

REMEMBERING AEMILIA LANYER

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This essay considers Aemilia Lanyer as both subject and object of practices of memory. Writing as a subject of the verb 'to remember', Lanyer drew on techniques of memory and a storehouse of memorized cultural materials as resources for the composition of her sole publication, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (London, 1611). Thematically and conceptually, too, memory is crucial to this volume of verse. At its heart is a long narrative poem which articulates a revisionary, woman-centred account of Christian tradition. This is framed by a suite of dedicatory poems and the country-house poem 'The Description of Cookeham', which together deploy personal and cultural memory in support of Lanyer's attempts to fashion patronage relations with some of the women celebrated in the volume. By writing and publishing *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, Lanyer sought to construct her own textual legacy, claiming a woman's right to assert a poetic vocation and address posterity in terms previously restricted to men (McBride 1998; Rogers 2000). Her success in securing a place in cultural memory was belated, however. Consigned to oblivion for nearly four centuries, Lanyer has only in recent decades become the focus of a significant body of critical scholarship and achieved a presence in the mainstream of Renaissance poetry. She has, in that process of scholarly recovery, become an object as well as subject of practices of memory. Indeed, as an object of purposeful recollection by those – particularly feminist scholars – who have read her work, meditated on her life, and sought a place for her in cultural memory, she can now be seen as an exemplary instance of the transformation of the canon of English Renaissance literature effected by feminist practices of counter-memory.

Memory as technology of writing and thematic content in Aemilia Lanyer's work thus intersects with the succession of forgetting and recollection that characterizes her subsequent reception to make of her life, writings and afterlife a richly symptomatic 'site of memory' (Nora 1989). And it is on this site that I wish to ground the present essay's analysis of the gendering of memory in the literary culture of the Renaissance. Remembering Aemilia Lanyer, I pose two key questions: How did early modern women engage with the arts and politics of memory in order to reflect in their writings on the personal and historical

dimensions of female experience? And what difference has the challenge posed by feminist scholarship to 'the official "forgetting" of women's histories' (Hirsch and Smith 2002: 4) made to the ways in which women like Lanyer, and the literary texts they created, are recalled or forgotten?

As Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith have argued, '[w]hat a culture remembers and what it chooses to forget are intricately bound up with issues of power and hegemony, and thus with gender' (2002: 6). Re-reading Lanyer's career, writings and after-life within a critical and methodological framework derived from memory studies offers new insights into the project of remembering the past differently to which she committed herself in composing *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. This process of revision exposes the ways in which her access to literary creation and the construction of her career and reputation as a writer have been inflected by power and gender. Feminist scholarship operating in the mode of counter-memory aspires to transform what we think, know and feel about the past by recovering women's contribution to it, and revising dominant androcentric narratives to take that contribution into account. It is an attempt at remembering differently in order to ensure that women are inscribed differently in the historical record. The nature and implications of Lanyer's proto-feminism have been much discussed (see, for example, Mueller 1993, Schnell 1996 and Trill 2001). Here, I argue that she too, like the feminist scholars who have recently reconsidered her life and work, can be seen as engaged in a project of feminist counter-memory. Her poetry engages with both personal and cultural memory in the service of a rethinking of the gendered nature of the relations between memory and history. The feminist commitments of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, this essay argues, constitute not only an intervention in the contemporary debate known as the *querelle des femmes* and a future-oriented claim to women's rights,¹ but also a bid to reimagine the dominant narratives of the past that shaped the cultural world of the English Renaissance.

1. 'Writ by the hand of true Eternitie': *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* as memory work

Lanyer inhabited a cultural world in which memory work played a crucial role in supporting literary production by both men and women (cf. Chedgzoy 2007). Like most other writers in early modern England, she employed mnemotechnical arts designed to train a retentive memory and support the retrieval of items from it for new use. They meditated on the meanings of events and experiences recalled from their own lives, and tried to intervene in what other people would subsequently recall about them and their times. And they drew on their culture's discourses and repertoires of memory and history, understanding themselves self-consciously as recorders of the past and present for the benefit of the future. We can find all these aspects of memory work in play in Aemilia Lanyer's oeuvre. Memory is not only crucial to her method as a writer; it is also thematised in the structure of *Salve Deus*

Rex Judaeorum. A concern with memory as a shaping factor in Lanyer's relationships with her putative patrons and in the securing of her literary legacy frames the volume, being prominent both in the dedicatory texts and in 'The Description of Cooke-ham'. In the long narrative poem positioned at the centre of this frame, history and memory intertwine to fashion a revisionary account of the core narratives of the Christian tradition shaped by methods and motives congruent with the feminist accounts of early modern literary history that have revised our perception of Lanyer and her peers.

The dedicatory poems that preface *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* both demonstrate how mnemonic strategies underpin Lanyer's writing, and provide a map of her book's persistent commitment to remembering women. In these nine poems and two short prose pieces, she frames the women she addresses as figures of exemplary femininity, even as she constructs an empathetic (and putatively predominantly female) reading community of 'all vertuous Ladies in generall' (12), who are tasked with remembering and emulating the idealized female figures to whom the book is dedicated.² Lanyer constructs a complex web of relationships among women over time, for example, when in the first dedicatory poem, 'To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie', she laments that it has been her fate to 'live clos'd up in Sorrowes Cell / since great Elizaes favour blest my youth' (ll. 109-10). Echoed in another dedicatory poem, 'To the Lady Elizabeths Grace', the sense of loss and nostalgia for an absent powerful and ideal woman articulated here prefigures the themes of 'The Description of Cooke-ham', and participates in a broader mood of (often politically-inflected) Elizabethan nostalgia in Stuart women's writing (cf. Gim 1999 and 2007). At the beginning of the narrative section of *Salve Deus*, Lanyer says that it is because 'Cynthia' (Queen Elizabeth) has passed on to a realm beyond the power of human expression that she turns now to the Countess of Cumberland, choosing to 'applie / My Pen, to write thy never dying fame' (ll. 9-10). Nostalgia for Elizabeth motivates Lanyer to create a permanent textual memorialisation of the Countess: 'That when to Heav'n thy blessed Soule shall flie, / These lines on earth record thy reverend name' (ll. 11-12). When Margaret Clifford too has gone into the realm of the inexpressible, a record of her will remain on earth, embodied in Lanyer's own verse. Here and in the dedicatory poems, Lanyer's poem deploys materials associated with both personal and cultural memory to underpin her attempts to manipulate patronage relations with a series of elite women – of whom Margaret is the most important – and thereby her very desire to be remembered as a writer. Offering *Salve Deus* to Margaret, Countess of Cumberland as a true and enduring 'mirrou of [her] most worthy minde' (35) which she hopes will outlast both author and addressee, Lanyer articulates her own claim to a place in cultural memory as a memorializing tribute to a woman whose patronage she seeks, and who plays a key role in the drama of memory and nostalgia staged in this volume of poems.

