Adam’s title as “Lord” can be read as a mocking rhetorical trope, jesting that he clearly is unable to handle authority, because he falls for the same temptation that Eve did, though she is under his authority. By revealing Adam to be the stronger of the two, Lanyer seems to imply that his sin is even greater than that of Eve’s because he should have been better able to resist it with his divinely-given strength.

Lanyer continues her indictment of Adam in the following stanza: “Who [Adam] being fram’d by God’s eternall hand,/The perfect’st man that ever breath’d on earth;... Yea 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” (lines 785-792). The section focuses on Adam and his relationship with God, and Lanyer is not stingy with praise: he is described as being made by God himself, as the perfection of all mankind, having been given God’s very breath. While a careless reader might take this as Lanyer subscribing to the patriarchal dialogue that has been impressed on her since birth, a careful reader will note the context of these praises in the midst of the discussion of eating the apple and the blaming and accusations that occur afterward (and were still occurring during Lanyer’s age). While in the prior stanza Adam could not be excused; here, Lanyer places Adam on a proverbial pedestal to then emphasize how little he did to prevent the sin of mankind, as well as his continual inability to create good in this world though given all the privileges directly from the hand of the Almighty himself. If this irony seems unclear, Lanyer becomes more direct at the end of this passage by saying that Adam was the one who brought us all into this

fallen, sinful state. Despite Adam's bestowed dominion over "both Sea and Land", he was unable to resist even the most basic of fruits, "one Apple". Thus, Adam's power is displayed as actually being a downfall (perhaps even a tragic flaw), giving him the burden of responsibility for the eating of the fruit of the tree and the origination of all sin.

By re-centering the account of the fall of mankind on the failed strength and power of men via Adam, Lanyer employs the modesty of Eve as a rhetorical tactic to strengthen her arguments about the nature of women, as well as to empower her female readership. If this jump from the creation account and a defense of Eve to seemingly political thoughts on the position of women seems far-fetched, Lanyer weighs in on this at the end of the speech by Pilate's wife: "Then let us have our Libertie againe,/And challenge to your selves no Sov'raintie;/You came not in the world without our paine,/Make that a barre against your crueltie;/Your fault being greater, why should you disdain/Our being your equals, free from tyranny?/If one weake woman simply did offend,/This sinne of yours, hath no excuse, nor end" (lines 825-832). Not only does the reader see a very straightforward appeal for women in the lines from Pilate's wife asking for equality, but the following stanza resounds with agreement in a voice other than Pilate's wife, as she is mentioned in a direct address to Pilate: "To which (poore soules) we never gave consent,/Witnesse they wife (*O Pilate*) speakes for all;/Who did but dreame, and yet a message sent,/That thou should'st have nothing to doe at all/With that just man" (lines 833-837). It can easily be deduced that the speaker, who I argue is Lanyer based on the dedicatory addresses, is weighing in on the status of women by plainly stating that the words she has just put into the mouth of Pilate's wife are those that "speak[es] for all". This strong stance is artfully preceded by Lanyer's carefully

crafted and more subtle argument, voiced through Pilate's wife, where she employs another aspect of the modesty trope to turn the prejudiced "weakness" of women into a triumph, demonstrating that she can retool modesty as a way for women to be both vindicated and empowered.

Aside from the speech made through Eve, Lanyer's prevailing image of humility in the poem is the depiction of the suffering Christ. From the beginning of the poem, Lanyer points to the dichotomy of weakness and strength that is found within Scripture, using her humility as something synonymous with the lowly things that allow Christ's glory to shine. She compares her work to "the widowes myte" (line 293)⁷, which though little in actual monetary value, was deemed by the Lord to be worth more than the richest man's wealth. She then chooses to show Christ's suffering as his ultimate exercise in humility, rather than dwelling on his famous miracles or triumphal entry, starting with a great moment of weakness for him at the Garden of Gethsemane. While describing Jesus praying in the garden, Lanyer repeats that he was "saying, Not my will, but thy will Lord be done" (line 401) and "loe here his Will, not thy Will, Lord was done" (line 409), emphasizing Christ's submission and humility to the will of the Father. This act of submission to another's will resonates with the early modern women's position to her husband, placing Christ in the female spousal role in relation to God. This also mirrors the Biblical relationship of the Church as Christ's bride, a symbol that could only aid in elevating a wife's status in the eyes of the patriarchal Church that was called to have that

