

CLASS, AUTHORITY, AND THE *QUERELLE DES FEMMES*:  
A WOMEN'S COMMUNITY OF RESISTANCE IN EARLY MODERN EUROPE

A Dissertation  
by  
DANA EATMAN LAWRENCE

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2009

Major Subject: English

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## ABSTRACT

Class, Authority, and the *Querelle des Femmes*:

A Women's Community of Resistance in Early Modern Europe. (August 2009)

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This dissertation examines the poetry of Isabella Whitney, a maidservant in London, Veronica Franco, a Venetian courtesan, Marie de Romieu, a baker's daughter in rural France, and Aemilia Lanyer, the daughter and wife of Italian immigrant musicians in London, all of whom attempted to create communities of learned and literary women within their texts. In their works, all four women boldly reject the misogyny prevalent in early modern culture; however, they do so without being able to withdraw from the culture that contributed to such rhetoric, thereby writing from the periphery. In her essay, "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," bell hooks identifies this position on the edge as one of opportunity. She argues that the very presence of the Other "within the culture of domination" is in itself a threat. As such, existing on the margins of that culture is unsafe and requires a "community of resistance" to turn that space into "a site of radical possibility."

I argue that these four writers, marginalized by virtue of their sex as well as by their social positions, were united in a community of resistance through their

participation in the *querelle des femmes*, a centuries-long debate about women's place in society. Each recognizes class, gender, and geographical hierarchies as social constructions and presents her own imagined resistant community of women within her work—each authorizing her own voice as they collectively rewrite women's history. As an international community of resistance, the works of these women may be seen as prefiguring contemporary debates about gender, community, and globalization. By examining the early modern *querelle des femmes* through the lens of postmodern feminism, this dissertation shows that, despite all of the historical models that position early modern European women as physically, politically, historically, and legally subordinate within their respective cultures, there existed a women's community of resistance that not only refused to accept this inferior status but also recognized education and cooperation as a source of power.

Dedicated to my son, Hayden Reese Lawrence

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: REDEFINING AND RE-EDUCATING WOMEN

Aemilia Lanyer, in her *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, revises the Passion narrative to emphasize women's positive roles in human salvation. Praising the Virgin Mary, the "most beauteous Queene of Woman-kind" (1039), Lanyer asserts that, "as a Virgin pure" (1064), Mary is subject only to God: "Farre from desire of any man thou art, / Knowing not one, thou art from all men free" (1077-78). Her "chaste desire" (1079), rather than being a sign of man's control of a woman's body, is her source of freedom from such oppression. Throughout the volume, Lanyer emphasizes female chastity as a means of escaping patriarchal power. Lanyer, whose affair with Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, Lord Chamberlain of Queen Elizabeth's household resulted in the poet's marriage of convenience to another man and the subsequent birth of her illegitimate son, knew all too well the problems that result when a woman "knows" a man. The primary dedicatee of the *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, Margaret Clifford, Countess Dowager of Cumberland, likewise had personal experience with the powerlessness that comes with being a woman in a patriarchal society—even for a woman of rank. As Barbara K. Lewalski notes in "The Lady of the Country House Poem," Margaret Clifford "occupied the vulnerable, displaced, and isolated position of estranged wife and widow, without husbands or sons to define and secure her place in the social order" (272). Though Lanyer refers to the Countess Dowager's lengthy legal battle to secure her daughter's

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This dissertation follows the style of *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America (PMLA)*.

inheritance, she emphasizes the freedom that Margaret Clifford's widowhood offers, likening her patron to the Virgin Mary and presenting her as the Bride of Christ.

Lanyer offers the Bridegroom as women's only possibility for an equitable marriage, recognizing that social institution as yet another means of patriarchal control—and what twentieth-century theorists and anthropologists identify as an “exchange of women.” In her now classic essay, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” Gayle Rubin draws upon Marxism and psychoanalysis to re-examine the social institution of what she terms the “sex/gender system” and its oppressive effect on women’s lives. Dissatisfied with the concept of “exchange” as it is applied in feminist theory, Rubin proposes a revised interpretation of Freud’s theory of femininity, suggesting that the Oedipal crisis, rather than being “a description of a process which subordinates women” (197), can be read as “a description of how a group is prepared psychologically, at a tender age, to live with its oppression” (196). Though Rubin is proposing an alternative approach to thinking about sex and gender within a twentieth-century feminist political movement, her discussion of the socialization of subordination is equally applicable to an exploration of early modern constructions of gender. Of course, early modern women did not need to experience an Oedipal crisis to learn that they were inherently subordinate to men because, according to patriarchal authorities, this gender hierarchy was established when God created the first man and woman and was reinforced when Eve partook of the Tree of Knowledge.

The Book of Genesis was, as Gisela Bock and Margarete Zimmermann note, “a ‘foundation text,’ and its interpretation [was] already a matter of debate” when early

modern writers were using it to reinforce or challenge gender roles (137). This debate over gender, currently known as the *querelle des femmes*, was a centuries-long literary exchange that began in France with the *querelle de la Rose*, which took place from approximately 1401 until 1402. The medieval *querelle* began when French author Christine de Pizan wrote a critical letter in response to Jean de Montreuil's great praise of Jean de Meun's extended version of the *Roman de la Rose*, and the resulting *querelle des femmes* had several different incarnations in England and on the continent during the early modern period. In her letter, Christine respectfully disagrees with Montreuil's opinion of the *Roman de la Rose*, writing, "I wish to say, to divulge, and to maintain openly that (saving your good grace) you are in grave error to give such lavish and unjustified praise to Meun's book—one which could better be called plain idleness than useful work, in my judgment" (Baird and Kane 47).<sup>1</sup> Christine's challenge was met by a number of prominent men,<sup>2</sup> including Pierre Col, who dismisses the "weak" (93) arguments "uttered too quickly and thoughtlessly by the mouth of a woman!" (103). Jean de Montreuil concedes that Christine, "within feminine limitations, is not, admittedly, lacking in intelligence, but...nevertheless, sounds to me like 'Leontium the Greek whore,' as Cicero says, 'who dared to criticize the great philosopher Theophrastus'" (153). On 1 February 1402, Christine presented a collection of the letters to Isabeau de Bavière, Queen of France, and Guillaume de Tignonville, Provost of Paris (Hult 184). In her epistle to the queen, Christine expresses her "diligence, desire, and wish to resist by true defenses, as far as my small power extends, some false opinions denigrating the honor and fair name of women" (65-66). Admitting that she is

“weak to lead the attack against such subtle matters,” Christine writes that she has nonetheless taken on the challenge because she is “firmly convinced that the feminine cause is worthy of defence” (66). In her first letter to Jean de Montreuil, Christine submits that, though she is not “learned nor schooled in the subtle language, which would make my arguments dazzling...I will not hesitate to express my opinion bluntly in the vernacular, although I may not be able to express myself elegantly” (47). Her primary opposition to Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose* is the unfair and misogynist treatment of women as a group, and she tackles his arguments against the female sex point by point, citing specific examples of women who do not exhibit the negative qualities that Meun describes and upon which Montreuil expands.<sup>3</sup>

Such positive examples also comprise Christine’s catalogue of exemplary women in her later *Livre de la Cité des Dames* (1405), a text that also expands upon her earlier complaint in the *Epistre au Dieu d’Amours* (1399):

If someone says that we ought to believe books written by reputable men of sound judgment, men who never deigned to lie but who nevertheless demonstrated the wickedness of women, my reaction is that such authors have never sought to do anything but deceive women. (35)

The emphasis on questioning patriarchal authority, rejecting misogyny, and promoting the education of women is one that continues in much of Christine de Pizan’s work, and is the focus of the numerous defenses of women that follow. Christine is generally considered the “first” female participant in the *querelle des femmes* and, in some ways, is the debate’s instigator. Christine introduced the female voice to the *querelle* and, as

Joan Kelly argues, she “created a space for women to oppose this onslaught of vilification and contempt, and the example of her defense was to serve them for centuries” (11). In the *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, Christine moves beyond Jean de Meun’s *Roman de la Rose* to confront misogynist discourse in general.

Like Christine de Pizan, early modern European women lived in a culture in which they were socially, economically, and legally subordinate to men. Also like Christine, they were surrounded by male-authored texts that reminded them of their inferior status. While a great abundance of conduct manuals and male-authored “defenses” of women were produced in England, Italy, and France individually, some others enjoyed an international influence thanks to numerous translated editions, particularly Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Famous Women* (1361-75), Juan Luis Vives’s *De institutione feminae Christianae (The Education of a Christian Woman)* (1523), Baldesar Castiglione’s *The Book of the Courtier* (1528), and Henricus Cornelius Agrippa’s *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* (1529).<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately, Christine de Pizan’s voice was unable to be heard over (or alongside) this chorus because it was concealed or altogether erased by male publishers.<sup>5</sup> However, while her name may have lacked familiarity, she nonetheless had a wide influence upon later works in the debate about women, as Stephanie Downes observes in her examination of the *querelle* in England: “[the] tropes and strategies developed in the *Cité des dames*...are embedded, consciously or unconsciously, in English defensive tracts, and by extension, styled into the fabric of the defence genre in Tudor England” (73). Further, Christine’s vision of a community of women, her emphasis on the

importance of education for women, and her simultaneous rejection and appropriation of misogynist discourse are dominant themes in early modern defenses, including the texts examined in this study: Isabella Whitney's *A Sweet Nosgay* (1570), Veronica Franco's *Terze Rime* (1575), Marie de Romieu's *Premières Œuvres Poétiques* (1581), and Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611). While I cannot prove that any of these women were directly familiar with Christine de Pizan's work, her influence is undeniable—even if her voice and her words were muffled or ventriloquized by male writers and printers.<sup>6</sup>

Each of these writers recognizes what Constance Jordan argues some four-hundred years later: "...it is generally true that women did not have the kind of social and legal standing that permitted them to be other than 'unfree' in an economic sense" (91). Further, the cultural belief that "the female [was] always inferior in her being and subordinate in her persons to the male" made women in general "constitutive of a 'class' apart from him" (92). While early modern women clearly recognized, as we do now, that "woman" did not constitute a homogenous group, they equally understood that "the effects of [women's] social rank, inherited or acquired in marriage, [was] negligible in comparison with those of men" (92). Therefore, sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European women, as far as (male) medical, political, religious, and legal authorities were concerned, were *all* a subordinate class of people. Through their participation in the *querelle des femmes*, imagining and calling for a united community of the oppressed, Christine de Pizan, Isabella Whitney, Veronica Franco, Marie de Romieu, and Aemilia Lanyer acknowledge that power can be located on the periphery of society through a

collaborative effort to appropriate misogynist discourse, rewriting women's history and claiming the right to define themselves.

Early modern women's participation in the various incarnations of the *querelle*, I suggest, constitutes what bell hooks identifies as a "community of resistance." In "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," hooks argues that the Other "must create spaces within [the] culture of domination if we are to survive whole, our souls intact. Our very presence is a disruption" (148). Such a space, which "can be real and imagined" (152), is "a site of radical possibility, a space of resistance" (149) precisely because it is marginal. Viewing the margin as a chosen rather than imposed location of identity is "crucial for oppressed, exploited, colonized people" (150) because it redefines the margin as a space of power and freedom. Further, it is only within the margin that oppressed people can find a "counter-language," which, "[w]hile it may resemble the colonizer's tongue, it has undergone a transformation, it has been irrevocably changed" (150). Illustrating this idea in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hooks "imagine[s] the terror of Africans" forced into slavery:

I imagine them hearing spoken English as the oppressor's language, yet I imagine them also realizing that this language would need to be possessed, taken, claimed as a space of resistance. I imagine that the moment they realized the oppressor's language, seized and spoken by the tongues of the colonized, could be a space of bonding was joyous... Possessing a shared language, black folks could find again a way

to make community, and a means to create the political solidarity necessary to resist. (169-70)

I imagine early modern women writers' revision and subversion of dominant literary genres, tropes, and arguments as their own counter-language. Marginalized by virtue of their sex, these writers were united in a community of resistance against misogynist discourse through their participation in the *querelle des femmes*.<sup>7</sup> The four writers included in this study are further united through their shared concern with deconstructing economic and gender hierarchies, as well as their emphasis on the education of women as a source of female agency. While modern feminist theorists argue against the idea of a community of women due to its implications of essentialism and homogenization,<sup>8</sup> the fact remains that, in early modern European culture, *all* women were viewed as subordinate and were subject to patriarchal control. The dominant misogynist discourse that sought to construct "woman" as silent, chaste, and obedient treated the female sex as a homogenous group. Such rhetoric of control, as Peter Stallybrass suggests, worked toward "the production of a normative 'Woman' within the discursive practices of the ruling elite. The 'Woman,' like Bakhtin's classical body, is rigidly 'finished': her signs are the enclosed body, the closed mouth, the locked house" (127).

By publishing their work (whether by their own authority or through the "unauthorized" efforts of a relative or friend), Whitney, Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer all transgress the ideal model of feminine virtue, especially because such public exposure was equated with sexual promiscuity. Moreover, their social positions and/or rumors of real or imagined affairs also designate them unchaste and immoral. In the face of such

stigmas and at the risk of offending the patrons in whose service they hope to be, these women dare to explicitly challenge hierarchies of class and gender, emphasizing the importance of education to equality. In their works, all four women boldly reject the misogynist discourse so prevalent in early modern culture; however, they do so without being able to withdraw from the culture that contributes to such rhetoric, thereby writing from the periphery as a community of resistance, participating and uniting in an international dialogue that counters prevailing cultural attitudes toward women. In this community of resistance, as well as in each writer's individual creation of a community of women, these four writers, both individually and collectively, redefine the female author as an authority, echoing Christine de Pizan as they cite experience as expertise.

In the opening scene of Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, the speaker considers the abundance of misogynist texts in which male authors "all concur in one conclusion: that the behavior of women is inclined to and full of every vice" (4). Although none of the women she has known exhibits these negative qualities, she finds herself convinced by the anti-woman arguments, because "it would be impossible that so many famous men—such solemn scholars, possessed of such deep and great understanding, so clear-sighted in all things, as it seemed—could have spoken falsely on so many occasions" (4). Given her earlier responses to the *Roman de la Rose*, this particular statement has the distinct ring of irony to it. She has been most ardent in her rejection of such misogynist arguments, so the shame that "Christine" (the speaker) feels as a result of reading such anti-woman texts provides an opportunity for Christine (the author) to counter them all. Despite the evidence of experience that she cites,

“Christine” comes to believe the attackers’ words and laments that “God had made me inhabit a female body in this world” (5). As she sits in shame and sorrow, the speaker is visited by “three crowned ladies,” one of whom tells her that they “have come to bring you out of the ignorance which so blinds your own intellect that you shun what you know for a certainty and believe what you do not know or see or recognize except by virtue of many strange opinions” (6). After all, the woman continues, “any evil spoken of women so generally only hurts those who say it, not women themselves” (8). Again, “Christine’s” acquiescence to dominant misogynist discourse provides a “rhetorical space”<sup>9</sup> in which Christine can assemble a community of resistant women. The three supernatural ladies, who later reveal themselves to be Reason, Rectitude, and Justice, explain to “Christine” that they will help her to construct a City of Ladies, “where no one will reside except all ladies of fame and women worthy of praise, for the walls of the city will be closed to those women who lack virtue” (11).

In order to build this city, however, the women must first deconstruct the site of misogynist discourse. The behavior of men who attack women, Lady Reason explains, “does not come from Nature, but rather is contrary to Nature” (16). These authors are motivated by a variety of causes, none of which “originated with me, Reason” (18). Unconvinced, Christine inquires about a number of misogynist texts, all of which are undermined by Lady Reason, who discredits the authors’ character, arguments, and evidence. Her approach, as Judith L. Kellogg notes, is to both disprove and rewrite their conjectures: “Here, Lady Reason goes beyond simply responding to individual misogynist claims, for she offers a careful analysis of the underlying bases of these

attitudes. If she can refute the very assumptions on which men claim ‘knowledge’ about women, then, of course, the entire misogynist argument crumbles” (132). This method of defense is adopted by a number of participants in the various incarnations of the *querelle des femmes*.

Christine de Pizan’s *Cité des Dames* is an obvious response to Boccaccio’s *Famous Women*, a catalog of exemplary women that he claims is an effort to address the absence of women’s biographies: “What surprises me is how little attention women have attracted from writers of this genre, and the absence of any work devoted especially to their memory, even though lengthier histories show clearly that some women have performed acts requiring vigor and courage” (4). Pamela Joseph Benson identifies Boccaccio’s *Famous Women* as “the foundation text of Renaissance profeminism,” though she notes that the author “never directly advocates social change” (*The Invention of Renaissance Woman* 9). She asserts, “the [male] author of praise of women *must* undercut his own efforts to represent women as self-sufficient if he is to succeed in promoting his own personal interest in fame and fortune” (13). Further, while his numerous examples of great women attest to their natural abilities, Boccaccio stresses that his exemplary women are extraordinary, and, in his text, “[h]e makes it seem that no other women are worth praising” (29). Boccaccio does not encourage his female readers to follow the lead of his examples, nor does he suggest that the existence of such great women proves that the female sex in general is being underestimated. Rather, *Famous Women* presents a catalogue of exceptional—not exemplary—women and, thus, does little to advance women’s social standing.

Likewise, Agrippa cites Scripture and classical sources to “prove” that women are superior to men, making arguments that become quite commonplace in *querelle* defenses. He posits that God “has attributed to both man and woman an identical soul, which sexual difference does not at all affect” (43). Further, woman was created last—from nobler materials (man’s body) and in “a place absolutely full of nobility and delight, while man was made outside of Paradise in the countryside among brute beasts and then transported to Paradise for the creation of woman” (48). Agrippa lauds women for their superior beauty, virtue, and constancy, as well as their role in Christian salvation. Like Christine and Boccaccio, Agrippa offers a catalog of exemplary women, including chaste wives, virgins, holy mothers, and the steadfastly faithful. Also like Boccaccio, Agrippa invites readers to add to the list if they identify an omission—an invitation that his many translators accepted, often embellishing the original text. For all of his profeminist rhetoric, however, Agrippa, like Boccaccio, stops short of calling for any action or social change. He celebrates the virtues of the ideal woman: modesty, chastity, loyalty, and Christian devotion, among others—maintaining the very cultural definitions of femininity that were used to control women.

The humanist movement had more to offer women than did such catalogues through its promotion of the education of women. However, Juan Luis Vives, the author of perhaps the most influential treatise on female education in Europe, advocated learning as a means of social control rather than as an avenue for individual advancement. In the preface to his 1523 treatise, *De institutione feminae Christianae*, the Spanish humanist explains the reason for his focus on the instruction of the female

sex: "...although rules of conduct for men are numerous, the moral formation of women can be imparted with very few precepts, since men are occupied both within the home and outside it, in public and in private, and for that reason lengthy volumes are required to explain the norms to be observed in their varied duties. A woman's only care is chastity; therefore when this has been thoroughly elucidated, she may be considered to have received sufficient instruction" (47). Dedicating the work to Catherine of Aragon, Queen of England, Vives proposes the text as a guide for the Princess Mary, though it would become very successful with a wide, international audience and, as Charles Fantazzi notes, "was generally regarded as the most authoritative statement on this subject throughout the sixteenth century" (3). Originally published in Latin, *De institutione feminae Christianae*, by 1528, had been translated into English, French, and the Castilian vernacular and would later appear in German, Italian, and Dutch editions—demonstrating tremendous influence upon women's education worldwide. Though Fantazzi stresses that, despite its misogynist undertones, Vives's treatise "laid the groundwork for the Elizabethan age of the cultured woman" (3), the fact remains that *De institutione* significantly limits the content of this education and identifies only three possible roles for women: "chaste virgins, virtuous matrons, [and] prudent widows" (49). Vives's model for the education of women merely uses female learning to reinforce traditional gender hierarchies.

Castiglione, while seeming to be progressive because of his inclusion of women in his *Book of the Courtier*, also praises the qualities that conform to the image of the ideal woman. Rubin writes, "The organization of sex and gender once had functions

other than itself—it organized society. Now it only organizes and reproduces itself” (199). While the efforts of Vives and other writers to reinscribe gender roles through education certainly had larger political and economic implications, Whitney, Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer all suggest that women, by conforming to and accepting prescribed social and economic hierarchies, are effectively reproducing (in all of the many meanings of the word) gender divisions as well and are complicit in their own oppression. Even the highest ranking women were subject to patriarchal control, as Anne Rosalind Jones has observed in her examination of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century courtesy manuals. Whereas “the most widely disseminated feminine ideal was the confinement of the bourgeois daughter and wife to private domesticity” (40), Jones explains, court ladies were also given strict instructions that attempted to negotiate expectations that she “be a witty and informed participant in dialogues whose subject was most often love” (43), while also protecting her reputation, which depended upon her chastity. In opposition to the “natural” female character described in medical, legal, and religious discourses, Jones argues, “[c]onduct books appear to be based on a different assumption: men and women can be *produced*” (41). The revelation that identity, rather than being innate, is socially constructed was not lost on early modern writers.

Despite the efforts of early modern male authors (and their predecessors) to construct and impose a model (or models) of the ideal “chaste, silent, and obedient” woman upon their female contemporaries, the plethora of literary representations of women who do not conform to that role (written by authors of both sexes) as well as the

abundance of proto-feminist, female-authored texts being circulated during the period indicate that this ideal was by no means the norm. A significant number of women writers recognized that obtaining an education was a means of freeing themselves from the cultural hierarchies that sought to control their minds as well as their bodies. Isabella Whitney, like Christine de Pizan, rejects the misogynist rhetoric of the Bible, various "Histories," and the works of Virgil, Ovid, and Mantuan as she sits in her study. Determining that such texts are not the authorities that some claim them to be, Whitney chooses to venture outside of the privacy of her home and enter the public streets of London. Also like Christine, Whitney turns experience into authority as she criticizes both economic and gender inequalities in *A Sweet Nosgay* in the persona of an unemployed maidservant. Downes, citing Jennifer Summit, notes that Henry Pepwell's 1521 edition of Brian Anslay's English translation, *The Boke of the Cyte of Ladyes*, appropriates Christine's opening scene, and she argues that "Pepwell's prologue sets a precedent for...male-authored defences...whose recognizably Christinian frameworks draw on both her authorial position and her content" (81). So, the remarkable similarities between Whitney's narrative framework and that of Christine may simply be attributed to this "Christinian" literary tradition in England. However, even if Whitney had neither heard of nor read the works of Christine de Pizan, the influence of these male "mouthpieces of Christine" (Downes 81) nonetheless speaks to the medieval writer's continuing authorial presence. Through her social criticism, Whitney creates a community of outsiders, most of whom are deemed criminals as a result of their poverty—poverty that is the direct consequence of London's hierarchical structure. She

does not offer specific solutions to these problems, nor does she anticipate any significant changes to the current situation. However, Whitney's ironic final poem, "The maner of her Wyll, & what she left to London," reveals the stark realities of the lower classes in general and poor women in particular, presenting a challenge to those in power to enact change.

Veronica Franco, a Venetian courtesan, certainly benefited from the education that she obtained by virtue of her profession, and, in her *Terze Rime*, she flaunts her learning as well as her poetic skill. In addition to her intellectual abilities, Franco boasts of her sexual prowess, brazenly flouting cultural injunctions of chastity, silence, and obedience. Though Franco's position gave her access to court circles and the literary patronage that could be found there, she remained a social and economic outsider. As a courtesan, she was encouraged to participate in dialogues with powerful men as an intellectual equal. However, as an openly sexual woman, she was viewed as an Other by men as well as by "respectable" women. Franco engages directly with her male detractors in her *Terze Rime*, criticizing the cultural hierarchies that both condemn her position and make it impossible for her to be anything else. Like Christine and Whitney, Franco cites personal experience as a source of authority, unapologetically asserting her voice, ultimately privileging it over those of the patriarchal society in which she lives. In the volume's final poem, an idyllic description of Count Marcantonio Della Torre's country villa in Verona, Franco imagines a world in which art and nature, urban and rural, and man and woman co-exist in a non-hierarchical utopia. In her *Lettore familiari a diversi* (1580) and her wills, Franco demonstrates her solidarity with other women

through her dire warning to a mother who seeks to train her daughter as a courtesan and her choice to bequeath money to fund group homes for women and to provide dowries for women whose only other recourse is prostitution.

Whereas Whitney and Franco appropriate “masculine” literary traditions in general, Marie de Romieu revises two very specific paradoxical “defenses” of women found in Ortensio Lando’s *Paradossi* (first published in France in 1543) and Charles Estienne’s translation/adaptation of Lando’s work, *Paradoxes, ce sont propos contre la commune opinion* (1553). Anne R. Larsen correctly argues that Romieu’s “Brief Discourse: That Woman’s Excellence Surpasses Man’s,” which is in the tradition of the catalogue of learned ladies, is more than a simple exercise in imitation, though she offers extended discussion only of Romieu’s named contemporaries. However, Romieu’s entire catalogue is clearly the result of very deliberate choices on the part of the author. Like Christine, Whitney, and Franco before her, Romieu challenges misogynist discourse, offering her own historical and contemporary proof of woman’s excellence. Through her exemplary women, Romieu creates a new definition of femininity and a more inclusive picture of the woman scholar and writer. In doing so, Romieu also redefines accepted boundaries of gender and class as she assembles a timeless and international community of accomplished and intellectual women. By constructing the female author as an authority, Romieu in turn strengthens her own position as a woman writer. Though her volume’s dedicatory pieces indicate that it was her brother, Jacques, who published her work (without her knowledge, of course), the many poems addressing members of the French court suggest that Romieu, a baker’s daughter in the rural region

of Vivarais, was seeking patronage herself, pursuing writing as a means of support. Her extensive list of contemporary French women writers in the “Discourse” suggests that Romieu was not only familiar with their works, but also that she sought to join their literary (and perhaps social) ranks.

Aemilia Lanyer, though writing thirty or more years later than the other three women included in this study, expresses the same concern with cultural disparities in gender and class, proposing education and a united community of women as a mode of resistance. Dedicating her *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* to an exclusively female group of potential patrons, Lanyer both asserts her identity as a professional writer and creates a hereditary tradition of aristocratic women patrons and writers. She emphasizes both real and imagined mother-daughter relationships, and establishes her own position as heir to a line of literary women. However, even as she bows in acquiescence to her noble dedicatees, Lanyer simultaneously risks offending the very women from whom she seeks support by openly criticizing the class hierarchies that separate her from her imagined community of learned women—and which maintain her potential patrons’ power over her. Like Whitney, Lanyer is an unemployed servant who criticizes social and economic inequalities, and, like Franco, she has access to court circles due to her sexual relationship with a nobleman. Like Romieu, she presents a catalogue of learned women to establish her own authorial voice, imagining a community of women resistant to misogyny. Lanyer’s primary emphasis is the importance of education to women’s freedom from oppression. More than any of the other three writers, she points out women’s complicity in perpetuating their own inferior status, reminding even Queen

Anne that she is still “just” a woman and, as such, remains powerless in a patriarchal world. Whereas Whitney, Franco, and Romieu acknowledge that women’s lesser status is a product of social construction, Lanyer follows Reason’s lead in the *Cité des Dames* and deconstructs misogynist arguments against the female sex point by point. Through her own example, Lanyer demonstrates that a thorough education will allow women to construct their own identities.

In her country-house poem, “The Description of Cooke-ham,” Lanyer creates a utopian female community distanced from the court and the city—and the patriarchal rule that these locations represent. Like Christine’s City of Ladies, this rural Paradise is completely protected from the influence of men; however, Lanyer’s idyllic world of women does not include separate classes or categories of women—all women are equal at Cookham. Also like Christine, Lanyer recognizes that the dream is just that—a dream.<sup>10</sup> She cannot imagine away the real world of social hierarchies in which she lives, and her praise of the estate at Cookham takes the form of a lament for this lost vision of happiness. Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer all describe a utopian vision of a non-hierarchical world. Whitney may be said to participate in this tradition as well, as her “Wyll” could be viewed as a *dystopian* vision in which she isolates the particular and varied experiences of London’s oppressed from a world that denies them a voice or an identity. All four poets imagine communities that are isolated from patriarchal power, participating in a strategy that Sonya Andermahr terms “separatism.” Andermahr identifies two primary forms of separatism. First, the “political” model “argues that if women cease to co-operate with men on a daily basis, the system of male power which

oppresses women will no longer be able to sustain itself. Separatism is therefore primarily a tactical weapon, a means to an end” (134). Second, the “utopian” model “sees separatism not only as a strategy but as a final solution to the problem of women’s oppression in male-dominated society. The emphasis is not so much on overthrowing the male system as on withdrawing from it for good” (134). The communities imagined by Whitney, Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer utilize both models, seeking to undermine patriarchal society by creating a utopian (or, in Whitney’s case, dystopian) vision of a united group of oppressed people who collectively resist and seek to eradicate cultural hierarchies.

As hooks notes, spaces of resistance “can be real and imagined” (152), and I submit that the imagined literary space of resistance created by Whitney, Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer through the assertion of their feminist voices is the space in which they construct, both individually and collectively, a City of Ladies. Like Christine de Pizan’s Lady Reason, these four writers first deconstruct misogynist arguments, then rebuild a pro-feminist community of resistance in which they (seek to) participate. Communities, like spaces, can be imagined as well. In fact, Benedict Anderson, in his discussion of nations and nationalism, argues that *all* communities are imagined:

[A nation is] an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign...It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image

of their communion...Communities are not to be established by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined. (5-6)

Although Whitney, Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer probably did not know each other, and they certainly did not know every woman in Europe, they *did* know that European women were an oppressed group of people whose voices deserved to be heard. By privileging the female voice in their work, these writers, whether they intended to or not, speak on behalf of *all* women—exposing the social injustices suffered by “daughters of Eve.”

In their introduction to *Female Communities, 1600-1800*, Rebecca D’Monté and Nicole Pohl identify three primary types of communities: 1) “a body of people organized into a sovereign sociopolitical unit which is spatially specific” (i.e., a nation); 2) “‘virtual’ communities, imagined through common political, professional or social convictions and shared pursuits...[virtual communities] are not spatially limited and are...united through mass ceremonies, rituals and, on a deeper level, shared dialogics;” and 3) “bodies of individuals, generally consciously congregating within the framework of a specific social or ideological body” (4). Though Whitney, Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer all closely identify with their geographical locations (specifically, the cities/towns in which they live), I propose that the political goals of their work reach beyond their respective countries of residence to include all European women in a virtual feminist community and, through their participation as defenders of women in the literary *querelle des femmes*, the writers themselves “consciously congregat[e] within the framework of a specific social or ideological body.” All four writers engage real and

imagined boundaries in their work, in particular, those which denote hierarchies of class and gender. Like Kristine B. Miranne and Alma H. Young, urban scholars who, in their study of gender and cities, conceptualize boundaries as both divisive and unifying, fixed and permeable, Whitney, Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer reject any notion that these hierarchies are anything but a social construction. They all identify the power that may be found in these liminal spaces on the margins of the dominant patriarchal culture.

One particular liminal geographical boundary that all four writers explore is the one separating urban and rural space. Like class and gender dichotomies, the urban/rural opposition is socially constructed, and it is closely linked to the opposition of art and nature. At the root of these (and, in some ways, all) cultural binaries is the male/masculine versus female/feminine hierarchy. Early modern culture aligned man with art and woman with nature, using these associations to privilege art over nature—and implicitly eliminating the possibility of a woman artist. Man's God-given right to dominate nature is translated into an equally sanctioned right to dominate woman. By extension, the feminine “nature” of rural space made it subordinate to the masculine power of the city. Like women, residents of rural villages were deemed a discrete—and lower—social class as compared to the sophisticated urban population. The English term “peasant,” the Italian “*contadino/a*”, and the French “*païsan(ne)*” each designates a person who lives and works in the country and carries derogatory connotations of being ignorant, rude, contemptible, and of low social status (OED).

Although urban centers like London and Venice were constructed as distinctly different from and superior to their rural neighbors, city dwellers were nonetheless

dependent upon the countryside for their access to grain, produce, and other agricultural products—and villages were likewise economically dependent upon their neighboring cities.<sup>11</sup> Further, rural-urban migration contributed to city growth, which was particularly important after outbreaks of plague, though Alexander Cowen notes that “the movement of journeymen, merchants and professionals was a strong reminder that some of the most significant migration in terms of skills and capital took place between one town and another, usually from a smaller urban centre to a larger one” (14). This urban growth, Cowan asserts, paradoxically served to further unite cities with their surrounding rural areas:

Indeed, the growth of suburbs beyond city walls and the decay of fortifications in areas no longer considered to be in danger from military attack increased the physical connections between towns and the fields in which they were set...Nor was urban agrarian activity so easily distinguished from occupations that are more commonly associated with the town. Many of those who worked on the fields in and around towns combined this activity with others. (20)

Despite the clear interconnectedness of urban and rural in early modern Europe, the socially-constructed divisions persisted. Alongside the negative depictions of rural villages and their inhabitants existed the notion of an idyllic countryside far removed from the corruption of the city, leading men who could afford it to purchase rural land, bringing the city to the country.

Land ownership, of course, came with many economic benefits, and the appropriation of rural land by wealthy townsmen further disempowered the rural population. While in Italy, for example, as Christopher F. Black observes, “[e]ntrepreneurial investment in land...could prove [economically] beneficial for the rural population,” the changes wrought by urban elites on land use often “[drove] peasants off the land and into cities like Rome and Naples where (without major expansion in urban industries) they swelled the ranks of the poor” (34). Urban exploitation of rural lands, like man’s exploitation of woman and the elite’s exploitation of the lower classes, served to reinforce social hierarchies. Amanda Flather argues, “The organization of space is not then just a reflection of society and its values, it is a medium through which society is reproduced, since it provides the context in which social and power relations are negotiated” (2). In addition to taking control of rural space, Thomas Brennan notes that, in France, “urban control of rural land had a profound impact on village life...[bringing] urban people economically into rural society” (256-7). Moreover, influenced by the concept of the rural ideal, “the acquisition of land offered [the wealthy] a new dimension to their leisure activities” (Cowan 26)—particularly in the growing attraction of the country home. According to Cowan, “Wealthy Venetians gradually transformed quite simple summer residences into sophisticated homes and villas in which they spent longer and longer periods away from the city” (26). In England, “the lack of emphasis on noble titles...eased the transition from wealthy townsman to landed gentleman and made marriage alliances between prominent urban and rural families...relatively simple” (67). So, the once scorned countryside was not

only idealized, but it also became yet another way for noble and wealthy men (land ownership was, for the most part, limited to men) to display their wealth and distinguish themselves as a class from the “others.” Ownership of rural land also signifies *control* of land, which was, of course, associated with the “natural” and “feminine,” and, therefore, it also reinforced the early modern hierarchy of gender.

Through their emphasis on the rural/urban divide, as in their appropriation of misogynist discourse, Whitney, Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer highlight, challenge, and revise hierarchical assumptions about class, gender, and geography. Karoline Szatek identifies the pastoral poetic mode as a marginal space of resistance:

[Pastoral] poets camouflaged the most controversial and compromising of issues within a metaphorical land space hedged by the pastoral border, the peripheral *loci amoeni* of homely shepherds, lush shade trees, pan piping, and comely lifestyles. In effect, the pastoral writers’ strategy shaped pastoral literature into borderland contact zones. (347)

Focusing on the work of male English poets, including Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, and Samuel Daniel, Szatek argues that the pastoral framework provides a space in which these poets “expose, critique, and interrogate human sexuality and sexual relationships both objectively and circumspectly” (359). She notes that this manipulation of accepted cultural views, according to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century pastoral theorists, is part of the very “nature of the pastoral”: “to contest within the pleasant borders of the greenworld of the dominant viewpoints, and this by first exposing them, and then, by cunningly appearing to perpetuate them” (351). Whitney,

Franco, and Lanyer all invoke the pastoral landscape in their volumes, and Romieu embodies the urban/rural divide as a rural poet seeking patronage from the urban court in Paris.

I suggest that all four poets embrace the associations of nature and the feminine as they engage the urban/rural dichotomy, claiming the liminal border between the two as a space of resistance. In his introduction to *Geographies of Resistance*, Steve Pile challenges the idea that a space of resistance is necessarily tied to a physical geographical location: “[R]esistance does not just act on topographies imposed through the spatial technologies of domination, it moves across them under the noses of the enemy, seeking to create new meanings out of imposed meanings, to re-work and divert space to other ends” (16). Pile adds, “Resistance...cannot simply address itself to changing external physical space, but must also engage the colonised spaces of people’s inner worlds...Indeed, it could be argued that the production of ‘inner spaces’ marks out the real break point of political struggle” (17). In the poetry of Whitney and Romieu, real and imagined rural space becomes a challenge to social hierarchies, whereas in Franco and Lanyer’s work, it provides a vision of a world in which such hierarchies cease to exist. All four poets connect their inner worlds to physical spaces, “moving under the noses of the enemy” as they “create new meanings out of imposed meanings” through their participation in the *querelle des femmes*.

