

**Aemilia Lanyer and Anne Bradstreet:  
Gendered Poetry and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England**

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## I. The English Civil War and Women's Poetry

The English Civil War was a series of civil wars and political machinations between supporters of the newly established Parliament and Royalists whose main conflict was over the manner of England's governance. In 1625, Charles I succeeded his father James who passed away and began to reign over England, Wales, and Scotland. Charles I believed in the king's "divine right" to rule which came from God rather than any earthly authority. He also implemented controversial religious policies which were a part of his attempts to impose religious conformity. This period became known as the "personal rule of Charles 1" during which many small rebellions and riots broke out.

In 1640, Charles I needed to impose new taxes to react to such rebellions and two Parliaments were convened in succession, the latter of which was hostile to his ideas and defended its rights against the king. The Civil War was initiated precisely due to the disagreement between Parliament and Charles I, who opposed all of Parliament's propositions because they threatened his divine right to rule. After many military clashes and rebellions, the war ended with the execution of Charles I on January 30th, 1649. The monarchy was abolished and the Commonwealth of England was established with Oliver Cromwell as its leader.

The political events of the Civil War and social revolutions that began during this era brought forth many notable changes, such as the sudden upsurge in the activity of writing and reading. Specifically, prominent male poets and their prolific works loom large in seventeenth-century literary history. In *Women Poets of the English Civil War*, Sarah Ross and Elizabeth Scott-Baumann state that Richard Lovelace and Robert

Herrick, poets who supported Charles I, are known for their expression of lively delights that shows the pleasures of life against political defeat (2). In contrast, Andrew Marvell celebrates Cromwell's rise as a new leader in his "Horatian ode." John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is seen as "a less obvious allegory of the English Civil War," with its portrayal of the turmoil of the English society and its multiple relations in political and religious thought (Ross and Scott-Baumann 3).

Of equal importance to poetic revolutions are the associated scientific, philosophical, and epistemological revolutions. "Philosophy, I say, and call it, He, For whatsoe're the Painters Fancy be, It a Male Virtu seems to me" famously wrote Abraham Cowley, a Royalist poet, in his statement "To the Royal Society," which was founded in 1660 as England's first scientific institution. Clearly, the notion of an early modern being that emerged from those associated revolutions were deeply reflected in the poetry of the canonical, male Civil War writers. The tendency to regard the early modern human being as a male political individual was heavily present in these academic areas according to Achsah Guibbory. In "Imitation and Originality: Cowley and Bacon's Vision of Progress," Guibbory states that this notion of a modern being was influenced by the Royal Society and its "connection with poetry in ways that would enrich the literary genre" (99) with references to influential figures of the past period such as Francis Bacon. Clearly, the notion of an early modern self that emerged from those associated revolutions were deeply reflected in the poetry of the canonical, male Civil War writers.

Yet, revolutionary shifts borne out of this era were developed differently for women. Many of the social environments in which male poets wrote prohibited women poets, such as professional institutions like the Inns of Court or academic institutions like the Royal Society and most universities. However, according to Ross and Scott-Baumann, women's literacy saw an exponential increase and women's writing thrived in both publishing networks and local communities (8). They also observe that despite the lack of equality for education, licensing regulations of published writing were regulated and subsequently, a larger number of female writers entered into the printing community (18). Like their male counterparts, women in poetry like Anne Bradstreet and Aemilia Lanyer were closely tied to the contemporaneous ideas and conflicts in their country. For example, Anne Bradstreet was a Puritan poet who was dissatisfied with Charles I's lack in support of the Protestant cause in Europe. She mainly wrote in the American colonies and often idealized Queen Elizabeth's past reign, while Lanyer wrote a series of dedicative poems, beginning with Queen Elizabeth, and each poem praises aristocratic women in high social positions.