The dedicatory poems thus model Lanyer's revisionary account of the past and put forward her claim to a place in cultural memory as a writer. In addition, they exemplify the importance of memory work in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* in a third way, in so far as they introduce the highly citational, intertextual style, informed by Lanyer's recollected reading of both classical and Christian texts, which characterizes her poetic style and method throughout the volume. Invoking Muses and wise virgins alike, "To all vertuous Ladies in generall" unites both aspects in bringing together classical and Biblical references to idealized female figures in order to underwrite the 'godly labour' of composing this book which addresses virtuous ladies and seeks to draw them into a transhistorical community (ll. 8-14, 29). For a writer who had received the kind of Christian humanist education to which Lanyer, on the evidence of her writings, had access, such intertextuality is grounded in memory work. The education that equipped Lanyer to write *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* involved both the process of training an active memory to store and retrieve images and ideas for use in conversation and writing, and the labour of stocking that memory with material for such retrieval. Her densely intertextual and allusive compositional method is clearly indebted to the practice of commonplacing which was integral to the strategies for purposeful reading, writing and remembering popularized in works such as Thomas Wilson's much-used 1553 *Art of Rhetorique*, a work with which Susanne Woods suggests she was probably familiar (Woods 1999: 13). This compositional method may embed both carefully reproduced allusions and half-recollected echoes of one's reading. With a certain self-consciousness about the pedagogic processes by which her memory had been trained and stocked, Lanyer alludes to such practices of collecting citations from one's reading for deployment as a writer when she portrays herself as a 'painefull Bee', laboriously gathering from diverse flowers honey 'Which is both wholesome, and delights the taste' ("The Authors Dreame to the Ladie Marie", ll. 197, 199).

The textual purpose of such allusions sometimes seems to be merely to demonstrate that the author can draw on the storehouse of common knowledge about classical culture to which an educated person would have access. "To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie", for instance, racks up an extended series of brief allusions – to deities including Juno, Pallas, Cynthia and Venus, and to the Muses and satyrs – which are essentially superficial, doing little to illuminate the specific concerns or dynamics of the textual contexts where they occur. Such classical references are mainly found in the dedicatory poems and in "The Description of Cookham". The most resonant classical allusions in the latter are those to Philomela, whose 'sundry layes, / Both You and that delightfull Place did praise' (ll. 31-2), but who later 'leaves her mournfull Ditty, / Drownd in dead sleepe' (ll. 189-90); and to Echo, who, though 'wonted to reply / To our last words, did now for sorrow die' (ll. 199-200). In each case, Lanyer takes a classical figure associated with the capacity of the female voice to mourn and lament for losses and wrongs, and transforms her into a motif of absence and oblivion. Her recreations

of Echo and Philomel thus exemplify the difficulties female voices have often had in being heard, recorded, and remembered. Both Danielle Clarke and Susan Wiseman have explored Echo's perhaps surprising capacity to serve as a model for female authorship in seventeenth-century women's writing: this possibility is ironically enacted here as Echo's lapsing into silence becomes the ground of Lanyer's own poetic self-assertion in her poem of loss and lament (Wiseman 1998; Clarke 2007).

Susanne Woods judges that Lanyer employed intertextual techniques of composition throughout her volume with 'a learned person's decorum' (1999: 13); however, many of her allusions are marked by a certain imprecision. Lanyer uses both Latin and Greek names apparently indiscriminately for classical figures, for instance, and some of her allusions are inaccurate. In 'The Authors dream to Ladie Marie', for instance, she presents Aurora as goddess of morning rather than dawn, for instance, and at one point appears to confuse Bellona with Minerva as the goddess of wisdom (though Bellona is later correctly identified as the goddess of war). I would suggest that this imprecision comes about because Lanyer was working from memory, rather than copying references out from written sources. To say so is not to excuse inaccuracy, but rather to see it as evidence that Lanyer was practising a compositional technique highly valued in her own time by maintaining a mental storehouse of citations and formulations that she could draw on in her own writing. Her use of classical allusion may thus draw on a memory-store furnished by her general participation in literate culture, rather than representing specific borrowings from particular works.