Though there is no known evidence that Whitney, Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer were familiar with each other’s work, I imagine them as a literary community of resistance based on their collective participation in the *querelle des femmes* as well as on

the intertextuality of their poetry. I draw upon the work of Laurel Fulkerson, who, in

*The Ovidian Heroine as Author*, uses intratextuality to argue that the women of the

*Heroides* constitute a metaphorical resistant community of female authors:

“Reading...figures centrally in the corpus insofar as the heroines base their own words on their interpretations of the stories of other abandoned women in their community” (4-5).

“Class, Authority, and the *Querelle des Femmes*: A Women’s Community of Resistance in Early Modern Europe” examines the poetry of Isabella Whitney, Veronica Franco, Marie de Romieu, and Aemilia Lanyer, four non-aristocratic European women who, though living in different countries and occupying very different positions in their respective cultures, all attempt to create communities of learned and literary women within and through their texts. Already marginalized by virtue of their sex alone, Whitney, a maid-servant in London, Franco, a Venetian courtesan, Romieu, a baker’s daughter in rural France, and Lanyer, the daughter and wife of Italian immigrant musicians in London, are doubly marked as social and economic outsiders. Each constructs her own imagined resistant community of women within her work, using a “multitemporal methodology” (Schibanoff 322) to create a non-linear, non-hierarchical tradition of female learning and authorship, which they then use to authorize their own voices as they rewrite women’s history.

## Notes

1. All citations of the letters of the *Querelle de la Rose* are from Baird and Kane.
2. Including “Jean de Montreuil, Provost of Lille and sometime Secretary to the Dukes of Berry, Burgandy and Orleans; to the Dauphin; and to Charles VI, King of France; Gontier Col, First Secretary and Notary to the King; and his brother, Pierre Col, Canon of Paris and Tournay” (Baird and Kane 12).
3. For critical discussions of Christine de Pizan’s participation in the *Querelle de la Rose*, see Quilligan, Semple, Kellogg, McGrady, and Brown-Grant.
4. Originally published in Latin, Boccaccio’s *Famous Women* was translated into Italian, French, German, Middle English verse, Spanish, and English during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Brown xix-xx). Likewise, Vives’s *De institutione feminae Christianae* appeared first in Latin and was translated into Castilian, English, French, German, Dutch, and Italian—all within twenty-five years of the text’s original publication (Fantazzi 30-33). By 1619, there were fifty editions of *The Book of the Courtier*, available in its original Italian as well as Spanish, French, German, Polish, and Latin (Burke 391). Agrippa’s text, too, first appeared in Latin and by 1575 had been translated into French, German, English, Italian, and Polish (Rabil, Jr. 27).
5. See Cynthia J. Brown’s examination of the print history of Christine de Pizan’s work in France and England, “The Reconstruction of an Author in Print.”
6. I draw upon Elizabeth D. Harvey’s *Ventriloquized Voices: Feminist Theory and English Renaissance Texts*.

7. While applying the work of a twentieth-century theorist whose work emphasizes race and postcolonialism to early modern European white women may seem incompatible, the writers included in this study are nonetheless constructed as inherently inferior, dangerous to social order, and in need of cultural surveillance and control. Though hooks's works focuses on women of color, her argument that individuals (or groups) who exist on the periphery of a dominant culture struggle both with their "real" identity versus their culturally-constructed identity and that oppressed people(s) may locate power within the margins allows us to read women's participation in the *querelle des femmes* as social activism rather than as a purely literary activity.
8. See Yeatman, "A Feminist Theory of Social Differentiation;" Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference"
9. See Lorraine Code's theory of rhetorical spaces, pp. ix-x.
10. In her *Livre de Trois Vertus*, Christine de Pizan offers *more* practical advice for women based on their actual lives, rather than continuing to image her feminine utopia.
11. See, Black, esp. pp. 32-62; Belfanti ; Brennan; Galloway; Glennie; and Cowan, esp. 14-26.

## CHAPTER II

### “MY BOOKES AND PEN I WYLL APPLY”: ISABELLA WHITNEY’S “WYLL”

#### TO WRITE

Christine de Pizan's *Livre de la Cité des Dames* opens with the speaker, "sitting alone in [her] study surrounded by books on all kind of subjects" (3). She has been immersed in her studies, her "usual habit" (3), and she decides to take a break by "reading some light poetry" (3), encountering *Liber Lamentationum Matheoluli* (*The Book of the Lamentations of Mathéolus*) and setting it aside for the following day. The next morning, the speaker continues her reading, troubled by the author's diatribe against women, and she wonders why so many learned men "are so inclined to express both in speaking and in their treatises and writings so many wicked insults about women and their behavior" (3-4). The speaker considers her own character as a woman, as well as that of other women she has known, unable to find support for the men's arguments. Despite this absence of evidence of women's inherent wickedness, the speaker grows depressed and begins to detest her own sex. Upon being visited by "three crowned ladies" (6) who commission her to build a "City of Ladies," the speaker, as Susan Schibanoff asserts, "come[s] to realize that her own feelings and thoughts about women...are more authoritative than the opinions of all the poets and philosophers she has studied. As 'Christine' reads herself into her subject, the nature of woman, she is able to reread her 'authorities' as nonauthoritative" (324).

I present the example Christine de Pizan not as a model or source for Isabella Whitney (though her influence upon the opening scene, however indirect, is clear), but

merely to illustrate their similar “ground situations” and to position Whitney’s work firmly within the *querelle des femmes*, of which Pizan is credited as instigator. As in *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, Isabella Whitney’s speaker in *A Sweet Nosgay* (1573) finds herself sitting in a study surrounded by books. She picks up and sets aside several male-authored texts, including the Bible, various “Histories,” and the works of Virgil, Ovid, and Mantuan. The speaker is dissatisfied with these texts, and, like, “Christine,” turns to a book of poetry: Hugh Plat’s *Floures of Philosophie*, from which she “picks” the flowers that compose her own volume and that serve as protection from and a remedy for London’s infected streets. Whitney enacts an Heroidean revision in the “familier Epistles and friendly Letters” that close her volume, and in the volume’s final poem, “The Manner of her Wyll,” Whitney envisions the city of London as a cruel Petrarchan lover whose abandonment forces the speaker to leave the very place in which she locates her identity.

Through her imitation, adaptation, and revision of these male-authored works, Whitney (and her speaker) is able to establish her identity as a writer while participating in a literary tradition from which women such as she had long been excluded. In her essay, “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness,” bell hooks identifies this position on the edge as one of opportunity. She argues that the very presence of the Other “within the culture of domination” is in itself a “disruption” (148). As such, existing on the margins of that culture is unsafe and requires a community of resistance to turn that space into “a site of radical possibility” (149). As she rejects and reworks male-authored canonical texts, Whitney shares Christine de Pizan’s strategy of

authorizing her own voice above those of a misogynist, masculine literary tradition, turning the very evidence condemning women on their detractors and defending *all* women against misogynist discourse and social and economic inequalities. From her position on the margin of early modern English culture, Whitney re-imagines the social boundaries that confine her, creating instead a community of outcasts while writing a scathing critique of London's inequities. She adapts the dominant tongue and creates a counter-language, giving voice to those who, like her, are both overlooked and oppressed.

Further, Whitney adopts a rhetoric of shame throughout *A Sweet Nosgay*, though her shame, unlike Christine's, is turned outward as she publicly exposes the wrongdoing of London's authorities. Elizabeth A. Clark argues that the "Church Fathers...attempted to construct a gendered disciplinary apparatus through the rhetoric of shame" (221). Like conduct manuals, the prevalence of which suggest that women were not as obedient as patriarchal authorities wished them to be, Clarke notes, "[t]hat even the perdurant gaze of God was not entirely effective as a disciplinary device is suggested by the fact that the rhetoric of shame required such constant repetition" (222). Pointing out the ancient association of shame with sight and "community participation in the creation and maintenance of standards of honorable and shameful behavior" (230), Clarke asserts that "[t]he ultimate shamer of all Christians, however, was God...[who] was constant witness to the inner thoughts as well as the outer deeds of Christians" (235). She cites Augustine's observation that, while women's behavior is carefully monitored and controlled by social and moral codes, men are only accountable to God (235)—a

perspective that led to the philosopher's call for public penance. While I am in no way suggesting that Whitney was directly influenced by Augustine's works, his ideas were nonetheless present in early modern culture, having an effect on all writers in the period.

I draw upon Clarke's work to propose that Whitney employs a similar rhetoric of shame, presenting her volume as a sort of textual Panopticon which renders visible the wrongs committed by London's hierarchical patriarchal culture. In doing so, she turns the gaze away from herself, becoming in some sense the eyes of God. This is particularly true in her "Wyll" as she describes the many images of injustice that she witnesses during her tour of London. Assuming the (possibly fictional) guise of an unemployed maid servant, Whitney's speaker is, at the beginning of *A Sweet Nosgay*, an object of shame. In her "Familier letters," the speaker becomes the shamer, chiding those family and friends who have failed to help her in her time of need. Finally, in the "Wyll," the speaker shames London, depicting the various punishments of shame inflicted by London authorities upon those whose only crime is poverty, followed by the greed of the city's elite, as represented by the many shops whose wares the speaker cannot afford to purchase. Uniting London's oppressed under this banner of shame, Whitney creates a community of resistance that emphasizes economics rather than gender as the basis of the city's inequalities. Through this fictional community, Whitney authorizes her own voice and, like Lady Reason, turns her detractors' arguments against them.

### A Maidservant in London

In general, very little is known about Isabella Whitney. Attempts have been made to reconstruct her biography based on her two volumes, *The Copy of a Letter* and *A Sweet Nosegay*—although critics have argued against assuming any biographical connection to her work. A handful of historians have made strides toward reconstructing Whitney's life both through her own writings as well as those of her supposed brother, Geoffrey Whitney. In his examination of Isabella's epistolary verses and Geoffrey's will, R. J. Fehrenbach argues that the two were, in fact, brother and sister, and he further speculates that Isabella eventually married, abandoning her literary career. Drawing upon Fehrenbach's work, Jessica L. Malay attempts to identify the "brother Eldershae" that Isabella is thought to have married. Richard Eldershaw, an Audlem physician and the dedicatee of one of Geoffrey's emblems in *A Choice of Emblems and Other Devises*, seems to Malay to be the logical identity of "brother Eldershae." She uses this as further proof that Geoffrey and Isabella are siblings; however, much of the evidence is circumstantial.

Averill Lukic, citing the notebooks of the nineteenth-century Nantwich historian James Hall, presents a thorough and convincing argument for Isabella's and Geoffrey's common family background. According to the Wilkesley Court Roll of 9 July 1576, Geoffrey Whitney's father was "fined a total of 20 shillings because his two unmarried daughters Isabella and Dorothea are each with child" (Lukic 397). Isabella's child, said to be fathered by a "John Lufkyn," was baptized Elinor Lovekin on 18 September 1576. Hall dates John Lovekin's death to 1608, and Lukic notes that "there appears to be no

further record of either Isabella or Elinor; if there were, Hall would surely have found it" (397). Citing Hall's evidence that Isabella resided at her father's home in Ryles Green<sup>1</sup> in 1576, Lukic makes a further connection to the poet "Is. W.," stating that "it confirms her 1573 complaint in *Certaine Epistles* and in her prefatory verse to *The Maner of her Wyll* that ill-fortune forced her to leave London" (398). However, Whitney's presence at her family home complicates attempts to attribute the 1577 poem, *The Lamentation of a Gentilwoman upon the death of her late deceased friend William Gruffith*, to her.<sup>2</sup> Lukic's research indicates that the Whitney family "was well-connected locally" (404), supporting Whitney's reference to her childhood memories of George Mainwaring in the dedicatory poem to *A Sweet Nosgay*. Lukic notes Whitney's identification of herself as "Is. W. Gent.," which may give a clue as to her rank, and she speculates that Whitney may have served in the household of Cheshire gentry, giving her the opportunity to form a friendship with Mainwaring. No other solid evidence of Isabella Whitney's whereabouts or life exists beyond 1576, although Lukic has discovered Brooke Whitney's 1624 will, in which "my sister Isabell" is "'bequeathed 10 sh 'and for any bond...I wish theye [the executors] paie half and remit the rest after any debts and legacies'" (406). Although all of this evidence is helpful in reconstructing Isabella Whitney's familial and geographical connections, none of it supports an exclusively biographical reading of her poetry. Lukic does wonder if Whitney was at some point employed as a maidservant, but there is no record of her holding such a position. Many details of Whitney's *A Sweet Nosgay* do lend themselves to a biographical reading because individual names and events *can* be tied to Whitney

herself. Regardless, however, of potential parallels between Whitney's poetry and her life, the fact that she chose the persona of an unemployed maidservant as the speaker in *A Sweet Nosegay* is significant, and it is Whitney's use of this persona in combination with the volume's biographical parallels that I will explore in this chapter.

In early modern England, as Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford report, "service was the archetypal 'growing-up' experience for young women" (92). Daughters of gentry, yeomanry, poor, and urban families regularly served "in a household other than that of the biological family" (Brooks 53). However, as Bernard Capp explains, young women "from more prosperous homes lived with their parents until they married, and a daughter was sometimes needed to manage the household if her mother was incapacitated or dead" (127). The purpose of service was to provide these women with safety, supervision, and support until they reached their mid-twenties, "the proper age for marriage, child-bearing, and the independent supervision of a household" (96). Women of all social classes were expected to learn the art of housewifery, and by the second half of the seventeenth century, servants' conduct books, like *The Compleat Servant-Maid* (1685) and *Advice to the Women and Maidens of London* (1678), included instruction in writing, arithmetic, and accounting (Erickson 55-6), formalizing the fundamentals of a maidservant's education which were already in play well before the seventeenth century. Further, Elizabeth I's 1563 Statute of Artificers made it a crime for single women between the ages of twelve and forty to *not* be in service, presumably because those were the childbearing years and requiring service was a way to control young women's sexuality. Mendelson and Crawford point out the irony of this plan,

noting that "the typical unmarried mother who was brought before the courts was the maidservant who had been impregnated by her master or fellow servant" (98).

Although records of abusive employers are easy to locate (in court records, etc.), Capp's examination of conduct books for servants and Samuel Pepys's diaries demonstrate that both servants and their employers were expected to and most likely did live up to the terms of the service contract: "Employers undertook to provide food, lodging, training, wages, and sometimes clothes. The servant undertook to be obedient, honest and diligent, and to submit to appropriate discipline" (129). However, the fact remains that male members of the household could prove a threat to a maid, whose low position made it difficult for her to defend herself from sexual advances or accusations. The consequences for a young woman who did try to refuse her master's advances could be quite severe, as Capp describes:

[A]n obstructive master could easily stop her from leaving by detaining her wages or clothes, or threatening to charge her with theft. There was usually little point in appealing to her mistress, who would almost certainly hold her to blame, as the "other woman" in this context. Once she had excited her master's sexual interest, however innocently, her mistress would inevitably view her as a threat. (146)

Even if she did not experience sexual abuse while in service, Ann Rosalind Jones explains, the maidservant was still economically vulnerable during "periods of low employment, when, through no fault of her own, a woman's failure to find work risked

landing her in debtors' prison" ("Maidservants" 22), the threat of which Whitney's speaker, as we will see, is all too aware.

While maidservants faced many challenges in their attempts to preserve their livelihoods and reputations, they also enjoyed increased mobility. Often, women in service held only year-long contracts, which found them moving from household to household in search of employment. This freedom gave maidservants leverage in negotiating room and board as well as "a wider pool of eligible men" (Mendelson and Crawford 103) in which they might find a husband. However, because many of these women were expected to provide a portion, or dowry, from their meager earnings while in service, marriage often occurred later in life or not at all.<sup>3</sup> Of course, Amy Louise Erickson's historical study reveals that "most young women put together a marriage portion from a combination of inheritance from their parents, gifts and inheritance from other family members, and what they could save of wages they earned from their midteens" (85). So, women must have had more than economic reasons for remaining single—although, as Erickson points out, most historians do not see it that way—because "there were proportionally more unmarried adult women in early modern England than there have been at any time since" (96).

Despite (or, more likely, because of) their large numbers, single women in England were deemed a threat to the social order, as evidenced by the laws enacted to keep them in service or "mastered." Erickson has shown that women in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England were not "kept," whether married or not—they worked both in the household and outside of it, and they owned material property (and

sometimes actual property). However, even if a single woman was *able* to head her own household, her social position forbade it. As the 1563 Act indicates, single women were required by law to maintain a dependent position within a male-headed household, whether as a daughter, a wife, a sister or other kin, or as a servant. Single women who lived on their own, Amy M. Froide explains, were likened to prostitutes by authorities:

The line between a singlewoman who worked and lived on her own and a prostitute became a (perhaps purposely) thin one. Thus, the morality of all singlewomen was called into question and, perhaps more important, allowed town fathers to demand that singlewomen be put under the authority of a male head of household. (240)

The existence of repeated proclamations against women who did not adhere to these expectations clearly indicates that early modern single women in England were not staying in their prescribed places. However, even maidservants who were firmly located within a master's household were seen as a threat to the social order.

The fact that many maidservants either never married or married later in life, combined with the women's mobility and the cultural association of maidservants with sexual promiscuity, aligned women in service with prostitutes in the popular imagination (and, in some cases, in practice)—pushing this group to the margins of proper womanhood. Indeed, a woman with no property had only her labor to sell—the payment being limited to maintenance, as Constance Jordan suggests (98), further identifying prostitution as "the most likely kind of work to escape male control" (104); however, this hardly led to independence, as women who engaged in selling their bodies relied heavily

on the financial support and discretion of their male "patrons." Paradoxically, the very laws intended to keep young single women "mastered" exposed them to the very freedoms said laws sought to restrict. "By the end of the sixteenth century," Patricia Fumerton writes, "it was increasingly difficult to tie both master and servant down to an annual contract. Not only was casual labor becoming financially preferable from the employers' viewpoint, but many servants appear to have embraced the resulting insecurity" (17). Service allowed single women greater mobility, which made them a danger to the social order and subject to laws requiring them to be employed. An "out of service" maidservant faced social ostracism, imprisonment, and accusations of prostitution. Paul Griffiths notes, "In London, women who were discovered 'out of service' and suspicious were sometimes 'searched' by the matron of Bridewell [a women's correctional facility] to check if they were a 'maid' or 'noe maid,' 'light' or 'otherwise,' yet another indication of the coupling of work and 'honest' behaviour in early modern minds" (357-8). Of course, even maidservants who maintained employment were suspect, because, as Patricia Phillippe observes, "As a migrant from one household to another, and as a sojourner between childhood and marriage, [the maidservant] was neither fully contained by the domestic sphere nor completely cut adrift in the commonwealth" ("Maid's," 446). Existence in this sort of limbo rendered maidservants a nonentity in a culture that primarily valued women only as wives and mothers. The stigma attached to those women who fail to adequately perform these ideal female roles manifests itself in the *querelle des femmes* through the rhetorical deployment of shame.

### **Constructing Abandonment as Authority**

In his discussion of the *querelle*, Mark Breitenberg notes, "Masculine identity depends on the prerogative to speak its desires, to express its volition, but also the power to deny the privileges of the same medium to women. . . . Since masculine speech conditions and exercises male subjectivities, the act of speaking is perhaps more important than what is said" (170-1). While it may be true that masculine discourse in early modern England sought to control and construct women by denying them a voice, historical evidence indicates that these efforts were not entirely successful. Mendelson and Crawford describe a distinct female discourse in which women were free to speak as they pleased, noting that this primarily oral culture was hidden from men, who "disparaged feminine rhetorical prowess not because it was insignificant, but because it could be powerful and dangerous" (215). In print, women's words were even more of a threat because "they invaded territory that men had defined as their own" (214). Although print publication prior to the eighteenth century was a questionable activity for both men and women in England, for the latter it carried an additional stigma because "a good woman was modest and silent" (214). However, as the multitude of recovered sixteenth- and seventeenth-century works by women attest, not all of "Hevahs sex"<sup>4</sup> were compelled to conform to society's standards of behavior. Isabella Whitney, in particular, makes clear that she will not only refuse to be silent, but she will also work to speak for those whose voices continue to be ignored.

Immediately establishing her intent to publish and her desire for patronage, Isabella Whitney opens *A Sweet Nosegay* with a dedication to George Mainwaring,

followed by a direct address to her public readership. Such an overt bid for literary fame and payment for her work, Ellinghausen notes, "suggested the trade of sex" (3), an association that Whitney extends in the opening lines of "The Auctor to the Reader": "This Harvest tyme, I Harvestless, / and serviceless also" (A5v). Here, she establishes the speaker's persona as that of an unemployed maidservant who is not only out of work but also out of her rural element. She is detained in the city by illness and, due to the threat of plague, confined to the indoors. With nothing else to do, the speaker turns to study, "To read such Bookes, wherby I thought / my selfe to edyfye" (A5v). Being so displaced, the speaker discovers that she has the freedom to study and to apply the knowledge she has gained. After picking up and discarding a number of male-authored works, none of which satisfied her "brused brayne" (A5v), the speaker ventures outside. The symbolism of her rejection of these texts is obvious and unapologetic, and this sets the tone for the entire volume as she moves from a revision of a man's work to commentary on her plight in epistolary verse to a satirical last testament in which she denounces London's social and economic failures.

Once outside, the speaker immediately encounters a passing male friend, who warns her of "the noisome smell and savors ill" with which the city will "infect" her, advising her to leave town "if you regard your health" (A6r). She replies, "I'le neither shun, nor seeke for death, / yet oft the same I crave. / By reason of my luckless lyfe / beleev me this is true" (A6r). At first, she heeds this man's advice, turning toward home "all sole alone," until Fortune (a female) "stood me in some stede, / and made mee pleasures feele. / For she to *Plat* his plot mee brought, / where fragrant Flowers abound. /

The smell whereof prevents each harm, / if yet yourself be sound" (A6r). These flowers provide protection from the plague and the other stark realities of the speaker's life, and she "[a]mongst those Beds so bravely dekt / ...I mee reposde one howre" (A6v). "And longer wolde, but leisure lackt," she adds, "and businesse bad mee hye" (A6v). This, of course, contradicts the speaker's previous claim of unemployment and "leisure goode" (A5v). However, we might read the sickness in the air as a metaphor for the general misogyny permeating the city of London (and beyond). In this scenario, the speaker's "friend" may represent those who seek to confine her to exclusively domestic concerns, for fear that exposure to the world will "infect" her womanly virtue. Whitney and her speaker both reject this "warning," and, perhaps like Virginia Woolf's Judith Shakespeare, Whitney would choose death over silence. And she does, in fact, choose death in the volume's final poem, "The maner of her Wyll, & what she left to London." The speaker's rejection of her friend's advice also reflects Whitney's movement outside of the confines of a discourse that does not recognize her voice. Her sudden lack of "leisure" and need to attend to "businesse" may be the result of the author's desire to respond to the misogynist texts that she had previously discarded, as she is no longer content to remain "reposde" and silent.

"Though loth" to leave the garden, Whitney's speaker nonetheless "parted thence," taking with her "[a] slip...to smell unto, / which might be my defence. / In stynking streets, or lothsome Lanes / which els might mee infect" (A6v). From Plat's text, the speaker "picks" the flowers which compose the modest *Nosegay* that she now offers to her readers, with hopes that her "Posye" (A7r) will grant them health as it did

for her. She also invites her readers to gather their own flowers from Plat's work if hers is not to their liking, but she warns them that his text is a "maze" (A8v). This final comment on her source may refer back to her initial frustration with the male texts she encountered on the shelves, indicating that not only was the speaker able to pluck the most beautiful flowers from Plat's work, but also to improve upon the original.

Acknowledging that "we are not all alyke, / nor of complexion one," the speaker asserts that these "flowers" "kept mee free, / because to them I smelt" (A7r). So, out of "good wyll," she offers them to her readers to "fyrst tast and after trye" (A7r). Here, Whitney offers her poems as examples to be followed by others who desire to write, and she notes that "yf thy mind infected be, / then these wyll not prevayle" (A7r). These infected minds, again, may belong to misogynist men who cannot abide by a woman writing. Whitney's request of those particular readers is that they "[r]efer them to some friend of thin, / tyll thou their vertue see" (A7v).

Although the dedication to Mainwaring modestly claims that her work in composing her flowers was minimal, Whitney's engagement with Plat's text is nonetheless brought to the forefront as she stresses that the poems were "of my owne gathering and making" (A4v). She continues to encourage her readers to write, suggesting that, if they desire to add to her poesy, then they should return to Plat's text "and gather there what I dyd not" (A7r). Whitney presents herself and her volume as participating in a literary circle that includes her readers as well as her source. Following her own "Phylosophicall Flowers," in "A farewell to the Reader," Whitney imagines Plat's reaction to her appropriation of his work:

And eke that he who ought the Plot,

wherein they same did grow:

Fume not to see them borne aboute,

and wysh he did me know.

And say in rage were she a man,

that with my Flowers doth brag,

She well should pay the price, I wolde

not leave her worth a rag. (C5v)

Whitney's hopes that Plat is not offended by her work are countered by the suggestion that her gender protects her from his potential "rage." Surely, she implies, he could not feel threatened by the simple verses of a woman. Again, however, Whitney's emphasis on the physical and mental labor that brought forth this nosegay overrides her self-deprecating description of the final product. This suggestion of a dialogue between Whitney and Plat highlights her unique role as a female poet as well as her taking on of a masculine literary tradition. Whitney remains conscious of her role as author throughout her dedication and addresses to the reader, in turn making sure that the reader is equally aware of her occupation of this position. By means of her own construction, Whitney establishes her authorial voice in this first section of *A Sweet Nosegay*, creating a space in which she can offer her social critique. Paradoxically, both Whitney and her speaker must go outside in order to find and establish her authorial voice. Once she does this, she is able to create a counter-language that simultaneously exists inside *and* outside of the patriarchal literary model that she has encountered.

Ellinghausen has argued that Whitney's unanswered letters to her family emphasize her "newfound lack of enclosure" (5) as an unemployed, single woman, which allows her "to explore the issues of gender and ownership that her status as a professional author raised" (4). Further, because of the one-sidedness of her correspondence, Whitney's "writing becomes a substitute for community" (9). While this analysis is convincing, I would counter that, through her fictional coterie, Whitney is, in fact, *creating* a community and giving voice to the disenfranchised. Though her letters go unanswered in the text, Whitney is still participating in a dialogic exchange through which she can both directly and indirectly confront the injustices encountered by her maidservant persona. Additionally, by drawing her readers in with personal correspondence, Whitney subtly privileges her point of view, persuading the reader to sympathize with her plight. In particular, she establishes a relationship with her female readers, whose voice she favors throughout the text, encouraging them through the text's dialogic form to submit their own contributions and participate in questioning masculine authority.

In the volume's second text, "Certain familier Epistles and friendly Letters by the Auctor: with Replies," Whitney shifts from her implicit dialogue with masculine texts to a more overt literary exchange with individual men and women, beginning her confrontation with the social and economic forces that keep her from her family and threaten her livelihood. All of the epistles position Whitney's speaker as an abandoned Heroidean woman, if not heroine, who, after receiving no or unsatisfying replies, sees (fictional) death as her only recourse. Whitney's unanswered (or unsatisfactorily

answered) letters echo those of the *Heroides* in their attempt to rewrite the "plot" of the ineffectual and shamed maidservant who has been dismissed from her post and seeks to clear her name (or at least explain herself). Her opening epistle, "To her Brother G.W.,"<sup>5</sup> is the first of five unanswered letters to members of Whitney's family. She laments her brother's absence from the city, longing to know his whereabouts. Seeking his assistance, she writes, "You are, and must be chiefest staffe / that I shal stay on heare" (C6v), asking for both his support and, perhaps, a letter to aid her in securing new employment. Whitney includes with her letter a copy of *A Sweet Nosegay* for her brother to present "Unto a vertuous Ladye, which / tyll death I honour wyll" (C6v), presumably someone whom she used to serve, but she may also hope to secure a new position with another noblewoman. To her other brother, "B.W.," Whitney also writes to discover his location: "But none can tell, if you be well, / nor where you doo sojurne" (C7r). However, she does not ask him for anything other than his presence, whereby she can verify his good health. Clearly, she has been abandoned by her brothers, as demonstrated by their lack of communication with their sister. Through these two letters, Whitney establishes that she cannot rely on the assistance of her brothers, or, by extension, that of men in general—and that she must help herself and women like her. This task she takes on in the third letter, "An order prescribed, by Is. W. to two of her yonger Sisters servinge in London."

To her sisters, which may be her actual biological siblings or her sisters in service, Whitney offers advice based on her own experiences as a maidservant in an effort to help them maintain their position in their respective households. First and

foremost, Whitney entreats them to "forget not to commende: / Your selves to God" (C7v) every morning. Beyond that, she counsels the young women to "justly" (C8r) perform their duties, to avoid gossip, and to be modest and gentle. For their secure positions in good homes, Whitney tells her sisters to "Geve thanks to God, & painful bee / to please your rulers well" (C8v) because the alternative, unemployment, is loneliness and poverty, as Whitney can attest:

For fleetynge is a foe,  
experience hath me taught:  
The rolling stone doth get no mosse  
your selves have hard full oft. (C8v)

This common proverb, she stresses, rings true in her experiences, and she encourages the young women to heed her warning. For her final admonition, Whitney urges her sisters again to perform their duties well and, before going to sleep at night, to pray, "geveing thanks for al that he, / hath ever for you wrought" (D1r). In closing, she asks that the girls remember their sister in their prayers, as she will remember them. This seemingly innocent letter of advice masks a strong commentary on the lives of maidservants in particular and poor women in general, particularly in light of the laws requiring the service of young women. Jones remarks that this letter "reveals a darker side of resentment and covert accusation against employers incapable of recognizing the merits—or even the humanity—of their maids" ("Maidservants" 23). I would add that Whitney also speaks in general to the issues facing women in a culture that consistently

devalues and subjugates them, yet punishes them for lacking the tools with which to support themselves—an argument made by Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer as well.

Demonstrating the support women might offer one another, the fourth letter, "To her Sister Misteris A.B.," also addresses the gap between married and single women. Whitney's opening stanza implies that her sister had previously provided her with financial assistance:

Because I to my Brethern wrote,  
and to my Sisters two:  
Good Sister Anne, you this might wote,  
yf so I should not doo  
To you, or ere I parted hence,  
You vainely had bestowed expence. (D1v)

Here Whitney suggests that she is writing to her sister so that she will not think her money, perhaps applied to Whitney's education, had gone to waste. The next stanza indicates that this letter of good will is intended as a meager attempt at repaying her sister's generosity. Significantly, it was Whitney's sister and not her brothers who had come to her aid in the past, and the prominent placement of this letter at the center of the volume emphasizes this feminine bond all the more for her readers.

The speaker goes on to wish her sister a long, healthy life, and a life "free from all annoyes" (18) for her brother-in-law and nephews. Whitney hopes for an equally lengthy and happy life for herself so that she can watch her sister's sons become men. In

the final two stanzas, Whitney apologizes for keeping her sister from her domestic duties with this letter:

I know you huswyfery intend,  
 though I to writing fall:  
 Wherfore no lenger shall you stay,  
 From businesse, that profit may. (D2r)

She again belittles her writing, holding her sister's role as wife and mother as superior to her own; however, in the last stanza, this hierarchy is not as clear:

Had I a Husband, or a house,  
 and all that longes therto  
 My self could frame about to rouse,  
 as other women doo:  
 But til some houshold cares mee tye,  
 My bookes and Pen I wyll apply. (D2r)

The implication seems to be that Whitney longs to follow in her sister's footsteps, but the underlying message indicates that marriage and family will only interfere with her authorial ambitions. Whitney obviously understands the loss of autonomy that comes with domestic responsibilities, whether those of her own household or of someone else's. As I have already noted, her single state and lack of employment combined is the source of her liberty to write as well as the marker of her criminality. Paradoxically, this illegitimate state is the very thing that legitimizes and authorizes Whitney indigent female voice.

Abandoning, or so it seems, social commentary for a moment in her final familial epistle, Whitney addresses "her Cosen F.W., " seeking news about his marital state. Her praise of and good wishes for her cousin may be a final attempt to obtain financial help from her male relative, as she signs this letter, "Your poore Kinsewoman, IS. W." (D2v). After what appears to be yet another unanswered request, Whitney expresses great loss of hope in the next poem, "A carefull complaynt by the unfortunate Auctor." Summoning Dido and claiming greater suffering, Whitney derides the pain of an abandoned lover in an Heroidean revision, putting forth the greater sorrow of one who has been betrayed, as the reader has witnessed, emotionally and financially by her family and whose health Fortune has turned "to heapes of payne" (D3r). The speaker has given herself over to her fate, begging for an end to her suffering:

O Death delay not long,  
thy dewtye to declare:  
  
Ye Sisters three dispatch my dayes  
  
and finysh all my care. (D3v)

Her plea finally elicits a response, although not the one she craves. T.B.'s "In answer to comfort her, by shewyng his haps to be harder" seeks to ease Whitney's pain through (non-specific) description of his own, more terrible, suffering. He tells her that "DIDO, thou, and many thousands more, / which living feel the panges of extreme care" (D4r), essentially dismissing her sorrow as something with which everyone must contend—but that will be eased "ere many dayes" (D4r) have passed. T.B. ends chidingly and with condescension:

Till then, with silly DIDO be content,  
 and rip no more, thy wronges in such excesse:  
 Thy FORTUNE rather, wills thee to lament,  
 with speedy wit, til hope may have redresse. (D4v)

He advises her to stop complaining and to keep herself occupied with "silly DIDO" in her poetry until her hope returns. Dismissing both her feelings of abandonment and her writing, this male respondent reflects the misogynist attitudes that acknowledge female authors as, at most, mere novelties.

In her response to T.B.'s "comforting" words, Whitney angrily remarks upon T.B.'s "changed hew" (D4v), asking, "Where be thy wonted lively lookes becom? / or what mischance hath dimd thy beauty so" (D4v). She chides his faith in Fortune, "whose profers prove in time to be but toies" (D4v), and who may be compared to those, like T.B., "whose painted spech, professeth frindship stil / but time bewrayes the meaning to be yll" (D5r). On a more kindly note, Whitney expresses sympathy for T.B.'s suffering (an act of compassion that he does not reciprocate) and hopes that time really will mend his wounds—though she does not foresee the same happy ending for herself. Her dismissive closing, "Farewell" (D5v), may further signify her lack of faith in T.B., to whom she turned for consolation only to receive a reprimand. This reading may be supported by Whitney's immediate turn to yet another friend, C.B., with the same complaint, asking for his advice "for feare of wracke" (D6r), or punishment like that received from T.B.

C.B. replies with the requisite sympathy, hoping that Whitney may "conquer care, / least she bring thy decay" (D6v). He warns her that her "fretting fyts" (D6v) only "augmenteth sin" (D6v), but assures her that God "doth us styll respect" (D6v). However, he rebukes her longing for death, cautioning, "Yet that for sin thou shuldst thee kyll, / Wold both thy soule and body spyll" (D7r). Reminding Whitney that it is Fortune, not sin, that causes her to suffer so, C.B. offers to take her sorrows upon himself in order to relieve her pain. Implying that Whitney fears her reputation has been stained by gossip, C.B. asserts his faith in her virtue, which "Doth me perswade thy enemies lye, / And in that quarell would I dye" (D7r). Complimenting her wisdom and courtesy, he reassures Whitney of his undying friendship and wishes for her a long, healthy, and happy life. As Whitney does not include any further letters seeking support and consolation, the reader is left to believe that C.B.'s response did, in fact, comfort her—even if only spiritually. Her economic concerns, however, continue to go unanswered, the result of which is later revealed in the volume's final section, Whitney's fictional "Wyll and Testament."

Prior to beginning her closing text, however, Whitney inserts three more letters. The first addresses T.L., a single male friend, whom she advises to "go chuse some vertues wife" (D8r) who will enable him to live a life devoted to God, as opposed to his present single life, in which gambling ("They think all wel that they can win, / and compt it their reward" (D8r)) and false friends are central. She tells her friend that, should he ignore her advice, this letter will be the last communication from her, "and so I say adewe" (D8v). The penultimate epistle is what appears to be a late response from

her "cosyn," G.W., hoping his letter finds her in happier circumstances.<sup>6</sup> Offering the metaphor of a ship at sea, G.W. reminds her that the ocean-tossed sailor's "joyes more ample are by farre" (E1r) after enduring great hardships, and he advises her that the troubles we experience may "som further harms prevent" (E1v). In the final letter, Whitney responds to her cousin's parade of clichés, thanking him for his words and telling him that "For now I wyll my writting clene forsake / till of my grieves, my stomach I discharg" (E2r). She concludes by asking G.W. to "write not nor any more replye, / But geve me leave, more quietnes to trye" (E2r)—in a sense, telling him to leave her alone. Clearly dissatisfied with the responses she has received, Whitney closes the door on her epistolary dialogue and turns to her verse satire in the form of "The maner of her Wyll, & what she left to London," in which her voice and her perspective are central.

