

# Class Consciousness in Jacobean Female Writing Tradition: Aemilia Lanver's Sense of Self in "The Description of Cooke-ham"

Shu-ching Chen

## Abstract

Like most of the literary figures in her times, Aemilia Lanver's poetic career is contingent upon the Jacobean patronage system, which preceded the publishing industry to serve as the material condition for the production of literary works. In returning the favor of their patrons, poets express their gratitude through writing dedicatory poetry. The genre, however, is marked by an innate tension between the poets' assertion of their writing authority and their vindication of their patron's social and political supremacy. Lanver's "The Description of Cooke-ham," in its female rendition of the genre of dedicatory poetry as well as that of country house poetry, reflects such tension in a female version. In this essay I explore Lanver's appropriation and displacement of country house poetry conventions in order to establish a discursive space for a community of good women, one that is constituted by her female patrons. The female discursive space, however, is occupied by upper class female subjects exclusively. Thus, although Lanver asserts cognitive female subjects, she unwittingly strengthens the class hierarchy implicated in the genre. To be sure, praising the patrons guarantees her social security as a writer. Yet it also erases her class specificity as a commoner and banishes her outside the female community she helps establish. Fully aware of her dilemma in writing a dedicatory poem, Lanver turns the poem into a battleground on which the struggle between her class/poetic consciousness and her writerly obligation to her female patrons is played out. I argue that Lanver manages to "resolve" and suppress this contradiction through the appeasement of the fractured, disrupting, uncertain voice in the margin by

means of the timely use of religious rhetoric. The “resolution” is a far cry from an effective subversion of gender and class coercion. But the daring insertion of the troubling voice of a gentlewoman in a dedicatory poem anticipates the expression of class difference at the historical juncture when female consciousness only starts to announce itself in the margin of mainstream literary scene.

Key Words: dedicatory poetry, country house poetry, patronage system, the community of good woman, class consciousness, and Protestant exegesis.

Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* celebrates a community of good women of Jacobean era. The collection of poetry comprises her poetic dedications to women ranging from Eve, to Queen Anne and contemporary Jacobean patronesses. Lanyer captures the lives and personal profiles of these women and imagines them members of a distinctive group different from the patriarchal society dominated by the male aristocrats. In her poems dedicated to these noblewomen, Lanyer develops a clear sense of collective female subjectivity, which is characterized by its moral, spiritual and intellectual power. Parallel to her construction of a collective female subject, Lanyer develops a distinctive poetic voice acting as the mouthpiece for these noble women. This is a poetic voice informed by her familiarity with the classical tradition, the techniques of rhetoric, and Protestant biblical exegesis. Lanyer rewrites these dominant cultural discourses so that they can be adapted to articulate the self-formation of a new female tradition in her poetry. A distinctive example of her modification of existing cultural discourse in order to formulate a female subject different from patriarchal conception is her reconfiguration of the idea "female virtue." For Lanyer, female virtue, being the core of female identity, is not defined in patriarchal terms. Namely, female virtue does not serve patriarchal ethics as the route to preserve male dominant power in the domestic sphere. Instead the women's virtue is considered a legacy of Jesus Christ, and the noblewomen are taken as spiritual heirs of biblical and historical good women. Thus, Lanyer's poetic voice for the female community has been persistently aiming to challenge patriarchal ideology and redefine woman's collective subjectivity in the context of existing cultural discourses.

In her delineation of the influential Jacobean noblewomen, however, one also hears a different poetic voice struggling to articulate a sense of self without offending the female hierarchy she endorses. As I will demonstrate in what follows, this is a voice of a female commoner, one which is rare to be heard in the stringent social, political as well as discursive environment of Jacobean England. Unwittingly, Lanyer's poetry seems to enact a double-move. The first is to open up a discursive space for the cultural representation of Jacobean aristocratic ladies. And because the first effort was made with the attempt to draw attention and favor from these patronesses, Lanyer has to highlight her poetic merits and, to a certain extent, to address herself as a member of the community. Thus, the second move: to define herself as a poet and a woman, although socially inferior, and to