Though classical references are found in the narrative section of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, not surprisingly they are employed less frequently and prominently in this part of the poem, which favours Biblical intertextuality, and which goes beyond embedding textual allusions in a citational manner to rework Biblical narratives with a gendered perspective. At the heart of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* is the Bible, the text which more than any other occupied a vital position at the nexus of many intertwining discourses of reading, writing, rewriting, and memorizing in early modern literary and spiritual culture. Lanyer's revisionary woman-centred re-reading of the scriptures is articulated to a considerable extent through intertextual strategies of citation, re-ordering, juxtaposition and retelling. The language of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* has a densely intertextual relationship with Biblical discourse, in which the psalms are particularly significant. The psalms played a key role in pedagogic, devotional and literary culture in the early modern period. Through recitation and reading, many early modern women (literate or not) would have memorized passages of the psalms, and it is not surprising that they feature in their writings (cf. Trill 1996). A woman of Lanyer's education and spiritual commitment would certainly have had a deep familiarity with them. Psalmic references are particularly important in 'The Authors Dreame to the Ladie Marie' ll. 117-20 and 'The Description of Cooke-ham ll. 87-90, as well as ll. 73-144

of the central narrative section, where the verse takes on the almost palimpsestic quality often associated with memory writing. Kari Boyd McBride and John Ulreich have argued that at times her poetry manifests in its form and language an 'internalization and rewriting of the Psalms' which had a profound effect on shaping Lanyer's poetic style (McBride & Ulreich 2001: 335). But perhaps their key role in the volume is the way they position her in a lineage of literary creation, revision, and memorialisation. For the key version of the psalms for Lanyer is the immensely influential psalter produced by one of her dedicatory addressees, Lady Mary Sidney.

Completing and revising after the death of her brother Sir Philip Sidney the volume of psalm translations which he had begun, Lady Mary Sidney undertook a work of memorialization which erected a poetic monument to her brother and tied her own place in cultural memory to his through their shared poetic labour. Characterizing the psalms she published as 'Immortall Monuments of thy faire fame' in her elegy 'To the Angell spirit of the most excellent Sir Phillip Sidney', Lady Mary Sidney designates them as both the work of her brother and a monument to his memory (Herbert 1998: II. 105). Lanyer, however, separates out the siblings' contributions to the volume even as she echoes her predecessor's wording when she pays tribute to Mary in 'The Authors Dreame' (ll. 121-2). She invokes Philip as one 'whose cleere light / Gives light to all that tread true paths of Fame' (ll. 138-9), but says nothing concrete about how his fame was earned, making no mention of his career as a writer or, specifically, of his contribution to the psalter. Rather he is called up as the object of the memory work of others, in particular the labour of memorialization and monumentalization carried out by his sister which, in Lanyer's words, ensured that 'beeing dead, his fame doth him survive, / Still living in the hearts of worthy men' (ll. 141-2). Occluding Philip's share of the work of psalm translation, Lanyer asserts that the Sidney psalter would assure Mary a place in 'th'eternall booke / Of endlesse honour, true fames memorie' (ll. 127-8). The composition of a book of devotional verse as a monument to her brother's memory has secured for Mary the place in 'fames memorie' that Lanyer hopes her own book of religious poetry - which, in turn, monumentalizes Mary herself - will gain for her. It was the work of memorializing Sir Philip that gave Mary Sidney access to a literary career, and though Lanyer highlights her contribution to the psalter, in subsequent centuries her literary fame was eclipsed by her brother's. Yet like Lanyer herself, Mary Sidney was eventually to be a key beneficiary of the collective remembering of early modern women writers effected in recent decades by feminist criticism. The recent scholarly reevaluation of her contribution to the Sidney psalter both runs parallel to the recovery of Lanyer and confirms the latter's emphasis on the importance of her part in the psalter.³

'The Authors Dreame to the Ladie Marie' both explores and enacts processes of textual inheritance across generations. The responsibility of

memorialization through poetic creation which Mary Sidney undertook in relation to her brother becomes a textual legacy which Aemilia Lanyer in her turn claims as her inheritance from Lady Mary. This gesture of literary filiation is reiterated in other dedicatory poems, as Lanyer repeatedly textualizes her relationships – real or wishful – with women like Mary Sidney and Margaret Clifford in terms of an interest in how they will promote her reputation and protect her memory as a writer. Dedicatory poems addressed to Margaret Clifford and her daughter Anne explore how women can act to establish their own familial and textual legacies, to enable the transmission of material inheritance through the female line, and in doing so to secure their own places in cultural memory. And it is again through constructing an enduring textual monument to these women that Lanyer asserts her own claim to be remembered:

And knowe, when first into this world I came,
This charge was giv'n me by th'Eternall powres,
Th'everlasting Trophie of thy fame,
To build and decke it with the sweetest flowres
That virtue yeelds. (1457-1462).

An eternal memorial to Margaret Clifford's celebrated virtue will be adorned by the flowers of Lanyer's verse, ensuring in turn the poet's own perpetual renown. It is this reciprocal association of memorialisation and poetic vocation that gives *Salve Deus* its coherence and integrity as an instance of memory work. The dedicatory verses trace women's cross-generational relationships and construct genealogies of female virtue and cultural influence (cf. Miller 1998). Transmitting a 'legacy of virtue from mothers to daughters' (Lewalski 1998: 49), they revise a popular genre of memory writing, the mother's legacy, from the daughter's point of view. In mother's legacy texts, a mother anticipating her own death writes to her children to record the spiritual and ethical inheritance she hopes to leave them (cf. Brown 1999). Lanyer was certainly concerned to construct her own textual legacy, but there is nothing specifically maternal about her self-fashioning as a writer. If anything, she seems to seek a dependent position in her poetry, one in which fantasies of idealized imagined daughterhood in relation to the older elite women she addresses intersect complexly with her positioning of herself as a supplicant for their patronage as a writer.

The dedicatory poems map out a set of textual dynamics that shape relations between women as an informal collective project that aims to secure their place in memory and history, and to shape the way in which they will be interpreted by the future. In undertaking memory work in this fashion, they model the central project of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* as a whole, to which the narrative section of the volume contributes by offering a revisionary account of the past as a gesture towards securing how women will be remembered in the future. Lanyer takes

familiar events which have traditionally been narrated in a way that foregrounds men's agency, and re-views them from a female perspective. The title page articulates this clearly from the outset, advertising that the poem contains:

1. The Passion of Christ
2. Eves Apologie in defence of Women
3. The teares of the daughters of Jerusalem
4. The salutation and sorrow of the virgin Marie.