### **Death and the Maiden**

As an introduction to her will, Whitney calls attention to the text as fiction, noting that the author, forced to leave London, "fayneth as she would die" (E2r). The "Wyll" personifies her cruel city as a faithless lover from whom she must now depart, brokenhearted but with great affection. London is portrayed as yet another in a line of disappointments for the speaker. She states, "I never yet to rue my smart, / did finde that thou hadst pitie" (E2v), drawing a connection between London and the unhelpful recipients of the letters preceding her will. Her lover-city has betrayed her, but she knows that she, like "many Women foolyshly... / Doe such a fyred fancy set, / on those

which least desarve" (E2v). This object of undeserved affection, she regrets, could never be depended upon to support her in her time of need:

That never once a help wold finde,

to ease me in distres.

Thou never yet, woldst credit geve

to board me for a yeare:

Nor with Apparell me releve

Except thou payed weare. (E2v)

Ironically, in a city that required women to be mastered, Whitney's speaker is unable to find a master who will take her in, even if only in exchange for room and board. She is not angry though, rather she resigns herself to her fate, and "In perfect love and charytie. / my Testament here write" (E3r), bestowing upon London a "Treasurye" (E3r). She warns London, personified this time as a lawyer, to "stand a side" (E3r) so that she can make out her will—a document she intends as a guard against the city's taking "of that I leave them [her heirs] tyl" (E3r). In writing this will, the speaker claims the entire city as her own property, asserting their mutual dependence upon one another.

Whitney's speaker begins the will proper by drawing a connection between her body, mind and purse—identifying her self as commodity while her financial state is "weake" (E3r). As a single woman with no property and no money, the speaker has only her body and her mind as her means of support. Already aligned with prostitution by virtue of her position as a maid servant, this unemployed and penniless woman could very well be forced into selling her body in order to survive. However, the speaker's

mind proves to have some worth, as she has successfully sold her writing. She stakes a claim on the city of London as well, both as the heir to her estate and as the estate proper. In this, her fictional death, she leaves to God her spiritual and physical assets, then turns to the dispensation of the city of London to itself. Whitney narrates her bequeathal as a walking tour of the city, identifying streets, buildings, and businesses, all of which she confers upon London.

As a single woman, the speaker's decision to write a will is not unusual. Most women's wills in early modern England, as Erickson has noted, were written by widows and single women (204). Even single women who had very little to bequest wrote wills, seeking to maintain the limited control they had over their estates. In her examination of such wills, Erickson observes, "women were much more concerned with the care of the poor" (211), and "both single women and widows showed a distinct awareness of women's risk of relative poverty" (212). This special concern for women, she writes, "strongly suggest[s] an awareness of women's economic vulnerability, the result of an inheritance system which disadvantaged them and their legal coverture in marriage" (221). Whitney's speaker is clearly aware of these and other inequalities, as the absence of financial support from her family and her negative views of marriage attest. In writing what Jill P. Ingram has identified as a mock testament, Whitney participates in a literary tradition that dates back to the twelfth century.

Galway Kinnell defines the mock-testament as "a widespread medieval form in which a dying testator, sometimes an animal, bequeaths the various parts of his body to different individuals" (xiv). "A characteristic example," he adds, "is the anonymous

*testamentum porcelli*, ‘The Pig’s Testament,’ in which a pig leaves his bones to the dicemaker, his feet to the errand runner, and his penis to the priest” (xiv). Danielle Clarke notes the mock-testament’s “deployment of the figure of the fool and its undermining of an authority which is revealed not to be an authority” (xiv). Citing Peter Burke, who “notes that ‘mock’ religious rituals and legal forms were a staple of popular culture all over early modern Europe. He notes that...they were more often ‘not a mockery of religious or legal forms but the taking over of these forms for a new purpose,’ a way of ‘taking over the forms of official culture’” (30 n.25), Laurie Ellinghausen contends that “the testament was a genre in which the will of an ordinary subject could find a final moment of assertion prior to its extinction” (30). Further, “[t]he speaker’s death provides the occasion for an otherwise marginal individual to speak critically of whomever or whatever brings about her destruction. But ‘Maner’ also departs from convention by making it clear that the speaker’s losses are economic rather than sexual or familial,” which emphasizes that the speaker is a single woman who “claims to be writing professionally for lack of other options” (30). Though she is “[w]hole in body, and in minde / but very weake in Purse” (B3r), Whitney does not bequeath parts of her body. However, as I have already noted, there is a possibility that Whitney will have to resort to selling her body if the product of her “minde,” her volume of poetry, does not result in financial support.

Instead of presenting herself as the traditional fool of the mock-testament genre, Whitney maintains the persona of an unemployed maidservant, which allows her the mobility that informs her walking tour of London. Rather than directly criticizing those

in power, Whitney reveals the experiences of the poor and powerless, ultimately undermining the authorities of London and usurping that authority for herself as the voice of the oppressed. First, the speaker leaves to her beloved city "Brave buildyngs rare, of Churches store, / and Pauls to the head" (E3v), emphasizing the importance of citizens' faith and reminding her readers of the Christian teachings shown to be ignored in the poem's description of London. Abruptly shifting from grandiose and godly architecture, she brings her focus to the streets found "betweene the same" (E3v), touring the shops of tradesmen and merchants upon whom the city's economy depends. The speaker bequeaths prosperous butchers, brewers, bakers, and fishmongers galore to provide London's inhabitants with food. She then bestows mercers and goldsmiths to provide luxurious fabrics of "silke so rich" (E4r), jewels "as are for Ladies meete" (E4r) and other fashionable items, such as "Hoods, Bungraces, Hats or Caps," "Nets," and "French Ruffes, high Purles, Gorgets and Sleeves" (E4r). If one finds herself wanting something, the speaker "by the Stoks have left a Boy, / wil aske you what you lack" (E4r). This gesture serves to mock the previous descriptions of plenty, as those punished at the stocks or pillory were most often of the lower classes. Andrew Barrett and Christopher Harrison document crimes and punishments recorded in early modern London, and the pillory served as punishment for the following crimes: deception, fornication (two young male servants brought prostitutes into their master's home), prostitution, fraud, a female poisoner (a maidservant gave her Mistress and her household poison), and a woman who attempted to free her husband from prison (47-56). The pillory and stocks were punishments of shame—the convicted individual was

publicly exposed for his or her crime, mocked by passers-by and often beaten or otherwise tormented. The pillar is also a site of penance and symbolic of the post to which Jesus Christ was bound while being whipped. Following the speaker's tour of London commerce and greed, the legatee is faced with the "Boy" as another reminder of Christ's teachings, exposing the "need" for such items of luxury as shameful and emphasizing the true need for forgiveness, charity, and humanity.

Leaving the boy, the speaker returns to the streets lined with shops, promising an abundance of hose for men and women and shoes aplenty. She leaves skilled tailors and clothing shops to keep the men and women of London fashionably attired. For personal protection, the speaker bestows weaponry to stock Temple Bar in the West and Tower Hill in the East. Having "fed and clad" (E4v) the people, the speaker then goes on to ensure medical care "for daynty mouthes, and stomacks weake" (E4v) in the form of apothecaries and physicians. She also confers surgeons and "Playsters" for the "Roysters" who will no doubt injure each other in their skirmishes (E4v). Returning to the question of need, the speaker assures her heirs that the goods she has bequeathed will not be out of their reach, because she has also left them a store of money:

Yf they that keepe what I you leave,

aske Mony: when they sell it:

At Mint, there is such store, it is

Unpossible to tell it. (E5r)

The speaker provides this wealth "[t]hat Ruffians may not stylly be hangde, / nor quiet persons dye" (E5r), drawing attention to those driven to crime because of their poverty.

She likewise highlights the bounty of wealth that exists in London, which is not available to much of the population.

More plenty exists in the "Stiliarde store of Wines" (E5r), which the speaker offers "your dulled mindes to glad" (E5r). At this point in the poem, the speaker turns her focus to a critique of London's social inequalities, focusing on the lower classes, whose want, given the abundance described above, is a clear indictment of the city. The wine, then, will help the poor find cheer where there is none, suggesting that the speaker knows that circumstances are unlikely to change. Leaving "handsome men, that must not wed /except they leave their trade" (E5r), the speaker points out how the system prevents the very thing that it promotes—marriage—the irony of which a maidservant would have been all too aware. These men, as an alternative to marriage, seek the company of "proper Gyrles" (E5r), the prostitutes "that neede compels, or lucre lurss" (E5r), clearly referring to women whose poverty leads them to sell their only commodity. To these poor souls the speaker leaves houses "for people to repayre: To bathe themselves, so to prevent / infection of the ayre" (E5r). Here, the speaker returns to the setting of the volume—an outbreak of plague. She does not condemn these people; instead, she offers a solution to the problems associated with their behavior. The speaker hopes that "those, which all the weeke doo drug [drudge]" (E5r), will spend Saturdays cleaning these houses, making them look neat and respectable come Sunday.

Admitting that she contributed little to London's plenty, she points out to her reader that "no thyng from thee tooke" (E5r), telling her legatees any other thing that they may lack can be found within themselves. As for the people of London, Whitney's

generosity is represented in a scathing social critique of the poverty that so pervades her beloved city. She leaves small "portions" to the prisons, in hopes that they will remember her. Here she alludes to her single status—her portion, or dowry, has not been put to use. In doing so, she also alludes to the many single women who find themselves in prison due to lack of employment, a punishment that she, too, faces. To her fellow poor, she leaves the debtor's prison, the "Counter" (E5v), which houses both cheaters and "some honest men" (E5v). To those whose friends do not come to their aid the speaker designates "a certayne hole / and little ease within" (E5v), referring to the lowest class of lodging within the prison. Promising monthly sessions at Newgate Prison for sentencing, the speaker seeks a solution to the problem of overcrowding, which leads to the spread of infection. She hopes that concern for the threat of disease will allow some of those on trial to "skape" (E5v), punished only with "burning nere the Thumb" (E5v). To those facing death the speaker leaves a nag that will allow them to either escape prolonged suffering or to escape altogether. The speaker continues her commentary on debtor's prisons, an interest likely stemming from her own vulnerability to such imprisonment based on her unemployment, although, as she makes clear, she cannot obtain the credit that would create such debt.

Although the harsh punishments describe above are not the concern of debtors, the speaker notes, she will not overlook those imprisoned for this crime. To Fleet Prison, she leaves "some Papist olds" (E6r) to hold up the roof, and an alms box to provide some financial relief to its impoverished prisoners. "What makes you standers by to smile. / and laugh so in your sleeve," she asks comically, then answers her own

question: "I think it is, because that I / to Ludgate nothing geve" (E6r). She had intended to leave herself to this debtor's prison, "yf I my health possest," but her inability to obtain credit has prevented her from going into debt, because "none mee credit dare" (E6r). When the collectors came looking for this imagined debt, the speaker tells us, she had planned to "flee" to Ludgate, like those other prisoners who would rather die in debt "than any Creditor, /should money from them get" (E6r). However, because she is "so weake" in debt, the speaker instead leaves "some *Banckrupts* to his share" (E6r). Lorna Hutson argues that Whitney seeks credit with her volume, both literary and economic, by adopting a "prodigal" identity and creating fictional relationships in an attempt to "legitimate the enterprise of authorship itself" (117). Expanding upon Hutson's nod toward the mock-testament genre, Jill P. Ingram adds that, in her "Wyll," Whitney is "dramatizing the ambitious female writer's plight as an 'outsider,' and calling for the opening of credit networks to the city's marginalized figures" (par. 2). She reads the poem as Whitney's attempt and failure to obtain credit, the lack of which forces her out of London. Both scholars make convincing arguments, and I agree that Whitney is seeking credit with her volume in the form of employment and *authority*. However, the epistles, while effectively creating a community, are not the primary means through which Whitney legitimizes her voice. As I have already discussed, the letters provide an opportunity for Whitney to demonstrate her loneliness and state of abandonment through Heroidean revisions. It is that isolation combined with her position as a social and economic outsider that not only legitimates her voice but actually provides the opportunity to write at all. Her "lament" about lacking the credit necessary to accrue the

debt that would send her to prison is a satirical critique of the practice of money lending, which exploits those who are in need. Ironically, she bestows upon these debtor's prisons the gift of more inmates, something of which these institutions have no shortage. Although this is not the last mention of London prisons, the speaker's critique of the correctional system exposes its weaknesses in the form of overcrowding, inhumane treatment, and wrongful imprisonment of those whose only crime is poverty. In so doing, she also criticizes the economic inequalities that offer no other choice to those experiencing financial need. This critique, joined with the speaker's evident sympathy for both guilty and innocent inmates, gives voice to the unheard and forgotten masses whose only crime, like that of the speaker, is trusting their city to care for its inhabitants.

Turning her attention to the bookbinders, "because I lyke their Arte" (E6v), Whitney bestows steady business—especially upon her own printer, to whom she "wyll[s] my Friends these Bookes to bye / of him, with other ware" (E6v). In this and her later bequeathal of the bookbinder's inventory upon the young male students at "Th'innen of Court" (E7r), Whitney calls attention to the book held in the reader's hand as well as to her own status as an author—and, by extension, to her potential influence should her own book be among those stocking "each Bookebinders stall" (E7r). To her fellow "Maydens poore" (E6v), the speaker provides wealthy widowers to keep them "alfote" (E6v), while wealthy widows are given "yong Gentylmen" (E6v) to help. She encourages these would-be lovers to take care of their benefactors by making use of "their Plate and Jewells" (E6v) and by spending their money. In this she implies a sort of equality between the sexes—the inequality being based in economics instead of

gender. To those who "come in and out" of "evry Gate," the speaker bequeaths "Fruit wives...to entertayne" (E6v). These women, entertaining those who "come in and out" suggest the trade of sex, as Ellinghousen has noted, and they "signify prostitution as an alternative to marriage for keeping a girl 'afloat'" (17). This section of the poem presents a list of seemingly unrelated endowments: book buyers, spouses, prostitutes; however, all three hold great personal significance for the speaker, for whom each represents her only options for financial support.

As an out-of-service single woman, the speaker can find financial security only by offering her self as a commodity: through the sale of her writing, the sale of her autonomy in marrying a wealthy (older) man, or the sale of her body as a prostitute. This precarious position allows her to identify with the debtors discussed above even though she cannot obtain credit herself. Like those poor souls, the speaker is punished for a situation that is out of her control. She is a criminal because she is "unmastered," she is a threat because she asserts her voice through her writing, and, whether she resorts to prostitution or not, her social position labels her a whore. Having already been denied support from her male relatives and finding her female relatives unable to help her any further, the speaker's only recourse is to leave London, presumably to return to her family's home in the country. It is at this point in the poem that her attention turns to her parents' former place of residence.<sup>7</sup>

Despite its brevity, the speaker's mention of Smithfield brings up a number of associations that illustrate the economic disparities so prevalent in London. "To Smithfelde," she writes, "I must something leave / my Parents there did dwell" (E6v).

The speaker explains that "none wolde accompt it well" (E6v) if she were to commit such an oversight, maintaining her emphasis on economic issues. Smithfield was London's primary livestock market and also the location of public gatherings, including the execution of heretics (277 Protestants were burned at the stake here during the reign of Mary I) (Thornbury 339-44) and other violent "entertainments" such as bear baiting.<sup>8</sup> For the livestock market, the speaker commits "Horse and neat good store" (E6v). Personifying Smithfield, she leaves "in his Spitle, blind and lame, / to dwell for evermore" (E7r), referring to St. Bartholomew's Hospital, "in Smithfield, an Hospitall of great receipt, and relieve for the poore, [which] was suppressed by *Henry* the eight, and againe by him giuen to the Citty, and is endowed by the Cittizens beneuolence" (Stow, v.2, 143). As she did with London's prisons, the speaker ironically metes out a gift of which the recipient already has an abundance. As she bestows plenty in the form of livestock, the speaker draws attention to the equal bounty of sick and poor citizens in London. Smithfield was also the site of Bartholomew Fair, an enormous four-day summer festival of commerce and entertainment that attracted people from all social classes (Thornbury 339-44), which again serves as a contrast to the patients at St. Bartholomew's and also alludes to a recent event (Bartholomew Fair was held in late August; Whitney's dedicatory letter is dated 10 October) that did not discriminate based on social and economic class. Of course, as a marketplace, Bartholomew Fair represents for the speaker and those occupying a similar position all of the material goods that they cannot possess.

As though her mention of St. Bartholomew's Hospital and its invalids served as a reminder, the speaker abruptly shifts her concern to St. Mary Bethlehem, a psychiatric hospital:

And Bedlam must not be forgot,  
for that was oft my walke:  
  
I people there too many leave,  
that out of tune doo talke. (E7r)

Leaving "too many" mentally ill individuals to this hospital, known for its abusive treatment of its patients, the speaker emphasizes London's own abusive treatment of its poor and infirm, a problem that Whitney, through the speaker, seeks to rectify.

According to Stow, St. Mary Bethlehem "was prouided for poore priests, and others, men and women in the City of London, that were fallen into frensie or losse of their memory, vntill such time as they should recouer" (v.2, 143). St. Bethlehem was managed by the Governors of Bridewell, a palace-turned-institute of correction for women. This house of punishment for "disorderly women" is the speaker's next beneficiary.

As a women's prison, Bridewell holds special significance for the speaker, who could easily find herself among the inmates, given her unemployed status. First, she allocates beadles, whose job it is to punish petty offenders and to convey the sentences handed down by the courts. These women, then, are not dangerous criminals, but women who, like her, have found themselves in unfortunate circumstances. Next, the speaker charges "Matrones" (E7r), who will supervise the women, ensuring that they

stay busy with their assigned tasks. Surprisingly, the speaker does not leave additional prisoners for Bridewell, a shift from her bequeathals to the other prisons and hospitals. Instead, she designates the authority figures who serve to maintain order within the institution. This change may be due to the fact that, as was not the case with the debtors, capital offenders, and mentally ill people that she addressed above, she *is* guilty of many of the same offenses on which Bridewell's inmates are held. Whitney's fear of Bridewell is well founded, as its very operation, as Fiona McNeill notes, "enforced Juan Luis Vives's proposal that women's idleness be prevented by what he calls 'women's crafts'" (176). The training provided in Bridewell, McNeill asserts, "ensured that [the women] would remain in unstable employment at the volatile margins of mastery" (177). Not only does Bridewell punish women, in Whitney's view, for the crimes of the city, but its "correctional" services only perpetuate the very injustices that lead to women's imprisonment.<sup>9</sup>

The speaker again abruptly changes topics as she alludes to Henry VIII's dissolution of the monasteries (Clarke 294 n.234), a movement against the Roman Catholic Church: "For such as cannot quiet bee, / but strive for House or Land" (E7r). To those who seek to take advantage of the newly available land, the speaker leaves lawyers at the Inns of Court "to take their cause in hand" (E7r). She legates "a youthfull roote" of male students, "for whom I store of Bookes have left, / at each Bookebinders stall: / And parte of all that London hath to furnish them withall" (E7r). Returning to the practice of bestowing an unneeded inheritance, the speaker draws attention to her own lack of access to a formal education, such as the one received by the young men at the

Inns of Court. Presumably, these men already have a profusion of books as well as "parte of all that London hath." In addition to the luxury of such schooling, the speaker leaves a number of recreational facilities for them to use "when they are with study cloyd" (E7r), including theaters, whose players "of wonders shall reporte" (E7v). This life is one that both Whitney and her speaker no doubt covet, but, as women *and* members of the lower classes, cannot hope to obtain. Of course, Whitney may also be tempting these privileged young men to visit the "other" side of the Thames so that they may perhaps witness the social injustices that Whitney has been describing. It is on this note that the speaker begins the conclusion of her "Wyll," further emphasizing her lack of wealth and opportunity.

Advising her executor to disperse of the "needfull thinges" (E7v) that comprise her estate "with conscience" (E7v), the speaker reminds her readers that "I nothing named have, / to bury me withall" (E7v). Although her death in this case is imagined, Whitney warns her readers that, until she leaves this earth, she will be a burden upon society. Rather than allow this to be so, she requests "a shrowding Sheet" (E7v) with which to hide her shame, and she asks that the citizens/readers of London "in oblivyon bury me / and never more me name" (E7v). She urges them to forego funeral ceremonies due to their cost and to "Rejoyce in God that I am gon, out of this vale so vile" (E7v), hoping that her bequeathals will relieve those left behind of their economic insecurity. She makes "thee," the city of London, "sole executor, because / I lov'de thee best" (E7v), entrusting her beloved home "to geve the goodes unto the rest" (E7v). The speaker appeals to London, its inhabitants, and its government to heed the instances of

inequality, injustice, and indigence that she cites in her "wyll" and that are rampant in the city. Her generosity, she hopes, will influence others and will lead to the changes necessary to raise her fellow poor out of their bleak circumstances. The speaker/author, as noted above, ironically asks to be buried "in oblivyon," but, of course, the very presence of Whitney's name on the volume in her readers' hands ensures that her name will carry on long after her "death."

In the "oblivyon" of her status as a "serviceless" servant, Isabella Whitney locates the opportunity and authority to assert her voice in defense of others whose poverty and shame, like hers, result from a cultural hierarchy that creates and perpetuates the very problems it seeks to punish. Exposing the social and economic inequalities that are rampant in her beloved city of London, Whitney identifies those in power as the true criminals and redeems her fellow prisoners of an unfair system. She re-imagines the social boundaries that confine her, creating instead a community of outcasts while writing a scathing critique of London's inequities. Utilizing Petrarchan and Ovidian conventions, she adapts the dominant tongue and creates a counter-language, giving voice to those who, like her, are both overlooked and oppressed. Having established her isolation and poverty, Whitney's speaker imagines her own death as she composes her last will and testament. Identifying the city of London as both heir and inheritance, the speaker imagines the neglected, abused, and oppressed residents of her beloved city as a community of resistance—of which she considers herself a member—as she exposes the wrongs committed against them.

Like Whitney, Venetian courtesan Veronica Franco, in her *Terze Rime* (1575), uses the dialogic format of her poetry to privilege her female voice, rewriting Petrarchan tradition to express her feminine desires and amorous talents. Franco moves from a poetic exchange with her male lovers and detractors to a monologue that privileges the marginalized voice and creates a community of resistance by aligning the reader with the female speaker's perspective. By embracing and revising these genres, Franco joins Whitney in their dissatisfaction with a masculine literary tradition and seeks to create a space for feminist discourse within the confines of a dominant misogynist ideology.

## Notes

1. Located in Cheshire, England. Henry Green, in his facsimile reprint of *Whitney's "Choice of Emblems"* (1866), notes that "At Ryles Green there are three farms, of which the largest contains about 200 acres" (lxxxv). One of these portions, Green suggests, is the one that Geoffrey Whitney bequests to his brother, Brooke in his 1600 will: "the residence of yeares yet remaininge in my Farme or lease which I hold of Richard Cotton of Cambermere esquier together with the deede of the same Lease" (See also Henry Melville.
2. This poem, a "remainder," could have been laying around the printer's shop for some time—meaning that its publication date is inconclusive evidence of its authorship. See Robert Fehrenbach, "Isabella Whitney (fl. 1565-75) and the Popular Miscellanies of Richard Jones" (*Cahiers Elisabethains* 19 (1981): 85-87) and Randall Martin, "Isabella Whitney's 'Lamentation upon the death of William Gruffith'" (*Early Modern Literary Studies* 3.1 (1997): 2.1-15).
3. In his *Of Domestical Duties* (1622), William Gouge requires that masters adhere to four "particulars": "One is, that masters accustom their seruants to paines. Another is, that they exercise them in some vseful calling. A third is, that they giue them sufficient wages. A fourth is, that after sufficient seruice they suffer them to prouide for themselves" (678-9). Gouge recognizes the future destitution faced by those servants whose masters fail in their duties, and he strongly opposes such irresponsible behavior. Of course, this treatise was published around fifty years after Whitney's

volume, and it is not clear whether his mandate reflected the way people lived or was an ideal that was rarely put into practice. Whitney's *Nosegay* suggests the latter.

4. Rachel Speght's defense of women, *A Mouzell for Melastomus* (1617), is a direct response to Joseph Swetnam's misogynist pamphlet, *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward, and Unconstant Women* (1615). In her dedication, she assembles a female collective of readers, with whom she seeks to establish woman's inherent equality with man, particularly through her exegesis of *Genesis*.
5. This epistle further supports claims that Isabella and Geoffrey Whitney were siblings.
6. The letter suggests that it is from the very same "G.W." addressed by Whitney as "her brother" in the first epistle. The sender may be using the term "cousin" in what the *OED* defines "as a term of intimacy, friendship, or familiarity," rather than in the strict sense of a distant relative.
7. Danielle Clarke points out that there is no biographical evidence to support this as a fact of Whitney's life, attributing this reference to Whitney's construction of her fictional persona. However, as noted in the biographical introduction to this chapter, Averill Lukic, by way of James Hall, asserts that Isabella Whitney's family home was located in the rural area of Ryles Green. Perhaps Whitney relocated her family to Smithfield in her poem for the sake of consistency in her fictional will's tour of London.
8. John Stow, in his *Survey of London* (1598, 1603), writes that "the rest of Smithfield from long lane end to the bars is inclosed with Innes, Brewhouses and large tenements, on the west side is Chicken land downe to Cowbridge. Then be the pens

or folds so called of sheep there parted, and penned vp to be sold on the market dayes...The rest of that west side of Smithfield hath diuers fayre Innes and other comely buildings, vp to Hosiar lane, which also turneth downe to Oldborne, till it meete with Cowbridge streete...And thus much for encrochments and inclosure of this Smithfield, whereby remaineth but a small portion for the old vses, to wit, for markets of horses and cattle, neither for Military exercises, as Iustings, Turnings, and great triumphes which haue been there performed before the princes and nobility both of this Realm and forraigne countries" (28-29).

9. It is worth noting that McNeill also discusses a later "arrangement" between The Virginia Company and the Lord Mayor of London in which young inmates (ranging in age from eight to eighteen) were refashioned as "maids" and shipped and sold to the Jamestown colony, where they were to be reformed as wives and mothers to help the male planters settle in England's new colony. This plan was a huge failure: "In court minutes and contemporary reports, the story reads as almost a war between men and women for survival, with hungry women devouring food, and men stealing and raping young girls" (194).

## CHAPTER III

### “I UNDERTAKE TO DEFEND ALL WOMEN”: VERONICA FRANCO’S WAR

#### OF WORDS

In *Capitolo 12* of her *Terze Rime* (1575), Veronica Franco responds to an admirer's poem in praise of Verona, the Italian city that basks in Franco's presence while she is away from Venice. Echoing her earlier rejections of hyperbolic Petrarchan praise, which Franco identifies as "clearly obvious lies" (18), she advises her would-be lover that if he truly wanted to honor her, he should have written about her beloved Venice: "But if you make such a conceit even of me, / why do you not consider the place I was born, / and why do you not constantly sing its praise?" (61-3). Like Whitney, Franco self-identifies with her city and its inhabitants, and, in this poem, she goes so far as to equate a description of Venice's commendable qualities with her own, blurring the physical boundaries that exist between Franco and her home. This self-identification with her city, and her subsequent exposure of the constructed nature of gender, class, and geographic binaries are central concerns of Franco's *Terze Rime* and her later volume, *Lettere familiari a diversi* (1580). This latter text, as Margaret Rosenthal has suggested, may easily be read as a companion piece to the former as both a gloss and "a continuous unfolding narrative that dramatizes Franco's discursive strategies and the ways that she managed her own life" (*Honest* 126). Drawing upon this idea, I read Franco's *Terze Rime* through the lens of her "Letter 22," in which she criticizes the commoditization of women and reveals the inherent dangers of the sex trade. Throughout both texts, Franco

"manages her own life" by constructing her identity as a courtesan and poet in response to ancient and contemporary attacks on courtesans, prostitutes, and women in general.

It is her identity as a courtesan, in fact, that provides Franco with the opportunity to write and publish her work in the first place.<sup>1</sup> In early modern Venice, courtesans were among the very few women who received a humanist education. This privilege was actually a necessity for a successful courtesan, who was expected to possess intellectual, artistic, and erotic skills—skills which also served to differentiate her from the common prostitute or *meretrice*. Like Whitney's maidservant, the courtesan enjoyed a level of freedom unknown to other women. In early modern Venice, the impulse to ensure the honor of noble families and the purity of patrician bloodlines meant that patrician women were forced to live very secluded lives.<sup>2</sup> In addition to access to an education, Veronica Franco and other courtesans had access to the city, to powerful men, and to literary salons, where they competed with male courtiers for patronage. Sara Maria Adler adds, "Being a successful courtesan meant independence, avoidance of financial and social subordination within the traditional patriarchal family structure. It also meant substantial income for the maintenance of a comfortable, well-equipped household" (213). This freedom came with a price, as Franco discovered, when her presence was viewed as a threat to social hierarchies and to the ambitions of other courtiers, resulting in vicious literary attacks. Rather than conform to the role in which Venetian officials and envious writers sought to confine her, Veronica Franco exploits her position on the margins to effectively deconstruct social dichotomies and conceive of a utopian community in which men and women of all classes can coexist in peace. Like

Whitney, Franco appropriates the dominant tongue in the form of Petrarchan and Ovidian revision.<sup>3</sup> She both rejects and adapts these poetic conventions, privileging the female voice and creating a space for feminist discourse within the confines of a prevailing misogynist ideology. In so doing, Franco also participates, through the *querelle des femmes*, in an international women's community of resistance while also helping to create a local community of women in Venice. In her writing and in her life, Franco sought to identify and correct the social and economic injustices that denied women a voice in their own lives and reduced them as a sex to yet another commodity in the Venetian economy.

As a courtesan, Franco was an integral part of Venice's economy. Although Venetian officials were morally opposed to prostitution—and, legally, no distinction was made between prostitutes and courtesans—they recognized the benefits that the profession offered an unstable economy, and so were willing to overlook a number of transgressions.<sup>4</sup> Sex crimes such as adultery, rape, and homosexuality "threatened the stability and order of family and community," Guido Ruggiero notes, whereas prostitution "could be legalized and treated as a legitimate source of profit for noble entrepreneurs of good family" (*Boundaries* 9). Although the state did not recognize a distinction between the *meretrice* and the honest courtesan (*cortigiana onesta*), Veronica Franco's poetry and letters demonstrate a struggle to distance herself from women who simply traded sex for money and a recognition that they have more similarities than differences. But, however superficially glamorous the life of a Venetian courtesan may appear, women entered the profession out of economic need—not by choice—and, it

seems, by introduction of their aging mothers, to whom the young women's fees were paid. Oftentimes this was necessitated by the lack of a dowry, which the young woman could earn as a courtesan. Marriage continued to be an important institution, even for the unchaste, as evidenced by laws established after 1542, indicating that "a Venetian courtesan's reputation and social standing were made more secure if she were married" (Rosenthal, *Honest* 66). She could, however, obtain equal protection from Venetian patricians without relinquishing her rights to her dowry. As many historians and critics have noted,<sup>5</sup> the tolerance of prostitutes and courtesans by Venetian authorities, rather than indicating social liberality, was "less severely punished because it eased the severe socioeconomic problems facing sixteenth-century Venetian society" (Rosenthal, "Venetian" 116)—much like the enforced service of women in London. For, however illicitly these women supported themselves, they alleviated the financial burden on the state with their income.

Prostitutes and courtesans served the state in other ways as well. The increasing price of dowries—for both the poor and the wealthy—meant that more and more young men and women were marrying later in life. This delay presented a problem for adolescent men, who needed an outlet for their sexual energy. Prostitutes, according to Ruggiero, provided this outlet:

Once again we begin with a 'youth' starting his sexual life in a situation where his socialization as a male calls for action and aggression, but his actual experience and position make both unlikely. The mythic prostitute with her experience and her active reputation, much like the active

partner in a homoerotic relationship, was in this vision a key to the transition from passive to active. With her—as would be stated with increasing frequency—the boy became a man; once again the danger is taken out of prostitution, which is placed in the service to the cultural ideals of licit society. ("Marriage" 25-6)

So, in addition to supporting the economy, prostitutes protected young men from the crimes of sodomy and rape, which also protected the chastity of young women.<sup>6</sup>

Further, the sexual experience that the prostitute provided served to reinforce the masculine role that the young man was expected to fill.<sup>7</sup>

In an effort to further protect women's chastity, charitable institutions such as the Casa delle Zitelle were established to house women "who were clearly at risk of becoming prostitutes...and educate them in a way that would make them marketable wives or nuns when they reached adulthood" (Chojnacka 226). Though the Zitelle (founded in 1568) "incorporated singlewomen from all levels of the Venetian class hierarchy," the house rules required that the girls be both poor *and* pretty (226). Those who did not meet these criteria could "find shelter elsewhere" (qtd in Chojnacka 226). Chojnacka offers the Casa delle Zitelle and other such shelters as communities of women, noting that the founders viewed these houses as a solution to women's lack of choice in Venetian society. Like Christine de Pizan's City of Ladies, the Zitelle was completely isolated from the world of men:

The Zitelle building was deliberately constructed to limit even visual access to the outside world. The aim behind this rule was clear: to keep

the girls and women away from the dangers and influences of the outside world. In this way, the Casa emulated a convent by creating a secluded environment of prayer, discipline, and contemplation. (228)

However, the goal of this house was to prepare women for marriage, and they "were taught skills to make them good helpmates for potential husbands. In this way, the house fulfilled a familial duty by sheltering its wards from the outside world while at the same time preparing them to return to it" (229). Although the Casa delle Zitelle and other charitable houses did indeed create communities of women, these communities were in no way resistant. Instead, they reinforced the social imperative that women be chaste, silent, and obedient and participated in an exchange of women that may not have been that far removed from the life of prostitution from which they sought to protect their residents.

Whereas prostitution required very little preparation, becoming a courtesan "meant establishing a network of high-class clients, learning the gossip of the city and the court with which to amuse them, [and] the acquisition of a house and clothes which would be pleasing to them" (Sennett 239). The *cortegiana onesta* had to have the skills of a male courtier and the appearance of a noblewoman, making the transgression of class and gender boundaries integral to her identity. This ability to fashion one's own identity is yet another requirement shared by the courtesan and the male courtier, both of whom must exhibit the *sprezzatura* described in Baldesare Castiglione's *Book of the Courtier*,<sup>8</sup> the danger of which Michael Rocke explains:

In learning “to pass,” the courtesan posed a peculiar problem: if successful, she had donned a disguise and could go anywhere. It was not so much that she could pass among virtuous women as that she could replace them, looking and sounding like them yet also serving as sensual companion to their men. It was for this reason that the courtesan was seen as a special threat, the threat of a lewd woman who seemed just like any other. (239)

Such a breach did not go unnoticed by officials, who became very concerned with making sure that the city's noblewomen were not confused with courtesans and vice versa. This confusion, Ann Rosalind Jones notes, seems to have been of greater concern to officials than any other aspect of the *cortigiana onesta* (*Currency of Eros* 179). Sumptuary laws forbidding courtesans from wearing certain fabrics and jewels or even having certain furnishings in their homes were passed, though rarely enforced.<sup>9</sup> Venetian officials, for all of their protests, had great pride in the beauty of the city's women and encouraged courtesans' international reputations, when it served their interests. As Margaret Rosenthal has discussed, Venice, identified with the Virgin Mary, Venus, and Justice, was figured as "a threefold female icon, located at the very heart of Venetian public, commercial and political life—a domain where all Venetian women citizens are forbidden regardless of social standing" ("Venetian" 109). However, when it suited the needs of the republic, "the elegant noblewoman, distinguished citizen, and sophisticated honest courtesan were paraded as female symbols attesting to Venice's tolerance of social diversity and its dedication to social injustice" (109). Veronica

Franco is fully aware of such contradictions throughout her works, and she seeks to both expose and resolve the rampant inequalities imposed upon women in Venice, positioning herself as a spokesperson for her sex.

As one of Venice's advertised attractions, Franco's most publicized and mythologized encounter was with Henri de Valois, the future Henri III of France, in 1575. Two sonnets to the young royal open Franco's 1580 *Lettere familiari*, poems with which she not only pays tribute to her most noble client but which also, as Jones has argued, have "a leveling effect: this prodigy, after all, came to her in the body of a customer seeking sexual pleasure and left as the recipient of her portrait" ("Designing Women" 139). In the 1998 film, *Dangerous Beauty* (a loose adaptation of Rosenthal's *The Honest Courtesan*), it is suggested that Franco's service to the future king actually secured France's financial support of Venice's war with the Ottoman Empire. However, the city did not always view courtesans as an asset, and it was at these times that strict regulations were made and enforced. On September 12, 1539, the Council of Ten and Zonta ordered that Venice's "whores" be subject to five "necessary measures," which "will not only preserve the honour of God, but will be of no little benefit to the city" (Chambers et al. 126-7).<sup>10</sup> Once again, the majority of these laws were concerned with protecting the "respectable" women in the community and maintaining social hierarchies.

