



GARY KUCHAR

*Aemilia Lanyer and the Virgin's Swoon:
Theology and Iconography in
Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*

In a recent summary of Aemilia Lanyer's well-documented efforts to represent women as possessing priestly authority, Micheline White observes that in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* "the Countess of Cumberland exercises the healing power of St. Peter's keys . . . ; the Countess of Cumberland and her daughter are 'shepherdesses' who heal and feed Christ's 'flock,' and [other] virtuous women are authorized to anoint themselves with 'Aaron's oil' and feed each other with the Word."¹ What White leaves out here, and what readers of the poem have not yet recognized, is the priestly role Lanyer attributes to Mary under the Cross: by evoking a late medieval iconographical tradition in which Mary's swoon under the Cross signals her role as a priestly co-redemptrix, the opening stanza of the two-part section on Mary positions the Virgin at the center of Lanyer's overall project of imagining women in clerical roles. Seen from this perspective, the theological particularity of Lanyer's text comes into fuller view as she resorts to a pre-Tridentine depiction of

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1. Micheline White, "A Woman with Saint Peter's Keys? Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611) and the Priestly Gifts of Women," *Criticism: A Quarterly for Literature and the Arts* 45.3 (2003), 323. For other readings of Lanyer's representation of herself and her patrons as priests, see Kari Boyd McBride, "Sacred Celebration: The Patronage Poems" in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, ed. Marshall Grossman (Lexington, 1998), pp. 60–82; Lynette McGrath, "'Let Us Have Our Libertie Againe': Aemilia Lanier's 17th-Century Feminist Voice," *Women's Studies* 20 (1992), 341–49; and "Metaphoric Subversions: Feasts and Mirrors in Aemilia Lanier's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*," *LIT* 3 (1991), 101–13; Wendy Wall, *The Imprint of Gender: Authorship and Publication in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, 1993), pp. 319–30; Catherine Keohane, "'The Blindest Weaknesse Be Not Over-bold': Aemilia Lanyer's Radical Unfolding of the Passion," *ELH* 64 (1997), 359–89.

Mary as co-redemptrix in order to make the Lutheran promise of the priesthood of all believers genuinely meaningful for women, particularly for herself as poet-priestess and for at least two, perhaps three, of her dedicatees.

Mary's priestly role is alluded to in the first stanza of "The Salutation and Sorrow of the Virgin Mary" when Lanyer evokes the controversy over the Virgin's physical comportment and spiritual experience under the Cross, specifically the question of whether or not she swoons in her grief. Once Lanyer's portrait of Mary is placed in the theological and iconographical context of the *lo spasimo* controversy—the controversy over whether she stands and thus transcends the effects of human grief or whether she swoons and physically suffers in tandem with Christ—it becomes clear that Susanne Woods's assertion that the poem "contains no hint of Mary as mediator or co-redeemer, but instead presents her as the chief exemplar of all the womanly virtues Lanyer praises throughout *Salve Deus*" needs to be rethought.² When Lanyer's portrait of Mary is situated within the pre-Tridentine Mariological traditions and controversies being evoked in the opening stanza of "The Sorrow of the Virgin Mary," it becomes clear that the poem is not, as Elaine V. Beilin has argued, "ardently Protestant."³ On the contrary, the poem's account of the Virgin Mary participates in a late medieval tradition of representing the Virgin as a physically anguished priestly co-redeemer—a role that is considerably at odds with the general Protestant view of her as having no active or direct role in the work of redemption.⁴

The theological significance of Lanyer's portrait of Mary's grief makes it evident that the two-part section dedicated to Christ's mother constitutes one of the most crucial features of Lanyer's overall attempt, as White phrases it, "to uncover a tradition of female priestly gestures and symbols."⁵ In particular, this representation of Mary in pre-Reformation terms is likely to have appealed to Queen Anne who is believed to have

2. Susanne Woods, *Aemilia Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet* (New York and Oxford, 1999), p. 138.

3. Elaine V. Beilin, *Redeeming Eve: Women Writers of the English Renaissance* (Princeton, 1987), p. 182.

4. My reading of the poem provides concrete evidence for Achsah Guibbory's claim that "Lanyer's extended attention to this 'Blessed' 'Mother of our Lord' (p. 95, l. 1031) recalls and perhaps revives the devotion to the Virgin Mary that blossomed in medieval Catholicism but withered with Protestantism." Achsah Guibbory, "The Gospel According to Aemilia: Women and the Sacred" in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 198.

5. White, "A Woman," p. 336.

converted to Catholicism in 1598–1599⁶ and to Lady Arabella Stuart who is believed to have shared some of Anne's Catholic sympathies.⁷ At bottom, though, Lanyer's portrait of Mary is an effort to situate female authority in relation to a gendered form of godly sorrow—what Lanyer identifies in the letter to Anne as a form of “sad delight” which is intuitively available to herself as a female poet and by implication to other women. Moreover, access to this empowering form of “sad delight” is figured, both in the letter to Anne and in the sequence on Mary, as a function of the affective and intellectual powers associated with motherhood. More precisely, Lanyer's claim to poetic and priestly power resides in her assertion that she has intuitive or unmediated access to the kind of sorrow exemplified by Mary under the cross—a grief, the poem tells us, that is deeply connected to the experience of maternal mourning.

II

The exclusion of women from ministerial responsibilities, which Lanyer implicitly challenges in *Salve Deus*, has long been defended on the grounds that Christ gave the male Apostles the “power of the keys.”⁸ Pope Innocent III, for instance, enshrined the exclusion of women from the priesthood on the grounds that “although the Blessed Virgin Mary surpassed in dignity and in excellence all the Apostles, nevertheless, it was not to her but to them that the Lord entrusted the keys to the kingdom of heaven.”⁹ While Pope Innocent III emphasized the non-priestly authority that Mary possessed in twelfth-century Catholic theology, a later and less official tradition would emerge in which Mary would come

6. See Peter Davidson and Thomas M. McCoog, S.I. “Father Robert's Convert,” *Times Literary Supplement* Nov. 24 (2000), 16–18.

7. For a recent account of the religious politics surrounding Arabella see Sarah Gristwood, *Arbella: England's Lost Queen* (London, 2003), pp. 89–98. Guibbory mentions in a footnote that the label Protestant is a problematic one for *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* insofar as “two of Lanyer's dedicatees—Queen Anne and Lady Arabella Stuart—had Roman Catholic connections” (p. 210). Michael Morgan Holmes also hints at the importance of Lanyer's Catholic readers to our understanding of the poem when he remarks that “the fact that Lanyer's father, Baptist Bassano, was a Venetian and her husband, Alfonso Lanyer, a Roman Catholic, might suggest the poet's awareness of, and interest in, Catholic devotion.” “The Love of Other Women: Rich Chains and Sweet Kisses” in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 188.

8. See White, “A Woman,” p. 339.

9. Cited in White, “A Woman,” p. 339 fn. 9.

to play the role of priestly co-redeemer. Lanyer invokes this late medieval tradition when she describes how Christ's

woefull Mother wayting on her Sonne,
All comfortlesse in depth of sorow drowned;
Her griefes extreame, although but new begun,
To see his bleeding body oft she swounded;
How could shee choose but thinke her selfe undone,
He dying, with whose glory shee was crowned? (p. 94, ll. 1009–14)¹⁰

By portraying Mary as swooning, Lanyer situates *Salve Deus* within a highly charged debate that occurred within sixteenth-century Catholicism over the Virgin's experience during the Crucifixion. The question at the center of the *lo spasimo* controversy, which was known in seventeenth-century England as in most parts of Western Europe,¹¹ is whether Mary's cooperative role in the sacrifice is reflected by her firm, dignified pose before the crucified Christ or whether her participation in Christ's agony is best figured through her physical collapse. At stake in the debate is the precise nature of the Virgin's bodily purity and spiritual integrity; the question, more properly, is whether Mary's exemplarity is a function of her capacity to restrain her human passions, thereby transcending normal human grief, or whether her capacity to feel and express sorrow is superlatively intense and thus intimately related to Christ's agony. For Lanyer, it is the deeply human, physically anguished dimension of Mary's grief that best expresses the Virgin's exemplarity and which best conveys her priestly role within the Crucifixion.