While Christ's passion is primary in Lanyer's Biblical revision, it is her point of departure for a set of accounts of women's stake in the past. The central event of Christian history is framed in terms of women's engagements with it. Memory work in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* is thus not merely allusive, but also ideological in nature, as the poem sets out to challenge the 'official forgetting' – and ideologically-charged misremembering – of women's place in memory and history. The intervention of Pilate's wife in the section known as 'Eves Apologie' (ll. 761-832) is a key example of this. A figure mentioned briefly in the biblical narratives of the Passion, she does not occupy a major role in the way the Easter story was told in popular culture or represented in Christian devotional practice in Lanyer's time. But Lanyer makes this unnamed woman – remembered, like so many women in history, only in relation to her husband – absolutely central, by conflating her voice with that of Eve. It is Pilate's wife who utters 'Eve's Apologie', and in doing so makes the much-quoted demand which has become a synecdoche for Lanyer's feminist claim, 'Then let us have our Libertie againe, / And challenge to your selves no Sov'raigtie' (ll. 825-6). Re-imagining Eve, Pilate's wife undertakes the same cultural work that Lanyer is engaged with in the poem as a whole: one challenge to the way in which women's place in history is recorded is nested inside another. And although Eve had certainly not been forgotten, the point here is that Pilate's wife – as Lanyer's surrogate – is trying to change how she is remembered. The transformation of cultural memory and historical narrative is what is at stake. Shannon Miller's recent argument – of which more below – that Lanyer's Eve may have influenced Milton suggests that Lanyer was perhaps more successful in this transformative effort than scholarship has hitherto assumed (cf. Miller 2008).

This 'message' from Pilate's wife to her husband was conveyed to her in a dream, endowing it with prophetic and representative authority:

Witnesse thy wife (O Pilate) speakes for all;
Who did but dreame, and yet a message sent (ll. 834-5).

The unique insight and authority associated with dreaming is a recurring theme in Lanyer's volume. 'The Authors Dreame to the Ladie Marie,' for instance, uses

dream vision to establish a writerly lineage between Lanyer and her addressee. This distinctive textual mode is implicated in the politics of memory and nostalgia both because it deliberately stages the recollection – the making conscious – of something remembered from an altered state of mind, and because it was a rather old-fashioned form at this time, to the extent that Lanyer’s use of it has been described as a deliberate archaism (cf. Shea 2002: 386). The relationships between dream, memory, writing and authority staged in Lanyer’s work are complex. Pilate’s wife ‘did but dreame’, a phrase which implies that dreams are fragile and insubstantial; and yet her dream provides the justification for her to invert normal power relations and to take on a role as representative of all women in calling on her husband not only to set Jesus free but to ‘let [women] have [their] Libertie againe’ (l. 825). In ‘The Authors Dreame’, the speaker is instructed by ‘God *Morphy*’ to remain in ‘Slumbers bowre... / Till I the summe of all did understand’ (ll. 18-20), suggesting that sleep can bring learning and wisdom not accessible to the waking self. The volume ends with a privileging of such insights when Lanyer claims, in the final note ‘To the doubtfull Reader’ that her poem itself had its origins in a dream. The title, she says,

was delivered unto me in sleepe many yeares before I had any intent to write in this maner, and was quite out of my memory untill I had written the Passion of Christ, when immediately it came into my remembrance, what I had dreamed long before (139).

The act of writing summons back to the poet’s memory a prophetic insight received in a dream and subsequently allowed to lapse into oblivion. Writing serves as a prompt to recollection, but one with ambiguous implications for Lanyer’s claims to control over her text and her memory. In this endnote, she employs the interaction of forgetting and recollection to disavow authorial agency and to claim prophetic authority instead. The apparent loss of intellectual control associated with the lapse of the phrase *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* ‘out of my memory’ corroborates the speaker’s passivity in the face of the (presumably divine) intervention that endows the titling of the poem in a remembered dream with its prophetic authority. Oscillating between past and present, ‘To the doubtfull Reader’ seeks to forestall future scepticism about Lanyer’s authorial undertaking by insisting that she was ‘appointed to performe that Worke’ (139).

Lanyer’s narrative of the passion and defence of Eve are framed within retellings of other narratives of the past which foreground women’s agency. She meditates on the historical and continuing significance of women including Helen of Troy, Lucrece, and Cleopatra; less well-known figures from English history such as Rosamund and Matilda; and women of the old testament such as Esther, Deborah, Judith, and Susannah as heroic figures. The cataloguing of ‘women worthies’ is a familiar tactic in the *querelle des femmes*, and its importance as a

rhetorical strategy within *Salve Deus* is signaled by Lanyer's rehearsal in the prose preface 'To the Vertuous Reader' of the names of some of the key female Biblical figures she will represent in the narrative poem. Lanyer's engagement with this diverse – and by no means all unambiguously worthy – cast of characters is no mere catalogue, but a complex and multi-faceted meditation on women's place in historical record and memorial discourse. There are certainly moments in her volume where she signals anxiety about how women have been or should be remembered (Eve, Pilate's wife, Margaret and Anne Clifford), or whether they have any claim to be remembered at all (herself). But when Lanyer comes to write of women like Deborah, Esther et al, she does not see her task as being to retrieve them from obscurity. Rather, she identifies them as 'famous women elder times have knowne, / Whose glorious actions did appeare so bright' (ll. 1465-6). Not merely celebrated in 'elder times', these are women whose 'worth' remains known centuries later because it was 'writ in lines of blood and fire' (l. 1473). Likewise, the Queen of Sheba's 'memorable Act' is in no danger of falling into historical oblivion because the account of her deeds too has been 'Writ by the hand of true Eternitie' (ll. 1687, 8). Foregrounding heroic women of ancient times thus enables Lanyer to make a case that not all women have been subjected to the disregard of posterity, but that some at least have succeeded in staking their claim to history's consideration. The sections of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* which rehearse and revise the stories of Biblical women embody a sense of history in which such women enjoy a secure, lasting, and, indeed, memorable place in narratives of the past.