insert herself into the female tradition she verbalizes. Since she is placed in an awkward position in which too much of self-indulgence would bring nothing favorable to her, Lanyer's self-expression has to be careful and tactic. As a result that voice often appears to be uncertain, hesitant, and sometimes self-negating. Is this marginal voice in Lanyer's poems fractured and inconsistent because of Lanyer's failure in language or is there certain suppression and silence, which indicate the lack of proper language for Lanyer's intervention? What seems to be at issue behind this uncertain voice is: How much can she say about herself without violating the general gender politics she draws upon in her poems? And what kind of cultural discourses are available for her to address the class difference between her and the ladies she praises without losing the legitimate membership of the female community?

These questions lead to some more general concerns in regard to Lanyer's politics/poetics of cultural identity. Does she possess some sense of autonomy as a woman of different social rank? Or, is the class difference a disturbing factor for her sense of self? Does she develop certain strategies to claim her poetic independence despite her need to rely on the support of the patronesses she praises? This article seeks to discuss Lanyer's poetic construction of a collective (upper class) female subjectivity, and the class consciousness revealed in the process of solidifying a female community through a reading of the longest dedicatory poem in the collection, "The Description of Cooke-ham". I will examine Lanyer's appropriation and displacement of the dominant literary genre of the time in her poetic effort to assert a humanist, rational female subjectivity. But more importantly, I will explore the dilemma and contradiction Lanyer faces between her individual sense of self as a poetess and a gentlewoman, and the female hierarchy she helps establish.

"The Description of Cooke-ham" is dedicated to her patronesses, Margaret Clifford, the Countess of Cumberland, and her daughter Anne Clifford, the Countess of Dorset. As the pivotal poem of the collection, "The Description of Cooke-ham" is marked by its adoption and rendition of the country house poetry genre<sup>1</sup>. The English country house poetry is a genre written specifically in praise of the house of the poet's patron. The point of the praise lies not in the house's aesthetic value, but in the ethical order of the aristocratic family who abode the house. By praising the head of the family and the material order of the house, country house poetry often serves as an ideological

underpinning for the exiting social and political order. Lanyer's poem appropriates the conventions of the country house poetry genre in order to establish a matrilineal hierarchy. It needs to be discussed, then: how does Lanyer disrupt the gender hierarchy implicit in the genre in order to affirm a female head of the house? On the other hand, the female tradition, though being able to clear a discursive space for women, inevitably creates a new class hierarchy in the community of women.

If Lanyer seems to pay respect to this new found power and order of women on conscious level, she is also able to discern the troubling factor that placing female subjectivity solely on the noble woman runs the risk of erasing the subjectivity of women of lower rank. This dilemma is highlighted in the nature of the genre of dedicatory poetry, which can be simultaneously categorized into the genre of country house poetry. In a dedicatory poem or a Country House poem, the innate power relation implicates the inferiority of the poet, and the necessity to draw upon the authority of the patrons or patronesses to validate his/her writing. The paradox in this relation lies in the fact that the authority of the patrons and patronesses need to be recorded and verbalized by the poet before it can be circulated in the public sphere, thus promoting the patron's/patroness's social image. In this light, the authority of the noble person is at the mercy of the poet's power of writing. Yet, in the mean time the writers are at the mercy of the noble (wo)men to secure their material conditions of writing and their identity as poets. This paradox suggests a potential cultural space for the unsettling of the seemingly rigid social hierarchy. Namely, the writer is not entirely inferior and vulnerable given that he/she is the one who has the pen. The poet-patron relationship is, to a certain extent, analogous to that between woman and man in Jacobean upper class cultural environment. At the time of King James's reign woman's social status witnesses a drastic derogation, to compare with Queen Elizabeth's reign. We however detect the rise of female writers and patronesses who are able to utter their own voices, taking advantage of the existing literary tradition and the tenets of Protestant Christianity. As a result, they are able to establish a countercultural female discursive space by means of endowing upon women superior moral and spiritual powers, thus validating their humanist middle class subjectivity. It is these multiple layers of opposition and the implicit possibility of transcendence on the level of gender as well as class differences that constitute the poetic drama in the deep structure of Lanyer's Cooke-ham poem. And it is in the midst of the

generic modulation, along with the reverberation between the main text and sub-text that we hear the two voices struggle to reach a final resolution.