The enforcement of such laws was very inconsistent and very much depended upon the current state of the city. Chojnacka writes, "In the early modern period, Venetians increasingly associated prostitutes with the problems of overcrowding,

poverty, and crime in their city. City crises, such as the food shortages and plague of 1576-77, were interpreted by some as divine retribution for the city's sinful ways" (224). Blamed for the city's problems, courtesans and prostitutes were in equal danger of prosecution for criminal activities that had previously been overlooked. The freedoms granted Franco and other courtesans were quite precarious, as Jones notes: "Courtesans could be arrested at any time; frequent proclamations imposed controls upon their dress, places of residence, and public appearances. Many were accused of witchcraft and pilloried by satirists, and all depended on the good will of clients who were bound to them neither by law nor custom" ("Designing Women" 137). Franco herself faced the Inquisition after being accused of witchcraft by her son's tutor, though she was never convicted.

One way in which Venetian officials sought to control the activities of courtesans and prostitutes was to designate specific areas of city in which they were allowed to reside.<sup>11</sup> Known as "whore towns," these districts were practically mythologized by foreign visitors to the city, who were amazed, Robert C. Davis suggests, by "the sheer number of women who sold themselves there for a living—some ten to twelve thousand according to tourist lore—and the contrast with the city's otherwise almost oriental customs of female seclusion" (31). In a city comprised of expressly gendered spaces,<sup>12</sup> these districts, Davis contends, "remained as contested and ambiguous gender territory" (31)—despite the fact that they were populated almost entirely by women and "had their own agendas of social control" (31). Because the sex trade was "run far more by 'olde baus' than by male protectors" (32), "whore towns" constituted a literal community of

women. These women, of course, were not eager or willing to be so confined, and prostitutes eventually expanded into "honest" neighborhoods seeking new clients. This infringement, along with courtesans' imitation of noblewomen, Rocke explains, "heightened concerns both about the bad example these unruly females posed to chaste women and about the blurring of social and moral distinctions between the *donna onesta* and the lusty *meretrice*" (160). The control of these women relied upon imposed boundaries that were porous and ineffective in containing women who had already disobeyed other social standards.

Another social and economic boundary that was easily traversed was the one dividing urban and rural communities, as I discussed in the Introduction. Although the economic functions of each were different, they were not discrete, and country and city were dependent upon one another throughout Europe. Of course, the specific relationship within individual countries varied, and in Italy, with its city-states, the provisions were further differentiated by region. Each city held dominion over its hinterlands, or *terraferma*, and the citizens of the urban community had special rights not afforded their rural counterparts. But the acquisition of land by wealthy townsmen meant that the even the distinction between urban and rural residents was less clear. Country retreats became a solution for those seeking to escape the increasingly crowded city of Venice, but the proprietors of these estates were not interested in abandoning city life altogether, bringing the opulence of their urban residences to their country homes. This developing interest in urban ownership of rural lands caused problems for residents as "urban dwellers consolidated rural properties, dispossessing smallholders, or

renegotiating share-cropping and leasing contracts to the *contadini*" (Black 32). The romanticized vision of the rustic life contrasted sharply with this urban exploitation of rural populations.

Like courtesans and prostitutes, the *contadino* did reap some benefits from their exploitation, including increased freedom of movement: "Shifts and adaptations were made easier because the rural scene in much of Italy was already in itself diverse, and experienced significant mobility..." (Black 42). However, as I have already noted, this mobility often compounded the problems of poor villagers, whose migration to the city did little or nothing to alleviate their poverty. Veronica Franco, for all of the bravado of her published works, was well aware of the dark realities lying just below the surface of the courtesan's glamorous façade. In Letter 22 of her *Lettere Familiari*, Franco advises a mother against making her daughter a courtesan. Acknowledging that she has been deliberately avoiding the woman, Franco warns that if her addressee fails to heed her advice, Franco will "take away any hope that you should ever speak to me again" (37). "Although it's mainly a question of your daughter's well-being," she continues, "I'm talking about you, as well, for her ruin cannot be separated from yours" (38). Franco refers to earlier exchanges, in which she urged the woman "to protect [her daughter's] virginity," noting that "the houses of poor mothers are never safe from the amorous maneuvers of lustful young men" (38). Franco claims to have offered to help the girl get "accepted into the Casa delle Zitelle" and to also "help with all of the means at my disposal" (38). The Zitelle offered the girl an alternative to a life of prostitution, and it offered the mother relief from the financial burden of keeping the girl at home. While

marriage may have placed women under the control of a husband, perhaps Franco believed it better to be subject to one man's authority (and the protection it offered) rather than exposed to the abuses of many men. Though addressed to one particular person, this letter appears in a published volume, allowing Franco to expose the "real" life of the courtesan to a wider audience—an audience that included many of her clients. Thus, she implicitly directs her criticism of Venice's economic and social disparities to the men who perpetuate them and upon whom she depends for protection and financial support. Further, she implicates women in the reproduction of a culture that exploits and oppresses them.

Franco describes the girl's once chaste and modest style of dress, and accuses her mother of treating her daughter like a commodity: "suddenly you encouraged her to be vain, to bleach her hair and paint her face...you let her show up with...every other embellishment people use to make their merchandise measure up to the competition" (38). Reminding the woman that she had offered her both "friendship and charity" (38), Franco again blames her withdrawn support on the mother's plans to sell her daughter. She warns the woman that this action will "slaughter in one stroke your soul and your reputation, along with your daughter's" (39)—a metaphor to which she returns later in the letter. Having condemned the mother's intentions, Franco offers more practical advice, based on her own experience. Like Christine de Pizan and Isabella Whitney, Franco invests her words with authority through such personal experience. She explains that the girl cannot be a successful courtesan because she "is really not very beautiful...and has so little grace and wit in conversation" (38). The profession, she

notes, “is hard enough to succeed in even if a woman has beauty, style, good judgment, and proficiency in many skills” (39). Franco, of course, does possess these qualities, as she makes quite clear in her *Terze Rime*. Her harsh words are an attempt to save the girl (and her mother) from a life of destitution and no hope of a respectable life, for an unsuccessful courtesan is doomed to live in utter poverty and most likely will have no other recourse but to work as a common prostitute.

Even if the girl is successful as a courtesan, Franco adds, “this is a life that always turns out to be a misery” (39). Again, in contrast to the confident assertions of her poetry, Franco acknowledges that the freedom and independence one enjoys as a courtesan are, in actuality, nonexistent. She is completely dependent upon men, as I have already noted, for support, and, while it may seem that the courtesan controls access to her body (as her poetry indicates), it is men who dictate every aspect of her life:

It’s a most wretched thing, contrary to human reason, to subject one’s body and labor to a slavery terrifying even to think of. To make oneself prey to so many men, at the risk of being stripped, robbed, even killed, so that one man, one day, may snatch away from you everything you’ve acquired from many over such a long time, along with so many other dangers of injury and dangerous contagious diseases; to eat with another’s mouth, sleep with another’s eyes, move according to another’s will, obviously rushing toward the shipwreck of your mind and your body—what greater misery? What wealth, what luxuries, what delights

can outweigh all this? Believe me, among all the world's calamities, this is the worst. And if to worldly concerns you add those of the soul, what greater doom and certainly of damnation could there be? (39)

The courtesan is man's slave, his prey—and any wealth she may obtain can, in an instant, disappear. Franco describes a life of uncertainty, vulnerability, and complete absence of autonomy. Further, for all of the earthly dangers that the profession brings, the courtesan faces much greater suffering in Hell.

Claiming concern for the girl's body and soul (as well as the mother's), Franco again compares the mother's plans for her daughter to the slaughter of an animal: "Don't allow the flesh of your wretched daughter not only to be cut into pieces and sold by you yourself to become her butcher" (39). Once more implicating the woman in the perpetuation of social injustices, Franco's graphic metaphor expands upon her earlier description of the courtesan as commodity. In this case, the mother is not merely selling her daughter, but also ensuring that they are both eternally damned. Finally, if all of the dangers that are described in the letter have not convinced the woman to change her mind, Franco threatens her with the loss of her daughter's love:

It won't be long, perhaps, before your daughter herself, recognizing the great harm you've done her, will flee from you more than anyone else does—all the more because, as her mother, you should have helped her and you'll have exploited and ruined her instead. (40)

Franco may be revealing here her own feelings about her mother's role in making her a courtesan, and she clearly hopes to save this girl from a similar fate. This concern for

poor Venetian women who may be forced into prostitution out of financial necessity, as she was, is one that Franco is quite devoted to, as her 1564 and 1570 wills reveal.<sup>13</sup>

Margaret Rosenthal observes that it was common for Venetian women to include in their wills women outside of their families, like “maidservants, tenants, and neighbors” (*Honest Courtesan* 74). Summarizing the content of Franco’s wills, Rosenthal notes that, in the first, Franco leaves money to women who served her family (such as the daughter of her brother’s wet nurse) and requests that, should her unborn child be a girl,<sup>14</sup> “all of the remaining capital [of her estate]...with the interest accrued to that point, be given directly to her in the form of a dowry” (77). If the child dies before reaching legal age, “all of the earnings, at 5 percent, that are in Baballi’s<sup>15</sup> possession should be given instead to Franco’s mother” (77). Upon the death of her mother, if no other family members are living, Franco wants the capital to be contributed to the “balloting system of the six guardians of the Scuole Grandi” (qtd in Rosenthal 77). The balloting system was a charity that provided poor women with dowries so that they could marry, a service similar to the one offered by the Casa delle Zitelle. This bequest demonstrates Franco’s desire to help other women, like the girl discussed in Letter 22, avoid or escape the life of a courtesan or prostitute. Though Franco assigns control of her estate and responsibility for her children to powerful men, she clearly focuses on assisting other women whenever possible.

In her second will, Franco identifies the various fathers of her children, though she does not expect all of the men to assume responsibility for their respective sons (all of Franco’s children were boys). Instead, she asks only one man, a married nobleman

named Andrea Tron, who is also the father of one of Franco's sons, to take on this role (80). Rosenthal laments that there is no documentation that reveals whether this wish was fulfilled. This later will also "bequeaths the balance of her capital to her brother Hieronimo's children" (81). However, Franco specifies that "if his wife should give birth to a daughter, this child should be granted the entire amount" and asks that the daughter be named Veronica (81). If all of the children are boys, Franco requests that the capital be divided equally among them. Rosenthal attributes Franco's favoring of a female child to a desire "to assure some sense of continuity among her female heirs, and perhaps owing to the absence of any daughters of her own" (81). Franco makes bequeathals to a nun and three female servants: her cook, Agnes, her "maid," Domisilla, and her previous maidservant, Caterina. Also, in contrast to her gift to the general funds of the balloting system in the 1564 will, Franco allocates "the 'surplus' of her capital...for the marriages of 'two worthy maidens'" (81). Alternatively, "in the event that 'due meretrici' (two prostitutes) can be found who want to leave the wicked life and marry or enter a convent, they should be 'embraced,' rather than the two maidens" (81). Rosenthal asserts that "[t]hese wills reveal Franco's allegiance to, and sense of responsibility for, young women who, owing either to lack of financial resources or lower social status, were denied the privileges of marriage or an education" (83). I suggest that they also construct Franco as a sort of "mother" to her similarly situated Venetian "daughters," creating a community of women comprised of her heirs, much as Whitney creates a community of the poor and oppressed in her "Wyll." Further, Franco's emphasis—both in her wills and in Letter 22—on helping young women avoid

becoming prostitutes is a form of activism against an oppressive social structure that often leaves women no other choice. Though Franco conforms in the sense that the only suggested alternatives are marriage or a convent, her public criticism of life as a courtesan in the letter and her offers of financial assistance to women in danger of entering that life clearly indicate her resistance to Venice's patriarchal culture—a resistance that is even more apparent in her poetry.

In *Capitolo* 16 of her *Terze Rime*, Veronica Franco announces to her detractor, Maffio Venier, "I undertake to defend all women / against you, who despise them so" (79-80). Although the poem directly addresses a specific reader, its appearance within Franco's published volume indicates that it is equally intended for the broader public, courtly or otherwise. The same is true of all the *capitoli*, which address the men in her literary salon in particular, the inequalities of Venetian society in general, and masculine poetic traditions (through her revision of Petrarchan and Heroidean conventions) at large. Fourteen of the twenty-five *capitoli* present epistolary exchanges between Franco and various men in her circle. As a courtesan participating in the literary salon of Domenico Venier, Franco occupied a far more privileged space as a writer than did Whitney. Like Whitney, Franco's single status (although technically wed for a time, she did not remain with her husband for very long) and her profession allowed her the opportunity to study and write; however, she was still dependent upon "the protection of male patrons willing to defend her reputation as founded not only on sexual labor but on 'honest,' that is, honorable, activities" (Rosenthal, *Honest* 60-1). She faced satirical representations by male courtiers, with whom courtesans competed for patronage, and

"the circulation of verse epistles was one way in which she could document her status as a private mistress and as an inspirer of poetry that went beyond the erotic" (Jones, "City" 312).

However, Franco also uses the dialogic format of her *Terze rime*, like Whitney in her *Sweet Nosegay*, to introduce and privilege the otherwise unheard female voice. As Patricia Phillippe has argued, Franco's inversion of the *Heroides*, moving from dialogue to monologue rather than vice versa, "suggests the emergence of an *individual* female speaker who portrays herself as a unique spokesperson for the group of women whom she represents, and a virtuoso performer within the literary and social conventions which she employs" ("Altera" 12). By embracing and revising these genres, Franco joins Whitney in her dissatisfaction with masculine literary traditions and seeks to create a space for her own authorial voice. Further, Franco presents herself as the voice of poor and exploited women in Venice, exposing the local figures of patriarchal authority as the cause of the very lifestyle against which they rail. Although Franco's defense of "all women" is addressed to specific men and is published in a volume that had limited circulation among members of Dominico Venier's salon, she nonetheless openly and directly criticizes the very men upon whom she depends—risking her livelihood as she challenges social hierarchies. In doing so, Franco emphasizes and takes advantage of her position on the margins of Venetian salon culture and Venetian society in general to reveal the contradictions inherent in the imagined boundaries that divide men and women, wealthy and poor. She joins Christine de Pizan and Isabella Whitney (as well as Marie de Romieu and Aemilia Lanyer) in turning misogynist arguments upside down to

defend herself and the women with whom she identifies. By asserting her female voice over the roar of misogynist discourse, Franco participates in the larger community of resistance of the *querelle des femmes*.

Franco's *Terze Rime* begins with a conventionally Petrarchan lament, presumably written by her lover, Marco Venier. In it, the speaker accuses his ladylove of possessing cruel beauty and torturing him by withholding her love. Franco responds in *Capitolo 2* with a reversal of Petrarchan convention in which the typically silent object of desire speaks.<sup>16</sup> She accuses *him* of inconstancy: "If I could be certain of your love, / from what your words and face display, /which often conceal a changing mind" (1-3), claiming that she closes her heart only to protect herself. The speaker goes on to explain the terms by which her suitor can gain her love:

...prove your love to me  
 by other means than compliments, for I  
 take care not to be fooled by them;  
 please me more with deeds and praise me less,  
 and where your courtesy overflows into praise,  
 distribute it in some other way. (55-60)

If he will only fulfill this desire, she promises him, along with her heart, the opportunity to "taste the delights of love / when they have been expertly learned" (149-50). Margaret Rosenthal suggests that, "by redefining the Petrarchan muse as poetic collaborator rather than disembodied and silent addressee, Franco decenters the lyrical love tradition which commonly uses the woman simply as literary currency" (*Honest* 186). In doing so,

Franco also criticizes Venice's exploitation of its female citizens as commodities in the city's economic and social exchanges. As in the epistolary section of Whitney's *Nosegay*, Franco creates a poetic dialogue between herself and her male lovers and attackers in the *Terze Rime*, easily exposing the empty flattery of Petrarchan conventions and rendering impotent their barbed verses, respectively. Her position on the margins of Venetian culture, even as she is firmly planted within it, allows Franco the freedom to be bold in her construction of herself as a writer and in her critique of the social system that dangles a better life before her eyes while ensuring that she will never attain that kind of security.

During the course of the *Terze Rime*, Franco effectively silences the tongues of her Petrarchan lover and her misogynist detractor, snatching and twisting their words to serve her own purposes. Rather than wholeheartedly rejecting this poetic tradition, however, Franco uses its conventions to create a counter-language with which she reverses traditional gender roles and places the feminine in the active position. Through this appropriation of the masculine voice, Franco rewrites her role as a commodity in Venice's culture of commerce, obscuring the boundaries between art (represented by the courtesan's performance and the cruel beauty of the city of Venice) and nature (seen in her biological sex and the perfect harmony of the countryside). At the same time, Franco exhibits the "natural art" of her intellect and poetic skill, using her praise of Venice, her male addressees, and, in the final *capitolo*, a nobleman's country estate to establish the authority of her voice as well as her identity as a poet.

Praising her skill as a poet, the speaker in *Capitolo 1* seems to envy Franco's devotion to her writing. He encourages her to "Circulate your work, go with it everywhere, / and as your virtuosity gains from doing so, / let not your beauty be the source of my tears" (142-4). Although hers is a cruel beauty, the speaker does not wish for her "to untie the knots / that your lovely hand wove around my heart" (100-1)—in fact, he hopes to have her "pull my ties tighter still" (108). However, she should try to please Venus, he argues, as much as she pleases Phoebus, because both will increase her fame, and "Phoebus himself bows down to obey her, / and he cannot do otherwise, though in the end / he takes great pleasure in service to her" (59). In other words, her beauty and her reciprocation of his love are as important as her literary skill. Franco responds, immediately rejecting both the male poet's praise and the Petrarchan tradition in which he participates in her poem's opening lines. She goes on to expose the false nature of Petrarchan poetry, assuring her would-be lover that she will not be fooled by his flowery language. Instead, she tells him, "And if you truly love me, it grieves me very much / that you do not reveal yourself by deed, / as a man who loves truly usually does" (28-30). These deeds may take the form of a public declaration of his love, as Rosenthal and Jones suggest in their introduction to their translation of Franco's works, in "an exchange of written texts that she can use as proof of a relationship extending beyond the private sexual liaison of courtesan and client" (14). Franco creates this exchange herself in her *Terze Rime*. In her construction of a dialogue between lovers in which the female voice expresses the sentiments of both the lover and the beloved,

Franco manipulates the dialogic form to equalize the sexes in such a way that she is eventually able to eliminate the male voice altogether.

Franco further distances herself from the courtesan as commodity, telling the poet, "And what I now request from you / is not that you express your love / for me with silver or with gold" (94-6). Whereas her love is not for sale, his love, shown in deeds, is, for Franco, an article of trade: "There'll be no gap between merit and reward / if you'll give me what, though in my opinion / it has great value, costs you not a thing" (139-41). At the same time, though, she draws attention to the courtesan's erotic role when she promises him sexual pleasure as well as her love if he does what she asks of him:

So sweet and delicious do I become,  
when I am in bed with a man  
who, I sense, loves and enjoys me,  
that the pleasure I bring excels all delight,  
so the knot of love, however tight  
it seemed before, is tied tighter still. (154-159)

Referring to the male poet's earlier mention of the knot around his heart, Franco echoes his description of the power she holds over him. The pride that she exhibits in her excellence as a courtesan stands in marked contrast to the misery described in Letter 22. Of course, if she is to poetically and socially dominate her male addressees she must construct her position as one of power rather than drawing attention to her dependence upon these men. She assures her addressee that her devotion to Venus is strong enough that, for the man who enjoys her lovemaking, "my singing and writing are both

forgotten" (169). However, even as she touts her erotic skills over all others, this poem also highlights her literary talent. Franco continues to play with her fidelity to Venus and Phoebus as she assumes both the feminine and the masculine roles throughout the volume and deconstructs this socially-constructed gender binary in her exploration of the urban/rural divide.

Drawing upon Ovid's *Heroides*, Franco writes in *Capitolo 3* an elegy for Venice, which is constructed as the abandoned, feminine beloved, in contrast to Whitney's treatment of London as the departed lover. In this poem, Franco is both the absent lover and the longing beloved. She also conflates her lover, her city, and her own identity into one—the first of many of her self-identifications with Venice that form a current in this volume: "No sooner, alas, had I turned my steps / from the maiden of Adria, where my heart dwells, / than I was transformed in will and appearance" (4-6). Her absence from Venice and from her lover has impacted both her physical and mental well-being. Away from her city, Franco is but a shadow of herself. Borrowing from another Ovidian source, his *Metamorphoses*, Franco compares her suffering to that of Echo, Procne, and Philomela to more fully illustrate her pain. These mythical women are moved to tears by the poet's anguish, suggesting that Franco's sorrow is even greater. Nature herself is affected by the speaker's cries as tigers, lilies, violets, and even the sun sympathize with her plight (23, 28-9). These lines mark yet another of Franco's attempts to transgress boundaries as she contrasts and then, later in her volume, unites the city with the countryside.

Although for many, the countryside is a place for retreat and calm, for Franco, her distance from the city of Venice causes as much pain as does the absence of her lover. It is at this point in the poem that the identity of the woman speaker becomes discrete from those of the city and the man. Franco expresses envy for Venice, "which still enfolds / the man to whom I always return in thought, / from whom I live at such distance and pain!" (46-8). Here, the city and the man become one because each possesses what the speaker longs for the most. However, it is Franco who has abandoned her lover-city—a position that reverses the Heroidean lament that she adapts in this poem. She exploits the constructed nature of dichotomies such as urban/rural and male/female to expose other socially-constructed identities that perpetuate the social and economic inequities that she critiques in both the *Terze Rime* and Letter 22. Adler suggests that the *Terze Rime*'s first two pairs of poems work to equalize the female poet with her male lover: both are "miserable, melodramatic, unreasonable, confused, and pretentiously conventional—[she is] not his indifferent superior but his anguished equal" (217). However, Franco ultimately uses this leveling effect as a platform from which she urges her beloved city to change. By identifying herself with the city of Venice, Franco is further able to lay bare (pun intended) the republic's failure to live up to its image of equality.

Franco's affinity with Venice, while merely suggested in *Capitolo 3*, is made explicit in *Capitolo 12*, in which she faults a suitor's praise of Verona based on Franco's presence there. In addition to using the "obvious lies" of Petrarchism, the poet has paid tribute to the wrong city: "you might have turned your attention instead / to praising

Venice, the one and only / miracle and wonder of nature" (127). Franco's description of this distinctly urban center as part of nature is yet another step toward dissolving the separation between the two. The poem, which initially addresses the male poet of *Capitolo* 11, is interrupted by a brief ode to Venice, and Franco writes the verses that her admirer did not:

Looking at the sky from one side or the other,  
 we see that the sun moves all the way through it,  
 yet we still esteem most highly the east:  
 ...  
 so I, too, in this and any other voyage,  
 though without equaling myself to the sun,  
 think of you, dear Venice, as my east. (67-75)

In this poem Venice is both the speaker, in the guise of Franco, and the beloved. The final lines of the *capitolo*, in fact, completely reject the male poet, whose failure to fully understand Franco only reinforces her rejection of him: "I will delay my return as long as I can: / so much do I disdain your love for me!" (83-4). Though she claims to not identify herself as the sun, the speaker is nevertheless the sun to Venice's east. She returns to her commitment to Phoebus, who is the sun-god as well as the god of poetry, and Venus, with whom Venice's identity is closely connected—assuming the identities of both and implicitly linking the feminine with poetry. This poem leads the reader into the climactic mid-point of the volume in which she violently challenges those who would defame her as a poet and as a woman.

In *Capitolo* 13, Franco issues a call to arms against a lover she believes has slandered her, claiming the role of poetic woman warrior—a role that is reflected throughout the *Terze Rime* as she confronts an exclusive masculine literary tradition and continues to breach conventional gender boundaries. "No more words!" she exclaims, "To deeds, to the battlefield, to arms!" (1). Her language is in direct contrast to male-authored dialogues, in which "the image of dialogue as a battle fought with rhetorical weapons is part of a broader strategy to exclude women" (Smarr 11). However, in this case Franco not only adopts the masculine rhetoric of war but also challenges her male detractor to a physical battle: "The deceiving tongue that lies to do me harm / I will tear out by its root, after it's been bitten / against the palate with repentant teeth" (19-21). Her threat evokes the cultural injunctions against female speech, which associate a woman's tongue with sexual promiscuity and a general menace to social order. Franco re-assigns this danger to a male tongue, suggesting both the silencing and castration of her foe, a reading supported by her proposed battlefield. This confrontation, she declares, will take place in her bed, "which once was / the cherished shelter of my joys" (40-1), but now offers only "torment and grief" (42). Once again, Franco disregards limitations of gender by staging this masculine battle in her feminine bed. Comparing herself to a knight, Franco demands the opportunity to clear her name in a duel involving "the two of us alone" (56)—either through agreement or bloodshed. She then addresses her heart, imploring it to "hold firm" (88) and, upon slaying her betrayer, "end your agony with the same blade" (91). Her anger, however, presumably never reaches its culmination, because she receives a desperate plea in *Capitolo* 14 from her offender,<sup>17</sup>

begging for forgiveness, and ending the verse exchange of the *Terze Rime*. In choosing to end the first half of her text with the voice of a female warrior and the surrender of her male foe, Franco makes it clear to her reader that the female voice in one of power and authority.

The language of battle appears again in *Capitolo* 16, in her challenge to a poet who has insulted her in her absence. Unlike Franco, this poet cannot claim knightly honor when he sets about "with insidious and hidden weapons / to strike without warning an unarmed woman / and to deal her blows that mean her death" (7-9). She assures him that she, like any woman, can also fight—because she has been taught the skills necessary to do so. As she did the addressee in *Capitolo* 13, Franco "dare[s] to defy you to combat in the field / with a heart entirely aflame for revenge" (56-7), and she warns him again that, though a woman, she is as skilled a warrior as any man. Franco turns the poet's personal attack on her into an affront to "us all" (76), and she vows to "undertake to defend all women / against you, who despise them so / that rightly I'm not alone to protest" (79-81). As part of this defense, Franco asserts that "Feminine beauty is a gift from heaven, / intended to be a source of joy / to every man with a gentle heart" (85-87), once again taking on feminine and masculine traits as she combines this discussion of female beauty with the aggressive language of combat. This time, however, Franco emphasizes that this is a battle of words, unlike the bloody fight she envisioned in *Capitolo* 13, and she demonstrates that her skills with the weapons of verbal sparring far surpass those of the man who dared insult her or her sex.

Boasting of her poetic prowess, Franco confidently offers her opponent his choice of weapon, whether it be "the common language spoken in Venice" (113) or the Tuscan dialect, a "high or comic strain" (116) or "mock-heroic verse" (118). To her it does not matter: "I am equally happy with them all, / since I have learned them for exactly this purpose" (125-6). Franco's arrogance, though partly bravado stemming from anger, projects a self-confidence not often found in the works of either men or women and contrasts in particular with her self-deprecation in her dedicatory epistle. Her poetic voice has evolved at this point from a playful, yet gracious revision of Petrarchan love to a brazen, proto-feminist battle cry proclaiming her rhetorical skills. Twisting the metaphorical knife in her opponent's body of work, Franco goes on to critique the very poem that spawned her response: "'Verily unique,' among other things, you called me, / alluding to Veronica, my name" (139-40). Analyzing his choice of words, she refers to the dictionary definition of the word "unique," informing the poet that this word "is used in praise and esteem / by those who know; and whoever speaks otherwise / digresses from the true meaning of words" (154-6). Franco turns the insult back on its writer, revealing his ignorance and misuse of language—a great fault in a poet, whose trade is in words. She even questions his use of the term "prostitute" as an insult, because "either you imply that I'm not one of them, / or that among them some merit praise" (179-80). She apologizes if this is the case, although she knows that "in fact you are reproaching me" (188). Because of this, Franco reiterates her original challenge, calling on him to "make ready your paper and ink" (193) and accusing him of cowardice if he does not respond. However, as evidenced by his absence in Franco's volume, the poet's

response is not required—she has made her point and has publicly attacked his intelligence, skill, and masculinity in her verse. Franco shows herself to be more of a woman than he can hope to have and more of a man than he can hope to be. She knows that she is the victor in this battle, and, ceasing to acknowledge her attacker any longer, she returns to the topic of betrayed and unrequited love.

Again reversing Petrarchan gender roles in *Capitolo* 17, Franco addresses a "Faithless man" who has wronged her (4). She assures him that "my charm and my beauty, / whatever it may really be worth, / is still prized and valued by many noble souls" (10-2). Although she avoids assigning any monetary value to herself, Franco still alludes to her position as a commodity in these lines, while also reminding him of the competition that exists for her heart. She is the tortured Petrarchan lover who cannot convince herself to stop loving a man who hurts her: "Yet though you've certainly offended me too much, / I still live tied to you in a sweet knot, / which entangles me the more I try to loose it" (26-8). Here Franco returns to the image of the knot, but this time it is she who is bound rather than her lover. She is no longer the controlling force in the relationship, but this does not stop her from directly challenging this man who "dared to think of another woman / and to polish verses written in her praise" (32-3). The infidelity, Franco reveals, was not sexual, but literary—a betrayal that Franco deems nearly unforgivable. As a courtesan, she could not reasonably expect her lover to be physically monogamous, but his treachery in verse cannot be condoned. Her jealousy moves her to thoughts of violence: "The book you had written in, you hastily closed, / and I should have torn out your eyes with my hands" (43-4). This reaction serves to

reinforce the sincerity of her own poetry, even as she focuses on the words of another.

The book, which the man "hid in his breast" (64) as though it were his very heart, tortures the speaker so that, "all aflame with rage, I didn't give up / until I had grabbed the book from his breast, / and had read what was written there" (67-9). She effectively steals his heart, reading the painful evidence of his disloyalty. Unable to trust her lover's written words any longer, Franco demands to "see and speak to you in person" (115), so that "you answer me with your own mouth / and that you come in a few hours' time" (117-8). Throughout this poem, Franco conflates the material text with the male body, again placing herself in the position of masculine authority as the wielder of the phallic pen. She confiscates this power from her lover by taking the book in which he writes woman and by denying the weight of his written words in her demand for a face-to-face, oral explanation.

In addition to renouncing the power of a man's poetry, *Capitolo 17* marks a turning point in Franco's *Terze Rime*, in which the dialogue becomes a monologue, and only the female poet's voice is heard. The preceding *capitoli* gradually move from granting the male voice prominence (by placing Marco Venier's poem first in the volume) to demonstrating the female poet's ability to outmaneuver a male competitor (in her battle of words with Maffio Venier) to finally erasing the male voice altogether. Franco's strategy here assigns all literary authority to herself, and she takes advantage of her newly constructed position to further transgress and deconstruct other seemingly clear boundaries and create a more equitable and peaceful existence in the *Terze Rime*'s final four *capitoli*.

Reiterating the sentiment expressed in *Capitolo 3*, Franco again aligns herself with the city of Venice and conflates her abandoned home with a male beloved in *Capitolo 21*. The poet, "having fled far from my love" (4), immediately regrets her decision to leave, asking herself, "Can it really be true / that I am leaving this city and these seas / where my sun in his splendor dims all other lights?" (13-5). Her sorrow is again reflected in the empathy of nature and the mythological Echo, ensuring that her lost beloved will not be forgotten. In her admonition to herself, Franco assumes the identity of the deserting male lover:

Oh, how mindless and how self-deceptive  
 is the man who, though he could happily live  
 in the heart of his country, his beloved at his side,  
 goes on a search from one shore to another,  
 thinking perhaps that distance can be  
 a safe refuge from the blows of love!

Let a man flee, if he knows how;  
 the memory of his beloved always surrounds him;  
 indeed, he carries her image alive in his heart. (52-60)

Here Venice is the feminine beloved whom Franco has left behind. Because of her strong self-identification with her city, no distance is enough to separate the poet from her home, just as the Petrarchan lover cannot convince himself to stop loving his Laura. She also revises the Heroidean lament, again speaking as the departed male lover rather than the abandoned female beloved. Everywhere she looks she sees her beloved's face,

and, switching sexes once again, Franco notes that the stars in the sky "are not as numerous as the virtues of the man / who ruthlessly tears the soul from my breast" (71-2). Again, the poet conflates the beloved and the lover in the form of a man, her self, and her city in this *capitolo*. Not even nature herself can help her escape the memory of her lover-city, as Venice seems to have followed her to her country retreat. Far from her "light" (74), which continues to make her burn even from afar, Franco has but one recourse: "I write" (76). As the final action of this poem, this statement reaffirms Franco's talent as a poet, the authority of the text in the reader's hands, and her participation in the Venetian literary community. She also, by defiantly declaring herself a writer, joins the wider community of women writers who seek an equal voice in the early modern world.

Franco continues to lament her absence from Venice in *Capitolo 22*: "Since destiny forces me to go elsewhere, / oh, my beautiful home, with regret at leaving you / ...in memory I constantly come back to you, / oh, friendly and faithful refuge of my birth" (1-6). Her departure, she complains, was against her will, and she impatiently awaits the day that she will return once more to her beloved city. In this poem, Franco constructs a sharper distinction between country and city, listing the delights of her rural surroundings, but bemoans the fact that "all the things that art, nature, and heaven / with industrious hands have created here / are savage and foreign deserts to me" (22-4). Rather than sympathizing with her plight, nature now torments her with illusory images of the "vile man" (32) whose hold on her she seeks to break: "And I seem to see him, transforming himself / now into a beech tree, now a fir, now a pine, / now a laurel, now a

myrtle, into all sorts of shapes" (34-6). The poet realizes, as she does in *Capitolo 21*, that she cannot run away from her pain, because it follows her. In nature, however, she begins to see a different kind of love, one that does not cause suffering:

in the groves and woods, one senses Love,  
 driven from the company of men, among  
 the animals, which love each other equally;  
 mutual desire draws wild creatures  
 to the sweet invitation of love's delights,  
 with feeling shared equally between two hearts; (52-7)

In nature, love does not exist as a hierarchy, with one being holding power over the other. Franco sees among the animals the possibility of reciprocal love that results in harmony and joy, and she criticizes man's inability to allow the same kind of parity in his own relationships. She marvels that these creatures, over which God has granted man dominion, are able to experience such unity, while man, "endowed with reason and intellect" (63), is unable "to love without finding his beloved's heart / marked with desires that resist his own" (68-9). Franco concludes that, in love, "heaven opposes women / more than men, for women feel / almost nothing in love except pain" (70-2). She blames this on women's weak nature—a surprising shift in perspective following Franco's bold stance in the preceding *capitoli*. However, read in a broader context, Franco's words make a strong argument on women's behalf.

After describing Cupid's power over the female heart, Franco writes of the danger this poses to women's lives:

And the less freedom we possess,  
 the more blind desire, leading us astray  
 will find a way to penetrate our hearts.

So a woman either dies of love,  
 or escapes from our shared constraint  
 and goes far astray for a slight mistake.

The less she has the habit of freedom,  
 the greater heights of fury she'll reach  
 if Love once violently breaks those bonds; (79-87)

Within the context of the poem, these lines simply document the injustices of love.

However, Franco's repeated use of the word "freedom" (*libertà*) and her emphasis on its absence in the lives of women suggests a larger argument against the cultural restrictions that confine her sex. *Libertà* denotes "liberty," a very specific kind of freedom: freedom from external governmental or religious control, and/or freedom from physical restraint (OED). It is here that Franco uses her construction of Venice as the lover/beloved as a tool to criticize the city's many inequalities. Just as man suffers because of his failure to achieve parity in love, so, too, does peace elude Venice because of the inequities it imposes upon its citizens. Franco becomes the great defender, warning her city, "even if I must suffer great injury, / no argument used to fight against you, / thankless lover, discourages me or weighs me down" (94-6). The poet's strong words contradict her previous description of woman's inherent weakness, and she once again assumes a position of bold authority as she writes.