Although a standard analysis of seventeenth-century literary history mostly highlights prolific male poets, many women in poetry felt the influence of the war in various ways and their poetry richly responds to the political events that changed their nation. Bradstreet and Lanyer are good examples of how female poets during the English Civil War present an intricate poetic canon that showcases a woman's viewpoint during a time tainted by political conflict and strife. In particular, poetry of Anne Bradstreet and Aemilia Lanyer are important as they show examples of ways

women can use poetry to write politically or express an unsolicited opinion, even during times when women were not socially nor lawfully entitled to such freedom. The specific messages that they deliver are interesting because their poems deploy common ideas based on gender stereotypes but use poetic modes of modesty and irony to ultimately subvert such stereotypes. Bradstreet and Lanyer purposefully utilize these tropes which mark their poetry as literary and well-read, and further prove that they are fully capable poets with proficient writing ability and knowledge, despite the harsh conditions for women in their society. As Patricia Pender states in *Early Modern Women's Writing and the Rhetoric of Modesty*, their use of what we now criticize as sexist vocabulary should not be read as endorsements of misogynistic exhortations for women to remain restrained and subordinate, but instead we should see that language as a method of disarming potential criticism. Moreover, as abidance to literary form and modesty became ways to highlight the two poets' connection to and respect for classical traditions in poetry, they paradoxically also highlight the poets' own scholarship, skill, and expertise.

Before analyzing the poetry of Bradstreet and Lanyer, it is important to note that the common critical analysis of English Civil War poetry often elides women's poetic engagement in the political and social cultures of seventeenth-century England (Ross and Scott-Baumann 3). Bradstreet and Lanyer's pioneering poems are extremely useful in adding on to such mainstream analysis, and their works share many similarities like use of gender stereotypical language and symbolism. Their poetry can be read in depth alongside each other and hopefully take their places in the poetic canon of seventeenth-

century England as progressive literature that ultimately argues against the prevalent gender conventions of the seventeenth century. By placing their works within the poetic canon, we can gain a more complete understanding of English Civil War poetry and understand that poetry has an important social function of challenging discriminative conventions and stereotypes pertaining to gender, even in today's modern society.

## II. Critical Analysis of English Civil War Poetry

As the English Civil War culminated in the execution of a king, the inauguration of a Commonwealth, and thus a new Republic of England, it has loomed large in seventeenth-century history and literature. Historians continue to argue whether the war constituted a genuine revolution or simply a constitutional crisis, but there is no doubt that the events of the war deeply influenced England's literary culture. In *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660*, Nigel Smith notes that "Never before in English history had written and printed literature played such a predominant role in public affairs, and never before had it been felt by contemporaries to be of such importance" (1).

Literary texts, especially poetry, were used to challenge the political status quo, or to encourage the public to return to normal life and indulge in its daily pleasures. In *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature Volume 2: The Renaissance and the Early Seventeenth Century*, Joseph Black et al. categorize English Civil War poetry into mainly two groups of cavalier or Royalist poetry and Parliamentary or Roundhead poetry (20). A "cavalier" traditionally meant a mounted soldier, but when it was applied to

those who supported Charles I and was first used as a demeaning term meant to belittle them. In contrast, roundheads, who supported Parliament, often consisted of Puritans and distinctly differed from cavaliers in their lifestyle. Black also explains that an overarching theme in cavalier poetry was "*carpe diem*," which emphasized a sentiment of enjoying life, friendship, and allegiance to one's personal and political acquaintances. Meanwhile, Parliamentary poetry, of which there were fewer poets of note than there are cavalier ones, supported political Republicanism against the Royalist cause (Black et al. 20).

In "*Royalist lyric*," Alan Rudrum writes that cavalier poets discussed moral debates from Classical times that were revived by Renaissance humanism. According to him, poems of cavaliers such as Robert Herrick and Henry Vaughan are important in that they "*emphasize the performance of public duties carried on within an apparently private life*" (182). This situational paradox is frequently highlighted and thus female writers who supported Royalist causes are omitted from such evaluation due to the fact that women were limited from obliging in public duties regarding politics and warfare. Rudrum also highlights a certain common theme often coined as "*cavalier eroticism*" which is reflected in the poets' tendency to write frequently of vital pleasures and love. The love poetry which ranges from the highly erotic poetry of Thomas Carew to the more chaste and chivalrous poetry of Richard Lovelace is characterized typical of such cavalier culture. Although this critical analysis of Civil War poetry reasonably emphasizes the cavaliers' devotion towards heterosexual desire and idyllic romance in order to show their secular concerns, I believe that it omits female poets like Aemilia

Lanyer who adopted a different perspective in her poem "Salve Deus Rex Judæorum" and criticized the relationship between Adam and Eve.