In this respect Lanyer's poem is not a work of recovery of forgotten and overlooked women; rather it is a celebration of women's place in the historical record. Yet her ostensible purpose in retelling the stories of women such as Cleopatra, Esther, Susannah and Sheba in the closing section of the narrative poem is to employ their enduring fame as a foil to Margaret Clifford's unique and incomparable virtues. Women of the past are invoked to set off a woman in the present, inscribed in the textual record formed by Lanyer's verse so that she will be remembered in the future. In each instance, Lanyer praises the selected heroine for her virtues, but finds them lacking because they are essentially worldly in comparison with Clifford's purer orientation towards the divine. Compared, for example, with the 'Scythian women' who 'by their power alone / Put king Darius unto shamefull flight' (ll. 1469-70), Margaret is more virtuous and more notable:

[Their] worth, though writ in lines of blood and fire,
Is not to be compared unto thine;
Their powre was small to overcome Desire,
Or to direct their wayes by Virtues line:
Were they alive, they would thy Life admire,
And unto thee their honours would resigne:
For thou a greater conquest do'st obtaine,

Than they who have so many thousands slaine. (ll. 1473-80)

The juxtaposition of Margaret Clifford with her female predecessors shows Lanyer framing an intervention in public historical narrative within intimate stories of personal memory, in the service of her articulation of what Constance Furey calls a 'utopian vision of women's place in history [a]s the site of a dynamic exploration of what it means for women to have a place – to read, to write, to speak, to create different roles for themselves' (Furey 2006: 562). In this sense, then, Lanyer's poem may be read as staging the education of utopian desire for a different future by means of a different reading of the past. At the same time, she aspires to inscribe something as enduringly powerful and memorable as the stories she rehearses – to write her own lines of blood and fire.

Lanyer's focus on Margaret Clifford as the object of her memory work and the embodiment of the dynamic, utopian relation between past, present and future which her poetry seeks to instantiate is also central to her country-house poem 'The Description of Cooke-ham'. Bringing *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* to a conclusion, this is an elegiac poem of parting and departure, in which the abandoned place is given 'great charge' to 'preserve' the 'noble memory' of those who have left (ll. 155-6). The poem foregrounds its own status as a text of memory by beginning with an invocation of the muses, who as the daughters of Mnemosyne, the Greek patroness of memory, embodied the vital relationship between memory and creativity. Cookham, Lanyer says, is the birthplace of her poetic vocation, the site where 'the Muses gave their full consent, / I should have power the virtuous to content' (ll. 3-4). 'The Description of Cooke-ham' exemplifies the Janus-faced nature of memory work. Creating in her description of the garden at Cookham the textual trace of a material memory-place, Lanyer both reminisces about this lost paradise and rests her own claim to be remembered as a writer on her association with the Clifford women there.

Like other country-house poems, 'Cooke-ham' encodes a politics of place and of historical change, but it gives voice to a distinctively feminine perspective within a predominantly masculine genre.⁴ The focus on the garden is a key aspect of Lanyer's feminization of the country-house poem. Imagined as a shared female space, the garden becomes the locus of Lanyer's recreative deployment of memory. The opening lines establish it as both the textual ground of her invocation of the lost past for which she yearns, and the poetic figuration of the space where the memories she summons up were created:

Farewell (sweet *Cooke-ham*) where I first obtain'd
Grace from that Grace where perfit Grace remain'd;
And where the Muses gave their full consent,
I should have power the virtuous to content:
Where princely Palace will'd me to indite,

The sacred Storie of the Soules delight,
Farewell (sweet Place) where Virtue then did rest,
And all delights did harbour in her breast:
Never shall my sad eies againe behold
Those pleasures which my thoughts did then unfold (ll. 1-10)

Throughout 'The Description of Cooke-ham', Lanyer repeatedly calls upon memory to restore the lost social and emotional plenitude she claims to have shared with the Clifford women in the garden at Cookham. Yet she regretfully acknowledges that it can only do so imperfectly, substituting 'dimme shadows' for the 'celestiall pleasures' the women have lost (13-15). Lanyer's depiction of the garden at Cookham both recreates Eden in the English countryside, and refashions the culturally powerful Biblical associations of women with gardens, and of gardens with suffering, evoked by her retelling of the stories of Eve and of the Passion in the main part of *Salve Deus*. Danielle Clarke insists that Cookham is continuous with the narrative section of the volume insofar as its nostalgic evocation of 'an ideal exchange between devout and virtuous women in the earthly paradise' forms a counterpart to the utopian 'vision of the heavenly paradise adumbrated in the main body of the text' (Clarke 2000: xxxv). As a site of memory, the 'Cooke-ham' garden is thus implicated in both the revisionary narrative of the central poem in the sequence and the very fact of the poem's existence. For Jennifer Munroe, the trope of the garden in Lanyer's volume works to bind past, present and future, in a way which, I would suggest, is analogous to the work of memory itself:

If the Garden of Gethsemane offers Lanyer's female readers the promise of salvation and inheriting the kingdom of heaven later, the Cooke-ham garden offers them the hope of enjoying the circumstances of Edenic perfection in the present, perpetually re-experienced in Lanyer's poetry and in the memory of the women who lived there with her (Munroe 2008: 76).