Describing her idyllic surroundings, Franco refers again to the act of writing: "Here I have come, where the meadow is green / and the brook is clear, and I speak and write / of the sweet waves' roar and the singing birds" (100-2). This beautiful scene provides no joy for the poet, however, because the perfect love that she sees in nature only serves as a reminder of her own tortured love. She again envies Nature's lesser creatures, who "[go] freely together without any fear / wherever Love leads them on" (130-1). This freedom in love is also experienced in the daily lives of these animals: "Nothing deprives them of their joy / but their highest delight grows ever greater; / so I am slain by envy, mixed with grief" (133-5). Venice's class hierarchies prevent any freedom in love, as individuals are limited by their social status and their parents' wishes—all of this in addition to the risk of not having one's love returned. Franco, in contrast to the creatures around her, *is* deprived of joy—as much in her rural retreat as in her beloved Venice. Neither of these opposing scenes offers her any comfort, as both are equally cruel. The source of the city's cruelty, however, is "the hatred of that man" (153), from whom Franco has fled. Her pain is caused by thoughts of the man, while her memories of Venice bring her pleasure. The poet describes with longing the urban magnificence she has left behind:

...that tranquil and beautiful Adria,  
unequaled by any other land  
in whatever adorns a heaven on earth:  
from those gold, marble mansions and sculptured stones,  
so raised on the waters that the quiet sea

turns back to contemplate such beauty; (154-9)

Even Nature herself cannot help but admire Venice's splendor. Franco goes on to imagine her Venetian paradise as central to life itself: "Everything the universe contains / that is useful and needed for human life / is transported here from the whole universe" (178-80). Why, she wonders, did I leave such a place behind? It was, she realizes, "to fulfill and appease the will of another" (199), echoing her warning in Letter 22 that the courtesan is subject to the will of man. She is determined to stop this unnecessary suffering by returning to her home—refusing to allow a man to dictate her place in the world. Franco concludes this poem with an apology to Venice, assuring her beloved that "even though an hour seems like a century, / in a few short hours I hope to return" (234-5).

Return she does—with a vengeance. In *Capitolo 23*, Franco seeks advice from a man "to whom the forms of duels and honor are known" (11). She longs for revenge against "a certain indiscreet man" (3) who has defamed her, but she worries that she would only "debase myself by honoring with my scorn / a man who deserves not even a thought" (29-30). At the same time, though, she fears that this man's speech, if left unchecked, will only encourage others, like insects, to "[buzz] in chorus with his rough voice" (60). Her return to the rhetoric of war and armed battle suggests that Franco is again referring to Maffio Venier, whose slanderous verse posed a great threat to her honor. She once again accuses the offender of cowardice, for his attacks were made in her absence rather than directly to her face. The poet's anger and desire for self-preservation drives her to seek to physically harm the man, but she also asks, "Shall I

really commit the foul error / of soiling these hands of mine with that blood, / infected with malice and cowardice both?" (172-4). Responding to him, she knows, will only put her on the same low level, and she wants to be better than that. However, her honor is at stake. For the first time, Franco finds that her pen is not as powerful as she had thought: "Silence is bad, / but action is worse. Oh, useless words of mine!" (176-7). In this poem, Franco's masculine and feminine personas are at war with each other. As a woman and a courtesan, her honor is her most valuable possession. But her desire to overcome the restrictions imposed upon her feminine self compels her to take on the role of the male aggressor in defense of herself. Significantly, Franco does not write to her friend seeking protection—she is confident in her ability to act as her own protector.

Franco's final solution to her dilemma is not revealed. Instead, *Capitolo 24* offers advice to a man who is rumored to have "offended an innocent woman / with your sharp tongue and ill-disposed heart" (26-7). He also is said to have "threatened her mightily / and swore that you would slash her face, / naming the day and the hour you'd do it" (34-6). This unnamed women may, in fact, be Franco, but the poet's decision to speak from outside of the situation confers upon her an authority that she would not have if she responded as the injured woman. By offering unsolicited advice to a man—a nobleman—Franco transgresses both gender and class boundaries. She also offers *all* of her gentlemen readers a model for how they should treat women, turning her defense of one woman into a vindication of women in general.

Franco is careful in her *capitolo* to give the gentleman in question the benefit of the doubt. Citing his "virtue" and "honorable deeds," she assures him that "I cease to

believe what I was told" (41-42). But, understanding how anger can affect a person—as we have seen in the previous poem—she persists in offering her guidance. If anger caused you to act inappropriately, she counsels, do not persist in this behavior. Instead, "admit / how far you overstepped the bounds of duty" (50-1). Abusing women in this way, she asserts, is the antithesis of gentlemanly behavior. The female sex, which is "always / subjected and without freedom" (56-7), suffers enough injustice. "But this has certainly been no fault of ours," she continues, "because, if we are not as strong as men, / like men we have a mind and intellect" (58-60). Identifying a separation of mind and body, Franco disassociates gender and intellectual abilities. At the same time, Franco again exposes the unwarranted inequalities imposed upon women in early modern Venetian society, and she argues that, in fact, women are superior to men "in the vigor of the soul and mind" (62).

Men continue to believe that they hold power over women, Franco reveals, only because women allow them to think that they do. If women chose to, they could easily demonstrate their pre-eminence, but this would have dire consequences:

But human offspring would cease to exist  
if woman, determined to prevail in the duel,  
were as harsh and cruel as man deserves.

To not ruin the world, which our species  
makes so beautiful, woman is silent  
and submits to tyrannical, wicked man  
who then so enjoys having power to rule... (85-91)

Men are aware of this delicate balance, Franco writes, which is why women are treated as such treasures—dressed in the most luxurious fabrics, adorned with the most precious jewels, and treated with "reverence" by men (103). This interpretation of women's dress is particularly interesting. Of course, only noblewomen and courtesans dressed in such finery, and these lines effectively equate these two classes of Venetian women. Rather than identifying such displays of wealth as a representation of the greatness of Venice and its men, Franco views Venetian women's beautiful clothing as a sign of men's great respect for them, "their highly placed treasure" (99). Although she uses the language of monetary exchange, Franco actually appropriates the word "treasure" and redefines it in opposition to the idea of women as commodities. The women are not part of the garish displays of wealth that Venetian authorities seek to regulate, and they do not participate in an "exchange of women." Instead, in this vision of Venice as a sort of feminist utopia women are rightfully honored for their "excellent wisdom" (100). Franco seems to include all classes in her imagined group of women, and she perhaps offers this as an alternative to the "real" world described in Letter 22 and in her wills.

Returning her attention to the poem's addressee, Franco cites the previous discussion as evidence that "attacking women is an obvious sin" (117). She implores him to "cease your offenses from now on, / cease your disdain, and all the more / since this is behavior unfit for a nobleman" (124-6). Further, any man who "enters into contention with women" (135) will only suffer humiliation and ruin. In this line, Franco speaks of women again as a collective, suggesting a sisterhood against which men are powerless. She also echoes Christine de Pizan's Lady Reason, who states that "any evil

spoken of women so generally only hurts those who say it, not women themselves" (8).

Additionally, Franco's reminders of the appropriate behavior of a gentleman suggests this as his "natural" behavior as well, and she again agrees with Lady Reason's assertion that man's poor treatment of women "does not come from Nature, but rather is contrary to Nature" (16). As she does throughout the *Terze Rime*, the poet directs her response to a single man toward all men as a lesson in women's moral and intellectual superiority.

*Capitolo* 24 concludes with Franco again hoping that the rumors she has heard about her friend are untrue, but she assures him of her faith that, if he has offended this woman, he "will amend the error unworthy of you" (159). Rather than expressing herself in anger, as she wishes to do in *Capitolo* 23, Franco's tactic is to show this man and all men the worth of women, thereby shaming men for their harsh treatment of the "weaker sex." This approach no doubt elicits a more favorable response, and her move toward a peaceful resolution prepares the reader for the *Terze Rime*'s final poem, in which Franco presents her vision of an ideal society.

Franco concludes the *Terze Rime* with a country-house poem in praise of Count Marcantonio Della Torre's villa in Verona. Like Aemilia Lanyer's later poem, "The Description of Cooke-ham," Franco's praise takes the form of a lament for her physical separation from this place. The estate becomes, like Venice was once before, the absent beloved, whose beauty, having been experienced and then taken away, torments the speaker's memory. In a dramatic geographical shift from her previous poems, the speaker finds herself at home in Venice, remembering with longing this rural estate, which is now a permanent part of her: "I have that fair site always before my eyes, / and

though absent from it in body, / in my mind I still dwell there, never departing" (19-21).

As did her absence from Venice, Franco's distance from Della Torre's villa causes her to experience mixed emotions, with which she struggles in her attempt to honor this place of dreams:

In this state, I take up my pencil in ready hand  
and to satisfy my longing, I depict  
that place as truthfully as I can:

And though I know that I undertake a great task,  
drawn onward by my own desire,  
without art I paint and draw what I know. (34-9)

Once again, the poet draws the reader's attention to her poetic skill, although she emphasizes that she writes without artifice and represents only what is real. Though she describes Della Torre's estate, Fumane, as her source of inspiration and as a subject whose beauty surpasses her ability as a writer, Franco actually appropriates Fumane from its owner, transforming it into a mirror of her own poetic talents.

Because her words invest Della Torre and his estate with greatness, she effectively takes ownership of the property—a privilege that, in general, early modern women were not afforded. Franco privileges her voice above Della Torre's social status and invests with authority the description of a world without socially-constructed boundaries and hierarchies that follows. Marveling at the “flowering and joyful beauty / nature there displays and unfolds” (40-41), Franco constructs nature as blessed by God: “Heaven, favoring such a work, / pours down unendingly the greatest fame / of

containing every good and joy in the world" (46-48). As a feminine noun, "nature" (*la natura*) emphasizes its association with women, and Franco's repetition of the estate's sacred status implicitly imbues the feminine with divinity. Fumane's natural beauty reveals both the limitations and the possibilities of artistic creation. The natural beauty of this place, she writes, far exceeds "the imagination in every human art" (52). Franco constructs this rural retreat as another Eden: "In this blessed, loving countryside / the ornaments of heaven appear on earth, / and descend to make it a paradise" (61-3). These "ornaments of heaven" allude to the "highly placed treasure" that is Venetian women. Like the stars, the female presence imbues their city with magnificence. Her extended description of the estate's incredible physical beauty supports this comparison to Paradise, and she incorporates pagan gods into this Christian sanctuary with ease, removing yet another line of separation.

Presenting her description of Fumane as a walking tour similar to Whitney's "Wyll," Franco first ascends a hill "[a]s if mounting a staircase, a step at a time" (67), though it gradually becomes "easier and less steep" (69). The gently curving landscape is, in fact, designed "so that Phoebus is not kept from entering, / as soon as he has risen from the east, / the dewy and yielding meadow of grass" (76-8). Here nature is compared to a female body which controls the masculine god's access, much as Franco claims the power to control her lover's access to her own body:

The sun penetrates, as far as he's allowed,  
a wood of lofty pine and cypress,  
full of shadows welcome in the long, hot day,

and he delights in seeing, among the trees,  
 his beloved, once human, now a mass of leaves,  
 once arms and hair, now thick green branches,  
 where he enters as deeply as he can and hides,  
 moved by the memory, still kept in his heart,  
 of the deep wounds caused in him by love. (79-87)

This feminine space, like Franco's earlier description of the countryside, is both a refuge from and a reminder of lost love. Phoebus and Franco are both victims of Cupid's arrow—doomed to be tormented by unrequited love. She again identifies with the god of poetry, transgressing gender boundaries in her verse, but she is also the feminine space in which nature and the female body become one in an erotic embrace. In this scenario, “[t]he nymph’s cruel fate draws Apollo, / pitiful, to her welcoming branches / and he rests tenderly upon the grass” (88-90). Both Phoebus and Daphne are victims of a hierarchy of love in which the male god feels compelled to possess his female object of desire—a version of love that Franco later condemns as distinctly *unnatural*.

Describing the estate’s natural abundance, Franco imagines “laughing fountains” (109) of water whose “diverse paths...join together” in perfect harmony (113). She characterizes this cooperative relationship as the result of “nature’s art” (115), and the united streams “offer themselves in sweet tribute / to a blooming, pleasant garden” (120-21). Here the reader is introduced to “the gardener” (124), who possesses the power of nature and directs the water’s flow into “the glory of the garden’s artifice” (128). “Art does not yield to nature” (127), we are told, and the reader’s eye is directed to “a palace /

as beautiful as the Sun's, sung in poets' verse" (131-32). The verse to which Franco refers may be Ovid's sketch of Apollo's palace, but, having firmly established her own poetic voice at this point, she may also be highlighting her own role in instilling Della Torre's estate with the unsurpassed beauty that she describes. Though she briefly identifies the Canon—"the gardener"—as "a talented man" (126) who can control the natural world, Franco's statement that "Art does not yield to nature" suggests her own poetic art and ability to "create" the natural world, as she does in this final *capitolo*. Just as Ovid's verse bestows upon Apollo's palace its famed splendor, so too does Franco's description of Fumane. Della Torre's "palace is worth an infinite treasure" (133) and "has no equal in richness and beauty" (135). Her description of the splendor of Della Torre's villa and nature's veneration of it echoes her praise of Venice in *Capitolo 22*, constructing the "palace" as a symbol of the city's union with the countryside. Although this incredible structure is a creation of man rather than nature, with its "fine marbles and polished porphyry, / cornices, arches, columns, carvings, and friezes, / figures, perspectives, gold and silver" (136-8), the villa enhances rather than competes with the beauty of its rural surroundings.

Franco's descriptions of the interior of the house are as exquisite as those of the garden, and the villa's elements work together to create an equally harmonious and perfect setting. The gods, nymphs, and animals found in nature are found again in the villa in even greater number, represented in the rich tapestries and bed covers that adorn its chambers. On the bed's "covers and curtains" (155) are depicted more tales from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In particular, the selected stories focus on "enamored gods...in

pursuit of nymphs" (157-58). These divine men, "with faces colored by passionate love, / eager, they pursue their desires" (160-61). The women's only means of escape is transformation "into diverse shapes" (159). Franco's extended account of these scenes again calls attention to the active male lover who seeks to dominate (often through rape) the passive female beloved. Caught up in the magnificence that encircles her, Franco marvels that mankind's ability to create is on par with that of Nature and of God:

How powerful is our human invention,  
which can bring depicted things to life  
by means of color and design!

In the tapestries that adorn these rooms,  
made of silk and gold and multicolored wool,  
imitation surpasses things that really exist. (178-83)

Again, in her praise of other arts, Franco draws attention to her own and reiterates her earlier suggestion that the beauty of Fumane is no comparison to her poetic "imitation." Balancing the pagan imagery in the house are "the portraits of those / who sustain the blessed entrance to heaven" (200-1), making this "heavenly residence...resemble paradise" (204-5). The house once more mirrors the Eden in which it sits, and the boundaries that separate man and nature, urban and rural begin to dissipate.

Franco goes on to enact a complete erasure of these boundaries in the poem as she remembers her own experience visiting this divine dwelling. She recalls "[l]ingering on the white marble balcony" (229), admiring the natural world and being spellbound by the nightingale's song. Alluding to Philomela's and Procne's earlier empathy for the

poet's sorrow, Franco now reverses roles and experiences compassion for the mournful women. This time it is the crying sisters who elicit nature's response:

from the fountains this and that little brook  
came to listen, and, murmuring,  
seemed to accompany them in their weeping.

Soon after, singing in high, sweet harmony,  
the birds fluttered in the green branches,  
revealing the power of their love.

Oh, what happy complaints, oh what laments  
they addressed to heaven, as does the person  
who, loved by one, strongly loves another! (235-42)

Unlike the *Terze Rime*'s other *capitoli*, this poem depicts nature as a soothing force.<sup>18</sup> Whereas Franco's earlier experiences in nature only served to exacerbate her love wounds, here she is reminded of the joys that can be found when one is "tightly bound to the sides of those they love" (249). The knot of love now provides comfort and pleasure rather than the pain described in the preceding poems.

The rural environment has become a source of contentment, inspiring the poet to see even more of the beauties it offers, as one lovely sight directs the eye to another. Franco, for a moment, emphasizes the distinction between the world "outside the palace" (269). "But then," she writes, "inside, art displays such skill / that it equals and outdoes nature" (271-2). Ann Rosalind Jones argues that Franco's description "attributes the villa's beauty to art more than to nature: heavenly order, 'the source of art in all lovely

things,' has shaped the landscape" ("Designing Women" 142). However, I propose that, as she does with class and gender distinctions, Franco actually equalizes the two—art and nature become one and each depends upon the other for subsistence. Without nature, Franco implies, artists would have little to imitate, and, without art, nature's true beauty may never be revealed. Turning her attention to the house, Franco finds that its splendor, like that of the garden, draws the eye from one delightful sight to another and increases her desire for more. She becomes the subject rather than the object of the gaze, and her desire mirrors that of her male lover.

However, rather than seeking to possess the beauty that she sees, Franco is content to admire it and enjoy the pleasure that it freely offers. But her feeling of insatiability also serves a greater purpose:

We feel this great lack of satisfaction  
for a particular reason: that, by philosophizing,  
we may contemplate the divine intellect.

Divine truth leaves in the struggling mind  
an ever stronger love for itself,  
through which man draws perfection from physical things,  
though the struggle is such that at every moment  
it frees our spirit further from earthly mire,  
and gives it wings, at last, to fly to heaven. (283-91)

The beauty that surrounds us, she argues, reminds us of our heavenly creator and inspires us to pursue intellectual and creative endeavors. These deeds, in turn, will bring us spiritual enlightenment.

Franco goes on to trace the path of the eye as it responds to the many wonderful sights that it encounters. Even as she praises the exquisite beauty of the garden's "every well-kept and neatly planted part" (309), Franco narrates the uncontrolled activity of the animals that populate the grounds. However, these elements are not in conflict with one another. In fact, their coexistence actually serves to make Fumane's beauty all the more perfect. The descriptions that follow document the many ways that humans and nature interact in harmony with each other. It is in this space that Franco finally finds reciprocal love between a man and a woman as she watches a shepherd and shepherdess tend their flocks:

Sometimes the shepherdess he loves arrives,  
attracted by the sound of his panpipe,  
in a way that increases his desire:  
  
he keeps his eyes fixed avidly  
on her arms and bare breast and beautiful face,  
and he can barely refrain from embracing her. (364-9)

The shepherd does not pine woefully for a woman who does not return his love. Rather, he eagerly takes in her beauty, mesmerized by her form. Intruding hunters, though they turn his gaze, become yet another glorious sight for both the shepherd and the poet. While this intrusion appears to divert the shepherd from his desire to hold his beloved in

his arms, there is never the suggestion that he seeks to possess or rule the shepherdess. Instead, he, like Franco, is content to appreciate the delight that her beauty offers even as it inspires in him a desire for more.

Following the many vivid description of the wonders of this place, the focus once again returns to the poet. She laments her inability to capture in words the true splendor of Della Torre's villa, which is only surpassed by her failure to sufficiently honor Della Torre himself: "I would like, although I hardly know how, / to speak in praise of the lord who owns you, / but no human style can rise so high" (457-9).<sup>19</sup> However, she attributes the beauty of this "most serene and agreeable countryside" (468) to the presence of this man, without whom the estate "would doubtless be / deprived of everything that gives you value" (470-1). At this point, man again holds dominion over nature, and Della Torre becomes like Apollo:

To encounter his noble footsteps,  
 the little grasses and flowers grow high,  
 for at his touch new beauty adorns and renews them;  
 and, ready to wash his honored hands,  
 fresh water enters his room and seems  
 always to long to follow close behind him. (478-83)

The natural world reacts to Della Torre's presence as though he were a god, a power that has been bestowed by Apollo (508), giving the Canon "command / over the elements, which, on his estate, / perform as much as he requires" (514-6). The plants and streams are his servants, eager to fulfill his every requirement. This man's nobility matches that

of his country home, and his presence, along with the "delightful pleasures" (538) of his estate, once eased Franco of "all the grave and troubled thoughts / that came with me when I left Adria" (536-7). As a poet seeking patronage, Franco is both a master and a servant to her addressee. Her verse increases his fame and excellence, but her ability to write her verse depends upon his financial support.

Significantly, Franco's final evidence of the greatness of both Della Torre and his estate is his "household of well-trained servants, / ready to wait on their lord from all sides" (545-46). Though they are "of various ages and shades of hair [and] dressed alike, they obey him as one" (548-49). She describes this "handsome livery" (551) as "another noble sight" (550) for Della Torre to enjoy, and their devotion and splendid appearance reflect the Canon's own nobility. In a sense, Franco here reverses the roles of master and servant in the same way that she places herself as poet above her social superior. The suggestion is that the servants' outward obedience and fine appearance invest Fumane with its pre-eminence. Della Torre's country retreat is so "unique and beloved" (553) that Franco exclaims, "let Baia and Pozzuoli cease to boast, / for lovely Fumane contains within / all the heavenly graces attributed to them" (556-58). Jones and Rosenthal note that "Baia and Pozzuoli were Neapolitan villas praised in the poetry of Luigi Tansillo" (Franco 283 n.53). So, even as Franco declares Fumane to be greater than these other estates, she also claims her own superior poetic skill. It is not the villa that "boasts," of course, but the poet who writes in praise of it. Franco's *Capitolo 25* is Fumane, for its verse creates the estate's reputation. Therefore, it is *her* poem that

"contains within / all the heavenly graces" that have previously been recognized in the work of other (male) poets.

Although the perfection of Fumane once provided such sublime comfort, now that the poet is no longer there, she feels that "the more I speak of it, the less I praise it" (563). Thinking of this paradise enflames her with desire, much as Venice and her former lover did in the earlier poems. Franco's passion for this rural haven is inspired by the absolute equality she witnessed there—the divisions between country and city, man and woman, courtesan and nobleman ceased to exist, and the harmony that she seeks throughout the *Terze Rime* is finally achieved. Franco claims the incapacity to adequately represent this utopia, and she brings the *capitolo* and the *Terze Rime* to a close: "Flying in thought, I tie my tongue in a knot" (565). Revisiting the image of the love knot a final time, Franco places it not around the heart but around her own tongue. In her earlier descriptions of this knot, the individual bound by it was a prisoner of love. In these scenarios, love is represented as a hierarchy in which one person holds power over another, and the bound individual is powerless to change his or her place. Franco's *capitoli* gradually lead the reader from this version of love to the harmonious relationships found in nature and at Fumane—the latter being what the poet deems perfect love and perfect equality. Through the equalizing effect of her praise of Fumane, Franco also deconstructs the other power hierarchies depicted in the *Terze Rime*: the male poet's threat to the autonomy of Franco's pen and the male-authored text's power to undermine her sense of self worth and her faith in the written word. In her final lines, Franco silences her poetic voice, not because of the outside influence of patriarchal rule,

but as a testament to her own self-control. She alone rules her tongue, and, by extension, her pen.

Isabella Whitney and Veronica Franco both emphasize economic disparities in their criticism of gender hierarchies, providing further evidence of Constance Jordan's assertion that early modern "woman" constituted a discrete economic class. Like Christine de Pizan, both writers assert their authority through their personal experiences of the social inequities that they describe. Though their freedom from men (as single women) provided them with the opportunity to write, both Whitney and Franco acknowledged the vulnerability that accompanied such independence. At the same time, both required the assistance of a man (or men) in order to publish their work, and the unrestrained criticism of their respective cultures posed a threat to the continuation of such support. Following in the tradition of Christine and other defenders of women, Whitney and Franco expose the constructed nature of social identities, presenting their works as a mirror in which their readers can identify their own complicity in creating the hidden or ignored destitution and desperation so prevalent in London and Venice.

Marie de Romieu, a baker's daughter in the rural French region of Vivarais, seems to have been insulated from such scenes, though her "Brief Discourse: That Woman's Excellence Surpasses Man's" suggests that she was not as cut off from the urban literary salons of Paris, Lyon, and Poitiers as one might expect. Adhering to a more conventional genre of the *querelle des femmes*, the catalogue of exemplary women, Romieu participates in and revises the popular and male-dominated literary trend of the paradox. She reveals her familiarity with contemporary French women writers, and, like

Christine de Pizan, Romieu rewrites women's history in her construction of the woman writer as an authority.

## Notes

1. This fact has been noted by a number of critics, including Sara Maria Adler in "Veronica Franco's Petrarchan *Terze Rime*: Subverting the Master's Plan." Gabriel Niccoli, in "Autobiography and Fiction in Veronica Franco's Epistolary Narrative," argues that Franco's identity as a courtesan actually complicates the way we read her: "This may determine a priori either a negative attitude, based on moralistic preconceptions, or an excess of enthusiasm, which is equally of uncritical nature, as it may well derive from the admiration for a free, unashamed and libertine conduct both in public and in private" (129-30). While Niccoli makes a good point, I think that Franco herself makes it impossible to separate courtesan from poet in her work. In fact, throughout both the *Terze Rime* and the *Lettere familiari*, Franco deliberately challenges her readers' preconceptions of the poet as woman and courtesan in the same way that she challenges culturally-accepted hierarchies of class and gender.
2. Michael Rocke observes, "Women at lower social levels, who generally lacked this powerful familial protection, had greater exposure to males and more freedom in their daily lives; for them, the conventions regarding virginity and chastity were probably somewhat less rigid" (152). Lower-class women, however, were still expected to marry—especially in the event of pregnancy; and the prescriptions for sexual behavior were still fairly rigid, particularly in comparison to that of men of all classes.
3. Adler argues that Franco's subversion of Petrarch and Petrarchism "is clearly the work of a dissident," however, she was part of "a groundswell of avant-garde

Petrarchans who were exploding the codes and transgressing against the rules of the dominant cultural language. With these others, Veronica was at the margins, and outsider" (228). And so too, I would add, were Whitney, Romieu, and Lanyer, who similarly revised and adopted dominant literary traditions as part of their cultural resistance.

4. A Venetian senate decree from 21 February 1542 states, "The term 'whore' [*meretrice*] shall be understood to refer to those women who, being unmarried, have dealings and intercourse [*comercio et praticha*] with one man or more. It shall also apply to those who have husbands and do not live with them, but are separated from them and have dealings [*comercio*] with one man or more" (Chambers et al. 127). Though Chambers translates *comercio* as "dealings," the noun also connotes "commerce"—characterizing all female sexual relations outside of marriage as an economic transaction whether she receives payment or not. As a verb, *comercio* is the first person singular indicative of the verb *commerciare* ("to sell"), and the phrase *commerciare* translates as "traffic in." So, if I may return to Gayle Rubin's discussion of marriage and kinship relations as a "traffic in women," this decree suggests that women are always objects of trade. Even women who entered a convent were often sent there by their fathers, who could not or did not want to pay the higher price of a dowry.
5. See Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros* and "Marriage, Love, Sex, and Renaissance Morality"; Sennett; Jones, *The Currency of Eros*; Quaintance; and Rosenthal, "Venetian Women Writers and their Discontents."

6. Of course, this placed the female prostitute and courtesan in a position of sexual power, which, as Ruggiero points out, "fitted only easily with the sexual stereotypes of society. This is yet another reason why the governments of the Italian city-states were so concerned to discipline prostitution effectively" ("Marriage" 26).
7. While chastity and fidelity were not necessarily expected of men, their masculine identity relied on equally specific characteristics, as Michael Rocke notes: "Masculine identity did not, however, lie in the double standard that allowed men the sexual freedoms denied in women, but also in conventions that identified manliness solely with a dominant role in sex. In this regard, males' sexual and gendered norms were as rigid as those imposing chastity on females" (153). Men also had strict economic rules imposed upon them, as I discuss later in this chapter.
8. Castiglione's Count Ludovico defines sprezzatura as the ability "to conceal all art and make whatever is done or said appear to be without effort and almost without any thought about it" (32). This skill allows the courtier to exhibit grace in all things.
9. The following restrictions were named in the senate decree of 21 February 1542: "BE IT [THEREFORE] DETERMINED that, whilst in all respects the decrees already adopted concerning the clothing of women and the adornment of houses shall be confirmed, no whore living in Venice may dress in, or wear on any part of her person, gold, silver or silk, except for her coif, which may be of pure silk; and such women may not wear necklaces [cadenelle], pearls, or rings with or without stones, either in their ears or in any other imaginable place, so that gold and silver and silk

and the use of jewels of any kind shall be forbidden to them, whether at home or outside, and even outside this city.

They may not keep in their houses any furnishing forbidden by law, and furthermore they may not have any furnishings of silk, or arrases, or upholstery, or bench-covers, or leathers of any kind, but only cloths of Bergamo or Brescia, and these must be plain and have no patterns [destagi] cut upon them. Those who break this rule in any respect shall forfeit the goods and pay 100 ducats for each offence..." (Chambers et al. 127).

10. These measures were as follows: "1. that all whores that have come to live here in the past two years shall be expelled; 2. that whores shall not be permitted to live near churches; 3. that they shall not be allowed to go to churches at the times when there are frequented by women of good and respectable standing; 4. that they may not keep in their service girls or serving-women aged thirty years or less; 5. that travelling female servants, until they find a place to live, may lodge only in the house of some woman of good reputation, and one such person shall be appointed in every parish, as shall seem best" (Chambers, Pullan, and Fletcher 126-7).

11. Richard Sennett explores the similarities between prostitutes and Jews, both groups of "alien bodies" that were segregated from the rest of the population. Further, he notes, "the city sought to draw a special connection between prostitutes and Jews, by making them both wear yellow clothing or badges" (240).

12. The gendering of urban space in Italy is discussed at length by Robert C. Davis in "The Geography of Gender in the Renaissance": "Linked with an enduring

'Mediterranean' culture whose roots reached back to well before classical Athens, such social traditions in Renaissance Italy saw the public realm—the guild halls and taverns, the main streets and piazzas—as the appropriate male sphere; while to women were allotted the household, local neighbourhoods and parish churches, and the convent—all of those urban areas most 'identified with the private, domestic, and sacred roles that women were expected to play in society'" (19-20).

13. Margaret Rosenthal makes this connection in *The Honest Courtesan* (77-78).
14. Franco, like many early modern women, feared and prepared for death in childbirth.
15. In the will, Franco identifies Jacomo di Baballi as the child's father.
16. Extended discussions of Franco's subversion of Petrarchan conventions can be found in Adler, "Veronica Franco's Petrarchan *Terze Rime*: Subverting the Master's Plan" and Rosenthal, *The Honest Courtesan*.
17. Margaret Rosenthal notes that author of the poems attacking Franco has been identified as Maffio Venier, although Franco initially thought they were written by her lover, Marco Venier. Rosenthal suggests that this error was encouraged by Dominico Venier as an "opportunity for Franco to enter into an interesting and entertaining poetic debate" (155). *Capitolo 14* was written by a very confused Marco, who did not know about Maffio's poems (189-90).
18. Adler notes that this is also a reversal of Petrarchan convention, in which "a major source of victimization is that which is beautiful and pleasing in this life" (224).

19. The unworthiness of Franco's love here, as Adler observes, echoes Petrarch's for Laura, as does Della Torre's attractiveness—"but, contrary to her, his role is that of a wholly accessible source of comfort" (225).

## CHAPTER IV

### IMITATION AND CREATION: MARIE DE ROMIEU'S (RE)LOCATING OF POWER AND AUTHORITY WITHIN WOMEN

Of the four writers included in this study, we know the least about French poet Marie de Romieu, whose biography, like Isabella Whitney's, is drawn primarily from her writing. The title page of her only published volume of poetry, *Les Premières œuvres poétiques de la Mademoiselle Marie de Romieu, Vivaroise* (1581),<sup>1</sup> identifies her as a resident of Viviers, which lies the southeastern French region of Vivarais (the modern Ardèche).<sup>2</sup> Like Whitney, Marie de Romieu was the sister of a better known male poet, Jacques de Romieu, who takes it upon himself to present her work to a noblewoman in order to obtain patronage and access to court circles. This fact has led critics to question Marie's agency, her authorship, and even her existence. However, while on the surface, Marie de Romieu may appear to be an unwitting participant in her brother's social ambitions, within her *Premières œuvres poétiques* one finds that she actually exhibits considerable control over the presentation of her poetic persona(e) and the messages contained within the volume.

Though only a handful of scholars have taken notice of Marie de Romieu's work, their responses have differed dramatically. Observing that Marie de Romieu's "Brief Discours que l'excellence de la femme surpassé celle de l'homme, autant recreatif que plein de beaux exemples" is the only poem in her *Premières œuvres poétiques* which has received significant scholarly attention, Margaret Harp writes, "Largely derivative of the Italian Renaissance and French Pléiade traditions, Romieu's writing is not considered

today to have significant literary merit but does reveal an enthusiasm for the cultural and humanist concerns of the day. Her choice of translations and adaptations reveals a keen interest in the role of women” (480). She asserts that Romieu “rarely attempts to establish her own narrative voice on issues of love, marriage, or life in general, as do her [French] female predecessors. Instead, she prefers to imitate what she considers the best poetry, whether by men or women” (480). Harp all but dismisses Romieu’s work, contending that her “love poetry serves, first as a means to describe her patron’s love for others, and second as a translation exercise” (480). Given the fact that much early modern poetry was “derivative” of a number of literary traditions, Harp’s response to Romieu’s work seems a bit hasty—though she does give marginal credit to the poet’s humanist “enthusiasm” as well as her “keen interest” in women.

Claude La Charité, perhaps the most prolific critic of Romieu’s work, also views her “Brief Discours” as a faithful translation of her source texts. He posits that “the almost nonexistent restructuring [of her source texts in her “Brief Discours”] shows...that Marie de Romieu does not have the means to make her own voice heard, if it is not to establish her own list of French female authors...or to found her argument upon personal experience” [“la quasi-inexistence des remaniements prouve...que Marie de Romieu n’a pas les moyens de faire entendre sa voix propre, si ce n’est pour établir son propre palmarès d’auteurs féminins français...ou de fonder son argumentation sur son expérience personnelle”] (“Ce Male Vers” 83).<sup>3</sup> Marian Rothstein argues, on the other hand, that, in the “Brief Discours,” Romieu’s voice “is distinctly that of a woman” and that “she takes Estienne’s dispassionately expressed arguments to heart; her version

conveys a sense of sincere outrage at, for example, the accusation that it is women who lead men astray" (139). In the only published in-depth analysis of Romieu's "Brief Discours," Anne R. Larsen asserts that the poem "is a feminist refashioning of Estienne's declamation and Lando's paradoxical encomium, differing considerable from these in ethos and in style (768). Noting Romieu's use of the "narrative 'I'" and her omissions of material found in her sources, she claims that "such a reading of Romieu's text alongside the men's brings out significant gender and political differences" (768).

While Lando's *Paradossi*, first published in Lyon in 1543, made the paradox fashionable in France, it was Charles Estienne's 1553 adaptation, *Paradoxes, ce sont propos contre la commune opinion*, that inspired the many French imitators that followed and had enjoyed nine printings by the time that Marie de Romieu's *Les premières œuvres poétiques* was published in 1581. Larsen observes that, instead of a paradox, which "generally plays at reversing received opinion" (764), Estienne writes a *declamatio*, which "challenges popular attitudes, without revealing the author's personal stance" (764). This allows Estienne to make bold claims that he may or may not believe to be true without risking public criticism. So, while both male-authored texts list models of female excellence in their defenses, they can be read as mocking the suggestion that a woman could ever be superior to a man in any way. On the other hand, Larsen posits, while Marie de Romieu is, technically-speaking, imitating both Lando and Estienne in her "Brief Discourse," she, too, chooses a different genre: the discours (767). Unlike the paradox and the *declamatio*, Romieu's discours is "a highly argumentative and reasoned response whose implications she considers for women's social and

political lives” (767). She observes that Romieu boldly declares her animosity for the men who do not give women their due respect, while also taking on “the immense task of recording women’s true history” (769).

While Larsen effectively demonstrates Romieu’s differences in genre, tone, and treatment of her exemplary women, she only devotes detailed discussions to Romieu’s list of her contemporaries. Romieu’s addition of these sixteenth-century women is certainly important to her own identity as a writer; however, the many additions and omissions of material from both Lando and Estienne make it clear, as Larsen argues, that Romieu is not simply imitating these texts. Her catalog of learned ladies is very clearly the result of deliberate choices—choices that are worthy of closer examination. With her carefully selected and varied examples of female excellence, Romieu goes beyond promoting women to create a new definition of femininity and a more inclusive picture of the woman scholar and writer. In her list of great French women, as Claude La Charité has noted, “she enacts a cultural acclimation, frenchifying the references in her exempla of women writers” [“elle opera une acclimatation culturelle, en francisant les références aux exempla de femmes écrivains”] (“Le Problème” 126). However, her praise of female writers from multiple periods and nations indicates a desire to include herself and her contemporaries in an imagined international community of women. Further, like Romieu, the exemplary women in her “Brief Discourse” reject and redefine “woman” in opposition to misogynist discourse. So, Romieu creates from within the fortified walls of Viviers her own City of Ladies who refuse to be contained by conventional models of femininity. In doing so, Romieu also writes one of the “true

histories” (191) that misogynist writers overlook when they blame women for their faults, redefining accepted boundaries of gender and class as she assembles this timeless, international, and non-hierarchical women’s community of resistance.