The *lo spasimo* controversy emerged as a result of fourteenth-, fifteenth-, and sixteenth-century artistic representations in art and literature in which Mary is figured as swooning. Because of the popularity of these images and the very human view of Mary they offered, Pope Julius II was petitioned to authorize the feast *De Spasimo Beatae Virginis Mariae* and

10. All references to the body of *Salve Deus* are given in the text by page and line numbers and are from Aemilia Lanyer, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, ed. Susanne Woods (New York and London, 1993). All references to the prefatory letters are from this volume and are given by page and line numbers.

11. For a discussion of the controversy over the swoon in English context, specifically in relation to Richard Crashaw, see Eugene R. Cunnar, "Crashaw's 'Sancta Maria Dolorum': Controversy and Coherence" in *New Perspectives on the Life and Art of Richard Crashaw*, ed. John R. Roberts (Columbia, Mo., 1990), pp. 99–126. The likeliest case of a direct source for Lanyer's depiction of Mary as a swooning co-redemptrix is Thomas Lodge's anonymously published prose work, *Prosopopeia, containing the teares of the holy, blessed, and sanctified Marie, the Mother of God* (1596). See below.

to enrich it with indulgences.¹² In response to the petition, Pope Julius II charged Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan, to judge the canonical nature of Mary's swoon.¹³ As Leo Steinberg observes, the official position regarding Mary's swoon "is set forth in an important epistle of July 17, 1506 (republished 1529) . . . entitled *De spasmo gloriossime virginis mariae matris dei*."¹⁴ Cajetan, as Harvey E. Hamburgah writes, concluded that not "only is the swoon contrary to the text of the gospel, for John (19.25–26) says that the Blessed Virgin 'stood near the cross' but 'in the strict sense used by physicians' the swoon is a morbid state resulting from the contractions of the sinews, and 'therefore it is not proper to attribute this to the Blessed Virgin.'"¹⁵ Referring to the idea that the Virgin Mary is pure in body and thus not susceptible to a "contraction of the sinews," Cajetan rejected the argument that the enormity of the Virgin's sorrows caused her to swoon. Cajetan's resistance to the idea that Mary's sorrow is registered physically as well as spiritually brings into relief the precise theological significance attached to Lanyer's depiction of Mary; for anxiety over Mary's physicality stems from the strict limits placed on displays of female suffering in the post-Reformation era. And as Elizabeth M.A. Hodgson and Patricia Phillippy have shown in relation to Lanyer's work, these limits were repeatedly enforced in seventeenth-century England, even in Catholic texts such as those of Robert Southwell. By insisting on Mary's physical reaction to her emotional strife, Lanyer goes against the protocols of temperate mourning characteristic of post-Reformation homiletics.¹⁶ She resists the assumption that physical expressions of female grief are irrational—an assumption underlying Cajetan's assessment of the scriptural materials he marshals in defense of Mary's stoical comportment during the Crucifixion:

12. Harvey E. Hamburgah, "The Problem of *Lo Spasimo* of the Virgin in *Cinquecento* Paintings of the *Descent from the Cross*," *Sixteenth-Century Journal* 12.4 (1981), 45. See also Charles Jourmet, "Notre Dame des Sept Douleurs," *Les Cahiers de la Vierge*, II (1934), 56.

13. Hamburgah, "The Problem," 45.

14. Leo Steinberg, "Pontormo's Capponi Chapel," *Art Bulletin* 56 (1974), 386–87.

15. Hamburgah, p. 46.

16. See Elizabeth Hodgson, "Prophecy and Gendered Mourning in Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judæorum*," *Studies in English Literature* 43.1 (2003), 101–16; Patricia Phillippy, *Women, Death and Literature* (Cambridge, Eng., 2002), pp. 39–48. For an overview of the importance of moderation in grieving see, G. W. Pigman III, *Grief and English Renaissance Elegy* (Cambridge, Eng., 1985), pp. 27–39. There is a long tradition in the West of women gaining access to public authority by transgressing mourning protocols. See, e.g., Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature* (London, 1992).

But in truth the Blessed Virgin did not swoon in this way . . . for she was 'full of Grace' (Luke 1). It is necessary to deny such a bodily defect in her because it would have impeded this plentitude and perfection of grace. It is plain that grief which would have made her 'beside herself,' would have impeded her use of reason at that moment when it was the time for her to meditate most intensely and intelligently on the passion . . . It was more pleasing to God that Mary should have shared in the passion of her Son not only in her feelings but also in her mind since that is the nobler part of man in which merit and grace properly reside. Therefore, it was necessary that if the suffering of the Blessed Virgin should be most intense, then her whole lower affectivity should be governed and controlled by her fully conscious mind. This exercise and rule of reason over her lower sensitivities could not have occurred if her suffering had made her 'beside herself.' Therefore, a swoon, even in the popular sense of the term, seems very inappropriate to the Blessed Virgin.¹⁷

Cajetan's assessment of the iconography of the swoon anticipates the general shift in attitudes regarding the embodied nature of devotion which Donna Spivey Ellington traces in her study of late medieval and early Renaissance Mariology. Ellington observes a trend within the Catholic Church and European Christianity generally in which inner spirituality and virtue rather than external devotion are emphasized. As a result of this shift, proclamations of "the Virgin's shared flesh with her son and physical manifestations of her suffering were more at home in the world of late medieval piety. They did not typify the modest, restrained, and disciplined religious life sought by the Church after Trent." Ellington explains this shift by observing that the "downplaying of Mary's physical participation at the cross coincided with a growing suspicion of the body, and of women's bodies specifically, in European society as a whole."¹⁸ Writing within a Protestant context far more hostile to physical displays of devotion and mourning than Counter-Reformation cultures, Lanyer resists her culture's homiletic protocols and the theological assumptions underlying them by situating Mary's authority in a physical response to grief that is an expression not of irrationality but of the Virgin's compassion and comprehension of the providential events in which she actively participates.

17. Cited in Hamburg, p. 46. A full translation of Cajetan's treatise appears in Harvey Hamburg, "Aspects of the *Descent from the Cross* from Lippi to Cigoli" (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Iowa, 1978), pp. 750-54.

18. Donna S. Ellington, "Impassioned Mother or Passive Icon: The Virgin's Role in Late Medieval and Early Modern Passion Sermons," *Renaissance Quarterly* 6.22 (1995), 254.



16409 - MADRID - Van der Weyden - La Depositione dalla Croce - Gall. del Prado - Ripr. Luterletta - Anderson, Roma

Although Cajetan was unequivocally opposed, writers, preachers, and artists continued to represent Mary as swooning.¹⁹ As art historians Otto G. Von Simson, Harvey E. Hamburg, and others have concluded, the imagery of swooning in sixteenth-century paintings was not simply a function of “popular sentimentality but the utmost theological importance” for Catholics.²⁰ Hamburg outlines the theological significance this way: “1) that Mary is understood as the figure of the church itself; 2) that through her participation on Calvary she has been seen as our *co-redemtrix* with Christ; and 3) that the image of *lo spasimo* is explained by the dual notions of *compassio* and the pain of childbirth under the cross which connect decisively with the first two concepts.”²¹

Otto G. Von Simson cites Rogier Van Der Weyden’s fifteenth-century masterpiece, *Descent from the Cross*, as indicative of these Mariological

19. The popularity of such imagery led the Jesuit Peter Canisius to reiterate Cajetan’s point more forcefully in 1577 (Hamburg, p. 47).