In my discussion I will roughly categorize the poem into two parts according to their different concerns. The poem dedicates the majority of its verse lines to the description and praise of the Cookham estate and its owners, Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, and her daughter Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, and the female tradition they create. In depicting the estate, Lanyer invokes the genre of country house poetry and draws on Biblical metaphors to define and authorize the female subject. On the other hand, the poem also gives lengthy poetic space to the expression of the speaker's own sense of self and her marginal role in the tradition she witnesses and helps articulate in poetry. This disturbing marginal voice, thus, complicates the generic exploitation of the poem. It needs to be emphasized that the two parts are not clearly demarcated; instead, they are dispersed throughout the poem, often with the main praise, and the major voice, surrounded, framed, disturbed or challenged by the passages uttered by a voice wavering between affirmation and negation, utterance and silence.

The main body of the poem consists of the speaker's praise of Margaret Clifford and her daughter Anne Clifford at their departure from Cookham estate. It takes up the poetic convention of valediction as well as that of the country house poetry. As a valediction the speaker's voice is speaking, first of all, for the Ladies of the estate. For Margaret Clifford and Anne Clifford, the life in Cookham designates a past of Edenic pleasure; and the valediction depicts the emotional exchange between the ladies and the estate. The past experience in this female paradise is defined as sweet, transitory, and somehow in between worldly joy and celestial blessing: "As fleeting worldly Joyes that could not last:/Or, as dimme shadowes of celestiaall pleasures" (l.14-5). Lanyer then turns to country house poetic convention to bring out the distinctive substance of the daily experience of the estate; yet she displaces that convention so that a patroness, instead of a patriarchal male patron, can be accommodated. Jonson's Penshurst poem dedicates the majority of its verse lines to the description of Sir Philip Sidney's house and the domestic activities at the dinner table to highlight an ideal familial as well as social order ruled by a male patron. Lanyer not only reduces the role of the house in her poem by diminishing its poetic space--only four lines all together are dealing with the house--but also strips of its social, economic and ethical significance by rendering it into nothing but material

entity. "The House receive'd all ornaments to grace it,/ And would indure no foulennesse to deface it" (l. 19-20). Obviously Lanyer's despatialization of the house implicates a counter-ideology against what Jonson have advocated in his Penshurst poem. Namely, Lanyer is taking the women out of the house so that they can be absolved from the rule of the patriarchal domestic sphere, as well as its ideological entanglement with the power play of Jacobean court politics.

In contrast to her flattening the function of the house in the garden, Lanyer endows upon the natural objects in the garden metaphorical or spiritual meanings besides their immediate material functions. The natural objects are seen as similes that serve either to reverberate or shed light on the virtue and the distinctive character of Margaret Clifford. "The Walkes put in their summer Liveries. / And all things else did hold like similies" (l.21-22). On the other hand, Lanyer personifies the natural objects to establish an order and hierarchy between the objects and the owner. They are described as admiring subjects, offering their service willingly to the matriarch. The trees embrace each other to form canopies, "to shade the bright Sunne from [her] brighter eies"; the hill descends to be tread upon by the Lady's steps; the wind takes pleasure in breezing among the woods she wanders; the bank and the trees feel honored by supporting her, and so on and so forth. Although the harmony between nature and men is secured by this imposed man-made order, it is, however, a hierarchy without violence and brutal exploitation. No animals are killed to be put on the dinner table; violence is hinted more to emphasize the power of the Lady than to indicate genuine killing:

The little creatures in the Burrough by  
Would come abroad to sport them in your eye;  
Yet fearefull of the Bowe in your fair Hand,  
Would runne away when you did make a stand.