### L’Énigme de Marie de Romieu

According to “L’IMPRIMEUR AU LECTEUR” and Jacques de Romieu’s dedication to Marguerite de Lorraine, Duchess of Joyeuse, the *Premières œuvres poétiques* was compiled by Marie’s brother, Jacques (also a poet), who had it printed on behalf of his sister by Lucas Breyer in Paris. In his dedication, Jacques asserts that “our precursors and ancestors were always very affectionate and very humble servants to all those of the ancient family and illustrious house of Joyeuse” [“noz devanciers et ancêtres ont été toujours très-affectionnez et très-humble serviteurs à tous ceux de l’ancienne famille et trèsillustre maison de Joyeuse”] (27), a claim that led Prosper Blachemain, the editor of an 1878 edition of the *Premières œuvres poétiques*, to assume Marie de Romieu’s aristocratic connections. However, historian Auguste Le Sourd, in his 1934 *Recherches sur Jacques et Marie de Romieu* refutes these earlier claims of Marie’s noble status, identifying her as the daughter of Etienne II Romieu, a baker, and Anne Albert (68). Based on the fact that their marriage contract was witnessed and signed by “un Boulanger, un tailleur, un charpentier, un mercier, un laboureur” (70), Le Sourd concludes that, contrary to the conclusions drawn by Blachemain, the Romieu family could not have been “une ancienne famille attaché à la maison de Joyeuse” (70). Instead, Le Sourd asserts that Marie and her brother, Jacques, came from a long line of

bakers, beginning with Claude Romieu in the late fifteenth century (40-1). That said, Le Sourd notes that, while he found official records for male and female members of the Romieu family, he could find no trace of Marie's existence beyond her poetry. This absence of evidence leads Le Sourd and others to question the existence of the poetess.

He notes that “[t]he Romieu family...had a modest background, where the instruction of women would not have been encouraged” [“Les Romieus appartenaient...à un milieu modeste, où l'instruction des femmes ne devait pas être très poussée”] (95). To further support this point, Le Sourd adds, “one of Jacques de Romieu’s brothers did not know how to sign [his name]” [“l’un des frères de Jacques de Romieu ne savait pas signer”] (95). The logical conclusion, then, is that a Romieu daughter most likely would not have known how to write—much less have been a poet. Playing with Blachemain’s suggestion that “Marie de Romieu” could have been a pseudonym, Le Sourd observes that, for Jacques de Romieu to be the author of the *Premières œuvres poétiques*, he would have required “des collaborateurs ou complices” (96), since the volume “contains, according to custom, several laudatory poems addressed to the author by peers and admirers” [“contient, selon l’usage, plusieurs pieces de vers louangeuses adressées à l'auteur par des confreres et admirateurs”] (96). According to Blachemain, Le Sourd reports, only one of the named poets “appears in biographical collections” [“figure dans les recueils biographiques”] (97), which the nineteenth-century editor cites as evidence that “Marie de Romieu” did not exist. Le Sourd argues that, on the contrary, all of these poets were actual contemporaries of the Romieu siblings. If Jacques did, in fact, write the poems under a pseudonym, Le Sourd

wonders, would such falsities not have upset his dedicatee? Le Sourd suggests that, because Romieu himself was not well known, the Joyeuse family “would not have been concerned with verifying Marie’s existence” [“ne se seraient pas soucié de vérifier l’existence de Marie”] (99). He contends that Jacque’s claim of a historical connection with the house of Joyeuse was nothing more than “a simple expression of courtesy that biographers were wrong to take literally” [“une simple formule de courtoisie que les biographes ont eu bien tort de prendre qu’au pied de la lettre”] (99).

Only two of the volume’s poems—the “Brief Discourse que l’excellence de la femme surpasse celle de l’homme, autant récréatif que plein de beaux exemples” and “A mon fils”—could have been written by a woman, Le Sourd asserts, noting that this claim is difficult to make in regards to the other poems “written in the name of paralyzed lovers, in order to move their cruel [beloveds]” [“écrits au nom d’amoureux transis, pour attendrir leurs cruelles”] (100). Citing Guillaume Colletet, a seventeenth-century French poet and critic who declared that “Marie de Romieu’s style seems to us superior [to that of Jacques de Romieu]” [“Le style de Marie de Romieu nous paraître bien supérieur”] (qtd. 100), Le Sourd presents an unlikely scenario:

Jacques de Romieu is in Paris in 1581; he wants to publish his first poems; he assembles a collection of his manuscripts, chooses the best, and to better attract attention, he publishes them under the name of a young woman, and these are *Les premières œuvres poétiques de Mademoiselle Marie de Romieu, Vivaroise* (1581). The book receives praise and...Jacques de Romieu collects all of his manuscripts, the

bottom of the barrel, the bad and the worse, and these are *Les Mélanges de Jacques de Romieu, Vivaroise* (1584). (100)

[Jacques de Romieu est à Paris en 1581; il veut faire imprimer ses premiers vers; il fait la revue de ses manuscrits, choisit les meilleurs, et pour mieux attirer l'attention, il les publie sous le nom d'une jeune femme, et ce sont *Les premières œuvres poétiques de Mademoiselle Marie de Romieu, Vivaroise* (1581). Le livre obtient des éloges, et... Jacques de Romieu reprend tous ses manuscrits, jusqu'au fond de son tiroir, les moins bons et les mauvais, et ce sont *Les Mélanges de Jacques de Romieu, Vivaroise* (1584). (100)]

And this would be the end of “Marie de Romieu.” Of course, such an approach on the part of Jacques de Romieu makes no sense and provides circumstantial evidence that “Marie” was not a pseudonym for Jacques. Having seemingly “disproven” this theory, Le Sourd goes on to “prove” that Marie could have existed—even without official documentation.

In regards to her absence from notary registers, Le Sourd notes only one instance in which a woman might be required to register with a notary: “Her marriage, first of all” [“Son mariage, d’abord”] (102). He also suggests that such documents could have been easily lost and/or destroyed by fire. His second approach was to search for “the act which regulated the succession of Estienne Romieu” [“l’act qui réglé la succession d’Etienne Romieu”] (102). This particular document, he reveals, was lost, however, “its execution gave rise to some difficulties which were mentioned in a later act, received on

26 August 1591 by the notary Louis Crouzet” [“son execution donna lieu à quelques difficultés qui furent mentionnées dans un acte postérieur, reçu le 26 Août 1591 par le notaire Louis Crouzet”] (103). Unfortunately, Marie does not appear in this act either. Le Sourd offers an explanation for her absence: “First of all, perhaps, [it is] because she had no disagreement with her brothers concerning her part of the paternal succession” [“D’abord, peut-être, parce qu’elle a pu n’avoir aucun différend ave ses frères, touchant sa part de la succession paternelle”] (103-104). Alternatively, he suggests, it is possible that she had died by 1591, given that “these were years of civil war, famine and plague and mortality there was terrible” [“ces années furent des années de guerre civile, de famine et de peste et que la mortalité y fut terrible”] (104). “Finally,” he proposes, “[perhaps] Marie de Romieu had left Viviers by the time that...the paternal succession was settled” [“Enfin, Marie de Romieu avait pu quitter la ville de Viviers lorsque fut réglée...la succession de son père”] (104).<sup>4</sup> Le Sourd concludes his search for answers having come to no conclusion regarding the existence of Marie de Romieu, declaring, “I do not know how to penetrate the mystery” [“Je n’ai pas su percer le mystère”] (106).

The *Recherches sur Jacques et Marie de Romieu* continues with detailed discussions of Jacques’s life, which, as in the case of Isabella Whitney’s brother Geoffrey, was well documented—unlike the lives of their sisters. Le Sourd all but overlooks his point that documentation of a woman’s life was usually limited to marriage (and birth) records. While it is true that these records could have been lost or destroyed, it is also possible that Marie de Romieu never married or had children, which could explain the lack of documentation of her life.

In her “Brief Discourse,” Marie de Romieu responds to a letter written to her by her brother, Jacques, whom she claims made derogatory remarks about the female sex. In the dedicatory letter that opens her *Les Premières œuvres poetiques de Marie de Romieu* (1581), she expresses the shock and hurt that his letter caused, writing “And what tormented me most, was that I didn’t know the reason that you had to thunder in this way against women” [“Et ce qui me tourmentoit le plus, c’estoit que j’ignorois la cause qui vous avoit peu esmouvoir à tonner ainsi contre les femmes”] (4). As a woman, Marie takes it upon herself to show that she and those of her sex are “devoid in no way of the art of poesie” [“du tout despourveuë de l’art de poësie”] (4), and, further, she states that she is “one who is herself pleased sometimes with an incredible delight after the reading of it” [“comme celle qui se plaist quelque fois avec une incredible delectation après la lecture d’icelle”] (5). Her confidence in her abilities is immediately tempered when she admits that her work was “composed enough in haste, having no free time, because of our household” [“composé assez à la haste, n’ayant pas le loisir, à cause de nostre mesnage”] (5), denying her the time to devote to her writing that Jacques enjoys. Even as she belittles the quality of her work, Marie emphasizes that the problem is lack of opportunity rather than ability. She proves her femininity by declaring her dedication to household duties, but suggests (much like Whitney, Franco, and Lanyer) that, given the chance, women could equal or even surpass men in their intellectual and artistic pursuits.

As is the case with Aemilia Lanyer, Marie’s proto-feminism may be viewed as suspicious given the fact that the volume is dedicated to one of the most powerful

women in France. Jacques's dedicatory poem, "A Madame Marguerite de Lorraine, Duchesse de Joyeuse, Jacques de Romieu Desire Salut," was written to commemorate the marriage of Marguerite de Lorraine-Vaudémont to Anne, Duke of Joyeuse. Anne was the favorite of Henri III, and Marguerite was the sister of Henri's wife, Louise de Lorraine. Frances A. Yates notes that the wedding festivities celebrating this union were some of the most extravagant of the Valois court festivals (82).<sup>5</sup> In addition to this dedicatory poem, the *Premières œuvres poétiques* includes six more poems addressed to Marguerite de Lorraine, all of which André Winandy, editor of the 1972 critical edition of Marie de Romieu's collection, asserts could not have been written by Marie because 1) the Joyeuse wedding took place in September 1581, and Marie's "Epistre a Mon Frere" is dated 15 August 1581; and 2) "the collection is published without her knowing" ["le recueil est publié à son insu"] (29 note). As is the case with many of the claims made about Marie de Romieu and her work, this evidence is open to challenge: 1) while Marie's letter to her brother may be dated August 1581, this does not necessarily indicate that all of her poems included in the volume were written prior to that date; and 2) the preliminary material of the printed works of a great many male and female writers in early modern Europe claim that their work was published without the writer's knowledge, so Jacques's and Breyers's claims in their introductory material cannot necessarily be taken at face value. Further, Marie's addition of many contemporary French women writers and patrons to the catalog presented in her "Brief Discourse," as well as the fact that nearly every poem included in her *Premières œuvres poétiques* addresses a member of the nobility suggest that Jacques was not the only Romieu sibling

seeking patronage. In fact, in his dedication to the Duchess of Joyeuse, Jacques offers Marie's volume "to the end that my sister and I should once again be positioned among your many very humble maidservants and servants" [*à fin que ma sœur et moy fussions mis de nouveau au nombre de voz treshumbles servantes et serviteurs*] (27). This statement suggests that Jacques and Marie de Romieu had been in service to Marguerite de Lorraine once before, and that Marie, like Isabella Whitney and Aemilia Lanyer, hopes to return to service in her former employer's household. Jacques requests that Marguerite "accept...this small offering that I dedicate to you in her name, until such time that my sister comes to this court to do you reverence and dedicate at your feet a stronger and more careful argument, as I understand that she has made" [*Recevez...ceste petite offer que je vous dedie en son nom, jusques à tant que ma sœur mesme vienne en ceste Cour vous faire la reverence et consacrer à vos pieds quelque chose de mieux solide et plus meur arguemtn, comme j'ay entendu qu'ell' a fait*] (27-28). It is significant, I think, that Jacques, a poet, offers his sister's verse in his attempt to return to favor and that he signs his dedicatory poem, "From Paris, in my study, the penultimate day of September 1581" [*De Paris, en mon estude, le penultimate de Septembre 1581*] (28). In comparison to Marie, who must find time to write in between household duties, Jacques writes from "a room of his own." Nevertheless, it is her poetry that is deemed worthy of the new Duchess's attention. Jacques may be relying on the novelty of a regional French woman poet to appeal to a local aristocratic woman, or he may recognize, like Colletet, that his sister's verse is superior to his own.

### Fortifying the Walls of the City of Ladies

As she begins her “Brief Discourse,” Marie de Romieu claims that men devalue and denigrate the female sex because they “know not the virtue it contains” (2). She goes on to note her appreciation of man’s strengths, however, “if we do really prize the valor, / Courage, mind, magnificence, / The honor, virtue, and all excellence / that shine forever in the female sex, / Justly we will call it the more divine” (12-16). In keeping with conventional defenses of women, Romieu acknowledges that, as humans, women do have faults, but she argues that “this doesn’t mean that honor is not due / The woman who is fully blessed, / Bans all evil, worry, mourning, pain, / And is the certain solace of the human race” (23-26). Like Lady Reason in Christine de Pizan’s *Livre de la Cité des Dames*, Romieu acknowledges, deconstructs, and revises misogynist arguments against women, turning them in favor of the female sex. Just as Christine’s catalogue of exemplary women both closely imitates and significantly alters Boccaccio’s *Famous Women*, Romieu’s translation, while appearing to be completely faithful to her sources, transforms the tongue-in-cheek “defenses” written by Lando and Estienne (which, incidentally, are also indebted to Boccaccio) into a genuine argument for the worth of women. Not only does Romieu assert her own voice in her “Brief Discours,” but she also, like the other poets included in this study, effectively countermands the authority of “the great and wandering hordes of men” (Romieu 356).

As her first evidence of woman’s merit, Romieu turns to the popular argument that woman’s creation from man’s body is superior to his creation “from common clay” (36), though she attributes this to Jupiter rather than the Christian God, and she declares

women to be “Of God’s virtue the truest masterpiece” (46).<sup>6</sup> She claims that “Jupiter, wishing her the equal / of heaven’s citizens, called upon the gods” (47-48) to imbue woman with the gift of “graceful speech” (51), bright eyes (52), power (53), honor (54), and prudence (54). No one, she claims, could adequately describe “all the things divinely found in women” (62), and, were she to try, her “lowly style would then lose heart and power” (66). She commands that no one should celebrate “men’s battles” (67) or “their strength of arms” (68), because none can compare to women like Camille, Penthesilea, Semiramis, Velasca, or Zenobia (73-79). These first five women correspond exactly to both Lando’s and Estienne’s texts though she adds Pallas/Minerva as the source of Semiramis’s strength and inverts the order of Velasca and Zenobia. While it would be easy to attribute the inclusion of these illustrious women to Romieu’s source texts, her later omissions and additions suggest, as I have already noted, that their presence in her “Brief Discourse” is a deliberate choice and not the product of an exercise in imitation.

For each of these six women, Romieu emphasizes power and skill in battle, omitting any reference to virtue, beauty, or any other “feminine” quality. All of them defy expectations of femininity—even their chastity is chosen rather than imposed. They are physically powerful, intellectually superior, and self-assuredly independent. By citing such women as her opening examples, Romieu immediately announces to her readers that her definition of female virtue is markedly different than the conventional expectation that women be “chaste, silent, and obedient.” Though she follows her source texts in this ordering, her later differences suggest that she did so intentionally.

The first virtue that Romieu chooses to illustrate is that of strength and courage in battle—a trait that Castiglione’s interlocutors deem unfit for an ideal (court) lady: “it is not seemly for a woman to handle weapons, ride, play tennis, wrestle, and do many other things that are suited to men” (153).<sup>7</sup> Further, all of these warrior queens led their campaigns either alone or as an equal to a man—and those women who fought alongside a man continued to lead even after said man’s death in the field.

Although Romieu is not engaged in a physical struggle, she is certainly fighting against an oppressive force. And, though she may be seen as operating alongside her male sources, it is her female source and her fellow women writers with whom she most strongly aligns herself. Romieu picks up where Lando and Estienne left off (or, rather, she actually does what they feigned doing) and defends women’s strengths in all arenas—even those to which women are not supposed to be admitted. As she continues to do throughout her “Brief Discourse,” Romieu echoes Christine de Pizan’s lauding of the many ancient women that she includes. Though, as I have already admitted in the Introduction, I cannot claim that Romieu was definitely familiar with Christine’s works, the two writers’ similar treatment of these historical women suggests it as a possibility. Christine describes both Camille and Penthesilia as “high-minded” virgin warriors, both of whom led battles after the men alongside whom they fought had died. Like Romieu, Christine dismisses any attempt to claim any greater men. She writes of Penthesilia, “one will not find more notable princes in greater numbers nor as many people who accomplished such noteworthy deeds than among the queens and ladies of this kingdom [the Amazons]”(51).

Semiramis, too, was a warrior whose strength and courage cannot be matched by any man. The addition of Pallas/Minerva as the queen's source of strength is included only by Christine and not Boccaccio—and reappears in Romieu's "Brief Discours." Whereas both Boccaccio and Christine note that the ancients believed this great woman to be the sister of Jupiter and the god of Saturn, Romieu likens her to a goddess. Like Semiramis, Minerva was a human believed to have descended from the heavens, though this attribution was due to her great intellect and "outstanding chastity" rather than her physical strength (73-4). According to Christine, Minerva had "profound understanding, not only in one subject but also generally, in every subject" (73). She is credited with inventing, among other things, "a shorthand Greek script" (73), "the entire technique of gathering wool and making cloth" (73), and body armor (74). Romieu's addition of Minerva to her celebration of these women not only removes the male influences of Jupiter and Saturn, but also stresses women's roles as scholars and inventors—talents to which she continually returns.

Rounding out this first group of notable women are Velasque (Valasca) and Zenobia. The former is most surely taken from Lando and Estienne, as neither Boccaccio nor Christine mention her. Both women were Amazon queens and warriors who surpassed men in every way and had no desire to submit to a man. Valasca, Ben Johnson writes (quoting a certain Raphael Volateranus), sought "to redeem herself and her sex from the tyranny of men" and "led on the women to the slaughter of their barbarous husbands and lords" (150). Zenobia, despite her desire to "keep her virginity for life" (Pizan 52), was "pressured by her parents to marry the king of Palymnes" (53).

Fortunately, the couple were well-matched, and they fought alongside one another to conquer Mesopotamia—a fight Zenobia continued “on behalf of her children” (53) after her husband was killed. As with Penthesilea, Christine declares that Zenobia exceeded both men and women in her attributes. To emphasize the queen’s previous commitment to virginity as well as her sense of duty, Christine tells us that Zenobia avoided other men and only slept with her husband to procreate (54). However, the “high point of her virtues” (54) was her “profound learnedness in letters, both in those of Egyptians and in those of her own language” (55).

Romieu continues her “Brief Discourse” with a nod to the more traditionally feminine virtue of “sweetness / And saintly human kindness” (83-4) through acts of generosity and charity. She asks her readers, “Has any man been found possessed of a soul / With like goodness, favor, courtesy?” (85-6). The unstated answer is, of course, no, and Romieu offers up her first example—one not found in either Lando or Estienne. She writes of “that noble lady... / Who deigned to welcome, with an honorable, / Most liberal hand, the great armed host of Rome” (99-100). Here, Romieu alludes to Paulina/Busa, who, as Hannibal was “ravaging the Romans with fire and arms” (Pizan 210), provided shelter and care to “some ten thousand” (211) retreating soldiers. This aid allowed the people to recover, and they “were able to return to Rome and put the army back on its feet, for which she was highly praised” (211). Both Christine and Romieu omit Boccaccio’s additional comment that Busa surpasses even Alexander in her generosity because “stinginess is as habitual, or rather innate, to women as is their lack of boldness” (141-2). Romieu’s previous and forthcoming examples easily

contradict this statement, further uniting Romieu with Christine and other learned women in resisting and overcoming rampant and timeworn misogyny.

Returning again to the lists of Lando and Estienne, Romieu cites Phriné (Phryne), praising her “noted courage” and her “liberality” (101-2) and reminding readers that is was she “who offered to rebuild the grand Thebean walls” (104). Romieu differs from her source texts in that she omits the fact that Phryne’s condition for rebuilding the walls was that her name be inscribed upon it. All three writers fail to mention the exact phrase that she reportedly wanted: “Alexander destroyed this wall, but Phryne the courtesan restored it” (Althenaeus 944). It is certainly worth noting that, after extolling the virtues of the aforementioned chaste women, all three texts include a courtesan as an exemplary woman. It is true that all of them focus on the story of the Thebean wall, but any reader familiar with the identity of this woman would also know of her profession. The seeming incongruity fits in nicely with the tongue-in-cheek praise of women offered by Lando and Estienne, but what of Romieu’s sincere effort? Her volume suggests access to a humanist education, so it is unlikely that she blindly included Phrine among her examples. So, this celebrated courtesan (who, incidentally, was the mother of another famed courtesan, Danae), must be there for a reason.

In Book 13 of his *Deipnosophists*, “Concerning Women,” Athenaeus’s male interlocutors spend a great deal of time discussing the positive and negative attributes of *hetaerae*—ancient Greek courtesans—often referring to specific women. Phryne’s detractors, like Romieu’s imagined male readers, characterize Phryne—and, indeed, all *hetaerae*—as manipulative and dangerous to men. According to Athenaeus’s

interlocutors, “Anaxilas, in his *Neottis*, says— / The man woe’er has loved a courtesan, / Will say that no more lawless worthless race / Can anywhere be found” (892). Later, he asks, “Then does not Phryne beat Charybdis hollow? / Who swallows the sea-captains, ship and all” (893). In Book XII of the *Odyssey*, Odysseus is warned that “God-size Kharubdis swallows the dark sea. / Three times a day she retches, she swallows it three times, / it’s fearsome to watch. Don’t be there when she swallows— / no one could save you from harm, not even Poseidon” (104-7). Randy Lee Eickhoff argues that Charybdis “represent[s] women in man’s nightmares, the fear that he may be devoured by women, passivity suddenly become demonic” (32). This fear corresponds easily with the threat posed by the educated, sexual, and independent *hetaera*, as well as with the learned woman writer who refuses to remain silent. If masculinity is measured by the ability to control women, then unruly women—such as those named in Romieu’s poem—threaten to undermine masculine power and the social order.

Though Phryne, as a courtesan, was an example of the dangerous, uncontrollable woman, Romieu and her source texts cite only her generosity in offering to pay for the rebuilding of the Thebean wall—which had been destroyed by the “great” man, Alexander. Phryne’s demand is not mentioned by Romieu, but Estienne refers to the inscription of Phryne’s name as a simple request in lieu of any other compensation.<sup>8</sup> In framing it thus, Estienne downplays Phryne’s desire for public recognition, an approach used by many an author—male or female—whose work appears in print. Claiming distance from the publication of a text was especially important for a woman, however, given the association of such public speech with sexual licentiousness. Romieu is able

to maintain her virtue because both her brother and Lucas Breyer claim that the volume was published without her knowledge. The nod to modesty, however, is merely that. As Ann R. Larsen notes, whereas Lando and Estienne “valorize the privatization of female patronage carried out,” Romieu’s “project is the public promotion of women” (774). By praising accomplished and intelligent women and highlighting the fame of her contemporaries, Romieu demonstrates that female excellence is not confined to a certain age nor to a small group of novelties. Rather, it is an innate quality possessed by a great many of her sex.

Following Phryne, Romieu turns her readers’ attention to “the great charity instilled in Tabitha” (106), another kind woman who differs from the Greek courtesan in every way, yet shares with her the admirable trait of generosity. Tabitha, also known as Dorcas, appears in the Book of Acts as a disciple in Joppa “who was full of good works and almsdeeds” (9:36). Romieu emphasizes that “she was to everyone most justly kind, / To orphan children and to widows equally, / Who lay helplessly in want and torment” (110-12), differing from her source texts in her focus on equality both here and throughout the poem. After an extended illness, Tabitha died, and Peter was summoned. Upon his arrival, he was taken to see her body, “and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them” (9:39). Peter then prayed for her and miraculously raised her from the dead—causing many people in Joppa to then believe in the Lord. The story of Tabitha emphasizes God’s love for the most underprivileged, suggesting women’s privileged

status in the eyes of God—a suggestion that will become the central argument in Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*.

This is not the last time that Romieu will pair a courtesan with a saintly woman, highlighting their similarities over their differences. Throughout the “Brief Discourse,” Romieu diverges from her male sources in focusing on the women’s achievements, as Larsen states, rather than their “‘moral’ character” (773). Clearly, though, there is a sense of morality in Romieu’s choices, all of whom prove to be loyal (to themselves and their fellow citizens), strong-hearted, and charitable. Some fulfill the ideal of chastity—though not necessarily in the way that the patriarchal powers-that-be had in mind—while others most decidedly do not. Some are obedient—to their god and their parents, but not to a man. None are silent. Though many of the women have had their stories told by others, their stories have nonetheless been told. Romieu reclaims them from the mocking, cynical grasp of men like Boccaccio, Lando, and Estienne, and, like Christine de Pizan, truly celebrates individual women—rather than didactic ideals. Fully aware that not all of her readers will appreciate her argument, Romieu turns her attention to those who would quarrel with her.

In the digression which follows, Romieu differs significantly from her source texts, imagining the misogynist arguments that may be offered to refute her claims. Romieu, early in the “Brief Discours,” characterizes her detractors as angry and irrational—“full of spite and choleric with rage” (17). Turning the association of the feminine with the irrational on its head, Romieu easily defeat her opponents’ objections. Later, her imagined male opponent asks, “Really, don’t you know, / That we men fall

only by your ways?" (127-128), citing the commonly used example of Helen of Troy. She responds, "So say you, but, alas, by this you clearly show / Your brain has neither bridle nor restraint" (139-140). Mocking men's waste of their ability to reason, she argues, "You are not fooled by our seductive lures. / Instead it's one of us, alas, who is seduced / By those deceptive nets you cast to trap her" (146-148). Various other men continue to claim that women abuse, titillate, and ensnare them with their beauty and heartlessness, proclaiming their devotion and irresistible attraction to the female sex. With a verbal roll of the eyes, Romieu dismisses such "powdered language" (169), exclaiming that such rhetoric exemplifies her earlier point about women's susceptibility to men's false charms:

Who would not be tricked by such honeyed words,  
 Haughty and proud, troublesome and tiresome?  
 That's how a maiden among so many  
 Allows the pricking of her loveliest fruits;  
 It's more by deception and bedazzlement  
 Than placing in those words a faith too great.  
 O hope misleading! Happy is she  
 Whose mind with such words is not engraved!  
 How false you are, how full of vanity!  
 Happy is she who hearkens not your vexing plea! (181-190)

Like others before her, Romieu criticizes the false Petrarchan conventions of verbal love making, placing the wooed woman in the position of the victim and seemingly

contradicting her previous claims of female strength and superiority. However, her recognition of the danger of “such honeyed words” and her implied public warning to other women to be wary of men who flatter them challenges the assumption that a woman can be so easily “caught,” and places Romieu firmly among the great ladies that she lists throughout her “Brief Discourse.” She likewise parallels the warnings offered by Whitney, Franco, and Lanyer regarding the dishonest and manipulative nature of men. No woman in history, Romieu claims, “gave herself, / without the meddling of her intimates, / To any living man” (193-5), yet, many a man has been known to “feign love’s martyrdom” (196) and “Invent, compose, a thousand sonnets write, / To prove that it’s for her he sighs” (203-4). “What more is there to say?” she asks (213), but she does say more—expounding further upon woman’s superiority to man.

In her first nine examples of female excellence, Romieu openly challenges conventional ideas of femininity and womanhood. She goes on to extol the philosophical and literary contributions made by an impressive number of accomplished women, both ancient and contemporary. Citing Aristotle, who claimed that the “more delicate and fine” (216) human must also “have the better mind” (218), Romieu argues that woman, whose “whole body is delicate and fine” (221), clearly possesses a superior intellect. Building upon the commonly used defense that men should honor women because women give birth to men, Romieu asserts that, though men dominate the sciences, women are the greatest inventors:

Men’s praises you’ll see there haughtily sung,

Even as inventors of the human sciences,

Which now they proudly claim to be their own,  
 Their protection against a hundred thousand deaths.  
 But I can show you that since men are born  
 Of women, and by their means grow up,  
 So too the sciences that we call human  
 Are inventions of women's true divinity. (231-238)

Woman's divinity lies in her ability to create life—a role assigned by God—and, as a creator, she is responsible for all of the great accomplishments that men “proudly claim to be their own.” Romieu challenges anyone to prove her claims untrue, asking her reader, “Isn't it so (for I will not lie) / That learned women began in old Carmanta?” (239-240). Here Romieu refers to Carmentis, or Nicostrata, a Greek woman renowned for her intellect and mother of Evander, king of Arcadia, who “was held by ancient legend to be the son of Mercury” (Boccaccio 52). Carmentis and Evander were thought to have such ties to the god because of their shared gift of eloquence (53; Christine 71). This great lady was a prophet, and founded the future site of Rome, where she “was the first to institute laws in that country which subsequently became so renowned and from which all the statutes of law derive” (Christine 71). She is also credited with inventing the Latin alphabet and introducing grammar to the world (Boccaccio 53-4; de Pizan 54). According to Christine de Pizan, the Italians were so grateful for Carmentis’s contributions “that they not only deemed this woman to be greater than any man, but they also considered her a goddess and even honored her during her lifetime with divine honors” (72). Further, she notes, “Poems were named *Carmen* in Latin, after this lady”

(72). In doing so, Romieu effectively unites childbearing, innovation, and writing under the banner of distinctly female, and perhaps feminine, abilities. She then offers a catalog of learned women to further support her case for women's intellectual and creative pre-eminence.

Romieu begins with "Leontia" (241), or Leontion, an ancient Greek philosopher who "publicly vanquished / Great Theophrastus by many a fine argument" (241-2). Neither Lando nor Estienne include Leontion in their texts, though she does appear in both Boccaccio and Christine de Pizan's exempla. It is worth remembering here that one of Christine's attackers in the *Querelle de la Rose*, Jean de Montreuil, compared her to Leontion, as I noted in the Introduction. Romieu makes a bold choice here, given the fact that Leontion was often used as a negative example of female learning. Cicero and Pliny the Elder cite Leontion's retort to Theophrastus in their efforts to attack Epicurean philosophy. Both writers are appalled that a *woman* dared to challenge "a man so eminent in his eloquence that he obtained his name, which signifies the Divine Speaker" (Pliny 1009-10). Cicero writes, "...even the courtesan Leontium ventured to write against Theophrastus[.] She did so, it is true, in a neat and Attic style, but still—" (I.33). This "Attic style," by which he means that she favors the Athenians, marks Leontion's strong identification with the city in which she lives—an association that Whitney, Franco, and Romieu also emphasize in their work. Whether or not Leontion was actually a courtesan, or *hetaera*, is unknown, but her identity as such is maintained by Boccaccio in his *Famous Women*, in which this ancient woman is presented as a tragic waste of talent: "If she had preserved her matronly honor, the glory attached to her name would

have been much more radiant, for she had extraordinary intellectual powers” (124).

Boccaccio notes that, though he has never read Leontion’s work, its continued fame signifies that it was not “a trifle,” nor did it demonstrate “a lack of ability, although it is a clear sign of an envious disposition” (124). Here, Boccaccio echoes Cicero in admitting Leontion’s talent while criticizing her character. He goes on to argue that her learnedness is a clear indicator that she did not come from the lower classes: “It is rare indeed for sublime genius to spring from those dregs, for even if genius is sometimes implanted there by heaven, its radiance is darkened by the shadows of lowly estate” (124).

Given Marie de Romieu’s apparent humanist education, it is almost certain that she would have been familiar with the works of Pliny, Cicero, and Boccaccio—and that she would have encountered these diatribes against Leontion. As the daughter of a baker in rural France, Romieu was possibly the last woman that one (especially Boccaccio, it seems) would expect to be learned and a poet, but she did, in fact, rise from the “dregs” to demonstrate her learning and talent in the very volume that the reader holds in his or her hands. It is not surprising, then, that Romieu would begin her list of exemplary women writers with Leontion, a possibly low-born woman who fearlessly and effectively questioned a prominent male scholar in written texts that remained well-known nearly thirteen centuries later.

Nevertheless, all of the brilliance and nobility in the world could not make Leontion a good example for ladies, Boccaccio tells his readers, because “trustworthy sources” reveal that she “disregarded feminine decency and was a courtesan, or rather, a

little trollop" (125). As such, he adds, "she was able to stain Philosophy...if indeed the splendor of Philosophy can be dimmed by the infamous action of an unchaste heart" (125). Boccaccio's claims about Leontion's social standing and indiscretions are ironic and hypocritical given the fact that he himself was born into the merchant class and fathered five children out of wedlock (Wallace 20, 61). While there is no evidence that Marie de Romieu had any skeletons in her closet,<sup>9</sup> her identification of a woman assumed to have been a courtesan as a true model of female learning certainly bucks against conventional models of acceptable female behavior and flies in the face of misogynist associations of female speech and writing with sexual promiscuity.

Unlike Boccaccio, Christine barely mentions Leontion—adding the philosopher to her discussion of Sappho. She does not refer to Leontion's profession (perhaps in an attempt to distance herself from the earlier comparison), instead focusing solely on her role as a philosopher who "dared, for impartial and serious reasons, to correct and attack the philosopher Theophrastus, who was quite famous in her time" (68). If Leontion was, in fact, an *hetaera*, then her intellectual and philosophical prowess as well as the opportunity to write her invectives against Theophrastus were actually due to the privileges afforded a woman in her occupation. So, like Isabella Whitney and Veronica Franco, Leontion's position on the margins of respectable society allowed "even a woman" (Pliny 1009) to participate in arenas that had historically excluded the female sex. Although Marie de Romieu's outsider status has more to do with class, gender, and geography than with any particularly scandalous behavior (as far as we know), she clearly had literary ambition that would have made Leontion's rebelliousness and

success appealing. With Leontion, Romieu again appears to follow the lead of Lando and Estienne, but her placement and pairing of yet another *hetaera* with a model of Christian virtue suggests a more mindful approach.<sup>10</sup>

In stark contrast to Leontion's flouting of convention, Romieu offers as her next exemplum Saint Eustochium, a Roman woman who made a vow of perpetual virginity shortly after the death of her husband. Greatly admired by Saint Jerome, she helped him and her mother, Paula, establish four monasteries near the location of Christ's birth in Bethlehem—one for men and three for women. Saint Eustochium assumed the direction of the nunneries after her mother's death (ca. 380). Romieu emphasizes this exemplary woman's origins, noting that Saint Eustochium wrote to Saint Jerome "To show the Romans she too was born in Rome, / Rome, mother of arts and noble minds, / Where Hebrew, Greek, and Latin she had learned" (244-246). According to Michael Ott, "Many of St. Jerome's Biblical commentaries owe their existence to her influence and to her he dedicated his commentaries on the prophets Isaias and Ezechiel" (629). Romieu could not have found a more perfect candidate to balance the potential scandal of Leontion's prominent placement. But Romieu does not contrast the two scholars; rather, she holds them up as equally admirable:

A week, a month, even perhaps a year  
 Would not suffice to laud the treasures  
 Of their subtle minds; indeed, the universe  
 Disdains them not. (247-250)

Unlike certain male writers, Romieu emphasizes the intellectual strengths of these women—only mentioning their biographies as they pertain to their learning. In doing so, Romieu also disregards any notion that female intellect is limited by birth or character or subject-matter. Alternatively, she may be suggesting that *neither* exhibited questionable behavior—an opinion that would certainly shock her virtuous readers.

Romieu continues with Sappho, who, she writes, “found verses / That have been labeled Sapphic after her, / And much esteemed by men prophetic” (250-252). Like Leontion and Saint Eustochium before her, Sappho “triumphed through her learned reason / Over the vaunted sages of her celebrated time” (253-254). While both Landi and Estienne praise Sappho for her great poetry and her ability to outdo her male contemporaries,<sup>11</sup> Romieu adds that the ancient poet was admired by “men prophetic” and emphasizes the role that her superior learning had in her triumphs. She again echoes Christine, who acknowledges Sappho’s great beauty, but insists that “the charm of her profound understanding surpassed all the other charms with which she was endowed” (67). Among Sappho’s mastered subjects are “several arts and sciences” and “the works and writings composed by others” (67). Further, Sappho “also discovered many new things herself and wrote many books and poems” (67). Christine cites Boccaccio’s description of the ancient poet to support her own claims of Sappho’s greatness: “From what Boccaccio says about her, it should be inferred that the profundity of both her understanding and of her learned books can only be known and understood by *men* of great perception and learning, according to the testimony of the ancients” (67, emphasis mine). There is no hint of irony in Christine’s use of male esteem as a marker of

Sappho's intelligence and talent, though she plays into the idea that a woman must be better than a man in order to be viewed as an equal. Romieu does the same thing, but given that her stated audience is her brother and other men who would demean women, claiming that Sappho was admired by exceptional men suggests that 1) Romieu is certainly worthy of respect from presumably lesser men; and/or 2) her imagined male readers are not clever enough to recognize greatness when they see it. Either way, Romieu inserts a subtle jab at "learned" men whose minds will not allow them to see beyond gender.