20. Hamburg, “The Problem,” p. 51. See also, Otto G. Von Simson, “*Compassio* and *Co-Redemptio* in Rogier Van Der Weyden’s *Descent from the Cross*,” *Art Bulletin* 35 (1953), 9–16.

21. Hamburg, “The Problem,” p. 51.

themes: The “Virgin swoons, and in collapsing her body assumes an attitude almost identical with that of her dead Son.”²² This view of Mary makes her an “almost independent center of attention, nearly as important to the composition as is the figure of Christ.” The intensity of Mary’s suffering “evokes, in striking and dramatic manner, the Virgin’s supreme dignity as fifteenth-century theology had come to formulate it: her share in the work of Redemption; more precisely, her dignity as *co-redemptrix* in virtue of her *compassion* on Calvary.”²³ Such depictions express the Virgin’s capacity for compassion in a dramatically physical manner. As Cajetan’s disavowal of such iconography makes clear, this physical component is absent from representations of her as a dignified, somatically controlled woman in the manner of *Stabat Mater*.²⁴ When Mary is represented as standing in a dignified manner she discloses an elegantly spiritual sorrow that is contained by her bodily purity and her knowledge of the atonement. In this respect Lanyer’s depiction of Mary is distinct from the Counter-Reformation view of her expressed by François de Sales who insists that Mary “did not faint or make an excessive outward show of her grief, as some painters falsely portray.”²⁵

In the Protestant context of Jacobean England, Mary’s experience under the Cross is not generally the focus of devotional attention because, as Christine Peters observes, “the compassion of the Virgin Mary had to be distanced from ideas of maternal intercession with her Son.”²⁶ Hence, the question of Mary’s experience under the Cross is generally of more homiletic than of theological interest. When Mary’s experience does appear in official English Jacobean Protestant contexts, it is often to

22. For discussions of other examples of this iconography and its theological implications see Cunnar, “Crashaw’s ‘Sancta Maria Dolorum’”; David Baier, “Mary at the Foot of the Cross,” *Franciscan Studies*, 23.2 (March 1942), 3–11; J. B. Carol, “Our Lady’s Part in the Redemption According to Seventeenth-Century Writers,” *Franciscan Studies* 24 (1943), 3–20; Paul Y. Cardile, “Mary as priest: Mary’s Sacerdotal position in the Visual Arts,” *Arte Cristiana* 72 (1984), 199–208.

23. Von Simson, “*Compassio*,” 11, 11, 11. Along with Lodge’s 1596 *Prosopopeia*, this late medieval way of depicting Mary’s experience is expressed in England in the 1519 prose meditation, “The lamentacyon of Our Lady,” which depicts the Passion from Mary’s point of view. In this early Renaissance text Mary’s participation in the Crucifixion is figured by having her faint five times, each symbolically corresponding with Christ’s five wounds.

24. “Juxta crucem tecum stare, / Et me tibi sociare / In planctu desidero [I long to stand with you by the Cross, and to be your companion in your lamentation].” Cited in Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c. 1580* (New Haven and London, 1992), p. 259.

25. Cited in Ellington, “Impassioned,” p. 245.

26. Christine Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge, Eng., 2003), p. 237.

foreground Christ's suffering as the greatest of agonies and her sorrow as the greatest of empathic responses to His suffering. In one of the rare instances that Lancelot Andrewes addresses Mary's experience under the Cross, the discussion of the Virgin casts Christ's suffering into greater relief rather than being an isolated focus of attention: "Truly Simeon saith to the blessed Virgin by way of prophecy, that 'the sword should go through her soul,' at the time of His Passion. And as the sword through hers, so I make no question but the spear through His. And if through hers which was but *anima compatientis*, through His much more, which was *anima patientis*; since compassion is but passion at rebound. Howbeit, it is not a sword of steel, or a spear-head of iron, that entereth the soul, but a metal of another temper."²⁷ Andrewes—who is generally recognized as a precursor of the high-church sensibilities which characterize the Caroline Church—not only distinguishes Christ's agony as more immediate and thus more intense than Mary's; he also emphasizes the spiritual nature of Mary's sorrow, focusing little or no attention on her physical suffering.

Unlike De Sales and Andrewes, Lanyer returns to a more late medieval form of Marian devotion.²⁸ By returning to a pre-Tridentine, swooning Mary, Lanyer's vision is consistent with, and likely informed by, Thomas Lodge's implicitly Catholic and anonymously published prose work, *Prosopopeia containing the teares of the holy, blessed, and sanctified Marie, the Mother of God* (1596). Dedicated to the Countess of Cumberland as well as "The Mother Countesse, Countesse of Darby" (the openly Catholic and politically disgraced Margaret Stanley), Lodge's work depicts Mary as speaking in the voice of Her son, "immaculate" and "the mediation and head of grace." Lodge concludes his depiction of Mary with the dramatic image of the swoon: "Thus plagued in bodie and distressed in soule, sate

27. Lancelot Andrewes, *Ninety-Six Sermons* (Oxford, 1841), II, 123.

28. The Protestant poet John Taylor presents an even more sober Mary than does Andrewes. Taylor emphasizes the "supernal patience" Mary displays during the Passion, presenting the Virgin as an ideally moderate griever. See John Taylor, "The Life and Death of the Most Blessed among women, the Virgin Mary" in *All the Workes of John Taylor The Water Poet Being 63 in number* (1630), p. 23. Jeremy Taylor would later speak of Mary standing at the Cross in the stoical manner favored by post-Reformation Christianities: "By the cross of Christ stood the holy Virgin-mother, upon whom old Simeon's prophecy was now verified . . . Now she was put to it to make use of all those excellent discourses her holy Son had used to build up her spirit, and fortify it against this day." Cited in Marianne Dorman, "Andrewes and the Caroline Divines' Teaching on the Blessed Virgin Mary," November 29, 2004 *Project Canterbury*, <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/pc/essays/dorman>, 9.

poore *Marie* (a holy and happie virgin) enacting hir grieffe with her armes . . . The image of her grieffe before her, and the damage of her losse within her, shee sowned on the senselesse earth, and being conueied to her oratorie by the holy assistance, the sacred bodie of Christ was bound up and borne to the sepulchre."²⁹

In Lodge's work the swoon encapsulates the priestly, co-redeeming role attributed to Mary throughout the text, a role vividly expressed through the analysis of the Crucifixion as "one massacre" (sig. D6v). Given the pre-Tridentine character of Lodge's depiction, it is not surprising that he follows his anticipation of Protestant hostility to his work by anticipating critique from certain Catholic readers, those interpreters who "will accuse me for writing these teares, desiring rather with [the Lutheran theologian] *Brentius* to impaire the honor of the mother of God, than with *Bernard* to inhanche it." Such readers "will accuse the stile, as to stirring" and "the passion, as too vehement" (sig. A5v). Lodge makes clear that the theological controversy surrounding the nature of Mary's grief remained a vital issue for Elizabethan Catholics.

While there are many similarities between Lodge's and Lanyer's portraits of Mary as actively participating in the work of sacrifice and atonement, Lanyer situates her account of the Virgin Mary's priestly functions at the center of a larger effort to imagine women in ministerial roles. Moreover, this effort is grounded in the Lutheran promise of the priesthood of all believers rather than in any fidelity to the Catholic faith itself.³⁰ While Lodge's portrait of Mary is primarily an effort to recuperate Catholic devotional traditions, Lanyer's vision of the Virgin is primarily an effort to empower women as priests. For Lanyer, a central feature of women's authority as priests is the power attributed to them as mothers; this power is embodied in her depiction of Mary as actively participating in the sacrifice of her son.