(l. 49-52)

Furthermore, Lanyer spiritualizes the creatures in the estate in religious terms. They have now become evidence of God's "beauty, wisdom, grace, love, majestie" in the eyes of the Lady. Similarly, the Countess of Cumberland is given a spiritual character by the poet's imaginary fabrication of her social intercourse with the figures in the Bible. She is first elevated to the level of Christ's apostle and then to be compared to the Christian patriarchs of the Old Testament: Moses, David and Joseph.

What was there then but gave you all content,  
 While you the time in meditation spent,  
 Of their Creators powre, which there you saw,  
 In all his Creatures held a perfit Law;  
 And in their beauties did you plaine descrie,  
 His beauty, wisdom, grace, love, majestie.  
 In these sweet woods how often did you walke,  
 With Christ and his Apostles there to talke:  
 Placing his holy Writ in some faire tree,  
 To meditate what you therein did see:  
 With *Moyses* you did mount his holy Hill,  
 To know his pleasure, and performe his Will  
 With lovely *David* you did often sing,  
 His holy Hymnes to Heavens Eternall King.  
 And in Sweet musicke did your soule delight,  
 To sound his prayses, morning, noone, and night.  
 With blessed *Joseph* you did often feed  
 Your pined brethren, when they stood in need.

(l. 75-92)

If we read this passage literally, the woods in the garden is conceived as a religious site where the Countess participates an imaginary religious group consists of Christ and his apostles, and the patriarchs in the Old Testament. Metaphorically, the passage not only elevates her to the status of Christ's apostle, but also compares her religious identity to that of the religious patriarchs. With this, Lanyer inserts the Countess into both Old Testament and New Testament, thus establishing a certain textual authority for the spiritualization of the matriarch. The female community in the estate is then given a religious authorization. Once the female power is buttressed by Providence, the Countess's reign over the natural order is further legitimized.

As I have mentioned before, Lanyer's poem displaces the location of human social activities from the house to the garden. It is, furthermore, in an Oak Tree in the garden where Lanyer finds a substitute site for the formation of a distinctive female subject and the transmission of female tradition. The Oak Tree is both a replacement of the country



house and a rewriting of the Tree of Knowledge in the Bible. Here Lanyer is able to reach out from the country house poetic conventions and annex it with a modified Christian discourse to assert a new female subject, which is a cognitive subject. With this motif, Lanyer takes women out of the social order, represented by the domestic hierarchy in the house, and defines them in the context of natural order. The Oak Tree in the female paradise is a better version of the tree in the Garden of Eden. While the Bible portrays the Tree of Knowledge as toxicant for woman and eventually for all mankind, Lanyer rewrites the story and affirms the validity of knowledge for woman and vindicates woman as intellectual subject. It is shown metaphorically by taking the tree as the site of female *vision*. It is the place where the Countess of Cumberland overlooks the landscape and receives the solution of her property.

Where beeing seated, you might plainely see,  
Hills, vales, and woods, as of on bended knee  
They had appeard, your honour to salute,  
Or to preferre some strange unlook'd for sute:  
All interlac'd with brookes and christall springs,  
A Prospect fit to please the eyes of Kings:  
And thirteene shires appear'd all in your sight,  
Europe could not affoord much more delight.

(l.66-70)

This is not the vulnerable, easy-to-be-seduced woman under the tree in the Bible. Her vision--indicated by "see", "eyes", "sight"-- gives her power and sovereignty equal to those of a king. The Tree is then directly shown as a site of learning and reading between the mother and the daughter. In a especially emotionally loaded section of the poem, the speaker mentions the Oak Tree again to show its importance in the emotional exchange between the natural objects and the Countess of Cumberland, as well as its role in the women's cultural activities:

But specially the love of that faire tree,  
That first and last you did vouchsafe to see:  
In which it pleas'd you oft to take the ayre,  
With noble *Dorset*, then a virgin fair:  
Where many a learned Booke was read and skand

To this faire tree, taking me by the hand,  
 You did repeat the pleasures which had past,  
 Seeming to grieve they could no longer last.