⁷ Jesus calls attention to a poor widow putting two small coins into the temple offering and declares her sacrifice greater than all that the wealthy give, because she gave out of her great poverty and not her excess. Found in both Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4.

same relationship with their Godhead. While the Church as bride is a metaphoric device utilized in Biblical and exegetical theology, Lanyer is calling on this tradition in establishing the humility of Christ and that of women as rhetorically linked, bringing the power of Christ to rest not only on men (as is noted by their authority within the Church) but women as well. She clearly demonstrates her knowledge and understanding of theology, going to the point of reinterpreting Scripture, all of which were considered off limits to women—a further indictment of Lanyer using sincere modesty, revealing it as just a cover for larger motives.

Lanyer then calls attention to the humility of Christ in contrast with His actual power and authority as he assumes the burden of the cross: “Loe here thy great Humility was found./Beeing King of Heaven, and Monarch of the Earth,/Yet well content to have thy Glory drownd,/By being counted of so meane a berth;/Grace, Love, and Mercy did so much abound,/Thou entertaindst the Crosse, even to the death:/And nam’dst thy selfe, the sonne of Man to be,/To purge our pride by thy Humilitie” (lines 473-480). Not only is Christ, the king of both heaven and earth, humbling himself to die on a cross, but this passage also shows that he died to rid humans of their pride by his own humility. This commanding assertion of the power of humility plays into the repeated claims throughout the texts of Lanyer’s own humility in writing; her humility has power as well. This paradox of humility and power used by Lanyer is literary ingenuity at its finest, pulling on the well-known and revered concept of Christ as fully divine, imbued with power and authority, and yet willing to be humbled and take on full humanity. These lines also hit on Christ’s humble birth origins, here indicating that deity would take on the form of earthly man, but it is reminiscent of Lanyer’s own “humble” beginnings that she is

clearly aware of as she negotiates dedications to many aristocratic ladies surrounding the poem. Again, Christ's passion is placed alongside the humility of the author herself, rendering her work and her employment of humility as something strategic rather than sincere, for the wonder of the Incarnation brought power to frail man, as Lanyer seeks to bring power through her words to humbled women.

When depicting Jesus being met in the garden and arrested, Lanyer poses his questioning of the mob in a paradox, "yet *mightie* Jesus *meekely* ask'd, Why they/With Swords and Staves doe come as to a Thiefe?" (lines 617-618, emphasis mine). Jesus is shown as prudent and wise, asking why the crowd has come to arrest him with a show of force when they have had plenty of opportunity to do so while he was teaching in public all this time. Though it is clear that he is the one in a position of authority, possessing more might than those wielding weapons, he answers in humility, knowing that he is innocent since they did not arrest him by the light of day in view of the public eye. This paradox of humility and might echoes the one question that scholars of early modern women have been wrestling with: How can one be both humble and powerful in one's work? It seems that Christ is offered as a potential model for an answer. Jesus' humble speech belies the power of which he was capable and had previously exerted, but at the time he was aware that it was more prudent to speak meekly, at the same time refusing to undermine his power and authority, thus providing an excellent example of strategic rhetoric which suited both the audience and the situation. This kind of silence reflects early modern women's inability to defend themselves with words if accused of anything, particularly sexual impropriety, as the very accusation was enough for condemnation. Here, Lanyer portrays Christ in a very similar situation, though her readers are very

aware of his innocence, bringing Christ's connection with Lanyer and other women to include mistreatment and false accusation. The preferred, and even socially prescribed, use of silence and humility is once again exalted by Lanyer as an indication of innocence rather than guilt, one that is imbued also with power.

After describing the crucifixion, Lanyer continues to remark on the humility of Christ, from his sacrifice "to yield himself unto such shamefull death" (105) to "there you may see him as a God in glory/And as a man in miserable case" (108). She also uses the medieval rhetorical device, the *blazon*, as a way to describe individual body parts of the crucified Christ, as well as those of the resurrected one. On the cross, Christ is described as a "Bridegroom that appears so faire" with "His cheeks like skarlet, and his eyes so bright/as purest Doves that in the rivers are,/Washed with milke" and "his head is likened to the finest gold,/His curled lockes so beauteous to behold" (lines 1305-1312). This beautiful picture of Christ employs language seen in romantic love poetry of both the medieval and Renaissance periods, which Lanyer continues on: "Blacke as a Raven in her blackest hew;/His lips like skarlet threads, yet much more sweet/Than is the sweetest hony dropping dew,/Or hony combes, where all the Bees doe meet;/Yea, he is constant, and his words are true./His cheeks are beds of spices, flowers sweet;/His lips, like Lillies, dropping downe pure mirrhe,/Whose love, before all worlds we doe preferred" (lines 1313-1320). Christ's death was not only an act of humility by someone having divine power and authority, but that act is further beautified by this detailed description of his physical attributes as he dies for the sins of humanity. Nancy Vickers' scholarship on the *blazon* reveals it to be a method of both objectifying and silencing women within Renaissance poetry, a method that was made popular by Petrarch, whose influence over