Another ancient Greek poet follows Sappho in Romieu's catalog: "Corinna" (Korinna), who, in her work, "goes telling all the world / The virtues of this sex, wherein all honor does abound" (259-260). According to Jane McIntosh Snyder, Korinna is one of the few early Greek female poets other than Sappho who "has had the good fortune to have more than a few lines survive the passage of time and the forces of ignorance" (39). She was the only poet of Tanagra, a rural Bœotian town, where the second-century author, Pausanias reported seeing a public monument dedicated to Korinna (42). Her fame stems primarily, it seems, from her lyrical defeat of the canonical poet Pindar in competition "no fewer than five times" (42). In Korinna, we once again find a poet whose work emphasizes her home with "a literary dialect strongly colored by Bœotian features, apparently focusing on local myths and legends" (44). This bold assertion of her roots is particularly interesting given that the word Bœotia was widely used in the fifth century B.C. as a derogatory term—a use introduced by Athenians who sought to highlight their city's role as cultural center of Ancient Greece:

By Athenian standards, Boeotia was a backward area full of country bumpkins who produced wonderfully good things to eat but ate too much of it themselves. The Athenians thought of them as uneducated, slow, and stupid and fixed on them the epithet “Boeotian swine.” (Kagan 78, 80)

This characterization of Boeotia and its inhabitants persisted well into the nineteenth century (OED), despite the fact that a number of celebrated poets claimed the region as their home, including Pindar, Hesiod, and Plutarch.

Korinna’s rural roots would obviously appeal to an aspiring female poet living in rural France, and Romieu accentuates Korinna’s global influence—evidence that one need not live in a cultural center like Athens or Lyon in order to have one’s work circulated and appreciated. Unlike Landi and Estienne, who only briefly mention Korinna’s name in relation to Sappho, Romieu devotes six lines to the poet, characterizing her as an angel or herald spreading the word of woman’s merit:

Likewise Corinne, by them much praised,  
 Who flies strong-winged to the More, the Ganges,  
 Sometimes o’er Atlas guiding her delicate step,  
 Sometimes near the Nile to strangers speaking,  
 Now here, now there, goes telling all the world  
 The virtues of this sex, wherein all honor does abound. (255-60)

In addition to sharing Korinna’s bucolic background, Romieu assumes the same task of disseminating the excellence of women in her poetry. She firmly establishes a long

history of learned and writing women, inserting herself into that history both with the volume in the reader's hands and by following Christine's example of reclaiming the biographies and works of illustrious women from the cynical and sometimes dismissive "defenses" of male authors. As Larsen has noted, Romieu offers these women as *examples* rather than as *models*, marking them as individuals rather than embodiments of the conservative expectations imposed upon the female sex (771). Having venerated an inspiring catalog of learned and talented ancient women, Romieu turns her attention to the sixteenth century.

Early in her "Brief Discourse," Romieu boasted, "But olden times had not the many thousand / Women in our age so highly skilled" (81-2). Nearly two hundred lines later, she begins to offer proof:

If Italy chose her women to make known,  
 No man however brave would dare to rival  
 The least of all those countless thousands,  
 Without to one and all his arrogance displaying. (260-4)

Though women writers abounded in Italy around the time that Romieu was writing—including Veronica Franco—she only mentions three—all of whose work predates her own by fifty years or more: Veronica Gambara, Vittoria Colonna, and Armille Angosiole. Of course, it is quite possible (and likely) that the writings of more recent authors had not yet reached Viviers. Also, Romieu's placement, identification, and non-specific discussion of each woman's talents—which is nearly identical to that of Landi and Estienne—may indicate that she was not completely familiar with these Italian

works and was simply repeating the earlier lists. But Romieu's earlier changes and the extensive and original catalog of French women writers that follows suggests again that blind imitation is not at work here. Estienne's inclusion of Colonna, Gambara, and Angosciole likewise indicates that their work was known in France. Although Landi offers upwards of twenty five examples of learned and accomplished Italian women, it is only the first three that Estienne chooses to incorporate. The fame of these earlier Italian women writers in France points to an international literary exchange of sorts—one in which Romieu clearly hopes to participate.

In a significant departure from her source texts, Romieu directly addresses her Italian predecessors. Landi and Estienne both ask their readers which ancient woman could possibly compare to these great ladies.<sup>12</sup> Romieu, on the other hand, establishes a personal connection with Veronica Gambara and Vittoria Colonna, offering them her own deference:

You'll be my witness, learned Degambara,  
 For who would be so foolish as to dare  
 To contradict your will or that of Pesquière?  
 For he would gain but bitter sorrow,  
 Trying futilely with you to argue,  
 You, source of honey and sweetest nectar. (265-70)

In these lines, Romieu constructs her Italian predecessors as fellow woman warriors fighting for a common cause. This imagined communication with female poets of her own century marks the beginning of Romieu's endeavor to establish an international

community of early modern women writers and patrons in which each provides inspiration and support for the others.

Romieu briefly returns to a more distanced praise of excellent women, asking, “What should I say of Armille [Emilia] Angosiole [Anguisciola]?” (271).<sup>13</sup> Anguisciola is the last individual that either Estienne or Romieu have in common with Landi, who focuses only on Italy in his praise of his female contemporaries, presumably to present his own country as a center of female excellence—or because he is not familiar with any female writers outside of Italy. However, Landi’s *Paradossi* was first published in 1543 in Lyon, where he lived briefly “as a fugitive monk...[because] there was no faculty of theology to restrict his freedom” (Pizzorno 13); its Italian printing didn’t come to light until the following year in Venice (16-17). So, his extensive praise may indeed be an act of patriotism. Estienne’s treatment of the three Italian women follows Landi’s almost exactly, and both he and Romieu continue their catalogues with a nod toward Germany and Spain. He writes that legions of women would *claim* to teach a lesson to the most educated of men—particularly in proper language and good writing.<sup>14</sup> In this brief passage, Estienne simultaneously mocks these rivals of France as well as women who view themselves as equal or superior to men in their intellectual capacities. Romieu’s text again appears to only imitate Estienne’s, but she again makes subtle changes to convey an entirely different meaning. Although Romieu, like Estienne, does not name any specific learned women from Germany or Spain, she does note that both countries “have legions / Of such women” (272-3) who “could easily found / A school for learning, open to all, / Even the most learned” (273-5). Rather than deriding other

women, which would only serve to counter the purpose of her “Brief Discourse,” Romieu notes that German and Spanish women (and perhaps, by extension, all learned women) could *easily* establish an educational institution, not only for men or for women, but “open to all.” Unlike Estienne, Romieu’s women do not presume that they could teach any specific group of people or any specific subject. This hypothetical school is simply “open to all”—only those receptive to such an idea need attend. Her addition of “even the most learned” does not presuppose a particular gender, suggesting that men and women could learn the same things in a common environment. Clearly, this is not the scenario that Estienne has in mind, though Landi also sought an intellectual community that was free of boundaries (except, it seems, in the case of gender)—one that he found in Lyon in the *Respublica Literaria*: “In this half-real, half-ideal society, men who were of different social origins, professions and nationalities, but equals in intelligence, shared common spiritual and intellectual interests ranging from medicine to the Christian Cabala and Hermetism” (Pizzorno 13). Whether Estienne or Romieu knew of this is uncertain, but the contrast in levels of inclusiveness is interesting nonetheless.

From Spain and Germany, Estienne quickly moves on to his homeland of France, which is represented in his *Paradoxes* by five “citoyennes” (228). The first two, Hélisenne de Crenne (possibly the pseudonym of Marguerite Briet) and “Morel,” who is probably Antoinette de Loynes, were both famous during their own time for their learning and writings. The former authored three original novels between 1538 and 1540 and published the first French prose translation of the first four books of Virgil’s *Aeneid* in 1542. The latter was a poet and humanist who, along with her husband, Jean

de Morel, hosted many great French writers in her home—including Pierre de Ronsard and Joachim du Bellay. As Jane Stevenson has noted, some of her letters, written in both French and Latin, survive—one, written to Nicholas Bourbon, in which Madame de Morel apologizes for her lack of learning:

She writes to thank him for kindness shown to her children, and regrets her own studies are little more advanced than theirs. By way of excuse, she enumerates the duties which claim her attention in order of precedence: her religious obligations, her care for her husband, who must be freed to serve letters by her efforts, her children, for whose education she is personally responsible, and finally, household cares, domestic matters, and business. (188-9)

We have seen the same complaint about domestic responsibilities limiting women's ability to study and write from Whitney and Romieu, though both obviously carved out a little bit of time for such pursuits. Likewise, Morel's seemingly self-effacing reference to her children's education is interesting because her daughters were or became well-known for their learning—especially the eldest, Camille, who “seems to have been the only one of the sisters to write Latin verse” (189). Both Hélisene de Crenne and “Morel” are included among Romieu’s examples, though, given the later date, the name Morel could refer to Antoinette de Loynes as well as to her daughters.

Estienne’s final three models of French women’s excellence—“Robertet,” “Baiiuve de Toraine,” and “Jeune Moyfait”—are not quite as easily identifiable, and all seem to be included only because of their connections to famous men.<sup>15</sup> Marie de

Romieu chooses to omit all three individuals from her list. Whereas Estienne only produces five French models of female excellence, Romieu offers her readers ten—only two of whom replicate the list found in the *Paradoxes*. Having generously commended the learned ladies of Italy, Spain, and Germany, Romieu declares, “but above all it is France / Who’ll win the prize for greatest knowledge” (275-6). From this point forward, Romieu’s text diverges completely from her sources, and she creates an original historiography of sixteenth-century French women’s writing. As Whitney does in her epistle to the reader, Romieu compares her selection of her examples to gathering flowers to form her own “poesy”:

I am now like a woman who steps into a garden  
 When morning comes to pick some flowers.  
 Here’s hyblean thyme, and there’s a lovely rose,  
 A lily, a carnation, so many a fresh bloom,  
 All vying themselves to offer ‘til she cannot tell  
 Just how her hands a bouquet will compose. (277-82)

In addition to boasting of the sheer number of learned women in France, Romieu’s descriptions of the many varieties of flowers from which she might assemble her bouquet highlight the differences that exist among the “noble female minds” (285)—in France as well as across boundaries of time and nation, as we have already seen. France is so “fertile” with great women, Romieu effuses, that it “drive[s] my senses all to ecstasy” (286).<sup>16</sup>

Maintaining her non-linear history of women writers (as well as her modesty about the quality of her work), Romieu chooses to “imitate the bees, / That go gathering flowerets here and there” (287-8), so that her list of women will not reflect any hierarchy of talent or importance: “in this my discourse, one will be first, / Another in the middle, and one must be last, / With neither art nor order” (291-3). Of course, while Romieu may claim to have chosen her examples of female excellence at random, the reader’s experience of her poem thus far indicates that this is not and cannot be the case.

Larsen observes that Romieu regards these contemporaries throughout this section “as her ideal readers, as friends, and even as loved ones” (769). I would add that, as she did with Gambara and Colonna, Romieu adopts a familiarity with her contemporaries that implicitly assumes a place for herself among these admirable writing women. Thus she begins her tribute to the excellent women of France with “my Countess de Retz” (295), or Catherine de Clermont, whose knowledge of Greek, Latin, Italian, and French (of course) is highly praised. Further, Clermont’s skillful compositions in both poetry and prose “ravish the minds of the best-spoken men” (305) and through which “our senses you charm” (306).

Larsen marks the significance of Romieu’s opening choice, noting that “Clermont publicly proved her eloquence and thereby promoted her reputation as learned woman” (772). In addition to being an author in her own right, Clermont led her own salon that attracted contemporary aristocratic male and female poets and scholars. Noting Clermont’s close friendship with Catherine de Medicis and Marguerite de Valois (both are also included among Romieu’s great French women) and her participation in

public court performances and debates, Julie Campbell offers Clermont as “illustrative of how Italianate literary and social practices were becoming arguably acceptable for French noblewomen” (81). Clermont, whose works appear to have only circulated in manuscript among those in her circle, nonetheless “may be seen as central to the transmission of Renaissance literary culture in which women participated via the rhetorical spaces provided by salon society” (94). This international influence may also be seen in the community of learned women that Romieu constructs in her “Brief Discours,” and, as Clermont’s salon did for her, Romieu’s women provide a literary tradition, inspiration for other female poets, and protection from the attacks of those who would seek to control her pen and her behavior.

Romieu follows this leader of women with a quick procession of highly regarded writers: “Morel, Charamont, Elisene, / Des Roches de Poitiers, Graces of Pierie” (307-8). Morel and “Elisene” we have already seen in Estienne’s text, though Romieu’s Morel may refer to Camille rather than her mother. Unlike Estienne, though, Romieu gathers in her posy only women known for their writing, rather than for their husbands. Charamont, who appears between Morel and Hélisenne de Crenne has been identified by eighteenth-century historian Louise de Kéralio as Madeleine Chemeraut—a relative of the Dames des Roches and a poet in her own right (Larsen, “Introduction” 770 n.46). Madeleine and Catherine des Roches themselves follow “Elisene,” and Romieu calls them the “Graces of Pierie” (308), equating them with the ancient muses. Both Madeleine and her daughter, Catherine, were well known for their learning and poetry, and, like Catherine de Clermont, they were the hosts of a celebrated literary circle.

Further, both were recognized as great poets and learned women during their own time and beyond, inspiring both contemporary and later early modern female writers, such as Marie de Gendre, Dame de Rivéry, Marie de Gournay, and Madeleine de Scudéry (Larsen, “Introduction” 25). Of particular interest to the Dames des Roches was the importance of education for women, and their “coterie enabled its hostesses and other female participants to showcase their *érudition* at a unique moment in social literary history when the lines demarcating the later all-male academies from the salons run by women were still fluid” (23). This promotion of female learning, of course, is found in Romieu’s work as well. Catherine de Roches would have been especially appealing to Marie de Romieu (if we assume that she was unmarried at the time that her poems were published) because of her emphasis on defending “her status as a single learned woman” (80).

Continuing with her direct addresses to “you,” Romieu refers to—but does not identify by name--Marguerite de Valois, Hippolyta Scaravelli (Madame de Chastelier, Dame de Milieu), and Marguerite de Navarre. Marguerite de Valois earns a brief mention among the list of ladies beginning with Morel, with the emphasis on her role as leader—“you who hold the scepter of Navarre” (309)—rather than her role as Queen consort to King Henri III of Navarre (later Henri IV of France). Romieu also ignores Marguerite’s rather scandalous life and the riff with her mother, Catherine de Medici, who is the last contemporary woman to appear in the “Brief Discours.” While Marguerite de Valois was not known for her own writing, she, in her later years, became a great patron of the arts—but this happened well after the publication of Romieu’s

*Oeuvres.* Next comes Scaravelli, who, as Larsen remarks, was “the only high-born lady whom Marie de Romieu personally knew” (770):

And you, too, my lady-general, pride of Piedmont,  
 Whose illustrious blood embraces all of Italy,  
 Having long ruled Vicenza and Verona,  
 And whose ancestors, loving virtue,  
 Have always been both powerful and noble. (Romieu 310-14)

Little is known of Scaravelli except that she was a lady-in-waiting to Catherine de Medici and wife of Jean de Chastelier—the treasurer of France in Savoy and of the marquis of Saluces (or Saluzzo, on the border of south-eastern France and the piedmont in northwest Italy) in 1556. According to Prosper Blanchemain, the couple had three daughters and lived in “un château nommé le Plessis” (137n). He claims that they were close friends of the Romieu family. Jean de Chastelier was made a *chevalier de la main* by the Duke of Brissac in 1557, and he was treasurer of finances of France at the time of his death in 1580 (Allard 259). Despite the great reputation of Jean de Chastelier, Romieu chooses to emphasize the accomplishments of Scaravelli and her ancestors, whom she seems to identify as the Scaliger or Scaligeri family of Italian nobles—also known as the house of La Scala.<sup>17</sup> Scaravelli’s connection to the Scaligeri family is uncertain, but Romieu once again highlights the history and importance of the woman—rather than her (possibly more famous) husband. According to Romieu, Hippolyte Scaravelli’s ancestors were great leaders and warriors—traits that she too possesses in her “illustrious blood.”

Romieu claims that she will “say nothing of that princess great, / The pearl of Valois, goddess in the heavens / Now and forever” (315-17), referring to Marguerite de Navarre—the one French woman that Romieu does not address directly (perhaps because she was the only woman on the list who was no longer living). This Marguerite was also well-educated, thanks to the efforts of her mother, Louise de Savoy, and she was, of course, a prolific writer, as well as a patron of humanists and reformers and the leader of a famous salon. As the Queen of Navarre and the sister of King François I of France, Marguerite enjoyed great power and influence, which allowed her to support many artists and writers and to act on behalf of Reformers with her brother (Stephenson 113). Like the many ancient warrior-women that Romieu cites, Marguerite was courageous—as demonstrated by her successful efforts to free her husband from his imprisonment by Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, in 1525. For Romieu, Marguerite de Navarre’s legacy lives on in her nieces, Marguerite de Valois and Catherine de Medicis.

Finally, Romieu closes her commendation of the excellence of learned French women with Catherine de Medici, to whom all of France “surrenders to your sweet mercies” (318) and whose example confirms her “praises of the female race” (320). She was a queen and then the mother to three French kings—François II, Charles IX, and Henri III—all of whom she outlived. Her influence over her sons during their respective reigns was well-known, and she has been credited with keeping them in power, though she was denied the power to rule on her own (Crawford 23). Romieu acknowledges Catherine as the true and divine ruler of France:

Those who, in our time, have put in writing  
 The exploits of your kings, from your own mind have learned,  
 You're their holy Parnassus and their Permessian waters;  
 Everyone honors and regards you as a goddess. (321-4)

Though her sons were crowned kings, Romieu declares, it was Catherine who made them the great men that they became. However, this passage also highlights Catherine de Medicis's *lack* of power—the result of her sex (an inequity that we will see in Lanyer as well). Giving credit to Catherine for the “exploits of your kings,” Romieu also constructs “great Queen Catherine” (319) as the source of artistic and literary inspiration. She is “a goddess”—of France, of art, of all things—as “everyone” knows.

While Catherine de Medicis may, in her placement, appear to be held above the other named women in the poem, Romieu reminds her readers that Catherine is still only one of many great women whose virtues, Romieu claims, an unknown writer from rural France cannot adequately express:

To praise you worthily, my ladies,  
 One would need borrow the knowledge and the voice  
 Of a Valeria, or the fine speech,  
 Ornament of ancient Italy, of a Cornelia,  
 Not strong enough is my own voice. (325-29)

Here, Romieu brings her readers full circle—returning to ancient learned women. Of Valeria (Proba), Christine de Pizan writes, “She had such a noble mind and so loved and devoted herself to study that she mastered all seven liberal arts and was an excellent

poet” (65). In citing this accomplished Roman, Romieu also returns to Estienne’s *Paradoxes*. Once again, though, we see a marked difference in the treatment of this example of female excellence. Estienne, clustering Valeria with St. Paula and her daughter, St. Eustochion (whom Romieu named much earlier in her text), praises his final three models for their modesty and silence in not seeking fame through their endeavors (228). Romieu, as Larsen has noted, “purposefully leaves out such covert praise because her project is the public promotion of women” (774). Cornelia (Africanus), an original addition, was the mother of twelve children (she was, in fact, praised by Plutarch for being a good mother) who chose to remain a widow after her husband died. After her two surviving sons were “martyred for the Plebian cause,” Cornelia “continued her public life” and “entertain[ed] lavishly and correspond[ed] with the intelligent and powerful men of the age” (Salisbury 70-1). In stark contrast to Estienne’s celebration of women’s silence, Romieu admires and praises Valeria and Cornelia for their strong voices—and, by extension, honors all of the equally strong voices of the women who populate her “Brief Discourse.”

Romieu concludes her record of the excellence of women with a final invocation of her Muse, her “*Mignonne*,” asking her to “finish my dearest loves” (333). The relationships that the poet constructs here, as Larsen has observed, are “an inversion of the male erotic plot, where ‘Mignonne’ is the beloved” (769). Like Isabella Whitney and Veronica Franco, Romieu adopts the voice of the lover—an appropriation that continues throughout her volume as she praises both men and women. She asks her muse to “end this my discourse / With the friendship God always showed to women, /

Since he has given them his qualities most fine” (334-5). Here Romieu takes on those who would use biblical texts as evidence of woman’s inferiority, citing God’s command that Abraham was “always to do / What Sarah said” (339-40). Romieu here parallels Estienne as both take this command out of the context of Genesis 21:9-12, in which Abraham is told, “in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice” as it pertains to the matter of his son by his mistress, Hagar, and his son, Isaac. Abraham is by no means told to obey his wife in all things! It is likely that Estienne counts on his reader to recognize the omission—in keeping with the ambiguity of his “defense.” However, Romieu, making a more sincere claim, takes the same liberty with the text that her misogynist detractors have, and the fact remains that, in this particular passage, Abraham is indeed advised to heed Sarah’s words. Romieu strays from her source texts again in her last reference to the Bible as she turns to the New Testament, in which Jesus Christ, “rising from the dead, / First to women his sainted humanity revealed” (341-2). Citing Mark 16:9, “Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils,” Romieu challenges her Christian readers to argue against the superiority of the female sex. The implication is, of course, that if the son of God honored women so, what basis has any mortal man to do otherwise. Thirty years later, Aemilia Lanyer will make the same argument in England—though more thoroughly and more aggressively.

Finally, Romieu returns again to Estienne and his example of “Mercure Trismegiste,” or “Trismegistus,” as she calls him (343), adding “and several other sages” (perhaps to strengthen her argument—or to maintain her rhyme scheme?). She does not

stray very far from her source in this passage, repeating the claim of Trismegistus's "many solemn texts" (344) that "places uninhabited by women / Are, like the desert" (345-6). Continuing along the same lines as her source, Romieu credits women with being the recipients of heaven's "influx of good things in prodigal abundance" (352), then repeats Estienne's claim that women must be worthy of respect because the Greek virtues have retained feminine names (353-4). She omits Estienne's plea to his male readers to forget whatever negative picture of woman they carry in their memories and his hope that his "defense" has "imprinted and engraved" woman's excellence in their minds (230). He implores them to abandon "this too cold and venomous language," against which they should "criticize and rail" (231). Instead, Romieu is completely confident in her argument, which she concludes with a boldly defiant statement: "for women are, / In virtue and honor, more excellent by far / Than are the great and wandering hordes of men" (354-6). In these final lines, Romieu asserts her voice over that of her source texts, claiming ownership of the "Brief Discours" as well as her own poetic authority.

Margaret Harp, if I may return to her seeming contempt for Romieu's poetry (or, if not contempt, then a very low opinion), equates Romieu's "prefer[ence for] imitat[ing] what she considers the best poetry, whether by men or women," with the absence of the poet's "own narrative voice" (480). However, Romieu's epistle to her brother establishes from the outset the clear and distinctive voice of a woman who, like Christine de Pizan, Isabella Whitney, Veronica Franco, and, later, Aemilia Lanyer, rejects misogynist discourse and seeks to prove woman's excellence. Further, in her "Brief

Discours,” after clearing (through adaptation) the “rubble” of Lando’s and Estienne’s anti-woman “defenses,” Romieu also constructs a historiography of women writers that is based, not on hierarchical positioning, but on a shared defiance of cultural expectations of feminine behavior. Rather than viewing herself as being in competition with “more eloquent men,” as La Charité suggests, Romieu’s imitation and adaptation of conventionally masculine genres and male-authored texts provides an opportunity for her to demonstrate that her learning and poetic skill matches, if not surpasses, that of celebrated male poets.

In *Les Premières œuvres poétiques de la Mademoiselle Marie de Romieu, Vivaroise*, the poet exhibits her mastery of not only the discourse, but also the elegy, the sonnet, the eclogue, the complaint, the love lyric. While her poetic voice in the “Brief Discours” may be “distinctly that of a woman,” the volume’s other poems present much more ambiguous personae. Romieu writes *to* both men and women *as* both a man and a woman, a transgendered performance recognized by her brother, who, as La Charité notes, describes his sister’s verse in his Latin epigram to her volume “as ‘carmina digna viro,’ poems worthy of a man” (“Ce Male Vers” 91). In this respect, Romieu’s poetry is very much like that of Whitney and Franco, who both transgress gender boundaries in their work. Scholars have deemed both Whitney and Franco worthy of critical attention, emphasizing their imitation, adaptation, and subversion of masculine literary traditions. To exclude Marie de Romieu, who does the same thing, from such consideration is short-sighted at best. Though space prevents an in-depth analysis of Romieu’s individual poems here, they reveal the experiences and aspirations of a young, middle-

class woman poet who, despite her geographical and social distance from prominent literary circles, engages with their traditions and hopes to one day join the ranks of the professional poet.

Whether or not Jacques's claims of Marie's prior service to the volume's primary dedicatee, Marguerite de Lorraine, are true, they unite Marie de Romieu with the other writers included in this study as a fellow unemployed servant to the aristocracy. She does not offer the same criticisms of class and social hierarchies in her work, but this may be attributed to the fact that Romieu, unlike the others, is physically removed from the inner-workings of court circles and the visual evidence of the effects of economic inequality that is so apparent in densely populated cities. However, she is clearly aware of the social disparity that exists between men and women, as we have seen in her complaint that domestic duties keep her from her writing, whereas her brother, Jacques, is free to compose "in his study." Romieu continues her critique of gender inequality in the other poems of *Les Premières œuvres poétiques*, particularly in her praise of the widowed Madame de Chastelier and in the "love lessons" that she offers male suitors. She authorizes her voice and her participation in the *querelle des femmes* by first constructing her City of Women, which provides both protection and inspiration (much like a patron) for Romieu's work. Likewise, Aemilia Lanyer assembles a community of learned women and potential female patrons in her *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* as a mode of authorization. Instead of locating her source of protection within these women, however, Lanyer declares herself beholden only to God, and she offers herself and her

book as a mirror in which her noble dedicatees may experience Christ's love and gain true virtue.

## Notes

1. All citations of Romieu's "Brief Discours" are from Domna C. Stanton's translation, included in *The Defiant Muse*, unless otherwise noted. Citations of Romieu's other poems, as well as those from Ortensio Landi's and Charles Estienne's texts, are from André Winandy's edition of Romieu's *Les Premières œuvres poétiques*, translations my own.
2. Salmon explains, "The town of Viviers, which had been the bishopric of the Vivarais since late Roman times, is located on the eastern border of Vivarais on the Rhône, approximately 100 miles (164 km) south of Lyon. Viviers was a walled town with a population "not much in excess of three thousand" (212).
3. Charité uses this to explain the disparity in tone and style between Romieu's "Brief Discours" and *l'Instructions pour les jeunes femmes* and the love lyrics in her volume.
4. Le Sourd discusses the existence of a possible portrait of Marie de Romieu, kept by (possible) descendants of Jacques and Marie de Romieu in the Castle of Masigon. He describes the lady in the portrait, who appears to be dressed like a noblewoman, and notes that the name "Marie de Romieu" is inscribed in the background of the painting. Le Sourd does not, however, attempt to prove that this Marie is the poet (104-105).
5. Yates also identifies distinct religious and political motivations for Henri III's honoring of the House of Lorraine during these revels: "In 1581, Henri III appeared to be drawing closer to the extreme Catholic party amongst his subjects"—a party

with which the House of Lorraine was identified (87). “The Joyeuse wedding,” Yates observes, “which was a predominantly Lorraine affair, was attended by all the leading members of the house, including the Duke and Cardinal of Guise, who gave some of the entertainments in the series of magnificences” (87). While Henri III was “genuinely seized with Counter Reformation Catholic fervour,” Yates argues that “it has [not] been sufficiently emphasized that it was explicitly a non-violent Counter Reformation...[which] appeal[ed] to heretics through works of charity and exhibitions of penitence” (87). He suggests that Henri III’s attention to the House of Lorraine at the Joyeuse wedding festivals was “being a Catholic ‘politique,’ a believer in non-violence and tolerant methods” (88). This may indicate a political motivation for Jacques’s presentation of the volume to Marguerite de Lorraine.

6. This argument originates with Cornelius Agrippa and is frequently repeated by defender of women in the *querelle des femmes*. See Albert Rabil’s introduction to his edition of *Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex* (50-54). This influence upon Romieu’s argument is also noted by Larsen (772 n.56).
7. Of course, as Pizzorno notes, “Lando’s Paradossi and his keen rhetoric of estrangement is the opposite of Castiglione’s controlled manipulation of the rules of language and conduct in society” (24); also, she observes that the *querelle des femmes* in France “had developed more into an intellectual controversy on lady friends, or a *querelle des amyes*, conducted in a satirical and paradoxical tone. It was a serio-comic examination of the behaviour of the courtly lady and an expression of the anti-Courtier trend” (29).

8. “Consider the gentle heart and noble courage shown by the noble Phriné, who offered to rebuild the great wall of Thebes, without asking any other compensation from them than to accept this grace, that her gift should be legally engraved for the record on some spot there.” [“Considerez le gentil Coeur et noble courage que monstra la noble Phriné, de s'estre offerte à rebastir la grande longueur des murailles de Thebes, sans en demander autre recompense aux citoyens que de recevoir d'eulx ceste grace, que son don fust autentiquement insculpé pour memoire en quelques endroits d'icelles”] (Estienne 225).
9. Citing the *Nouvelle biographie générale* 41 (586), Rothstein notes that Marie de Romieu was “a favorite widely reputed to be the lover of King Henry III” (137). However, there is no evidence to suggest that these rumors were true.
10. Landi does not include Eustochium, while Estienne names her as his last model.
11. Landi writes, “Sappho, inventor of the Sapphic verse, courteous of poetry by the most excellent men of that profession & happy to remain confused, the same notwithstanding great praise did/made still the beautiful Corinna.” [“Saffo inuentrice de uerso saffi cōrotese di poesia con eccelletisimi huomini di quella professione & feceli rimaner cōfusi, lo medesimo non senza grā lode fece anchora la bella Corrinna...”] (144). Estienne writes, “Sappho trouva les vers qui de son nom furent appelez Sapphicques, & eut grande contention alencontre de plusieurs excellent poetes de son temps, touts lesquels a la fin elle rendit confuz, ainsi que (non sans grande louange) feit la belle Corinne” (137).

12. Landi writes, “...& in our times which sharp and clever poet can ever compare to the illustrious marchesana di Pescara & the courteous lady the signora Veronica da Gambera, or to the gentle Emilia Angosciolla? I will not write abundantly to argue about everything the women that to our clear times I am for true nobilta, & care for much virtu, having of that plentifully written monsignor Giovio bishop in Nocceria, & big writer of the stories it, but because he in little cards not bridge close a lot what, I dare I say, itself to the present much more wonderful woman of value, of what the ancient ours.” [“...& nostril tempi qual arguto & ingegnoso poeta por si potrebbe mai al paragon dela marchesana di Pescara dell’illustre & cortese signora la signora Veronica da Gambera, o della gentil Emilia Angosciolla? non mi stendero diffusamente in ragionare di tutte le donne che a nostri tempi chiare sono per uera nobilta, & riguardeuoli per molta uirtu, hauendone di cio copiosamente scritto monsignor Giouio uescouo in Nocciera, & gran scrittore delle storie moderne, ma perche egli in poche carte non puote chiudere molte cose, ardisco io dire, trouarsi al presete dōine di ualore assai piu marauiglioso, di quel chebbero gli antichi nostri” (144-45).] Estienne writes, “Et si nous voulons parler de nos temps, qui sera le poete Italiā si hardy, & si seur en sa composition, qui se vueille apparier a vne Marquisanne de Pesquiere, & a vne Veronicque de Gambara, a vne getille Armille Angosciole?” (137).

13. Italian poet, compared to Stampa, Gambara, and Colonna by Francesco Trucchi in his *Poesie italiane inedite di dugento autori dall’origine della lingua infino al secolo decimosettimo raccolte e illustre*, vol. 3 (1847) pp. 312-313—includes sonnet attributed to her. Little available biographical information. Identified by Corsaro as

being from a noble family in Piacentina. He also attributes the sonnet seen in Trucci's volume, *quando lieta pensai sedermi all'ombra*, to her and cites two sonnets by Giulio Camillo that are dedicated to her. A version of Anguisciola's sonnet also appears in Cyprienn Rore's 1552 volume, *Terzo libro di madrigal* (Corsaro 229 n. 13).

14. "En Espagne et en Alemaigne vous en trouvez des legions qui tiendroyent escole de toutes sciences (et principalement du bon langage et polie escriture) aux plus sçavans hommes du pays" (Estienne 227).
15. Trevor Peach hypothesizes that the first, "Robertet," might be Estienne's wife, Perrette Bade—but he offers no evidence to support this theory. As for the identities of the "Baliiuve de Toraine" and "Jeune Moyfait," Peach has no suggestions (228). My own research has turned up a few possibilities; however, they may be more confusing than helpful as they seem to point toward male rather than female writers—which is problematic given Estienne's description of them as "citoyennes," or female citizens. Robertet is the name of a famous Renaissance family, which descends from the male poet and writer, Jean Robertet (1405-1492). Jean is, in fact, the only member of this family described as an author—hence the confusion. The one well-known Robertet woman, Françoise (1520-1580), is Jean's granddaughter. Her fame, however, appears to be tied to her husband, Jean Babou, a statesman, and her granddaughter, Gabrielle d'Estrées (1571-1599), who in 1591 became the mistress and favorite of Henri IV, with whom she had three children. Françoise is included among Pierre de Bourdeille Brantôme's 1882 *Les Dames Galantes*, all of

whom are hailed on the title page as “belles et honneste.” Her praised “accomplishments” include the names of her two husbands (she remarried after Babou’s death), her five beautiful daughters (who also had many children), and her great, natural beauty (128-29). There is no mention of her learning. The “Baliiuve de Toraine” is an equally vexing reference, primarily because it also appears to point to Jean Babou and/or Françoise Robertet. Babou is described in J. X. Carré’s 1879 *Dictionnaire Géographique, Historique, et Biographique D’indre-et-loire et de l’ancienne province de Touraine* as “ambassadeur à Rome, capitaine du château d’Amboise, gouverneur et bailli de Touraine, maître général de l’artillerie de France et conseiller d’État” until his death in October 1569 (281). “Bailluve,” as the feminine form of “bailli,” suggests that Babou’s wife, Françoise, is the object of admiration. However, the fact remains that neither Babou nor Robertet is known to have written anything—and neither is known for being learned.

Etienne’s last named contemporary is “jeune Moyfaict,” whose identity, like the other two, is a bit elusive. The only reasonable match again seems to be a man: Pierre Moifait—who signed book-privileges by the *Prévôt* in several reform texts, including *L’histoire et recueil de la victoire obtenue contre les seduyctz et abusez lutheriens par Anthoine, duc de Calabre* (1527), *Chants royaux, oraisons et aultres petitz traictez* (1527), and *Le debat de deux dames sur le passetemps de la chasse* (1528)] and a 1526 edition of *Roman de la Rose* entitled *Clément Marot’s Recension, I* (Armstrong 52, n.2 and 281-2). Moifait was also the seigneur de Villeneuve-le-Comte en Brie et de Bon-Recueil (Jurgens 227). According to the *Ordonnances des*

*rois de France*, Pierre Moifait died in 1541, leaving behind his widow, Philippe Lormier (92). While no information other than her relationship with Pierre Moifait can be found about Philippe Lormier, Moifait's involvement (albeit indirect) with an edition of *Roman de la Rose*—arguably the text that prompted the *querelle des femmes*—is particularly intriguing.

16. Though Louise Labé does not appear in Romieu's catalog, this union of education and writing with sexual pleasure clearly echoes the Lyonnaise poet's dedicatory epistle to Clémence de Bourges. Labé's absence is difficult to explain, though Claude La Charité hints that this omission “seems at the very least revealing” [“paraît pour le moins révélateur”] (“Ce Male Vers” 90). What it reveals Charité does not say, but I suggest that Labé's absence is simply due to the fact that Marie de Romieu's list of great French women writers and patrons includes, with only two exceptions, women who were living at the time that her volume was published. “Elisene,” or Helisenne de Crenne, died sometime after 1552—so she may have been alive, though she would have been a very old woman (born near 1510). Marguerite de Navarre died in 1549, but her role as the daughter of Catherine de Medicis and former patron of Pierre de Ronsard may have earned her an honorary mention in Romieu's catalogue. So, Romieu's omission of Louise Labé does not necessarily indicate unfamiliarity with the Lyonnaise poet's work nor a statement about her place in a tradition of French women writers.
17. Dante mentions the La Scala family in his *Paradiso* (17.76-93), paying homage to Cangrande della Scala, who allowed Dante to take refuge in his home in Verona

during his years in exile (Havely 28). After more than one-hundred years of rule and in-fighting, the Scaligeri family was finally ousted from power in Verona in the late fourteenth century (King 201). One member of this family, Julius Caesar Scaliger or Giulio Cesare della Scala (1484-1558), was a renowned scholar and physician who spent much of his career in France—beginning in 1573 he was accused of lying about his ancestry and that he was actually of the Bordone family (Grafton 691).