(l.157-164).

The tree is said to be the location bearing witness to the endearing memories of the social gathering among Margaret Clifford, her daughter Anne Clifford, the Countess of Dorset, and the poet herself. The activities taking place here are mainly intellectual activities: reading "learned books" and discussions. The tree thus becomes the site of the consolidation of mother-daughter relationship and the formation of a female tradition hinged on the shaping and transmission of female intellect. On the other hand, it is also the place where the relationship between the patroness and the poet gets solidified on a more personal basis, and where the patronage system is rewritten.

Besides all these affirmative descriptions of the female version of the Garden of Eden, the Cooke-ham poem is also a valediction. It is written on the eve of Margaret Cliffords the departure and Anne Clifford's marriage: "But your occasions call'd you so away, / That nothing there had power to make you stay" (l.147-48). The actual incident that demands the permanent departure of Margaret Clifford is unable to be pinpointed, but Barabra Kiefer Lewalski suggests that she left for her widow's dower residences (Lewalsk 1993, p. 235). The departure indicates the vulnerability of the female paradise when facing the intervention from outside, which Lanyer interprets as fate in her poem: "But of the happiest made it most forlorne,/To shew that nothing's free from Fortunes scorne" (l.175-76). The impending fall of the Eden generates a sense of sadness similar to that of elegy permeated throughout the poem. To counter this would-be destruction of a newly built female tradition, Lanyer urges the Countess to turn the experience in the estate into memory and female history, to which the poem is partly contributed. "Yet you (great Lady) Mistris of that Place, / From whose desires did spring this worke of Grace; / Vouchsafe to thinke upon those pleasures past" (l.11-13). "When I am dead thy name in this may live" (l. 206). Lanyer's praise of this female paradise thus ends with an affirmation of her power of writing, the only agency that can survive the invasion of patriarchal power and continue the female tradition after the estate is no more. And it is her consciousness of this very poetic power that constitutes her unique sense of self uttered by a voice sometimes at odds with the over all voice of the valediction.

As I have discussed, the Cooke-ham poem is a valediction written in memory of the Clifford Ladies' past life in the estate. However, as a valediction, it has a second meaning for the poet herself. It is a farewell to her unusual youthful privilege at Cookham estate.<sup>2</sup> For Lanyer, her residence at Cookham designates a life of social and economic security, as well as intellectual inspiration thanks to Margaret Clifford's patronage. It is understandable that Lanyer places her reflection on her poetic career under Margaret Clifford's sponsorship before her praise of the lady and the estate. Lanyer's personal farewell to the estate in the first six lines serves as an act of self-definition of her role as a female poet.

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 powre the virtuous to content,  
Where princely palace will'd me to indite,  
The sacred stories of the Soules delight.

(l. 1-6)

The three Graces on the second line set up a female hierarchy on which the speaker finds herself on the lowest scale. The first Grace can be read as "favor" or "virtue" Lanyer receives from Margaret; the second Grace is both the virtue of Margaret and a synecdoche signifying herself; the third Grace, on the other hand, might well be interpreted as God's Grace which is impersonated by the Countess. Lanyer's poetic talent is licensed through the favor of the Countess who herself is favored by God. The third and the fourth lines specify the poetic inspiration she gets from her life in Cookham, and her ability to fulfill her job in writing poetry for her patronesses. The fifth and the sixth lines show that her work is "willed" by the house, justifying her position in the estate as the recorder of stories of the ladies' life. Lanyer's self-consciousness displayed in the first six lines is conceived in the totality of the imagined female community. It implicates that she is fully aware of the necessity of the patronesses in defining her role as a poet. In other words, Lanyer's self-consciousness as a poet is deeply rooted in the patronage system; and it seems that she is satisfied with and feels secured about her subject position at this point.