III

Like the Catholic Lodge, Lanyer focuses on Mary's sorrow as an intensely participatory form of suffering. The first stanza in the sequence begins with Mary "wayting on her Sonne" (p. 94, l. 1009) and ends by

29. Lodge, *Prosopopeia*, sigs. C8, D1v, D4v, D1, H8.

30. Recall, e.g., the anti-Catholic rhetoric used in the letter "To the Ladie *Susan*, Countesse Dowager of Kent": "From *Romes* ridiculous prier and tyranny, / That might Monarchs kept in awfull feare," p. 19, l. 25.

claiming that “None ever lost so great a losse as shee, / Beeing Sonne, and Father of Eternitie” (p. 95, ll. 1014–15). The phrase “wayting on her Sonne,” along with the act of swooning, initiates Mary’s active role in the Crucifixion as she “stands at the watch,” observing attentively (OED).³¹ This scene precipitates the sequence’s later focus on the active nature of the Virgin’s gaze, “When thy faire eies beholds his bodie torne” (p. 100, l. 1131), which develops and grounds the emphasis on the female gaze expressed in the “tears of the daughters of Jerusalem” whose “Eagles eyes did gaze against this Sunne” (p. 94, l. 991).³² Such focus on Mary’s attentiveness is characteristic of late medieval Marian devotions. As Christine Peters observes, “The increasingly Christocentric focus of late medieval piety, with its emphasis on the suffering Christ of the Crucifixion, promoted a re-evaluation of the role of Mary: she became primarily a witness who was intimately involved with the sufferings of Christ, and well placed to communicate her anguish to the human race” (p. 74).

Participation in her Son’s pain begins with Mary’s “griefes extreme”, which are “but new begun,” a phrase that recalls how Mary’s swoon is traditionally interpreted as a sign that under the cross she experiences the child-birthing pains which were absent during the original birth of Jesus as alluded to in Revelation 12.2 and as fulfilled in Simeon’s prophecy in Luke 2.35³³ and which Lanyer refers to in l. 1083 of *Salve Deus*. In her recent study of the connections between Mary’s swoon and the Virgin’s physical experience as a mother, Amy Neff cites many medieval and early Renaissance examples of Mary’s maternity on Calvary, beginning with Rupert (died ca. 1135), Benedictine abbot of the Rhineland monastery of Deutz who offers an interpretation of John 16.21 which focuses on Mary’s *compassio* in terms of her physical pain as a mother. In John 16.21–22 Jesus explains to the Apostles: “A woman, when she is in trauaile, hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but assoone as she is deliuered of the child, she remembreth no more the anguish, for joy that

31. Micheline White observes, in relation to these lines, that women in the poem are praised “for displaying watchfulness, the very virtue that the disciples lack,” p. 333.

32. For a discussion of the politics of Mary’s gaze in medieval literature see Sarah Stanbury, “The Virgin’s Gaze: Spectacle and Transgression in Middle English Lyrics of the Passion,” *PMLA* 106 (1991), 1083–93. The iconography of the swoon constitutes a visual parallel to the active interpretive role that Lorna Hutson sees as central to the representation of women in Lanyer’s poem. See Hutson’s “Why the Lady’s Eyes Are Nothing Like the Sun,” *Women, Texts, and Histories 1575–1760*, ed. Clare Brant and Diane Purkiss (London and New York, 1992), pp. 13–38.

33. See Cunnar, “Sancta,” p. 106.

a man is borne into the world. And ye now therefore haue sorrow: but I will see you againe, and your heart shall reioyce, and your ioy no man taketh from you." As Neff observes, Rupert sees these words as fitting not only the Apostles, but even more so Mary: at the foot of the Cross she "is truly a woman and truly a mother and at this hour, she truly suffers the pains of childbirth. When [Jesus] was born, she did not suffer like other mothers: now, however, she suffers, she is tormented and full of sorrow, because her hour has come . . . [I]n the Passion of her only Son, the Blessed Virgin gave birth to the salvation of all mankind: in effect, she is the mother of all mankind."³⁴

Consistent with this tradition of identifying Mary's swoon with the delayed effects of her physical suffering during childbirth, the Virgin's "new begun" agony in Lanyer's depiction of the Passion suggests that her sorrow is the fulfillment of the Annunciation. And whether or not this symbolic association accounts for Lanyer's reversal of the chronological order of events—a narrative decision which certainly emphasizes the symbolic relations between Mary's role under the Cross and her role as Mother of God—her physically registered sorrow re-contextualizes the Passion from Mary's perspective. Read in this manner, Mary's woeful tending to Christ's crucified body functions as a way of helping to give birth to the redemption just as she gave birth to the "blessed infant" (p. 97, l. 1071).

Mary's active participation in the work of the Crucifixion is further expressed in the following stanza when she protects Christ's blood and body so that its redeeming power might be gathered like a ripened flower. This representation of Mary as spiritual gardener and the swoon iconography which it thematically supports is consistent with conventional Catholic associations of her as a figure of the (Mother) Church. This portrait of Mary is also continuous with the poem's overall conflation, as Elizabeth Hodgson puts it, "of virtuous women with the Church . . . and the priestly and prophetic powers of its ministers" (p. 105). Moreover, Mary's role as spiritual gardener further suggests that she actively assumes her role within providence. This active assumption is centered on Mary's maternity of Christ, a participatory role alluded to in the figure of Christ as a flower which needs to be gathered at the

34. Amy Neff, "The Pain of *Compassio*: Mary's Labor at the Foot of the Cross," *Art Bulletin* 80.2 (June 1998), 256.

proper hour just as she protects His body through the nurturing power of her tears:

Her teares did wash away his pretious blood,
 That sinners might not tread it under feet
 To worship him, and that did her good
 Upon her knees, although in open street,
 Knowing he was the Jessie floure and bud,
 That must be gath' red when it smell'd most sweet:
 Her Sonne, her Husband, Father, Saviour, King,
 Whose death killd Death, and tooke away his sting. (p. 95, ll. 1017–24)

The representation of Christ as “floure and bud” is based on Catholic translations of Isaiah 11.1, which form part of the basis of flower symbolism in Christological and Mariological devotions: “there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a *flower* shall rise up out of his root” (Douay-Rheims). In Catholic traditions this passage is generally interpreted as a prophecy of the incarnation in which Christ’s lowly beginnings as the son of a Virgin Mother parallel David’s humble beginnings from the Patriarch Jesse. As St. Ambrose puts it in *On the Holy Spirit*, “The root of Jesse the patriarch is the family of the Jews, Mary is the rod, Christ the flower of Mary, Who, about to spread the good odour of faith throughout the whole world, budded forth from a virgin womb, as He Himself said: ‘I am the flower of the plain, a lily of the valley.’”³⁵ This rendering of Isaiah appears in Lodge’s *Prosopopeia* when the narrator proclaims to Mary, “thorough the vapour of the holy Ghost the flower sprong: A branch shall springe out of the roote of Jesse, and a flower shall ascende from the roote, as faith [sic] Esaie. And what other is this branch . . . but thy selfe the virgine of God: what this flower but thy sonne?”³⁶ These renderings of Isaiah 11.1 are distinct from the translation and glosses in the 1560 Geneva Bible. The Geneva translation has “grase” rather than flower (the King James uses the term “branch” as does Lodge) and more importantly the gloss elides altogether the Virgin mother’s role in the incarnation:

35. St. Ambrose, *On the Holy Spirit*, *New Advent Catholic Encyclopedia*, April 11, 2004, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/34022.htm>, 38.

36. This distinctly Catholic rendering of Isaiah 11.1 also appears in a 1598 English version of the Rosary: “The Virgin has given birth to the Savior: a flower has sprung from Jesse’s stock and a star has risen from Jacob. O God, we praise you” (sig. A4). *A Methode, to meditate on the Psalter, or great Rosarie of our blessed Ladie: With a Preface in the defence and commendation of it: And meditations for every Morning and Evening* (Antwerp, 1598).

Because the captivitie of Babylon was a figure of the spiritual captivitie
 Under sinne, he sheweth that our true deliverance must come from Christe
 For as David came out of Isaiah a man without dignitie: so Christ should
 come of poore carpenters house as out of a dead stocke.