Similarly, women are largely overlooked in the record written by Black and other editors, which analyzes Parliamentary poetry mainly through two pre-eminent poets under the group, Andrew Marvell and John Milton. Black especially asserts that Milton and Marvell both supported the "Good Old Cause" of Cromwell as devout Christians (509). He also highlights that John Milton's presence as a Parliamentary poet was further strengthened by the fact that he was employed as a civil servant for the Commonwealth of England under the rule of Oliver Cromwell. Black also says that Cromwell strictly abided to his Puritan faith and even executed an order for soldiers to walk around the streets and observe that women were appropriately dressed without showing any skin, and this allows us to see that the Parliamentary community was highly dependent on the religious values of conservative Puritanism. Christopher Warren refers to *Paradise Lost* as the most fundamental text that supports Parliamentary politics in "To Ruin the Repairs: Milton, Allegory, Transitional Justice," and goes on to argue that Milton heeds to contest the past rather than "forgetting or sanitizing it" (20). In Warren's analysis, Milton's story is the strongest text that demonstrates the Puritans' reasoned distrust against royalist allegories and also reflects their conservative ideas pertaining to gender roles.

Although I do not disagree with the way Warren and others have noted the significance of Milton's text, such critical analysis has omitted other Puritan approaches to the Civil War, including that of Anne Bradstreet, whose extensive reading of English

history is distinguished by the fact that she wrote in the new colonies of America. Each of Bradstreet's poems in *The Tenth Muse* responds to the contemporaneous political situation with themes that range from nostalgia for Elizabethan times, anti-tyranny, and support of Parliamentary values. Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson note in *Early Modern Women Poets (1520-1700): An Anthology* that the second revised edition of *The Tenth Muse* strongly differs from the first edition in that the second edition weakens her support for Parliament and radical Presbyterianism. Based on these two facts, we can deduce that *The Tenth Muse* indeed reflected some of Anne Bradstreet's ideas on England's political issues that deserve to be observed in light of its historic context.

In a society where publishing political works posited dangers of being accused of treason or political dissent, the very act of publishing for women was even more precarious. In fact, Scott and Ross-Baumann have analyzed that many women wrote prevalently in manuscript which would range from circulation in relatively small groups of families to enormous success in large communities (18). In regard to this historical context, then, today's reading of Civil War women's poetry is fragmented partially due to its underrepresentation in the print culture of seventeenth-century England, not to mention the further persistence of sexist stereotypes. Drawing on the poems of Bradstreet and Lanyer as examples and the rich experience of seventeenth-century politics they offer, I will show how our understanding of Civil War poetics will be rendered more complete by including these authors in the canon. They both reject the inferiority of women, but both exhibit a kind of superficial conformity to notions of inferiority in different ways. Bradstreet undermines her conformity with irony and

tone, while Lanyer achieves a similar end with more explicit deconstructions of the assumptions behind the notion of inferiority itself. Observing some of their most important works provides not only more diverse authorship, but also a wider range of perspectives on the English society of that time which gives current readers an opportunity to evaluate the seventeenth-century English society through a more thorough and balanced lens.

### III. Analysis of Anne Bradstreet and Aemilia Lanyer

#### A. Anne Bradstreet, *The Tenth Muse*

Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672) was a prominent English poet that belonged to the Elizabethan literary tradition, influenced by forerunners like Edmund Spenser and Sir Philip Sidney. She was born a Puritan in Northamptonshire, England, and emigrated to America due to unhappiness with Charles I's religious reforms. She became one of the first poets to write English verse in the American colonies and maintained an active interest in the social upheavals of England. During this time, she wrote many of the poems that her brother-in-law would take back to England and publish as her 1650 book of poetry *The Tenth Muse, lately Sprung Up in America*, composed of four long four-part poems.