Formalistically, Lanyer's voice in the first six lines is identical with the voice of the ensuing lines, which serve as a valediction to the Ladies' past life in Cookham. The

tones of the two voices both sustain an elegiac gentleness, yet in the mean time are tinted with a sense of delight and satisfaction for a happy past. As the valediction moves along to reveal the emotional exchange between the natural objects and the Countess, the poem unfolds the map of the garden (the house, as we know, has been set aside after initial introduction in line 19 and 20). The detailed description of the garden works metaphorically to push toward the establishment of Margaret Clifford as a Christian matriarch, equal to the status of Moses, David and Joseph in the Bible. Through the mapping and delineation of the natural objects, Lanyer first defines Margaret as the hostess and the owner of the estate, then elevates her to the position of King, and ultimately places her as one of Christ's apostles. The mapping of the garden, however, works in reverse for the psyche of the speaker. It brings to light Lanyer's actual social status on the map of social hierarchy. Hence, as Lanyer places Margaret to her spiritual height, she, as the speaker, undergoes a certain kind of mental recession, which ends up in her sudden realization of her inferior social status. This psychological experience exists only in the textual unconscious of the dedication, highly suppressed in the hyperbole of her praise of the Clifford ladies. As the poem moves to praise Anne Clifford--someone Lanyer envisions as a privileged "sister"--the speaker's suppression breaks down. It finds its emotional outlet in line 99 ("And yet it grieves me that I cannot be") and brings out a so far unheard of voice, a troubled, bitter voice, a voice that is yet to find a tone it can be appeased with. And from there the voice splits from the major voice of the text, highlighting the speaker's psychological drama in the margin of the main text.

Oh what delight did my weake spirits find  
 In those pure parts of her well framed mind:  
 And yet it grieves me that I cannot be  
 Neere unto her, whose virtues did agree  
 With those faire ornaments of outward beauty,  
 Which did enforce from all both love and Dutie.

(l. 97-101)

The lamentation of the speaker, of course, could be explained as the speaker's way of praising Anne Clifford. In that sense, the speaker is expressing her regret of not being able to form a close relationship with a woman whose virtue and beauty are at a high level because of the love given her by her mother. But it can also be read as a lamentation for

not being able to be *there* and partake of the mother-daughter lineage. Lanyer's discontent with the precarious relationship between the patroness and the female poet disturbs the sense of security she lays down at the beginning of the poem. Her despair in regard to not being able to form a lasting relationship with the Ladies is subsequently attributed to Fate, which casts her to a lower rank of social ladder:

Unconstant Fortune, thou art most too blame,  
Who casts us downe into so lowe a frame:  
Where our great friends we cannot dayly see,  
So great a difference is there in degree.

(l, 103-106)

However, the speaker's seeming reconciliation with fate is immediately negated by a disturbing voice that challenges the naturalization of social rank:

Many are placed in those Orbes of state,  
Parters in honour, so ordain'd by Fate;  
Neerer in show, yet farther off in love,  
In which, the lowest always are above.

(l, 107-110)

Line 107-108 continues the concept of fate as responsible to one's rank. Yet line 109-110 complains that in the transaction between the higher rank and the lower rank, the emotional exchange is not even--often the lower rank gives more. Here we may detect a sense of discontent and frustration over the unequal relationship between the nobility and the commoner. The sense of security and certainty of her role as a female poet at the mercy of patronage, which the speaker establishes at the beginning of the poem is destroyed because she realizes that the identity is a precarious one. It can be taken away as soon as she loses her connection with the noble ladies. Here the persistent tones of sadness, nostalgia and praise are disrupted by that of bitterness. The incongruity of these verse lines with the over-all poetic scheme seems to correspond to Lanyer's concealed sense of alienation from the myth of female paradise she helps establish, while she is paying compliment to that paradise. If by writing poetry she verbalizes a female tradition headed by the Countess of Cumberland, then how should she identify herself when she is both the creator and the outsider of the tradition?