This celebration of Cookham's Edenic qualities occludes the sense of loss that pervades Lanyer's depiction of it, however. The idealization of Edenic unity is fractured by the different material relations which Lanyer and the Clifford women have to the estate. The preoccupation with class and status which is a persistent feature of the country-house poem as a genre complicates the sense of shared nostalgic pleasure associated with Cookham in Lanyer's poem. Her apostrophizing of 'sweet Memorie' as a bulwark against the loss of 'pleasures past, which will not turne againe' (ll. 117-8) concludes a sequence in which she meditates on the barriers imposed by social distinction, which she identifies as the ultimate cause of her separation from the Clifford women: 'our great friends we cannot dayly see, / So great a diffrence is there in degree' (105-6). In the context of a volume which is

strongly committed to framing a bid for patronage in the terms of female friendship, the early modern significance of 'friends' not merely as social companions but as people who could forward one's material and worldly interests is clearly pertinent here. Though the poem holds out hope that heaven may eventually offer a healing, unifying 'entire love' (l. 116), for the time being memory alone offers consolation for the wounds of class. What then is at stake, in class terms and in terms of the relationships between the women, in the injunction to Margaret to '*Remember* beauteous Dorsets former sports... / Wherein my selfe did alwaies bear a part' (ll. 119, 121)? Recalling togetherness at the same time as highlighting the current separation, the nostalgic injunction to her social superior is marked with a sense of loss, which may signal anxiety about the fragility of the speaker's hold both on memory and on the potentially advantageous relationships her poem celebrates.

Yet the position of Margaret and Anne Clifford in relation to the wealth and prestige emblemized by Cookham is less secure than this reading might suggest. The anticipation of exile and loss is intrinsic to any evocation of the garden of Eden, and the Edenic locus represented by Cookham is similarly shadowed by the threat of dispossession. The garden evoked by Lanyer is merely a temporary refuge for the Clifford women, not a centuries-old family possession. And this temporary status is gendered: the moment of Margaret Clifford and her daughter's presence at Cookham is a fraught one in the dispute over Anne's inheritance rights. The textual production of the garden as memory place is thus also a record of its loss and a performance of mourning for it – a performance in which the garden itself participates:

Each arbour, bank, each seat, each stately tree
Looks bare and desolate now, for want of thee;
Turning green tresses into frosty grey,
While in cold grief they wither all away. (ll. 191-4)

Cookham itself holds onto the physical memory of emotion: 'every thing retained a sad dismay' (l. 130) and is endowed with a certain agency in the processes of remembering and representing, in an echo of memory theory which links these lines back to the opening reference to Cookham as the 'princely Palace' that 'will'd [her] to indite' (l. 5). 'The Description of Cooke-ham' is thus both an exhortation to recollect, and itself a site of memory.

Lanyer depicts a complex, reciprocal relationship between human subject and inhabited landscape as sites and agents of memory and emotion when she addresses Margaret as the caretaker of the 'former pleasures' of the 'sad creatures' identified with Cookham itself, which she has lodged within her heart, 'Giving great charge to noble Memory / There to preserve their love continually' (ll. 155-6). Bidding herself think on Margaret's past youth as a way of recreating in her own

memory the relationship between her putative patron and the garden at Cookham, Lanyer holds out to herself the possibility that recalling those shared recreations will be consolatory, but dwells in doing so on her grief at what she has lost: 'Those recreations let me beare in mind, / Which her sweet youth and noble thoughts did finde: / Whereof deprived, I evermore must grieve' (ll. 123-5). In the end, it is Margaret, not Cookham, who is to be the focus of the writer's emotional engagement; and yet the very existence of the poem as a memorialisation of Cookham nuances and complicates that distinction. By systematically articulating all the features of Cookham, in a kind of blazon of the landscape, and connecting each of them to something about Margaret Clifford, Lanyer's poem quite precisely employs the specific relationship delineated in classical memory theory between *loci* and *imagines* – the imagined 'site' where the memory will be stored, and the image that will be associated with it and used to retrieve it (cf. Carruthers 1990). Acting on the injunction to endow that which must be remembered with affective and sensory significance, she depicts Margaret moving through the garden, inscribing the memorial associations with 'pleasures past' its features will 'retain' as she passes each of them: 'How often did you visit this fair tree ... In these sweet woods how often did you walk' (ll. 59, 81). Memory work need not, then, be exclusively visual or textual, but can also be embodied – enacted in movement through a place, not merely in a taxonomizing gaze at it. This emphasizes the intimate connection between Margaret and the garden at Cookham. 'The Description of Cooke-ham' thus concludes the volume's sustained address to Margaret as an idealized female figure who embodies a particular virtuous and gendered relationship between past, present and future. In contrast to the narrative section of *Salve Deus*, however, 'Cooke-ham' locates that conjunction not in narratives of women's history, but in a concrete place which materializes the symbolic resonance of such narratives on an intimate domestic scale.

Lanyer concludes her reflections on the absence of Margaret and Anne Clifford and closes the poem with her own 'last farewell to Cooke-ham', a valediction that attempts to pre-empt mourning by asserting the immortal memory that her verse will bestow on Margaret and on the place which constitutes her poetic monument: 'When I am dead thy name in this may live, / Wherein I have performed her noble hest' (ll. 206-7). In making this claim at the end of the poem – and nearly at the end of the volume – Lanyer returns to a point made in her prose dedicatory epistle to Margaret, where she offered up her book as 'the mirrour of your most worthy minde, which may remaine in the world many yeares longer than your Honour, or my selfe can live, to be a light unto those that come after' (35). Lanyer's own textual memorial is thus identified with her poetic monument to Margaret and to Cookham, reciprocally associating their fates in a corporeal metaphor that evokes a powerful combination of interiority, intimacy, and subjection: 'Whose virtues lodge in my unworthy breast, / And ever shall, so long as life remains, / Tying my heart to her by those rich chains' (ll. 208-10). In

employing the elegiac mode not merely to monumentalize and mourn what has been lost, but to assert her own claim to poetic fame by 'tying' her reputation as a poet to that which she celebrates, Lanyer employs a venerable poetic strategy. In doing so, she exemplifies the memorial aspirations she shared with many other early modern women writers – not least Anne Clifford, whose presence and absence from Cookham Lanyer memorialises in her verse.⁵