Bradstreet's most distinctive quality is in her writing undertone that superficially appears quite subservient to existing gender stereotypes of seventeenth-century England. In the beginning section titled "The Prologue" of *The Tenth Muse*, Bradstreet portrays the struggles of being a woman in a Puritan society and fundamentally rejects gender conventions with honesty and sarcasm. The first stanza hints at an irony that is present

throughout the entire poem in which she culturally devalues women on the surface, but also confronts the sexual biases of her society if we look more closely. She writes, "To sing of Wars, of Captaines, and of Kings, / Of Cities founded, Common-wealths begun, / for my mean Pen are too superior things." (1-3) Bradstreet seems to accept the misogynistic social stereotype of women's modesty as she claims that her "Pen," that is, her writing ability will not be able to cover such masculine topics. However, the reader should not readily accept this assertion. Bradstreet has both produced and agreed to publish this body of work during a period when literary publication was heavily discouraged for women. Thus, the very fact that she has written about the topic ironically contradicts her claim to modesty. Also, in *Conspiracy and Virtue: Women, Writing, and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England*, Susan Wiseman argues that "these topics are precisely the main poetic focus of the first section of her volume" (188). Thus, the opening lines of "The Prologue" lay out the foundation of Bradstreet's use of coded and sarcastic language which allows her to subtly defy the obstacles that women encounter in the predominantly male literary tradition. As Wiseman asserts, she nonetheless maintains a "positive model of feminine publication – rational, religious, politically informed, and learned" (206).

Bradstreet's first lines are similar to the beginning lines, "This is a tale of arms and of a man." of *The Aeneid*, which is a Latin epic poem written by Virgil in 19 BC that covers the fall of Troy and beginning of Rome. Bradstreet also states, "Great Bartas' sugar'd lines do but read o'er" (8) and this line seems to be referring to Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas, a French poet of the sixteenth century. When we consider the fact that Bradstreet wrote another elegy titled "In Honour of Du Bartas, 1641," we can deduce that Du Bartas

was a poet that she greatly admired. These references to two significant literary figures imply that she may be aligning herself with these poets, and this can be understood as a strategic citation of reverential literary figures who appear to be validating her intellectual status. Such academic and classical references overturn the validity of her previous modest statements that seemed to assert her poetic inferiority. The fact that she mentions Du Bartas and Virgil is also important in the sense that it connects her to a long-established and well-recognized canon of male heroes. In this way, the first stanza effectively alludes that "The Prologue" will be an assertion of Bradstreet's capability as a poet rather than an acknowledgement of her uncertainty about her work.

Her modest tone escalates in the third stanza where she further disparages her writing:

From School-boy's tongue no Rhetoric we expect,  
Nor yet a sweet Consort from broken strings,  
Nor perfect beauty where's a maine defect,  
My foolish, broken, blemished Muse so sings, (13-16)

Here, she is exclaiming that mere children are not expected to write intelligent or noteworthy writing, similar to how a broken instrument is not expected to play beautiful music. Bradstreet describes her "Muse," that is, her writing inspiration as flawed and irreparable. Historically, the dynamic between an artist and a muse has been similar to that of a creative male being and a female object, which is also closely related to the birth of the male modern intellectual being previously mentioned. With this in mind, the "maine defect" of which she speaks is pertaining to her gender and the three adjectives

she uses to describe her "Muse" could easily be expressed by a male voice. Although she approaches her poetry in a pessimistic way, she actually shows perfect and precise use of iambic pentameter and the rhyme scheme of ABABCC which is in reference to her previous citation of respected poets. The iambic pentameter is a famous poetic meter that became best known by its use during the English Renaissance, and its use with the strict scheme of ABABCC shows a profound level of regularity throughout the poem. From the fact that Bradstreet intended in part to respond to contemporary gender stereotypes that limited women from writing, we can deduce that was the poem's form was so regular and regimented to act as a testament to Bradstreet's writing expertise. Alice Henton critically points out that Bradstreet's reveal of poetic flaws by using language is too pretending to disparage her gender and thus, is too ironic to produce that effect. In relation to such analysis, I believe that Bradstreet's self-deprecation gains a certain ironic implication in its repetition and ultimately develops into a consistent motif.