Yet to fully articulate this contradiction inside the institution of patronage and the

awkward position she is situated in is to risk the loss of favor from the nobility. This disturbing voice thus needs to be suppressed and covered up by something more acceptable in the cultural political status quo. And that's what Lanyer does. She negates her complaints immediately and silences the voice of bitterness completely.

But whither am I carried in conceit?

My Wit too weake to conster of the great.

(l. 111-112)

The speaker refutes her previous revelation of bitterness as a foolish fancy, and deliberately subjects herself to the power of the noble ladies by admitting her wit as weak and insufficient to fathom the nobility. This arbitrary suppression of her true feeling and the rupture of tone is then once again disrupted by a third negation, in which she reasserts her agency by claiming her religious faith:

Why not? although we are but borne of earth,

We may behold the Heavens, despising death;

And loving heaven that is so farre above,

May in the end vouchsafe us entire love.

(l.113-116)

In reasserting her agency of wit and love, Lanyer adopts a few strategies so that the Ladies will not be offended. First, she changes the subject "I" to a nonspecific "We", and avoids putting herself in the spotlight. Thus the "We" is just a camouflage of "I". Secondly, she relates herself to the love of God--the Heavens, and by relating herself with the celestial power, she temporarily releases herself from the bond of terrestrial female hierarchy. Her love for the noble ladies may thus be legitimized by God and transcends social law. That is to say, the "entire love" she is able to give, being a celestial love, requires no reciprocation and suffers no inequality.

Lanyer's timely use of religious discourse in claiming her autonomy prevents an eruption of discontent against the nobility, while replacing the social hierarchy with the celestial rule which claims no difference among different ranks. This is a repeated use of a strategy found in almost all the poems in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, where Christian faith is categorized as a female cultural discourse. Taking Christianity as a female activity, Lanyer is able to place the community of good women outside the patriarchy; with this, a face-to-face confrontation between the patriarchy and the community of

women can be avoided. At this particular juncture of the poem, Lanyer displaces that strategy in addressing her autonomy as a gentlewoman. With the above-mentioned four lines (l.113-116), the tone of bitterness is repressed and the poem resumes its praise. Four lines later we find two very positive lines about her role in the estate: "Wherein my selfe did alwaies beare a part,/ While reverend Love presented my true heart:" (l.121-122). Here the speaker feels sure about her part in the lineage between mother and daughter. The subsequent grief she expresses, therefore, is more a convention of valediction that blends with the grief of the personified estate, then a genuine lament for herself.

The last six lines of the poem are a refrain of her farewell to Cookham, with the emphasis on the immortality of her poem that will keep the name of the estate everlasting. And in performing her task as the recorder of the female virtue, she too becomes the heir of the virtue. By thus writing herself into the female tradition, she confirms her ability to join the female community with her poetic power:

This last farewell to *Cooke-ham* here I give,  
When I am dead thy name in this may live;  
Wherein I have perform'd her noble hest,  
Whose virtues lodge in my unworthy breast,  
And ever shall, so long as life remaines,  
Tying my heart to her by those rich chaines.

(l.205-210)

The "lodge" on line 208 can be read both as "bearing the memory of" and "finding a permanent home". Putting it in context, Lanyer asserts that female virtue is not a property monopolized by noble women; it is something even women from lower rank can gain through certain industrious efforts. In Lanyer's case, it is her writing that provides her the channel of upward mobility because her poetry makes it possible for her to integrate the virtues she witnesses and writes about in the Ladies. And the female virtues she now possesses constitute the "rich chains" that tie her permanently with the Clifford ladies. Consequently, Lanyer is able to cross the seemingly unsurpassable boundaries between the nobility and the commoner she has lamented about earlier in the poem.

The disturbing voice from the margin in the Cooke-ham poem eventually becomes a positive voice that overcomes the distance of women at different social ranks by a

redefinition of female virtue and rendering Christianity an asset to *all* women. In this way, Lanyer skillfully exploits the available cultural discourses to articulate her sense of self without disturbing the aristocratic female tradition she has tried to work with and plead favor from. As a result, Lanyer's poetry not only codifies a community of good women but also anticipates a cultural articulation of class within gender.