Renaissance writers was immense: “First, Petrarch’s figuration of Laura informs a decisive stage in the development of a code of beauty, a code that causes us to view the fetishized body as a norm and encourages us to seek, or to seek to be, ‘ideal types, beautiful monsters composed of every individual perfection’ . . . And second, bodies fetishized by a poetic voice logically do not have a voice of their own” (*Diana Described*, 117). By depicting the body of Christ in such a way, Lanyer appropriates the *blazon* for her own purposes; by submitting Christ to a common literary treatment of women, she shows that the silence and objectification of the subject does not diminish the power inherent within—the Christ that is pieced apart in her poem is the one that is dying on the cross as the means of salvation for all mankind. The fulfillment of Christ’s unassuming nature to allow his death on the cross does not render him an outcast or hideous, but rather one “whose love, before all worlds we doe preferre.” Again, Lanyer is able to show the humbleness of Jesus as a possible advocate for her own humility to be considered—here, as something beautiful and admirable, but she does it by using a literary device that is difficult and erotic. She shows mastery over language even while utilizing that language to point out the humility of the subject, creating yet again the paradox of power and humility that is found both within Christ and woman.

Not only are Lanyer’s physical descriptions of beauty like those within a contemporary sonnet or medieval love poem, they also reflect the words used in the Song of Solomon when the Lover describes his Beloved. While the language of the Scriptures seems natural within this devotional work, the view of Christ as the female Beloved is not. Lanyer uses a rhetorical move typically reserved to describe the body of a woman and applies it to the body of Christ, further associating him with the feminine. But Lanyer

does not stop with the beautification of Christ as an act of humility; she further describes him in a romantic way while addressing Lady Margaret about a post-resurrection Jesus:

His bleeding body there you may embrace,

And kisse his dying cheekes with teares of sorrow...

Oft times hath he made triall of your love,

And in your Faith hath tooke no small delight,

By Crosses and Afflications he doth prove,

Yet still your heart remaineth firme and right,

Your love so strong, as nothing can remove,

Your thoughts beeing placed on him both day and night,

Your constant soule doth lodge between her brests,

This Sweet of sweets, in which all glory rests. (lines 1332-1344)

Here the exchange between Christ and the Countess takes on a more erotic tone, where Lanyer moves beyond the *blazon* of specific body parts to look at the romantic exchange between Christ and his lover, rather than his beloved. Instead of a chaste maiden seeking proof of love from her male lover, here Christ is shown as the one who puts the Countess' love to the test, checking for her constancy and faithfulness. In addition, the Countess is the one who makes the amorous displays of affection, like embracing his body and kissing his cheeks, which is generally depicted as the actions of an enamored lover who

can't stop thinking about his love "both day and night". Through Christ's humility, the Countess is given strength, but rather than the physical kind normally assigned to men, she has a strength of love that keeps her faithful and true—a quality that elevates her above most male lovers cited in early modern poetry. Lanyer once again takes her depiction of Christ to a level of humility traditionally associated with women, one that reveals the beauty of submissiveness, and even the religious appropriateness of such subjugation. However, that kind of subjugation to a love with the divine elevates women still over their male counterparts who tend to prove faithless in their love, lacking strength to endure.