As this motif of superficial modesty continues, Bradstreet upholds female authorship in a complex way. She states:

I am obnoxious to each carping tongue  
Who says my hand a needle better fits.  
A Poet's Pen all scorn I should thus wrong,  
For such despite they cast on female wits.  
If what I do prove well, it won't advance,  
They'll say it's stol'n, or else it was by chance.  
But sure the Antique Greeks were far more mild.

Else of our Sexe, why feigned they those Nine (27-34)

Here, Bradstreet decides to slightly retreat from modesty and defend women's writing while attacking its contemporary critical reception. She takes on a more combative position and angrily criticizes her society and its "carping tongue" that insists a woman's voice is better silenced, or rather, her hand is better holding "a needle," implying that women belong in the domestic sphere of housework. When we consider that both Cavaliers and Roundheads carried conservative views on gender roles, this criticism can be applied to both sides of the Civil War.

Bradstreet's reference to the "mild" nature of the Greeks may be alluding to the literary presence that Sappho, a female lyrical poet, had in ancient Greece. Sappho, who was given the name of the "Tenth Muse", was renowned as one of the greatest and highly esteemed poets of Hellenistic Greece. We can surmise that the title of Bradstreet's book may, in fact, be partly inspired by the presence that Sappho had in poetry. With this connection in mind, Bradstreet may have considered herself as a figure similarly competent as Sappho and believed that she is equally eligible of acclaim from her contemporary readers as well. We can further assume that she is suggesting that the literary critics of seventeenth-century England are even ignorant in not praising her for her "female wits" and should perhaps learn from their historical predecessors in rightfully admiring a female poet's work. Also, Bradstreet constantly tries to show her knowledge of academic and political history by alluding to diverse figures and facts such as Virgil and ancient Greece, which further accentuates the power of her "female wits."

After defending women's writing, Bradstreet returns to modesty and continues into the seventh stanza, which can be interpreted from two contrasting perspectives. Here, she takes on an almost obsequious tone in saying, "Men can do best, and women know it well." (40) but maintains that men should acknowledge women in their talent. I think this can be seen as a continuation of her modesty, altogether with the line "Give thyme or parsley wreath; / I ask no bays" (46). Bradstreet asks for domestic herbs rather than the time-honored bay laurel, which is the traditional prize for poetic excellence, military victory, or athletic prowess, according to Wendy Martin (49). This may reflect the longing of many women in the literary realm at the time. However, when you read the seventh stanza with the previous lines that criticize contemporary reception, she can be interpreted as retreating from, and thus undermining her work once again. By claiming that her work does not deserve a traditional reward, she appears to accept an inferior position. Perhaps Bradstreet is associating public acclaim and acknowledgement by contemporary critics who she previously deemed as stupid with unhealthy pride. Thus, it is not completely necessary for her to receive "bays" in order to establish literary excellence.

Bradstreet ends "The Prologue" by stating that her "mean and unrefined ore of mine / Will make your glist'ring gold but more to shine." (47, 48) The fact that she closes the poem by insisting that appreciating her poetry will make other poems shine in comparison is consistent with Bradstreet's intended humility and situational irony. "The Prologue" may feel outwardly modest, but the poem is clearly written to deliver a then-radical notion that a woman's writing could be as academic and valuable as that of any male poet during her time. The dynamics of the poem work to create an overall sense of

growing irony that is ultimately too confrontational to actually produce the effect of disparaging her gender. Her declaration at the beginning of "The Prologue" is merely a tease to be understood nonliterally, for discussions of politics and social tensions are precisely what her subsequent poems will be about. Hence, *The Tenth Muse* can be rightfully read as a bold assertion of Bradstreet's talent and her right to create poetry in a period when feminism was far from becoming a mainstream political movement.