## Notes

1. Basically, the English country house poetry is poetry written in praise of the house of the poet's patron. The point of the praise lies not in the house's aesthetic value, but in the ethical value of the family of the house. Ben Jonson was the one that established the literary form as a genre by the writing of his important poem "To Penshurst," dedicated to his literary patron Sir Philip Sidney. For William A. McClung, the country house poetry represents English idealization of England during Renaissance and the idealization of national virtue with certain characteristics of country life. For Don E. Wayne, the genre represents a stage in the emergence of a national culture closely identified with the land of England and with the value associated with land tenure. In it the pastoral conventions of Elizabeth's reign are transformed into a more domestic, historical and a relatively naturalist mode. Since the major subject--the head of the household praised by the poet of the country house genre--is invariably male aristocratic, the social and political order and cultural ideology sustained by this genre are ineluctably tied up with patriarchy and nascent capitalism. To appropriate such genre in order to assert a legitimate female subjectivity/tradition can hardly escape the hierarchy implicated and advocated by the genre. Lanyer's originality, as I see it, lies exactly in her insight to see the contradiction and the danger in appropriating such a genre. The fractures and uncertainty of her poetic voice, to my view, are textual locations where she expresses her anxiety toward an equally hierarchical aristocratic female subjectivity. For a social, economic, materialistic reading of the country house genre see William A. McClung, "The Country House Arcadia," 1989. Don E. Wayne, *Penshurst: The Semiotics of Place and the Poetics of History*, 1984.
2. Sussane Woods notes that "Alphonso Lanyer received in 1604 from King James a patent that granted him the income from the weighing of hay and grain, and Aemilia



spent some time before 1609 at the royal country house estate, Cookham, with Margaret, Countess of Cumberland, and her daughter, Anne Clifford. The patent provided some steady income, while the time spent at Cookham, and Lanyer's conversations with Margaret Clifford, must count as among the most powerful experiences of Lanyer's life" (P. xxv).

## Works Cited

- Lewalski, Barbara Kiefer. *Writing Women in Jacobean England*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1993.
- McClung, William Alexander. "the Country House Arcadia," *The Fashioning and Functioning of the British Country House*. Eds. Jackson Stops Vervase et al. Hanover: UP of New England, 1989. 277-288.
- Wayne, Don E. *Penshurst: The Semiotics of Place and the Poetics of History*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1984.
- Woods, Susane ed. *The Poems of Aemilia Lanyer, Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. New York, Oxford: Oxford UP, 1993.

# 文藝復興女性書寫傳統的階級意識： 愛米莉雅·藍能“庫恆莊園描寫”的自我之感

陳 淑 卿

## 摘 要

文學贊助制度在出版工業尚未發達的文藝復興時代，是文人文學生產的主要物質情境。敬獻詩成為當時特有的文化產物，並蔚然成風。為了回報貴族挹助，文人書寫獻詩以表忠誠，並間接鞏固文人的創作環境。然而敬獻詩固然是詩人稱頌貴族的文本場合，也是詩人展現創作權威的論述領域。兩者之間的角力暗含階級衝突的張力。愛米莉雅·藍能的文學創作，與她同時的詩人一樣，需仰賴貴族仕女的贊助。藍能挪用與移置敬獻詩中的次文類鄉村莊園詩的書寫成規以呈現一以貴族仕女為首的女性社群，復插入一邊緣聲音以表達詩人之階級焦慮。本文旨在探討藍能《庫恆描寫》一詩中女性意識與階級意識的衝突及其對應的詩文佈局。藍能雖暫時化解她的階級焦慮卻無助於階級平等。然而藍能的詩在宣揚一女性意識與主體的同時，復能表達內在於性別的階級問題，為後代平民婦女書寫與呈現中產階級女性主體的先聲。

關鍵字：敬獻詩，鄉村莊園詩，文學贊助制度，賢良婦女社群，階級意識，英國國教教義闡釋。