2. Aemilia Lanyer remembered

The recollection of Aemilia Lanyer began, somewhat disconcertingly for feminist critics, with A.L. Rowse's dubious identification of her in the early 1970s as the 'Dark Lady' to whom some of Shakespeare's sonnets were supposedly addressed (Rowse 1973: 12, and Rowse 1976). Rowse legitimised the reprinting of Lanyer's poetry by framing it as a supplement to Shakespeare's Sonnets and casting her as the lover of the more famous and canonical writer. Problematic both in terms of its methods – Rowse took poems by Lanyer and Shakespeare as transparent evidence for their lives – and its consequences for the public perception of Lanyer as a sultry temptress rather than an ambitious poet, nevertheless his publication of *The Poems of Shakespeare's Dark Lady: Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum by Emilia Lanyer* enabled Lanyer to take a step out of the obscurity in which she had long remained. Available in public libraries as well as universities, Rowse's quirky edition had the real value of making Lanyer's poetry much more accessible at a time when the nine extant copies of the 1611 edition of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* could be consulted in just seven libraries worldwide (three in the USA, four in the south of England). Rowse's volume helped to enable the first stages of the salvaging labour of feminist scholarship which transformed Lanyer's place in historical discourse and cultural memory. There are now more than two hundred items in Kari Boyd McBride's invaluable online bibliography of Lanyer studies, and only two of them – both entries in biographical indexes – precede Rowse's identification of her as Shakespeare's Dark Lady.⁶

Though few Lanyer scholars have taken the identification of Lanyer as Shakespeare's mistress seriously, it has nonetheless been influential in two ways. Firstly, to the extent that Lanyer has any purchase on cultural memory or popular perceptions of the Renaissance beyond the academy, it is in her capacity as Shakespeare's putative Dark Lady rather than as the author of a significant volume of verse. The growth of the blogosphere, and of electronic self-publishing more broadly, has given new impetus to the Dark Lady fantasy in recent years. Lanyer now has an internet presence that encompasses not only McBride's scholarly bibliography, but also a slideshow dramatizing her secret marriage to Shakespeare in distinctly queer terms, and the website John Hudson set up to advance his contention that she was not merely Shakespeare's lover, but his collaborator: 'this black Jewish woman, Amelia Bassano (the first woman to publish a book of original poetry) wr[o]te Shakespeare's plays'.⁷ The fact that feminist critical agendas have

apparently had less impact on the presence of early modern women in popular culture than such constructions of women writers as erotic accessories to more famous men is a cause for concern, and a challenge for future work. Secondly, this framing of Lanyer's recovery from cultural oblivion established a context in which questions of biography – of the relations between life and writing – have been intimately entangled with her relationship to the canon, and her status as an object of critical scrutiny. An interest in the writer's biography is not intrinsically illegitimate, of course, and careful, responsible biographical research is vital in enabling readers to contextualize a writer's literary production. In Lanyer's case, though, the interest in biography has had problematic consequences. Rowse is by no means alone in using Lanyer's literary compositions as surrogates for documentary evidence: the relative paucity of historical documentation concerning her life, combined with the apparent riches offered by the poems as a source for some aspects of her experience, have encouraged a persistent conflation of life and text. One instance is critical anxieties about whether Lanyer's textual fantasies of female community can and should provide a map for our interpretations of her real-life relationships with her dedicatees. Posing complex methodological questions about how best to trace the relations between memory and history, experience and inscription, examining these interactions can have the benefit of disclosing what is at stake in our textual constructions of women writers and our attempts to research their lives. The investments and critical desires revealed in these ways of reading have played an important role in energizing the project of recovering women from the past. However, they risk foreclosing the range of ways in which the recovered writer/texts may be read: a fascination with certain aspects of her life may overdetermine critical agendas, leading to an overly confessional and personalized reading of texts whose literary aspirations were not in fact determined by an autobiographical impulse. The danger is that such a concern with the grounding of a woman's writing in her life will lead to the reading of her work solely as a symptom of female experience. This is less true that it once was of scholarship on Lanyer, but it remains an issue in pedagogy, as students find the earlier phase of work on her that focuses on biography appealing. The challenge for feminist scholars is to capture this interest, in students and more broadly, in Lanyer's biography and use it to intervene in how she is represented in the wider culture. Moreover, biography is not a purely personal matter – though too often it appears as such, both in scholarship and in popular discourse – but rather a way of situating an individual life-story in relation to the historical and the political. As such, it can serve in the classroom and in scholarship to link personal memory with cultural history.

The cultural fantasies about Lanyer's life which followed in the wake of Rowse's identification of her as Shakespeare's Dark Lady have had their counterparts in an important trend in the recovery of Lanyer to the canon. Advocating and modeling cautious handling of biographical material, scholars