#### B. Aemilia Lanyer, "Salve Deus Rex Judæorum"

If Anne Bradstreet and her multifarious naivety and modesty can be seen as a foreground of the novelty of female authorship in the English literary tradition, then the domain occupied by Aemilia Lanyer was a subtly different that of Bradstreet despite resulting in similar ends. Aemilia Lanyer (1569-1645) was born Aemilia Bassano as a member of the minor gentry, the land-owning high social class, through her father's vocation as a court musician. She grew up with access to Elizabethan court circles and aristocrats, and this background seems to have influenced her to produce poetry designed to attract patronage from figures in high social positions, which led her to make political statements through dedications that indirectly challenged gender stereotypes.

In the second poem of "Salve Deus Rex Judæorum," Lanyer focuses on women's desire and intelligence by reinterpreting the book of Genesis in a feminist light. In this poem titled "Eve's Apology in Defense of Women," she follows a pattern similar to that of Bradstreet that embraces misogynistic rhetoric, only to pivot from it to ultimately take a feminist stance. "Eve's Apology" is narrated by the wife of Pontius Pilate, the official who

was in charge of the trial of Jesus Christ, as she begs her husband to spare his life. She says that if Pilate chooses to execute him, he will be committing a far more severe offense than the sin Eve committed in the Garden of Eden. In the opening lines of the poem, Lanyer describes Eve as a "poore soule" and "one weake woman" (743) which are both descriptions that reflect stereotypical female characterization of the period that is similar to the condescending tone of contemporary male poets.

Although this initial description is misogynistic, Lanyer pivots from this to assert that her reimagining of Eve's story will ultimately lead to a reevaluation of women and gender prejudices that have been projected upon them because Pilate's wife generalizes his actions with language like this: "Till now your indiscretion sets us free. / And makes our former fault much less appear;" (761) Here, Pilate's wife uses the expression "our former fault" which implies that history has blamed not only Eve, but rather the entire gender of women, for the original sin. By confirming that Eve's "fault" has been unfairly transferred to all women, Lanyer is expanding the contrast between Eve and Pilate from that of mere individuals to representatives of their respective genders, men and women. This idea also appears when Pilate's wife says, "That we (poor women) must endure it all," (794) and it further confirms that Lanyer is constructing Eve as a representative figure of women and how they have been wrongly evaluated by the general public. In Pilate's case, the narrator says this: "But you (men) in malice Gods deare Sonne betray." (816) Here, Lanyer makes the argument that Pilate's choice to crucify Jesus should be held against all men, similar to how Eve's choice to eat the forbidden fruit is held against the entire female gender. So, we can evaluate Lanyer's initial acceptance of misogynistic social

stereotypes of women's inferiority as only on the surface level. Her goal is to use this description in order to make her poetry more acceptable for the standards of her time, in order to deliver a further profound defense of women.

Lanyer subsequently explains the roles that both Adam and Eve played in the act of original sin. In the fifth stanza, she says "But surely Adam cannot be excused; / Her fault though great, yet he was most to blame." (777-778) Lanyer argues for the blame to be shared and in the process of making her argument, she refers to common gender stereotypes. She refers to Eve as "weakness" and Adam as "strength" (779), and Susanne Woods claims that this is consistent with traditional gender conventions that portray women as helpless and vulnerable (132). However, Lanyer curves this dichotomy with an ironic nuance to elucidate that if Adam were truly the embodiment of strength, then he would have turned down Eve's offerings in the first place. She also curves this dichotomy through another perspective, which is that any of Eve's characteristics is based on Adam. According to the general story of the book of Genesis, God takes a rib from Adam and uses it to craft Eve. This story was traditionally used to argue that women were created as inferior beings for the purpose of serving men. Instead, Lanyer writes that "If any evil did in her remain, / Being made of him, he was the ground of all." (809-810) She once again curves the general analysis of Eve to a unique argument that every negative trait that Eve may have initially stemmed from Adam. Thus, whatever criticism is directed towards Eve, it must be directed towards Adam as well. This is another instance of Lanyer exploiting and manipulating traditional and misogynistic ideas in order to draw from them a greater defense of Eve. She seems to accept certain gender stereotypes, and this gives her a

foundation from which she can build a stronger argument to eventually undermine the very stereotypes that she employs.