In addition to her feminine Christ and his humble demeanor, Lanyer devotes a portion of her poem to the Virgin Mary, who is not only shown as embodying humility, but whom also furthers Eve's reconciliation of women. Mary is situated at the foot of the cross, taking in the death of both her savior and son in a position of humility "upon her knees" (line 1020). But Lanyer does not leave her there, for she is quick to remind the reader that Mary was chosen to bear the "faultlesse fruit" (line 1025): "For the Almightye magnified thee,/And looked downe upon thy meane estate;/Thy lowly mind, and unstain'd Chastitie/Did pleade for Love at great Jehovaes gate,/Who sending swift-wing'd Gabriel unto thee,/His holy will and pleasure to relate;/To thee most beauteous Queene of Woman-kind,/The Angell did unfold his Makers mind" (lines 1033-1040). Mary herself is cast as a person of humility, but God approved of her "meane estate" and "lowly mind" in combination with her purity so much so that she was given divine knowledge revealed by the angel Gabriel. Not only is Mary part of God's plan, she is given foreknowledge of it—a startling concept that the God of the universe would allow

Gabriel to “unfold his Makers mind” to a human *woman*. Lanyer reveals that humility is once again rewarded by God, as well as the ability for Him to choose to impart divine information into a woman, much as Lanyer was attempting to provide the same evidence through her *Salve Deus*. Thus, she redefines humility for women by showing that it is what is rewarded by God, as well as even a means to obtain divine knowledge—something often denied women based on their diminished status.

The exploration of Mary’s humility continues when Lanyer tells of the proclamation that she will give birth to a son though still a virgin: “When on the knees of thy submissive heart/Thou humbly didst demand, How that should be” (lines 1073-1074). Not only is Mary’s heart submissive to the will of her Lord, but that submissive heart has taken the humble posture of being on its knees, as an additional act of meekness. While this may seem modesty overkill, Lanyer goes on to show what this kind of humility achieved for Mary; namely that she was above the desire of any man who might besmirch her character, and instead made her “Servant, Mother, Wife, and Nurse / To Heavens bright King, that freed us from the curse” (lines 1087-1088). Theresa DiPasquale in her work *Refiguring the Sacred Feminine*, sees this distinction of Mary as removed “farre from desire of any man” (1077) as more important than just the virgin birth. She states that:

it means not only that Mary does not want a human mate, but also that she has removed herself from being the target of men’s desires... Since a woman cannot normally be impregnated without being physically penetrated by a man, and since Genesis 3:16 links heterosexual intercourse so firmly to female subjugation, Lanyer’s Mary wishes to be assured,

before she consents to bear a child, that such consent will not be construed as surrendering the freedom that she has guarded as carefully as her virginity itself (179).

While DiPasquale makes some assumptions regarding Mary's desire to not have a mate (she might have willfully entered into her engagement with Joseph), it is important to note that there is a link between the freedom of Mary and her virginity, something that was an important point for Lanyer herself, having been cast off as the Lord Chamberlin's mistress after becoming pregnant with his child. Not only did Mary's humility allow her to receive magnification by God, but it also gave her a way to rise above the potential imposition of an earthly man in authority over her life, escaping the curse that Eve received in Genesis where her desire shall be for her husband, who was ultimately lord over her. While DiPasquale makes this connection that the sexual desire for men described in Genesis is linked to their dominion over women, it would seem that Lanyer relies on Mary as another means of exonerating women from their disgraceful place based on Eve's role in original sin. By including Mary's exaltation as mother of Jesus, Lanyer's previous avowals of modesty and piety help to form a link between all women (including the author herself) with Mary. DiPasquale puts it this way:

The poet implies, moreover, that Mary's exaltation, far from making her an anomaly, exalts all women; thus, as if to replace with a more gynocentric title the eight royal designations the Litany of Loreto assigns Mary (Queen of Angels, of patriarchs, of Prophets, of Apostles, of Martyrs, of Confessors, of Virgins; Queen of all Saints), Lanyer crowns the Blessed Virgin as the ruler and paragon of the sex she represents (176).

Lanyer again takes the woman's viewpoint, the humility and weakness of the Virgin Mary, revealing the paradox of power and honor that is given to this woman, thus giving all women and herself as a writer the ability to display the same attributes. In a society where a woman must be chaste above all things, and her chastity is something that is very tenuous, the reassurance Mary receives is that she will be above reproach for her virtue. Such a notion would have been very appealing to Lanyer's readers, who could have been tarnished by simply the suspicion of impropriety. Mary's humility is thus turned into the means by which she can have more freedom within society, because her actions will not be considered as sexually scandalous; her modesty leads to greater independence and agency, free from scrutiny—something that Lanyer wants to extend to her female readership. If they are humble and submitted to Christ, they should not have to suffer the constant and smothering inquisition of their actions; they should be deemed chaste and pure in the sight of God and thus man as well.