Lanyer's focus on Mary's role as the first person to prepare for the gathering of Christ's blood serves as a visible form of the iconographical significance implied by the Virgin's swoon.

The Virgin's priestly authority is further signaled when Mary kneels before Christ "in open street," an image that recalls how Lodge's Mary cries, "Let the voice of my mourning bee heard in your streets, for the noise of tribulation is harbored in my heart."³⁷ This active, visible and corporeally expressive Mary is distinct from the "silent, self-controlled, and obedient" Mary that predominates in post-Reformation culture.³⁸ Kneeling and protecting Christ "in the open street," Lanyer's Mary is closer in nature to late medieval views of Mary in which the Virgin, as Ellington observes, "gave public, ritual expression to the people's grief for the innocent suffering of her son on their behalf" (p. 79). More strikingly, Lanyer's focus on how Mary's knowledge of providence affects her inward experience and consequently how her outward displays of motherly compassion and protection suggests, *contra* Cajetan and other Counter-Reformation authorities, that there is no opposition between Mary's intense emotion and her profound spiritual understanding. In this way Lanyer's depiction of Mary is consistent with the epistemological view that the emotive faculties are not extensions of the sensitive appetite, as in Aristotle and Aquinas, but are a function of the will as in Augustine and the Franciscan tradition.³⁹ Lodge outlines this view when he depicts Mary as claiming that "Philosophie conceits to my sorow, for mine eies increase in grieffe, my passions are intollerable, beeing afflicted in al my senses, my loue quickens my passions, my deuotion nourisheth my loue, my teares beautifie my affection" (sig. D6v). Such an epistemology is in keeping with Lanyer's representation of Mary as suffering, like Christ, in

37. Lodge, *Prosopopeia*, sig. B5. Micheline Wright makes a related point when she observes that "Lanyer's depiction of Mary's grief is striking in that she positions her 'in open street' (1020), and in contrast to the disciples who 'waited on' Christ yet failed to understand his mission (577), Mary 'waits on her Sonne' and displays a profound understanding of the significance of his suffering (1009)," p. 334.

38. Ellington, *Sacred Body*, p. 148.

39. For a discussion of Augustine's faculty psychology in relation to the expression of religious experience in the Renaissance see, Debora Shuger, *Sacred Rhetoric: The Christian Grand Style in the English Renaissance* (Princeton, 1988), p. 133.

her body as well as in her spirit. For Lanyer, as for the Catholic Lodge, intense and gendered grief constitutes its own form of non-propositional, and hence properly spiritual, apprehension. What differentiates Lanyer's text from Lodge's is that this combination of emotion and reason, affect and comprehension, supports her effort to imagine women as bearing clerical authority rather than as a means of recovering Catholic devotional practices.

IV

A key part of Lanyer's effort involves exhorting her patrons to play clerical roles, as evinced in the letter to Dorcet. The gardener imagery used to express Mary's priestly authority closely echoes the imagery Lanyer uses in her exhortation to the Countess of Dorcet to adopt the role of a priestly healer. Lanyer calls on Lady Anne to "Bind up the broken, stop the wounds that bleeds, / Succour the poore, comfort the comfortlesse, / Cherish faire plants, suppress unwholsom weeds" (p. 44, ll. 276–78). As Micheline White observes, this gardening imagery "echoes Matthew 13.24–32, 36–43, a parable frequently used to discuss an English priest's responsibility to 'exhort by wholesome doctrine . . . [and] put to silence such as speak against it. The devil . . . ceaseth not at all time to sow his weeds, tares, and cockle in the Lord's field.'"⁴⁰ Lanyer's exhortation to Dorcet to play the role of spiritual gardener finds its theological ground in the Virgin Mary's priestly role as the protector and first gatherer of Christ's blood. Perhaps most importantly, Lanyer situates her own authority as poet-priestess in relation to Isaiah 11.1. In the prefatory letter to the Countess of Cumberland, Lanyer implies a parallel between the humble roots of Christ and her own socially marginal position: "The sweet incense, balsums, odours, and gummes that flowes from that beautifull tree of Life, sprung from the roote of *Jessie*, which is so super-excellece, that it giveth grace to the meanest & most unworthy hand that will undertake to write thereof" (pp. 34–35). Lanyer locates her poetic and quasi-priestly powers in the grace bestowed from one ostensibly abject figure to another. The paradoxes of authority in weakness, strength in compassion, are most clearly embodied in the Virgin Mary,

40. White, "Woman," p. 328. White is quoting here from Thomas Becon, *The Catechism of Thomas Becon . . . With Other Pieces Written by Him*, ed. John Ayre (Cambridge, Eng., 1844), p. 322.

who like Lanyer participates in offering Christ up for others to witness. For just as Christ is figured as a flower that springs from meek beginnings, so Lanyer secures the authority of her poem by remarking that “there is honny in the meanest floweres” (p. 30, l. 196). While ostensibly down-playing the power of her verse, this figure implies that her poem’s origins are comparable to Christ’s humble beginnings, thereby furthering her claim to a quasi-priestly function—a function symbolized by the swooning Virgin.

Lanyer’s reference to Mary’s kneeling posture before Christ is also a significant indication of Mary’s priestly role at the crucifixion (p. 30, l. 1020). Having fallen to her knees in order to protect Christ’s blood in a priestly gesture of devotion, the narrative again emphasizes her physical reaction to Christ’s suffering. This physical gesture recalls the Catholic practice of genuflection which early modern Calvinists repudiated. As with the controversy over Mary’s swoon, what is at stake in the controversy over genuflection is the value of physical, outward acts of devotion—acts which Calvinist Reformers often characterized as effeminate and excessively ostentatious.⁴¹ Embodying such outward displays of pioussness, Mary exemplifies a form of piety more in keeping with late-medieval than with Protestant devotions as she weeps, kneels, gathers, and protects Christ’s body. By doing so, Mary authorizes an emotionally expressive piety that, in post-Reformation contexts (especially in the context of English Calvinism), was derogatorily associated with the feminine and with women more generally. By re-authorizing this emotionally and physically expressive form of devotion, Lanyer’s text works to empower women as agents of an empathic and feminized Christ whom Mary parallels through her physical and spiritual suffering.⁴²

While Lanyer turns to Catholic translations of Isaiah 11.1 in order to express both her confidence as a poet and the Virgin Mary’s authority as a priestess, she also identifies her poetic powers in terms of a “sad

41. On the misogynistic nature of Calvinist polemic against Catholic and high-church devotions see Francis E. Dolan, *The Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (Ithaca and London, 1999); Achsah Guibbory, *Ceremony and Community from Herbert to Milton: Literature, Religion, and Cultural Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge, Eng., 1998); and Arthur F. Marotti ed. *Catholicism and Anti-Catholicism in Early Modern English Texts* (New York, 1999).

42. For a discussion of Lanyer’s feminization of Christ and the practice of blazoning attendant upon it see Wendy Wall, “The Body of Christ: Aemilia Lanyer’s Passion” in *The Imprint of Gender*, pp. 319–30.

delight”—a form of affect that is a function of both feeling and knowledge, emotion and cognition. The poem’s representation of Mary’s authority provides theological support for Lanyer’s own claims to poetic and priestly powers. In her letter to Queen Anne, Lanyer establishes her own poetic and spiritual authority on the grounds that Nature, as opposed to Art, has yielded her a “sad delight”:

And pardon me (faire Queene) though I presume,
 To doe that which so many better can;
 Not that I Learning to my selfe assume,
 Or that I would compare with any man:
 But as they are Scholers, and by Art do write,
 So Nature yields my Soule a sad delight. (p. 9, ll. 145–50)

The phrase “sad delight” upon which Lanyer grounds her authority is a pregnant one. It signifies a culturally unmediated relation to the paradoxes of joy in sorrow, victory in defeat, power in submissiveness that is the essence of incarnational theology. Moreover, the phrase implies that her “sad” soul is “steadfast, firm, constant, valiant, grave, serious” and perhaps most importantly “of trustworthy character and judgment” (OED). By implying that her authority rests on an unmediated access to Christly virtues, Lanyer distinguishes the precise nature of her authority as a female poet from the authority male poets achieve through learning and rhetoric (through scholarship and art). This passage is thus consistent with Marshall Grossman’s reading of “The Description of Cookeham” in which he demonstrates that Lanyer uses the “opposition between culturally mediated and naturally immediate discourse as a way of figuring difference; that is, of figuring the feminine as difference.”⁴³ Locating her authority in a proximate, even immediate, relation to Nature—which she refers to in the next stanza as the “Mother of Perfection” (p. 10, l. 152)—Lanyer identifies with a creative force that is presented as the progenitor of Art in order to present herself as a distinctly female writer. This intimacy with nature, this unmediated state of joy-in-sorrow, she tells us, makes her different from, but no less authoritative than, male poets who stand at one remove from nature.