After this implicit acceptance, Lanyer tries to subvert some of those stereotypes and this is evident when she suggests another possibility as to why Eve ate the fruit. "If Eve did err, it was for knowledge sake; / The fruit being fair persuaded him to fall," (797-798) she says. Lanyer is offering a completely different vindication for Eve's disobedience to God, and this explanation argues that Eve's desire for acquired knowledge is what caused her to eat the fruit. From this justification, one can extend Lanyer's argument to suggest that a male omniscient authority may have, in fact, prohibited Eve from realizing her natural desire. She contests the idea that a woman's desire, including that of intellect necessitates or presupposes her consent to a man's authority. This is connected to a wider gender stereotype that places women in an inferior position than men in academic areas such as poetry and philosophy, a social tendency that was previously mentioned in the introduction. We can see that Lanyer chose to reimagine Eve's action to eat the fruit as motivated by a subjective desire to acquire knowledge, rather than simply being under the order of another being, in this case the serpent. Thus far, Lanyer's vindication of Eve shows us how similar but different she is to Anne Bradstreet in terms of her use of modesty and gender stereotypes. Bradstreet asserts her modesty but uses it to elevate her position as a highly intelligent and praiseworthy poet, while Lanyer superficially accepts that women can be modest and inferior to men. However, this acceptance is manipulated to achieve the effect of construing an ultimate defense of her gender with the suggestion that the aforementioned defects are actually derived from men.

In contrast, Lanyer does not provide as much justification for Adam as she did for Eve. One of the few lines that do offer explanation says that Adam ate it because it was striking as she says, "The fruit being fair persuaded him to fall," (798) and this line puts him in direct contrast with Eve who ate the fruit out of a desire for knowledge. Again, Lanyer subverts a common gender stereotype that associates women with beauty and men with intellect. Based on the background that Adam ate the fruit for its beauty, the quote 'If he would eat it, who had power to stay him?' (800) points to Adam's position as the most powerful being on Eden with no one to prevent him from eating the fruit or questioning him. Thus, his part in committing the sin is based on his own judgment. Lanyer uses her reevaluation of Adam as an opportunity to subvert gender stereotypes by positioning men as morally inferior beings.

After Pilate's wife makes her final pleas for Eve's sin, Lanyer makes her strongest argument that encompasses her purpose in writing this poem. She writes:

Then let us have our Libertie againe,  
And challendge to your selves no Sou'raightie;  
You came not in the world without our paine,  
Make that a barre against your crueltie;  
Your fault being greater, why should you disdain  
Our being your equals, free from tyranny?  
If one weake woman simply did offend,  
This sinne of yours hath no excuse, nor end. (825-832)

In consideration of the narrator being a woman and thus the positioning of "us" as women, this stanza challenges the biblical idea that the subjugation of women is due to Eve's original sin. She renders it invalid based on the logic that if women are to be blamed, then men are equally, if not more, responsible. After she shows that Eve was deceived by the serpent's promises of knowledge and equality with God, she defends her actions as explicable. Unlike Eve's new motive, Lanyer argues that Adam ate the fruit for his own sake and paints Pilate in a similar way when she refers to his future decision as "malice." (816) This specific choice of vocabulary suggests that the crucifixion of Jesus is being executed based on ill will unlike Eve's choice to eat the fruit, which is comparatively purer and thus less blameworthy. Going back to Lanyer's use of "us," she effectively links Eve and Pilate's wife who is the narrator of the poem, and even extends this link to female readers, thus forming a collective of a kind, signified by their common trait of gender. By doing this, Lanyer is encouraging readers to align with the message being spoken in the poem through the voice of Pilate's wife. She does not argue that Eve should be absolutely absolved of her crime, but rather that transgression on both Eve and Adam's parts should be equally realized, thus providing a feminist perspective on the equal treatment of women and men.