Conclusion

With these constructions in mind, how can critics take Lanyer's dedicatory avowals of modesty as genuine? In writing of religious things, both men and women adopted the appropriate piety befitting someone approaching the divine. With the life of court being the height of society and status, it was especially important for writers to seek patrons there, following the carefully regulated language of court and class as prescribed by the works of classic orators and contemporary gurus like Castiglione. Lanyer, having been rejected from courtly life after her affair with Lord Chamberlain and the child they produced out of wedlock, would have felt the need for being well-versed in the humility rhetoric of the courtier/courtesan if she hoped to make even a modest living for herself

through her writing. But this is not to say that her humility is to be taken at face-value because she needed the patronage, but rather that she utilized it as a performance because of her understanding of courtly posturing, as outlined by the concept of *sprezzatura*. Finally, self-avowals and denials of authorial worthiness are common in the works of male writers of the early modern period, showing that it is not a novelty produced by women only, but rather a strategic move on the part of each author, whether male and female.

Therefore, it is clear that the incompatible self-image created by supposed “genuine” humility on the part of female authors can be further complicated by analyzing the work of Aemilia Lanyer. Her repeated usage of humility as a strategic rhetorical tool is evident within her title-poem *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, particularly her structured dichotomy of humility and strength manifested in her suffering Christ. The humble and thus exalted Virgin Mary and the radical defense of Eve point to a masterful control of her writing skill, with each example pointing out the delicate combination of strength and power that women have exercised even while considered the weaker creatures who must take up the mask of humility in order to be heard. It seems clear that Lanyer was not compelled to feel subjugated to the masculine order of things around her, but rather took pride in her work, as evidenced even in the simple desire and labor to have it printed for public view.

Once Lanyer’s work is unencumbered by the idea of humility as sincerity, it can be seen that Lanyer sought to use the expected humility of her sex in a rhetorical way to espouse more radical ideas of gender: the freedom and equality of and for women, particularly in regard to knowledge. While Lanyer’s text may not have been written

exclusively for feminist causes, it seems that her text is working on many levels to undermine or even redefine the traditional ways of looking at women as weak and subservient: first, she uses the guise of devotional literature in order to interpret Scripture without a male intermediary; secondly, she uses that reinterpretation of Scripture to exculpate women from their disgrace caused by Eve's giving of the fruit to Adam, by indicating the pure intent of Eve and the greater atrocity of Pilate's condemnation of Jesus, which she links to all males; and finally, she portrays Christ in the most feminine of terms, rendering his paradoxical nature of humility and power comparable to that found within women. This is not to say that Lanyer is advocating for a societal upheaval, where women are in dominion over men because of their greater proximity to the sacred, but rather *Salve Deus* puts forth the idea (echoed by others in the *querelle des femmes* movement) that women and men have spiritual equality. Through Pilate's wife's voice, she clearly states, "Then let us have our Libertie againe,/And challenge to your selves no Sov'raintie;/You came not in the world without our paine,/Your fault beeing greater, why should you disdain/Our beeing your equals, free from tyranny?" (87). *Salve Deus* then enters into the realm of providing theological and Scriptural evidence to overturn the prevailing sentiment of the church that women be relegated to second place, instead of alongside men.

Not all women of the early modern period used their language of humility to advocate for the equality of men and women as does Lanyer, but by undoing the need for women to be sincere in their use of modesty and reconciling the *seemingly* differing attitudes towards their sense of self within their published works, a more cohesive and accurate analysis can be made of the writings of early modern women. This is

particularly advantageous because these texts are currently being recovered for the modern reader; they will remain in obscurity if the stigma of genuine authorial disavowal continues to linger, giving the impression that these women are unskilled writers and thus unworthy of study. Instead, mother's advice books are no longer cute, colloquial remnants of the domestic past, but rather defiant declarations of the female voice and a demonstration of rhetorical ability. Perhaps the focus on Elizabeth Cary's beset heroine Mariam is replaced by the provocative and radical Salome as the source of agency in her play, begetting more scholarly interest. Even Lady Mary Wroth's love poetry, while admittedly controversial in topic, could be further interrogated by examining her mastery of the difficult corona form; an act of pure intellectual skill on her part because of the outdated poetic mode. These women and their writings, along with many others, have more to say to scholars if their use of modesty is recognized for what it really is—a strategic tool in the hands of masters.

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