By locating her authority in an intuitive understanding of the paradoxes of incarnational theology—an understanding yielded to her by nature—Lanyer presents an alternative to Sir Philip Sidney’s view that a

43. Marshall Grossman, “The Gendering of Genre: Literary History and the Canon” in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, p. 133.

poet's authority ultimately transcends nature. For Sidney, poetry supplements and thus helps perfect nature: "Only the Poet disdain[ing] to be tied to any such subjection [to Nature], lifted up with the vigor of his own invention, doth grow in effect into another nature, in making things either better then nature bringeth forth, or, quite anew, forms such as never were in nature, as the Heroes, Demigods, Cyclops, Chimeras, Furies, and such like: so as he goeth hand in hand with nature, not enclosed within the narrow warrant of her gifts, but freely raunging within the Zodiack of his owne wit."⁴⁴

Unlike Sidney, Lanyer's authority derives from an immediate proximity to, rather than a transcendence of, nature. The "sad delight" which nature affords Lanyer signifies a paradoxical state of affectively based knowledge that closely aligns women with Christ and the unmediated authority associated with Him. In this way her ostensibly humble admission of having less learning and art than men occasions a confident identification with the origin of creativity itself. Perhaps this identification with a personified Nature and men with Art in the letter to Anne explains Lanyer's later claim, in her letter to Pembroke, that the ladies in her dream vision insist that Nature and Art be equal, no one being subject to the other:

And therefore will'd they should for ever dwell,
In perfit unity by this matchlesse Spring:
Since, twas impossible either should excell,
Or her faire fellow in subjection bring. (p. 25, ll. 89–92)

The sacred spring in which Nature and Art are united not only offers a vision of equality among opposites, but it also shows women determining the relation between these forces and the power possessed by them:

But here in equall sov'raigntie to live,
Equall in state, equall in dignitie,
That unto others they might comfort give,
Rejoycing all with their sweet unitie. (p. 25, ll. 93–96)

Lanyer identifies poetic authority in terms of her intuitive relation to Nature and Nature's logical priority over Art.⁴⁵

44. Philip Sidney, "An Apology for Poetry," *The Golden Hind: An Anthology of Elizabethan Prose and Poetry* ed. Roy Lamson and Hallett Smith (New York, 1956), p. 275.

45. For the broader theoretical issues at stake in Lanyer and other women writers claiming a less mediated relation to nature see Grossman's discussion of Luce Irigaray, "The Gendering of Genre," pp. 132–33.

Given Lanyer's difference from Philip Sidney on the question of the poet's relationship to Nature, it is not surprising that Lanyer uses the trope of poetry as birth in a different way than Sidney does in the opening stanza of *Astrophel and Stella*. In the letter to Anne, Lanyer asserts:

And since all Arts at first from Nature came,
That goodly Creature, Mother of Perfection,
Whom *Joves* almighty hand at first did frame,
Taking both her and hers in his protection:
Why should not She now grace my barren Muse,
And in a Woman all defects excuse. (p. 10, ll. 151–56)

Here again, Lanyer's authority as a poet is a function of her intimacy with Nature, the "Mother of Perfection." The implication is that as a woman and mother⁴⁶ Lanyer has more immediate access to the creative force behind art than do male poets, particularly the male poet who labors so intensely in Sidney's sonnet sequence. In the opening sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*, *Astrophil* is initially unable to give birth to a persuasive form of praise not because of a lack of learning, but because he must abandon the weight of the past and look into his heart. *Astrophil's* lack of invention is a function of his alienation from Nature through too much study:

Invention, Natures child, fled stepdame 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:
"Fool," said my Muse to me, "looke in thy heart, and write." (l.ll. 10–14)

Astrophil's capacity to write truthfully occurs once he outstrips past authorities by locating truth in his own experience. What is remarkable about Lanyer's account of her authority is that it is grounded on the claim that she does not suffer the kind of alienation from Nature that *Astrophil* expresses. As a woman and mother, she is able to identify with Nature as the "Mother of perfection" in a way that is different from male poets, as implied in the pointed question: "Why should not She [Nature] now grace my barren Muse?" Ostensible humility masks a confident

46. For a discussion of motherhood in *Salve Deus* see, Naomi J. Miller, "Mother Tongues: Maternity and Subjectivity" in *Aemilia Lanyer: Gender, Genre, and the Canon*, pp. 143–66.

reappropriation of male discourse's tendency to appropriate female experience and characteristics. The "sad delight" which Lanyer construes as Nature's gift to her, and the quasi-priestly authority that extends from it, is exemplified by Lanyer's portrait of the Virgin Mary.

Indeed, the priestly role that Mary plays when she protects Christ's blood from the feet of sinners, mirrors, in reverse, the protective role that the hand of Jove plays in relation to nature and all of nature's offspring: While the father protects the mother in the dedicatory letter to Anne, it is the mother who protects Christ, "Beeing Sonne, and Father of Eternitie," in the section on the sorrow of the Virgin Mary (p. 95, l. 1016). The poem thus presents a reciprocal relation between God's protective role of Mother Nature and Mary's protective role of Christ. This reciprocity is embodied in the iconography of the swoon. More to the point, Lanyer's casting of Mary in a priestly role calls attention to the fact that male clerical responsibilities often entail an appropriation of conventionally female characteristics, an appropriation not unlike Sidney's use of pregnancy as a figure for the desire to write. As Ellington observes of late medieval Catholicism, to "cast Mary as a priest was to place her in a male role with female characteristics. In the place of women, men who are priests must now lay the table and prepare the food for the people to eat. Medieval mystical literature at times used such gender reversal to speak of the clergy as pregnant with Jesus, or as cooks who prepared Christ as food" (p. 90). By figuring herself as the priestess who invites women readers to the feast of her text,⁴⁷ and by figuring Mary as the priestess who shelters Christ's body, Lanyer reclaims for women those ministerial roles that have long been associated with femaleness. Just as Lanyer makes the case for her poetic power by reclaiming the male appropriation of metaphors of maternity, so she also makes the case for women as priests on the ground that such roles have always demanded characteristics more traditionally associated with women, particularly mothers.⁴⁸

47. For discussions of Lanyer's feast imagery, see Kari Boyd McBride, "Sacred Celebration" and Lynette McGrath, "Metaphoric Subversions."

48. For a discussion of how male religious roles and experience were represented in female terms in late medieval culture, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, 1982).