including Josephine Roberts and Lisa Schnell have reinflected the identification of Lanyer as Shakespeare's lover and the addressee of some of his sonnets to serve the purposes of feminist criticism (Roberts 1996; Schnell 1996). For Schnell, juxtaposing the careers of Aemilia Lanyer and William Shakespeare enables us to see more clearly the socio-economic and cultural factors that shaped an early modern literary career and to expose and critique the power differences between male and female poet that affected their access to such a career, however similar their class positions and situation in the literary marketplace. This strand of Lanyer studies is clearly indebted to the agendas for feminist scholarship laid out in Virginia Woolf's truly groundbreaking, and still hugely influential, search for the material and cultural explanation for the apparent silence of women at a time when, 'every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet' (Woolf 1998: 53). Indeed, had the work of recovery which has restored Lanyer to the canon been done in time to make Woolf aware of her foresister's career, she might not have needed to invent the aspiring poet Judith Shakespeare. The myth of Aemilia Lanyer as Shakespeare's Dark Lady both testifies to our continuing cultural investment in a fantasy of a female Shakespeare, and reveals some of the anxieties about difference that haunt canonical Renaissance literature. Lanyer's career and writing answered well to the concerns of feminist scholarship, and as a result they have been vigorously and inventively re-membered, in ways that are symptomatic of the changing agendas of feminist and other scholarship. Readings of her work have enabled scholars to move forward the discussion of key concerns such as female community, canon formation, women's engagement with religious discourse as well as questions of racial and national identity. As researchers, we too have indulged our fantasies about the 'dark lady' – even if rather than considering her to be Shakespeare's, we have instead focused on the conditions that might enable such a woman to achieve the agency associated with becoming a writer.

Remembering Aemilia Lanyer does not merely illuminate the conceptual questions addressed by feminist scholarship, but also challenges us to rethink our sense of women's place in literary history, and to meditate on the ways in which we make sense of the presence in and absence from literary history of particular kinds of texts and writers. Arguing that because of the lack of evidence for any attention and response to it in its own time *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* cannot meaningfully be seen as having a place in literary history prior to its recent rescue from oblivion by feminist scholarship, Marshall Grossman has interrogated the implications for criticism of Lanyer's belated entrance into literary history (Grossman 1998: 128). In this reading, we might see *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* as being known and read now for the first time, rather than being remembered, and Lanyer as a representative of all the women whose work has lurked in oblivion. Thus the work of recollecting her, and meditating on how she came to be forgotten, should provoke us to consider not merely the fact of an individual woman's writer inclusion in or exclusion from the canon, but also the processes by which canons

get constructed, and writers are remembered or forgotten. As Grossman contends, 'it is in the interest of literary history to consider Lanyer's peculiar ability to make us aware of what we might otherwise not notice, to recall what we have been in fact trained to forget' (1998: 130). The disjunction between the obscurity in which *Salve Deus* lingered for centuries and Lanyer's own vigorously articulated desire to be remembered as a poet is a painful reminder of the vulnerability both of women as historical subjects, and of all textual production, to lapsing from cultural memory.

However, Shannon Miller has recently countered Grossman's certainty that *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* went largely unheralded and unread in the seventeenth century by exploring a range of possible connections between the poem and Milton's literary career (Miller 2008: 49). Miller tracks 'a suggestive range of stylistic tropes' as grounds for 'hazarding' an intertextual relationship between Lanyer's and Milton's revisions of Eve; argues that both writers share a distinctive concern with the spiritual politics of the gaze in their re-narration of the Fall; and situates these putative intertextual connections in the context of wider claims that Milton could have had access to Lanyer's text as it circulated through a cultural network in which both he and the Clifford women were involved. To see Lanyer as a possible influence on Milton – or at least a co-participant in a shared literary conversation – replaces her in literary history and makes it possible to see men and women as in dialogue with each other in their cultural work. The repositioning of Lanyer in relation to cultural memory and the literary institutions that sustain it has, Erica Longfellow warns, tended 'to isolate Lanyer from history and her contemporaries by emphasizing her exceptionalism' (Longfellow 2004: 60). Yet the culture of memory work that informed Lanyer's own writing practice was one to which textual exchange and interaction with other readers and writers were crucial; the series of dedicatory poems testifies to her own sense of the importance of a cultural community for the woman writer. Relocating Lanyer as a participant in a world of reading, thinking and writing that was shared not only with other women, but also with male writers, enables us to understand the landscape of that world differently – as a place where women did not merely inhabit the margins, but where they were more normal presences than scholarship has sometimes assumed.

In her revision of the Christian past, Lanyer writes as a precursor of the feminist project of counter-memory. More than that, her tactics and motives for seeking to be remembered anticipate it, in that the intensely gynocentric nature of the content of her poem, the context of her dedications and the bid for patronage and tissue of social relations woven through them, together signal that it is specifically as a female poet that she wants to be remembered. *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* interlaces an intervention in public historical narrative with intimate evocations of personal memory. This volume of verse both constitutes an extended meditation on personal and cultural aspects of memory and situates the representation of women past and present at the interface of memory and history.

Lanyer's engagements throughout the volume with modes and genres associated with memory writing – mother's legacy, lamentation, and elegy – combine the articulation of personal memory in the face of bereavement and loss, with the writerly desire to ensure that inscription will endure and transcend the oblivion that such loss threatens. It is ironic, then, that for so long this was a poetry that did indeed suffer oblivion, despite Lanyer's best efforts to ensure that her textual legacy would secure her place in cultural memory.

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NOTES

- ¹ On Lanyer's engagement with the *querelle des femmes*, see, for instance, Richey 1998.
- ² On the relationship between female exemplarity and 'empathetic female reading communities' see Hampton 2007.
- ³ For an overview of the body of scholarship on Mary Sidney, see Hannay 2009, vol. 2.
- ⁴ On the genre's concern with historical continuity and the continuing presence of the past, see Fowler 1994: 7-8. Other women who intervened in the genre include Lucy Hutchinson, in her elegies on her husband, and Katherine Austen (cf. Norbrook 1997). Katherine Austen's 'On the Situation of Highbury' can be found in Stevenson et al. 2001: 315-6.
- ⁵ On Anne Clifford's various memorial projects, see Chedgzoy 2007, chapter 1.
- ⁶ <http://www.ic.arizona.edu/ic/mcbride/lanyer/lanbib.htm>. Accessed January 5 2010.
- ⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=em3IgjdpW0c>;
<http://www.darkladyplayers.com/index.html>. Both accessed January 5 2010.

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