#### **IV. Gendered Poetry and its Implications for Today**

In another poem included in *The Tenth Muse* titled "In Honour of that High and Mighty Princess, Queen Elizabeth, of Most Happy Memory," Anne Bradstreet absorbs and reproduces the major cultural myths about Elizabeth I and her position as ruler of a male-

dominated world. The most admirable achievement of Elizabeth, for Bradstreet, is that "She hath wiped off th'aspersion of her sex, / That women wisdom lack to play the rex." (29-30) Her leadership that "taught better manners" (32) to rivaling states and their male monarchs has singlehandedly proven women as an equal, if not superior, species of men. Bradstreet builds Elizabeth as a figure who surpassed these restrictions by taking over a public realm and position that was traditionally dominated by men, effectively making the world her stage as she claims, "The world's the theatre where she did act." (22)

Similarly, Lanyer dedicates her concluding poem of "Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum" called "The Description of Cooke-ham" to the women of Cooke-ham, which was an estate made as an academic sanctuary for women to freely read, write, and discuss. She focuses on especially Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, and elevates the Countess as a social and spiritual leader when she writes, "In these sweet woods how often did you walke, / With Christ and his Apostles there to talk." (81-82) Here, Lanyer seems to present the Countess as a powerful female figure that transgresses the human world and engages with the divine order of saints and holy beings. There is even an allegory of Eve and the original tree of knowledge inside Eden when Lanyer mentions a "faire Tree" (157) and its guardian, the Countess. Unlike Eden, the tree of Cooke-ham is given as a symbol of shared communal knowledge and this posits Cooke-ham as a sort of feminine academy that fosters women's academic endeavors and desire for knowledge.

These poems prove that there are actual female figures and communities that were heavily involved in the contemporary social and political domains of seventeenth-century England. They further prove that Bradstreet and Lanyer brought attention to such figures

and thereby participated in the political and social poetry symbolic of their chaotic period. Their poems ultimately advocate for equality among women and men, thus challenging the Renaissance society's presupposed gender roles and restrictions. Bradstreet's work utilizes negative female stereotypes such as weak traits and subordination in order to claim more knowledge and authority, and Lanyer's poetry works to focus on female subjects such as Eve to contend political views of women in her society. Their choice to interpret women in a way that reflects genuine admiration and respect contributes to not only women of high status but women in general by setting up a cultural precedent that represented female desire and knowledge.

Abraham Cowley's early statement to the Royal Society shows that much of the literary and academic texts from the seventeenth century may come across as misogynist in its employment of negative gender stereotypes and tropes. However, their use by female poets like Anne Bradstreet and Aemilia Lanyer reflect that although they could not completely distance themselves nor their writing from the prevalent gender roles, they were able to manipulate such conventions to promote their beliefs. In addition to reflecting upon Civil War poetic culture, their works contribute to its diversity in genre and poetics.

Patricia Pender notes that the early modern period invoked modesty tropes to be used by many poets and that male authors used those tropes to refer to poetic tradition and form (15). With this analysis in mind, I believe that female poets of the Civil War discovered a new way to utilize modesty as a useful tool in a patriarchal society that severely restricted their access to authorship and literary acknowledgement. In contrast, we now live in a world where traditional gender roles that cultivated misogynistic ideas

about women and their position in society are continuously being challenged, and these shifts are profoundly reflected in all kinds of literature. However, public and academic reception to female authors who write about gender equality is not always unbiased. I believe that if we observe the rhetorical nature of gender stereotypes used in the poetry of Anne Bradstreet and Aemilia Lanyer, we will not only gain a broad perspective of English Civil War poetry, but also find answers to some of the questions that are still relevant to the field of women voices in literature. The claims of modesty that Lanyer and Bradstreet each puts forward are applied in different ways, but to the same contextual end of upholding values that are fundamental to feminism and gender equality. This implication allows us to think about the current landscape of feminist literature and gives way to a more productive discussion about the intentional use of certain methods to advocate for gender equality in literary fields. At a time when discourses that encourage modesty and direct and indirect criticisms of modesty both exist in feminism, it will be interesting to see how Lanyer and Bradstreet can be rightfully read as feminist texts that can contribute to today's discussion of literary forms and tactics.

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