The reciprocity between Christ and Mary figured in the swoon assumes that Mary actively agrees to the message of the Annunciation and hence to her role as *mater dolorosa*. Catholic emphases on Mary's cooperative role in the Passion generally presume that Mary's submission to the message of the Annunciation involves a positive assertion of agency rather than a passive acceptance of God's will. In "Miracles Lately Wrought by the Intercession of the Glorious Virgin Marie, at Mont-aigu" (1606), for instance, Philips Numan describes Mary's role in the Annunciation as a function of her active agreement to participate in providence. As Frances E. Dolan remarks, Numan's text offers an interpretation of "Mary's response to the Annunciation, 'fiat' or 'let it be,' not as submissiveness but as an assertion of agency equal to God's creation of the world: 'By his Fiat, he made the world and man, by her Fiat, God entered into the world, and became man'" (p. 104). Protestants, by contrast, tend to view Mary as a passive vehicle of the divine plan, downplaying any active role on Mary's part. Luther, for example, remarks in a sermon that "Mary does not desire to be an idol; she does nothing; God does all. We ought to call upon her that for her sake God may grant and do what we request. Thus also, all other saints are to be invoked, so that their work may every way be God's alone."⁴⁹ Lanyer addresses this issue in one of the stanzas leading up to the "Salutation of the virgin Marie":

Most Blessed Virgin, in whose faultlesse fruit,
 All Nations of the earth must needes rejoyce,
 No Creature having sense though ne'r so brute,
 But joyes and trembles when they heare his voyce;
 His wisdomes strikes the wisest persons mute,
 Faire chosen vesell, *happy in his choyce*:
 Deere Mother of our Lord, whose reverend name,
 All people Blessed call, and spread thy fame. (p. 95, ll. 1025–32, my emphasis)

49. Cited in Thomas O'Meara, *Mary in Protestant and Catholic Theology* (New York, 1966), p. 117. Laudians sometimes permit Mary a more active role in the Annunciation than Luther tends to, such as when Andrewes represents Mary's acceptance of the Annunciation as a model for the faithful Christian heeding the Word: "to conceive is more than to receive. It is so to receive as we yield somewhat of our own also . . . She [Mary] did both give and take. Give of her own substance whereof His body was framed; and take or receive power from the Holy Spirit, whereby was supplied the office and efficacy of the masculine seed. This is *concipiet*" (Cited in Dorman, "Andrewes," p. 1). Here again, though, "yield" presumes a more passive acceptance than it does an active assertion of will. Lanyer places much more focus on Mary's experience and agency in the Annunciation than is normally seen in English Protestantism.

That Mary actively assumes her role is evident in the phrase “happy in his choice,” which indicates not only “having good ‘hap’ or fortune, blessed, or beatified,” but it also indicates as “having a feeling of great pleasure or content of mind, arising from satisfaction with one’s circumstances or condition” (OED). Mary’s active assumption of her role in providence becomes more explicit six stanzas later when the Virgin inquires how it could be that she should bear God in her womb and she concludes that it is the most extraordinary of blessings: “Thy virgin thoughts did thinke, none could impart / This great good hap, and blessing unto thee” (p. 97, ll. 1075–76). The Virgin’s “chaste desire” (p. 97, l. 1079) is fulfilled through her role as God’s mother as suggested when Mary is told that “He is with thee, behold thy happy case” (p. 96, l. 1043). Throughout this sequence Lanyer focuses on Mary’s experience during the Annunciation and Crucifixion, an experience that is repeatedly figured as active rather than passive.

By reading Mary’s acceptance of the message of Annunciation as a positive act of will we can see how the stanza quoted above establishes the context for the following stanza’s focus on her active role in inspiring God’s choice of making her the “Blessed vessel”: “Thy lowly mind, and unstain’d Chastitie / Did pleade for Love at great *Jehovaes* gate” (p. 95, ll. 1034–35). While the emphasis in this stanza is clearly on God’s magnification of Mary, which is broadly consistent with both Protestant and Catholic traditions, it shows clear similarities with late-medieval and Counter-Reformation traditions of presenting Mary as appealing to God through her virtue as a virgin—traditions which give Mary more active and central a role in providence than Protestant tradition tends to do. Robert Southwell expresses this tradition in “The Virgins salutation,”:

O virgin breast the heavens to thee incline,
 In thee their joy and soveraigne they agnize
 Too meane their glory is to match with thine,
 Whose chaste receipt God more then heaven did prize,
 Haile fairest heaven, that heaven and earth dost blisse,
 Where virtues starres God sunne of justice is.⁵⁰

Although Lanyer’s poem does not go so far as to place Mary above the heavenly host, it does imply that Mary’s virtue “pleads” with God. The “of” in Lanyer’s “The Salutations of the Virgin Mary” can thus be read as either subjective or objective genitive. It is not only the angel of

50. *The Poems of Robert Southwell*, S. J., ed. James H. McDonald and Nancy Pollard Brown (Oxford, 1967), ll. 7–12.

Annunciation's greeting that is expressed, but also, as Southwell's title suggests, the Virgin Mary's own salutation. When read together these elements make clear that Mary is presented as cooperating in Christ's suffering and thus the work of atonement.

At the conclusion of this stanza Mary's authority is summed up in terms of her role as the "most beauteous Queene of Woman-kind" to which "The Angell did unfold his Makers mind" (p. 95, ll. 1039–40). She embodies the best of womanly virtues and power and possesses knowledge of providential design. Moreover, her proximity to Christ is expressed in terms of the physical suffering she underwent at the Crucifixion with Christ—traditionally a sign of her priestly role within the atonement.

This account of Mary's authority initiates Lanyer's depiction of the salutation of the Virgin Mary. The line that begins this stanza opens with the language of the Rosary taken from the Douay-Rheims translation of the Bible: "Hail *Mary* full of grace." What is most notable about this stanza is not its evocation of the Rosary—a predominantly Catholic form of prayer—but its substitution of the word "worlds" for the terms "generations" and "ages" in the allusion to Luke 1.48 which concludes the stanza. While the 1587 Geneva Bible depicts Mary as claiming that, "henceforth shall all *ages* call me blessed," the King James and Douay-Rheims translations say that "all *generations* shall call me blessed." Lanyer glosses Luke 1.48 differently:

What endlesse comfort did these words afford
 To thee that saw'st an Angell in the place
 Proclaime thy Virtues worth, and to record
 Thee blessed among women: that thy praise
 Should last so many worlds beyond thy daies. (p. 96, ll. 1044–48)

The word "worlds" not only implies a "period or age of human history characterized by certain conditions" (OED), but it also signifies "eternity" as in English translations of the Latin *in secula seculorum*, *in speculum seculi* (OED). Lanyer's rendering of Luke 1.48 thus sustains a reading of Mary's authority extending into a more eternal point of view, an idea embodied in the Catholic theme of the Assumption. Perhaps most importantly, the word "worlds" is often used, as the OED has it, "with reference to birth or death especially *to bring into the world*, to give birth to." Like the adjective "happy," the substitution of "worlds" for "generations" or "ages" indicates that Mary is to be read as playing a physical and spiritual role in the Redemption. This stanza, then, continues

the sequence's focus on the comfort that Mary takes in the Word and on her experience as a distinct site of devotional meditation.

The focus on Mary's subjectivity continues in the following stanza as the Annunciation is presented from the Virgin's point of view:

Loe, this high message to thy troubled spirit,
 He doth deliver in the plainest sence;
 Sayes, Thou shoulds beare a Sonne that shal inherit
 His Father *Davids* throne, free from offence,
 Call's him that Holy thing, by whose pure merit
 We must be sav'd. (p. 96, ll. 1049–54)

The following stanza also emphasizes the effect that reception of the word has on Mary: "He cheeres thy troubled soule, bids thee not feare" (p. 96, l. 1057). Mary's subjectivity becomes most ideologically charged three stanzas later when she is presented in a state of spiritual genuflection, this time voicing her "chaste desire": "When on the knees of thy submissive heart / Thou humbly didst demand, How that should be?" (p. 97, ll. 1073–74). If Mary's authority is earlier presented in terms of her physical suffering alongside Christ, it is now voiced in terms of her physical and spiritual distance from the corrupting force of men:

Farre from desire of any man thou art,
 Knowing not one, thou art from all men free:
 When he, to answeare this thy chaste desire,
 Gives thee more cause to wonder and admire. (p. 97, ll. 1077–80)

Mary's affective experience is emphasized, just as her physical and emotional suffering was at the Crucifixion. At this point her experience culminates in an act of joyful weeping, an expression of the kind of sad delight Lanyer uses to distinguish her poetic authority from that of male poets: "Could thy faire eyes from teares of joy refraine, / When God look'd down upon thy poore degree?" (pp. 97–98, ll. 1085–86). Through the salutation, the first of Mary's joyful mysteries, she is afforded a relation to God based on an affective experience similar to the "sad delight" nature is said to afford Lanyer in the letter to Anne. In this respect the depiction of Mary provides historical and theological precedent for Lanyer's claim to priestly power, the power to "present unto you even our Lord Jesus himselfe" (p. 34, l. 7). In both instances female authority is figured in terms of *compassio*.

As the flashback to the Annunciation ends, the poem returns again to the scene of Christ's death and the iconography of the swoon. This transition unfolds from Mary's perspective as she witnesses Christ's walk to Golgotha:

How canst thou choose (faire Virgin) then but mourne,
 When this sweet of-spring of thy body dies,
 When thy faire eies beholds his bodie torne,
 The peoples fury, hears the womens cries;
 His holy name prophan'd, He made a scorne,
 Abuse with all their hatefull slaunderous lies:
 Bleeding and fainting in such wondrous sort,
 As scarce his feeble limbes can him support. (pp. 99–100, ll. 1129–36)

Mary's participation in Christ's agony is consummated now as Christ is depicted as bleeding and fainting in "wondrous sort," thereby paralleling Mary's posture earlier in the poem. The structure of Lanyer's sequence on the Virgin Mary thus bears a close relation to the many late medieval and early Renaissance visual depictions of Christ and Mary as sharing in physical agony and spiritual responsibility.

The iconography of the swoon condenses the poem's whole thematics of female suffering and the religious authority such suffering wields in the text. In sum, the swoon situates the poem's veneration of motherhood in a popular and powerful iconographic tradition which grounds Mary's spiritual authority in her physical experience as a loving and suffering mother.

VI

CONCLUSION: THE QUESTION OF PATRONAGE

The Catholic dimensions of Lanyer's representation of the Virgin Mary were presumably intended to appeal to at least two of Lanyer's readers, Queen Anne and Lady Arabella Stuart. Bearing in mind Lanyer's explicit concern with female patronage, her poem supports Peter Davidson's and Thomas M. McCoog's thesis that "Anne's Catholicism must be one of the factors which informs the debate about her cultural patronage."⁵¹ It is worth pointing out Davidson and McCoog's discussion of the gift Anne received on April 11, 1609 during a Jonsonian entertainment at Britain's Bourse put on by Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury. The gift was a silver bas-relief plaque of the Annunciation. This gift, Davidson and McCoog contend, "is a representation of Scriptural narrative, and, as such, theoretically tolerable in a Protestant context. It is also clearly open

51. Davidson and McCoog S. J., 17. For a recent study of Anne's patronage, see Leeds Barroll, *Anna of Denmark, Queen of England A Cultural Biography* (Philadelphia, 2001).

to interpretation as essentially Catholic; the first Joyful Mystery of the Rosary, the moment of the utterance of the ‘Ave Maria’” (p. 17). Lanyer’s depiction of a swooning, priestly Mary clearly presents a more complicated theological text than the plaque—reclaiming as it does a pre-Reformation view of the Virgin. Yet given the relative subtlety of swoon iconography, especially in post-Reformation cultures, along with the careful diction and allusiveness Lanyer uses in her representation of Mary as priestly co-redeemer, combined with the theological freedom made possible by poetry (a fact evinced by the publication of Southwell’s “The Virgin’s Salutation” and other clearly Catholic Marian poems in England),⁵² it is not surprising such a portrait could circulate in print without fear of censorship or reprisal. In any case, Lanyer’s portrait of Mary does not seem intended to line up with specific confessional or doctrinal positions so much as it works to foreground female spiritual power—a power no longer readily available in either official Protestant or Catholic doctrines.

While the two sequences on the Virgin Mary in *Salve Deus* were likely fashioned in order to appeal to Anne’s religiosity, Lanyer also seems to have connected the symbology of the Virgin Mary to her representation of the virtues of Lady Arabella Stuart who is believed to have shared at least some of Anne’s Catholic sympathies.⁵³ The letter to Arabella depicts the King’s cousin as a Phoenix and as a Morning Sun, traditional symbols of the Virgin Mary and of female learning more generally.⁵⁴ And like Lodge, Lanyer may have presented a powerful image of the Virgin Mary in the hopes that it would be received as appropriate praise of Margaret Clifford’s power as a matriarch, particularly Clifford’s fashioning of “a matrilineal heritage and kinship network.” As Barbara Lewalski has demonstrated, “Anne Clifford was profoundly grateful to her mother [Margaret] for beginning and carrying forward . . . lawsuits in her behalf, and admired her enormously for her patience in adversity and for her exemplary courage and firmness in opposing the patriarchal power

52. As William L. Stull observes, the 1635 edition of Donne’s collected poems includes a discernibly Catholic sonnet called “On the blessed Virgin Mary,” which Stull identifies as the work of Henry Constable (p. 130). William L. Stull, “‘Why Are Not Sonnets Made of Thee?’ A New Context for the ‘Holy Sonnets’ of Donne, Herbert, and Milton,” *Modern Philology* 80.2 (1982), 129–35.

53. For a recent account of the religious politics surrounding Arabella, see Sarah Gristwood, *Arbella: England’s Lost Queen* (London, 2003), pp. 89–98.

54. For a discussion of such symbols in England see Helen Hackett’s *Virgin mother maiden queen: Elizabeth I and the cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York, 1995).

structure.”⁵⁵ Taken together, the patronage context informing Lanyer’s depiction of Mary appears overdetermined and worthy of more analysis.

Yet perhaps the most important observation to be made in relation to Lanyer’s depiction of Mary’s physical suffering under the cross is that it circumvents, somewhat, the reasons many historians of religion have argued that the cult of Mary has had detrimental effects on the lived experience of women.⁵⁶ Insofar as Mary constitutes an impossible ideal of chastity, bodily perfection, and self-sacrifice, she stands at the center of a religious regime that is destructively asymptotic in nature, leading faithful women to strive for a form of being that is impossible to attain. By emphasizing Mary’s physical suffering, Lanyer presents a version of Mary that is more deeply human and thus more relevant to the lived experience of women than the other-worldly Mary venerated in the official Post-Tridentine tradition. Perhaps the best way to read Lanyer’s depiction of Mary is as an attempt to imagine a vision of female authority that is configured not as a disembodied ideal, but as a physically real, emotionally expressive, and intellectually engaged exemplum of female spiritual power—one who can be seen as playing an active rather than passive role in the work of redemption. Such a figure, Lanyer’s poem tells us, was not available in either of the official doctrines on Mary in Post-Reformation Europe; although something like it could be envisioned through an imaginative synthesis of pre-Reformation traditions and the newly emergent idea of the priesthood of all believers.

UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA

55. Barbara Lewalski, “Re-writing Patriarchy and Patronage: Margaret Clifford, Anne Clifford, and Aemilia Lanyer,” *Yearbook of English Studies* 21 (1991), 92, 92.

56. See, e.g., Marina Warner, *Alone of All her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (New York, 1976); Merry Wiesner, “Luther and Women: The death of two Marys” in *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics, and Patriarchy* ed. Jim Obelkevich, et al. (London, 1987). This same attitude underlies Ellington’s *Sacred Body*. For a psychoanalytic account of what is both satisfying and oppressive about varying versions of the Virgin Mary for women and men, see Julia Kristeva, “Stabat Mater,” *Tales of Love* (New York, 1983), pp. 234–63.