## CHAPTER V

### “LOOKE IN THIS MIRROUR OF A WORTHY MIND”: AEMILIA LANYER’S REFLECTIONS UPON CLASS AND AUTHORITY

Aemilia Lanyer’s *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (*SDRJ*), as represented by its title page, is a devotional work that appears to pose no threat to social order because its religious subject matter was viewed as appropriate and, as Barbara K. Lewalski adds, “perhaps even laudable for women writers” (“Seizing Discourses” 51). The volume’s advertised content, which includes only the title poem and “divers other things not unfit to be read” (1), seems to disguise the work’s feminist arguments; however, three of the four listed topics emphasize women: “Eve’s Apologie in defence of Women,” “The Teares of the Daughters of Jerusalem,” and “The Salutation and Sorrow of the Virgine Marie” (1). Though the title page declares its author to be “Wife to Captaine *Alfonso Lanyer* Servant to the Kings Majestie” (1), claiming authorization for Lanyer through her husband and his ties to James I’s court, the book is published under *her* name—a move that asserts her own authority. Lisa Schnell contends that the title page “indicates that, while Lanyer herself might have insisted on a masculine notion of authorship...,she is, at the same time, entirely subject to the restrictions governing women’s writing” (81). This is supported by the fact that the volume’s “divers other things” are not specifically listed as part of the book’s contents; however, I suggest that the omission of certain information on the title page suggests that either Lanyer or her publisher 1) knew that the arguments within were subversive; and 2) chose to submit—at least on the surface—to patriarchal social codes. Inside the *SDRJ*, Lanyer adapts the masculine conventions of

patronage poems, misogynist biblical discourse, and even the country-house genre—using them to condemn rather than reify the history of women’s oppression.

As did Whitney, Franco, and Romieu, Lanyer adapts, manipulates, and appropriates traditional poetic conventions, tropes, and forms in order to craft a counter-language with which she can confront and reject the socially-constructed hierarchies that these traditions perpetuate. However, whereas the other writers focus their criticism on men, misogyny, and patriarchal authority, Lanyer emphasizes women’s role in perpetuating their own oppression. As we have seen, Franco performs a similar critique in her Letter 22, but her concern is specifically with the Venetian sex trade. Lanyer also echoes Whitney’s exposure of the negative effects of arbitrary class distinctions, though the *SDRJ* focuses on these divisions among women in particular. Finally, like Christine de Pizan and Marie de Romieu, Lanyer rewrites women’s history, but she concentrates on the biblical narratives that were at the very heart of the early modern *querelle des femmes*. Since its inception, Christian doctrine had been used to maintain strict hierarchies of power—most notably that of strong over weak, which was easily interpreted as man’s domination over woman. Lanyer’s exegesis of the Fall and the Passion as well as her emphasis on women’s virtue throughout the volume, argues that such patriarchal interpretation of biblical texts is not only incorrect but is in complete opposition to the true teachings of Christ.

Just as misogynist readings of the Bible were used to create and uphold oppressive hierarchies, so too did the patronage system function within a patriarchal culture. While the *SDRJ*’s distinctly Protestant character may be part of the author’s

attempt to distance herself from her Jewish-Italian background, her Protestantism also authorizes her re-reading of the Fall and the Passion as well as her emphasis on the power inherent in female learning. Achsah Guiborry argues that, “for all of its concern for patronage, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* asks to be taken seriously as religious poetry that adopts Christ’s message to give a special place to women in devotion” (192). However, this distinction between patronage and piety is reductive in that it ignores Lanyer’s own decision to incorporate the two in her volume. By combining her efforts to attract exclusively female patrons with a distinctly feminist reading of biblical narratives, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, as Barbara K. Lewalski has argued, “challenges patriarchal ideology and the discourses supporting it, opposing the construct of women as chaste, silent and obedient, and subordinate, and displacing the hierarchical authority of fathers and husbands” (14). Lanyer’s imagined community is comprised of some of the most influential and powerful Protestant women in Jacobean England, and her biblical exegesis is essential to her criticism of the social hierarchies that separate her from her patrons—ultimately preventing the kind of united community of women that is required to resist misogyny and patriarchal rule. Through her use of mirror imagery, Lanyer imagines a legacy of learned women whose real and imagined daughters are reflections of their mothers, creates a community of resistant women that is authorized through their true reflection of Christ’s teachings, and self-identifies with the garden of a country estate which reflects the author’s own sense of sorrow and loss, caused by the oppressive external forces of patriarchal rule.

### **Othering Authority**

The daughter of an Italian-Jewish immigrant, Baptist Bassano, and his English common-law wife, Margaret Johnson, Aemilia Bassano entered the world in 1569, firmly residing on the margins of London society. Baptist, part of a family of Italian musicians, held a position in the court of Elizabeth I, giving Aemilia access to a world that a middle-class girl would not have normally enjoyed and which may have been the impetus for her later role as professional writer. After her father's death in 1576, Aemilia, according to Leeds Barroll, "presumably lived alone with her mother, her sister having married in that same year" (31). However, Pamela Joseph Benson proposes that, having "learned to play an instrument...as a professional skill" ("To Play the Man" 245) from her father, Aemilia may have been "in domestic service as a musician and perhaps a music teacher" (245)—possibly working for Margaret Clifford, Countess of Cumberland, the primary dedicatee of the *SDRJ*. Benson's scenario seems more likely, and it certainly would explain Lanyer's claims of a personal relationship with several of her dedicatees and would have put her in contact with Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, Lord Chamberlain of Queen Elizabeth's household, with whom she had an affair.

Lanyer's proposed access to court circles is supported by the dedicatory poems to *SDRJ*, in which she claims to have been personally acquainted with the late Queen Elizabeth—"Since great *Elizaes* favor blest my youth" ("To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie" 110)—and to have been in service to Susan Bertie, Countess Dowager of Kent—"Come that you were the Mistris of my youth" ("To the Ladie *Susan*" 1). Lanyer also refers to the previous patronage of Margaret Clifford, Countess Dowager of

Cumberland in the title poem and the concluding country-house poem, “The Description of Cooke-ham.” In the latter, Lanyer credits the countess with the very existence of the volume in the reader’s hand: “...you (great Lady) Mistris of that Place, / From whose desires did spring this work of Grace” (11-12). Throughout the volume, Lanyer constructs a community of women that works in opposition to patriarchal control—in her dedicatory poems, in her feminist exegetical reading of women’s roles in her retelling of biblical narratives, and in her vision of a lost female utopia in “Cooke-ham.” However, even as she bows in acquiescence to her noble dedicatees, Lanyer simultaneously risks offending the very women from whom she seeks support by openly criticizing the class hierarchies that separate her from her imagined community of learned women—and which maintain her potential patrons’ power over her. Like Isabella Whitney before her, Lanyer is an unemployed servant of the aristocracy, and, like Veronica Franco and Marie de Romieu, she actively seeks to be in service to her potential patrons, though she ultimately expresses little hope of receiving any support from her dedicatees. It is from this vulnerable position in the margins that all four writers recognize what bell hooks argued some four centuries later: “Our words are not without meaning. They are an action, a resistance” (146).

Lanyer’s very public affair with Lord Hunsdon no doubt helped to further distance her from a position of power—marking her as unchaste in addition to being foreign and a servant from the middle class. However, unlike traditional English models of womanhood, which allowed for neither independence nor a life outside of the domestic sphere, Lanyer’s Italian background provided a very different “notion of

artistic opportunities,” which, by extension, allowed her to imagine the possibility of “fashion[ing] a self, and, from the position of that self, address past and potential patrons. In other words, she was freed to act like an English man” (Benson 43). As we have already seen in the example of Veronica Franco, women’s writing and publication were far more common and acceptable in Italy than in England.<sup>1</sup> Further, as Benson notes, “there were professional women musicians and actresses in Italy” (245), providing examples of women with successful public lives. Going so far as to suggest that Lanyer may have been “an English *cortegiana onesta*,” Benson attributes Lanyer’s bold request for patronage to her outsider status as an Italian in London (245). Whether or not Lanyer actually played the role of the courtesan in her relationship with Lord Hunsdon, it would not be unreasonable to think that she knew of the Venetian courtesans because of their widespread fame. Further, as Benson suggests, Lanyer probably knew Italian as a result of her family ties (263-4)—a knowledge that allows for the possibility that she read Italian texts like Franco’s *Terze Rime*. Though no solid evidence exists to prove that Lanyer was familiar with Franco’s work, the many textual similarities between *Terze Rime* and *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*—particularly in the two volumes’ concluding country-house poems—suggest that she was.

In addition to releasing Lanyer from the constraints of English models of gender, her Italian-Jewish background also came with potentially dangerous consequences. As Barbara Bowen has noted, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* was “written as England underwent a massive shift in its relation to the world” and “at a time when both [Italians and Jews] were racialized and ‘race’ was being newly mobilized as a political category”

(275). With the memory of the 1609 expulsion of Jews from England fresh in her mind, Lanyer was no doubt aware of her precarious social position and the fact that her Jewishness “could still be a criminal offense” (291). Lanyer, again like Whitney’s unemployed maidservant and Franco’s courtesan, is made unlawful by inequitable laws that sought to control those who were seen (however unreasonably) to pose a threat to social hierarchies. Lanyer’s repeated descriptions of herself as “dark”—which, incidentally, have led A.L. Rowse and others to identify her as Shakespeare’s “dark lady”—indicate her familiarity with the newly developing meanings of this descriptor (and its converse, “fair”) “as she places herself in relation to a (white, Christian) community of women” (Bowen 289). Bowen further complicates Lanyer’s notion of an egalitarian society of women—barring issues of class—by submitting that “poststructuralist thought has made it clear that communities tend to consolidate their identity through the nomination of an Other” (279)—in this case, the contrast is between “fair” women, who constitute “womanhood,” and “dark” non-women, like Lanyer. This new concept of race is the product of “the colonial enterprises of merchant capitalists,” which Bowen notes, citing Kim Hall, included “England’s entrance into the African slave trade” (280). Lanyer, I agree, does present her darkness as a “‘sign’ of [her] class and cultural ‘difference’” (hooks 148). However, rather than “surrender every vestige of who [she is],” Lanyer attempts to redefine the “role of ‘exotic Other,’” transforming it into a position of authority as she “creates spaces within that culture of domination” (148).

While her community of women may define itself in opposition to an Other, Lanyer does not necessarily define that Other as the “dark” non-woman. Instead, I suggest that, in emphasizing her darkness in contrast to her “fair” dedicatees, Lanyer is actually embracing her difference as part of her efforts in the *SDRJ* to highlight the socially-constructed nature of accepted hierarchies of gender and class. As an individual on the threshold of such binaries of identity, Lanyer, like the other women included in this study, is removed enough from dominant culture that she does not feel compelled to abide by its rules, but she is close enough to it that she recognizes its inner workings. From this vantage point, Lanyer is able to expose the weaknesses of England’s social hierarchies in the same devastating manner as Whitney’s “Wyll.” But rather than simply identifying the problems inherent in this imposed social order, Lanyer rewrites the myths that were used to form the inequities that currently exist, exposing their false nature and establishing women’s authority as the true imitators of Christ. Ultimately, Lanyer places *men* in the role of Other, reversing traditional subject-object positioning, and investing women in general and women writers in particular with “natural” and divine authority.

### **Mothers’ Legacies and the Mirror of Female Authority**

Lanyer’s nine dedicatory poems and their female addressees have been the subject of much critical debate—particularly over whether they, along with the rest of the volume, constitute a cohesive community of women. Lewalski, in her essay, “Of God and Good Women,” posits that, not only do the dedicatory poems “portray a contemporary community of learned and virtuous women with the poet Aemilia their

associate and celebrant” (212), but they also “present a female lineage of virtue from mother to daughter” (222). Elaine V. Beilin adds that the potential patrons compose “an ideal gallery devoted solely to Christian virtue” (184). Arguing that “the *Salve*’s copious preliminary material announces the text’s site of production as collective and socially collaborative,” Wendy Wall views this community as “compensat[ing] for Lanyer’s sense of social alienation” (322-3). Susanne Woods, in “Aemilia Lanyer and Ben Jonson: Patronage, Authority, and Gender,” suggests that the poet “seeks to create authority through community,” using class to obscure gender and using Christian devotion to obscure class (20-24). Lewalski, in “Seizing Discourses and Reinventing Genres,” notes that Lanyer’s dedications “rewrite cultural and literary discourses pertaining to courtiership and patronage” (50), as does Kari Boyd McBride, who adds that Lanyer “substitut[es] a religious sphere for the courtly one” (60). McBride also observes the dedications’ “dynamic of competition as well as cooperation,” which Lanyer uses as part of “her constructio[n] of female connection across distances” (155). Identifying the “matriarchal emphasis” (149) in the poems, Naomi J. Miller contends that Lanyer urges the women to move “beyond paternal constructs of maternal duties and capabilities...to potentially enabling maternal legacies of speech and female authority” (155).

While these very positive interpretations are exciting and lend themselves nicely to arguments for Lanyer’s feminism, other critics are not so convinced that Lanyer’s patronage poems represent unity as much as they highlight its absence. Lisa Schnell points to the bitterness that Lanyer may have felt at losing access to “some of the

material privileges of aristocratic life" (79), which she had enjoyed as Hunsdon's mistress, but which she lost once she was made to marry Alfonso Lanier after she became pregnant with the Lord Chamberlain's child. Schnell argues that Lanyer actually constructs herself in the dedications as superior to her dedicatees and that "for all her feminist energy, Lanyer is unable—and, it would seem, unwilling—to gloss over the enormous differences that exist between her and her addressees...[making her] incapable of imagining a unified female community. Her emphasis, instead, is on the divisiveness of women" (95-6). Barbara Bowen, as I have already noted, makes a similar claim, citing racial divisions between Lanyer and her potential patrons. However, Bowen believes that Lanyer *can* imagine a community of women—but that this community "is always envisioned or remembered, never experienced by Lanyer in the present" (293). Mary Ellen Lamb, like others, recognizes Lanyer's written challenge to class hierarchies in the dedications (and the volume as a whole), but she also stresses that Lanyer is actively seeking patronage—that is, economic support—from these women, which automatically places her in the position of a servant who is "not invested with the rights to make explicit demands" (55). Finally, Kimberly Anne Coles urges critics to "be alert to the artifice" of Lanyer's voice (151). She identifies the *SDRJ*'s feminism as a "rhetorical tactic—one developed in contradistinction to male poets with whom she was in direct financial competition—that amounts to a marketing device" (151). Lanyer, Coles claims, enacts "a self-conscious performance of gender" (164), and she wonders "whether this expression would have been conceived absent the financial imperative that forces its claim" (165).

This critical divide between patronage and piety and between community and otherness, I maintain, does not need to be divisive at all. In fact, Lanyer's overt bid for patronage, her imagined community of learned women, and her emphasis on her social and physical distance from her dedicatees work together as part of the volume's complicated arguments against the culturally-constructed hierarchies that prevent the creation of a truly unified female community of resistance. Such a proto-feminist movement could, in Lanyer's mind, disrupt patriarchal injunctions on members of the lower classes, which include women, people of color, and individuals who are economically dependent upon the whims of the aristocracy. One cannot ignore the *SDRJ*'s feminism and class-consciousness, nor can one overlook Lanyer's thinly-veiled criticisms of her dedicatees. To suggest that Lanyer is *either* seeking patronage *or* making a feminist statement *or* criticizing class distinctions is to miss the point altogether. Instead, Lanyer relies on the trope of mirrors and their reflections throughout her dedicatory poems to create a maternal legacy of female patrons. In her analysis of mother's legacies and Whitney's "Wyll," Wendy Wall contends that "these female legacies do not merely make visible women's disenfranchisement, but act as a complex form in which a provisional self-authorization is made possible" (40). The authors of mother's legacies anticipated "future appearances in print, appearances which would transform them into 'publique Monuments'" (40). Even as Lanyer offers her book as a monument to her dedicatees, she emphasizes its role in securing her own place in a feminine literary history—hoping for the future support of female patrons. She creates a

community of heirs to a tradition of learned women that includes both writers and patrons, positioning herself as the next in line.

However, Lanyer is aware of her lower status, and she emphasizes class divisions among women as the primary impediment to collective female autonomy. This imagined Protestant and feminist community of women, Lanyer asserts, must first recognize that the female sex is constructed as a social and economic class in and of itself if they are to overcome the history of unjust oppression of women. By constructing her maternal legacy of real and imagined mother-daughter relationships, Lanyer creates a familial bond that subverts the link between social rank and birth. Instead of inheriting titles and wealth, Lanyer's daughters receive their mothers' virtues, and all of the women are united in a cooperative community that is committed to the advancement of the female sex as a group. Lanyer's dedications vary from general addresses to "all ladies," to recommendations to mothers to pass the *SDRJ* along to their biological daughters, to the learned "daughters" of Elizabeth I, to Lanyer's literary "mothers," to widows who are presented as models of female virtue and (potential) "mothers" to Lanyer's future work, and, finally, to a daughter and "sister" whose recent marriage threatens the existence of Lanyer's imagined community. This female lineage, which is both ideal and flawed, reveals the potential for women to effect social change as well as the social realities that make Lanyer's vision seem unattainable—points that are mirrored in the passion poem and "The Description of Cooke-ham."

Lanyer's first dedication to address a wider female readership, "To all vertuous Ladies in generall," exhorts her addressees to "Come wait on hir whom winged Fame

attends” (3), and to “Let this faire Queene not unattended bee, / When in my Glass she daines her selfe to see” (6-7). “Put on your wedding garments” (8), she continues, advising these literary ladies-in-waiting to “Let Virtue be your guide” (10) and to rest assured that “The Bridegroomme” (9) will be with them. Lanyer’s aristocratic readers are both bridesmaids and ladies-in-waiting to Queen Anne, though their primary concern is (or should be) serving Christ. Lanyer compares her readers to the five wise virgins whose faith allowed them to attend the bridegroom’s wedding banquet:

But fill your Lamps with oyle of burning zeale,  
That to your Faith he may his Truth reveale. (13-14)

Inviting them to honor Christ’s passion in robes of “purple scarlet white...deckt with Lillies” (15-17), Lanyer instructs the celebrants to “Adorne your temples with faire *Daphnes crowne*” (22), whose transformation into a laurel tree prevented her rape by Apollo—protecting female chastity from the dangers of man’s desire to possess woman. This image of the tree as symbolic of woman’s protection from man will appear again in “The Description of Cooke-ham” as part of Lanyer’s feminine utopia—as does the laurel wreath, which will represent female constancy.<sup>2</sup> The poet aligns the wisdom of Minerva with Cynthia’s chastity, qualities that define Lanyer’s notion of virtue, and she disregards the disapproval of Venus, the goddess of beauty and love. Again, Lanyer introduces more of the themes of the *SDRJ*: the danger of female beauty and the misfortune that will befall women who love (earthly) men.

As an alternative, Lanyer proposes a homosocial (and, some argue, homoerotic) community, beginning with the Muses: “these nine Worthies [to whom] all faire mindes

resort" (35). She authorizes the women to "Annoynt your haire with *Aarons* pretious oyle," consecrating themselves as priests, which was, of course, a radical suggestion—though Lanyer has already established herself as priest as she ministers to her readers and will later (re)interpret Scripture. "In Christ," she proclaims, "all honour, wealth, and beautie's wonne: / By whose perfections you appeare more faire / Than *Phoebus*, if he seav'n times brighter were" (54-6). Here and throughout the *SDRJ*, Lanyer argues that true nobility can only be achieved through virtue rather than blood, so this poem addressed to "all vertuous Ladies" challenges the very basis of social hierarchies—which she will extend from class to gender and beyond. In closing, Lanyer requests that these "worthy Ladies" (71) will "grace this little Booke" (72), assuring them that her admiration of them is no less than that of the named dedicatees, "[w]hom Fame commends to be the very best" (77). Lanyer begins to address Fame, who "willd my Muse" (81) to commemorate "their glorious Trophies" (82) in verse. While, as Woods's notes on the text explain, Lanyer is here "acknowledg[ing] that many of the 'vertuous Ladies' she addresses deserve more specific praise, but time and humility allow her only to praise them in general" (15), I suggest that her emphasis on "fame" invites another reading. Lanyer assigns the responsibility of deciding who is worthy of praise to Fame, by whom "there are a number honoured." In doing so, she emphasizes that the superior worth of her dedicatees is socially-constructed rather than innate, as "fame" connotes "that which people say or tell; public report, common talk; a particular instance of this, a report, rumour" (OED). She declares that if she were to try to describe in verse "their glorious Trophies," her "tired Hand for very feare would quake" (84). As she has done

in the preceding poems, Lanyer disguises criticism within her praise, implying that these “Trophies,” which, by definition, are “taken”—either in war or through hunting (OED)—are the spoils of their defeat of non-aristocratic women (like Lanyer) through oppression. This, of course, adds a note of irony to the title of this poem, as such inhumane treatment is anything but “virtuous,” and aligns her dedicatees and her female readers with the patriarchal system of hierarchies that oppresses all women.

As monarch, Queen Anne is first among women and is the first of Lanyer’s dedicatees. Being the most powerful woman in England gives her a level of influence that the poet could never achieve, but it also makes her the guiltiest of the women who perpetuate their own subjugation. Subtly elevating her own authority over that of the queen, Lanyer ultimately identifies Anne’s most important role as that of mother to the Princess Elizabeth. In her opening dedication to Queen Anne, Lanyer acknowledges her own uniqueness—even as she praises the queen’s greatness:

Renowned Empresse, and great Britaines Queene,

Most gratioust Mother of succeeding Kings;

Vouchsafe to view that which is seldome seene,

A Womans writing of divinest things:

Reade it faire Queene, though it defective be,

Your Excellence can grace both It and Mee. (1-6)

Lanyer capitalizes “Mother,” “Woman,” “It,” and “Mee,” assigning the same importance to those words as to “Queene,” “Kings,” and “Excellence”—implicitly establishing herself, her sex, and her “defective” book as noble. She likewise capitalizes “Reade,”

which may simply be due to its position at the beginning of the line, but it may also signify the value of the act of reading as Lanyer all but commands the queen to read her work. Identifying Queen Anne as the “Mother of succeeding Kings,” as McBride has noted, “ma[kes] use...even of women’s powerlessness: women’s inability (in all but the most unusual cases) to inherit titles and property in a patrilineal system becomes a tool for Lanyer’s building of her own authority relative to titled women” (68). From the outset, then, Lanyer lays out for her readers the main arguments that will follow: the unfairness of the current hierarchies to even the most powerful of women; the authority found in women’s voices; women’s centrality to “divinest things;” and the importance of reading—and, by extension, learning—to women’s “grace.”

Acknowledging the competition for the queen’s patronage among “all the Artists at your becke and call” (20), Lanyer compares Queen Anne to the moon: “From your bright spheare of greatnes where you sit, / Reflecting light to all those glorious stars / That wait upon your Throane” (25-6). Lanyer makes her purpose quite clear, emphasizing her absence from the list of artists whom the queen supports. In comparison to the monarch’s “bright spheare of greatnes,” the poet’s “meanness” (28) leaves Lanyer with little to offer beyond her book. However, though the stars reflect the moon’s light, the moon’s “bright sphere” is a reflection of the sun. If the queen’s literary ladies-in-waiting, as I discussed above, can become, through their faith in Christ, “more faire” and “brighter” than Phoebus, then it follows that lower-ranking women may rise in stature through their virtue, surpassing queens whose greatness is a reflection of their subjects. Kneeling at Queen Anne’s feet, Lanyer extols her superior’s “Estate

and Virtue,” in which “none is greater” (33), and she “wish[es] that yours may light on me: / That so these rude unpollisht lines of mine, / Graced by you, may seeme the more divine” (34-6). Lanyer is rather conventional in this praise of the queen, establishing the monarch’s high rank in the social hierarchy and her own lowly status. However, the poet, identifying the queen’s power within her “Estate and Virtue,” identifies in the former the material possessions that give Queen Anne authority on earth and, in the latter, the quality that Lanyer will soon construct as the source of divinity.

Although Lanyer has just described Queen Anne’s ability to reflect value—in the form of economic support—onto her volume, she immediately puts herself in a position to reflect virtue onto the queen: “Looke in this Mirrour of a worthy Mind, / Where some of your faire Virtues will appeare” (37-8). Lanyer assumes the authority to declare hers a “worthy Mind,” placing herself over the monarch as the one who can show her the path to divinity. Of course, as a poet seeking patronage, Lanyer cannot be too presumptuous, so she diminishes the quality of her mirror: “Unlesse my Glasse were chrystall, or more cleare: / Which is dym steele, yet full of spotless truth, / And for one looke from your faire eyes it su’th” (40-2). The reflection that Lanyer offers the queen in her “steele” mirror is unclear and faulty, though it is still worthy of Queen Anne’s glance:

Here may your sacred Majestie behold  
 That mightie Monarch both of heav’n and earth,  
 He that all Nations of the world controld,  
 Yet tooke our flesh in base and meanest berth:  
 Whose daies were spent in poverty and sorrow,

And yet all Kings their wealth of him do borrow. (43-8)

However, even as she admits her mirror's inferior quality, Lanyer presents the reflection revealed within her book to be that of Christ and true virtue. With this passage, Lanyer begins her work of authorizing her poetic voice and exposing social hierarchies as artificial and detrimental to *all* women.

Lanyer's seemingly laudatory address to "your sacred Majestie" quickly becomes ironic as she compares the earthly queen to the true monarch of "heav'n and earth," whose rule extends to "all Nations of the world." Though his human form was of "base and meanest berth," and though he lived "in poverty and sorrow," "all Kings" derive their power and positions from Christ. Lanyer reveals that Queen Anne—and, by extension, all nobility—was placed on the throne by one whose earthly rank more closely resembled that of the poet whose supplication she demands. In doing so, Lanyer invests herself and her voice with an authority which overrides all human-imposed systems of rank—including the hierarchy that makes it necessary for her to seek the queen's patronage. Further, by including Queen Anne among "all Kings," Lanyer implicates the female monarch in perpetuating the very system that constructs all women as being of "meanest berth." Unlike Queen Anne, Lanyer's "wealth within his Region stands" (55), and "in his kingdome onely rests my lands" (57). Lanyer refers ironically to "her" lands, much as Whitney claims all of London as her property, and she contrasts her spiritual wealth with the queen's material wealth. She hopes that, "Though I on earth doe live unfortunate, / Yet there I may attaine a better state" (59-60). Again, Lanyer's "state" in Heaven appears in opposition to the queen's great "Estate," placing

the outwardly humble poet, both literally and figuratively, above this “Renowned Empresse.”

Having established her authority, Lanyer graciously offers the *SDRJ* as a means of raising the queen to her level, identifying Christ and her book as one in the same:

This holy worke, Virtue presents to you,

In poore apparel, shaming to be seene,

Or once t’appeare in your judicall view:

But that faire Virtue, though in meane attire,

All Princes of the world doe most desire. (62-6)

Though she previously proclaimed the queen’s virtue incomparable, Lanyer suggests that Queen Anne needs the virtue that the *SDRJ* offers—as do “All Princes of the world.” True virtue, it seems, requires the recognition of women’s worth. Directing the queen to “faire *Eves Apologie*, / Which I have writ in honour of your sexe” (73-4), Lanyer asks her “To judge if it agree not with the Text” (76)—confident, of course, that it does. “And if it doe,” she continues, “why are poore Women blam’d, / Or by more faultie Men so much defam’d?” (77-8). It is significant that Lanyer writes “your sexe” instead of “our sexe,” because this slight difference in possessive pronouns both acknowledges the social distance between poet and patron and reminds the queen that, despite all of her greatness, she, as a woman, is a member of the lower classes.

Having established the authority and value of her voice, Lanyer goes on to ask Queen Anne to allow her daughter, “the very modell of your Majestie” (92), to read her book. Here, Lanyer echoes Vives’s dedication to Catherine of Aragon, in which he

presents his *De Institutione Feminae Christianae* as a suitable text for the Princess Mary. Vives also presents his book as a mirror of its dedicatee, comparing it to a painted portrait: “As you would see your physical likeness portrayed there, so in these books will you see the image of your mind” (50). If she had Vives’s treatise in mind, Lanyer may be offering the *SDRJ* as an alternative approach to women’s education. Instead of presenting her book as a mirror that reflects her dedicatees’ virtues, Lanyer claims that the *SDRJ* is itself a mirror through which her readers may obtain the virtue that is reflected from within the text. As the creator of this mirror, Lanyer, too, becomes a source of virtue and holds spiritual authority over her readers.

Lanyer’s mention of the queen’s daughter introduces the text’s emphasis on female lineage—familial as well as literary—and reminds Queen Anne and other readers of the fact that, though the princess is the “very modell” of her mother, her claim to the throne is outweighed by that of even her younger brother, Charles, simply by “virtue” of her sex. This “natural” hierarchy is one that educational treatises such as Vives’s serve to reinforce. Lanyer’s view of education, like that of Christine de Pizan, Isabella Whitney, Veronica Franco, and Marie de Romieu, instead offers female learning as a source of power and authority in resistance to oppressive patriarchal rule. Moving on to the princess’s namesake, Elizabeth I, Lanyer asserts that the late queen’s “favour blest my youth” (110), presumably as further inducement for Queen Anne to do the same now that her predecessor is gone. Lanyer hopes that the queen’s “powre may raise my sad dejected Muse, / From this lowe Mansion of a troubled mind” (127-8), so that, through her poetry, she “may spread Her Virtues in like kind” (130). Assuming the guise of

modesty, Lanyer claims the lack of skill required to do Christ (or the queen) justice because she “wanted knowledge to performe my will” (132) and due to her “weake distempred braine and feeble spirits” (139). “Desireing that this Booke Her hands may kisse,” Lanyer admits that she is “unworthy of [the queen’s] grace,” but she holds out hope that “her blessed thoughts this book imbrace” (143-4). Continuing her apology, Lanyer nonetheless maintains her poetic authority:

Not that I Learning to my selfe assume,  
 Or that I would compare with any man:  
 But as they are Scholars, and by Art do write,  
 So Nature yeelds my Soule a sad delight. (147-50)

Under the pretense of submission, Lanyer “praises” male writers for their learning, attributing their talent to art(ifice). She, on the other hand, receives her poetic voice from nature. Here again, Lanyer parallels Franco, who writes her description of Fumane “without art” (39). Both writers take advantage of the cultural association of nature and the feminine to invest their voices and their work with an innate authority that men can only attempt to obtain through study. Lanyer asserts that hers is a *natural* talent. Therefore, since God created *Mother* nature, “[a]nd since all Arts at first from Nature came” (151), her talent is God-given and divine. So, Lanyer reasons, “Why should not She now grace my barren Muse, / And in a Woman all defects excuse” (155-6). Lanyer’s line of argument here again links poet and patron; if God offers special protection to “her [Nature] and hers [women],” and if Nature should (naturally) “grace my barren Muse,” why then would a fellow woman—Queen Anne—fail to do the same?

The volume's next dedicatee, "the Ladie *Katherine* Countesse of Suffolke," is another aristocratic mother whose daughters, Lanyer claims, will benefit from reading the *SDRJ*. The countess, to whom Lanyer is a self-proclaimed "stranger" (2), was the "wife of the King's Lord Chamberlain and later Lord Treasurer [Thomas Howard], and an intimate friend of Robert Cecil, first earl of Salisbury, Secretary of State and Lord Treasurer" (Daybell 165). The countess's connections to the king may have made her an attractive potential patron, though, as Lewalski notes, "she alone seems out of place in Lanyer's company of good women, though she and her husband were not yet notorious for the rapacity which led in 1618 to their disgrace and imprisonment for extortion and embezzlement" ("Re-Writing Patriarchy" 100 n.44). As the only dedicatee whose power and nobility derives entirely from that of her husband (as Lanyer describes her), the Lady Katherine is a particularly unusual member of this community of powerful women. However, Lanyer soon reveals the countess's importance within her imagined genealogy of women, directing her to "let your noble daughters likewise reade / This little Booke that I present to you" (49-50).

With these lines, the Countess of Suffolk's poem meshes with the matriarchal emphasis of the other dedications, with her daughters representing the next generation of virtuous women. The poet offers Christ as a model of manhood that surpasses all:

Heere they may see a Lover much more true  
 Than ever was since first the world began,  
 This poore rich King that di'd both God and man. (53-5)

Lanyer's book presents Christ as the only man worthy a virtuous woman's love. She offers Christ's body to the countess's daughters (as well as all of her readers), allowing them to "see him in a flood of teares, / Crowned with thornes, and bathing in his blood; / Here may they see his fears exceed all feares, / When Heaven in Justice flat against him stood" (61-4). Her readers will witness humankind's salvation, which could be achieved by "naught but [Christ's] dying breath" (69). They will see that this sin of man, which "[p]lac[ed] heav'ns Beauty in deaths darkest night" (72), could not conquer the "[f]resh beauty" (78) of "this faire corps" (80). In Christ, Lanyer declares, "is all that Ladies can desire" (85). This construction of the son of God as the ideal husband and lover is one that Lanyer will develop more fully in her retelling of the passion, in which the poet warns the Countess of Cumberland (and all virtuous women) against loving a mortal man, who will only cause her pain.

Lanyer presents Christ as the ideal man, possessing beauty, wisdom, wealth, honor, and fame (86-9), and she asks, "Who ever liv'd that was possest of more?" (90). However, the extensive list of his virtues that follows conforms exactly to the qualities expected of the ideal woman, including grace, piety, constancy, obedience, patience, and chastity among others (91-5). In this dedication to the Lady Katherine, Christ becomes an androgynous figure—subverting the boundary between masculine and feminine as he is simultaneously aligned with women and made the object of women's desire. His "pretious grace" (106) is thus found within the *SDRJ*—a book written by a woman for women—as well as within the female sex, which Lanyer seeks not just to defend, but to elevate. For Lanyer, the supreme model of feminine virtue, learning, and devotion to

Christ is the late Queen Elizabeth I. As a woman who recognized the threat that marriage posed to her authority, Elizabeth fashioned herself as an earthly Virgin, declaring herself to be England's "mother" and eschewing the womanly and royal duty of propagating the Tudor dynasty. In the *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, Lanyer creates Elizabeth I the matriarch of her community of women—not as a ruler, but as a source of inspiration for future female patrons and learned women. Lanyer identifies two women in particular as the late queen's "daughters," their kinship based more on shared virtues than on shared bloodlines.

Though Lanyer previously declared the Princess Elizabeth "the very model" of her mother, Queen Anne, in her next dedication "To the Lady *Elizabeths* Grace," Lanyer recalls the greatness of the princess's namesake, "The *Phoenix* of her age" (4) and the "deare Mother of our Common-weale" (7). As she establishes the Lady Elizabeth's lineage, Lanyer chooses to omit her biological mother and instead emphasize the princess's blood ties to her cousin and the two Elizabeths' shared love of learning.<sup>3</sup> The princess also mirrors the late queen in her challenge to the monarchy of James I and in her ardent Protestantism (Lewalski, *Writing Women* 65). The poet extends an invitation "unto this wholesome feast" (9), suggesting that Princess Elizabeth might increase her already "goodly wisedome" (10) by reading the present volume. Highlighting their common sex, Lanyer asks the princess to read the *SDRJ* despite the fact that her "faire eyes farre better Bookes have seene" (12), asserting its value as "the first fruits of a woman's wit" (13). This description of her book, as Susanne Woods notes in her edition of Lanyer's text, is "an allusion to Christ as the 'first fruits of them that slept'—as the

first immortal man” (11). Again likening her book to Christ, Lanyer also adopts the conventional trope of comparing book production to reproduction. Presenting the *SDRJ* as such, Lanyer implicitly claims the book to be the “very modell” of herself—much as the princess is of the two queens.

Elizabeth’s second “daughter,” Lady Arbella Stuart, like Queen Elizabeth I and Princess Elizabeth, posed a real threat to patriarchal rule through her strong claim to the throne of James I. In the poem, Lanyer addresses this “Great learned Ladie, whom I long have knowne, / And yet not knowne so much as I desired” (1-2) claiming (as she does on several occasions) a personal relationship with the dedicatee—though clearly, in this case, not as personal as she would have liked. It is quite possible that the two women had, at the very least, met, given Arbella’s brief position as a lady-in-waiting to Elizabeth I in 1588 (Marshall).<sup>4</sup> She continues, “Rare *Phoenix*, whose faire feathers are your owne, / With which you flie, and are so much admired” (3-4), once again making an obvious comparison to Elizabeth I (and perhaps to the princess as well). Further, she makes an equally obvious reference to the fact that Arbella was once supposed to be the late queen’s heir. As she did with the Princess Elizabeth, Lanyer constructs Arbella as a reflection of Queen Elizabeth I’s greatness, as well as a symbol of Protestant female resistance to patriarchal power.<sup>5</sup>

Lanyer emphasizes the Lady Arbella’s kinship with Elizabeth I through the matriarchal line headed by Margaret Tudor, Henry VIII’s sister—a lineage that makes the king’s cousin both powerful and dangerous, while also suggesting that her proclivity for learning is the natural consequence of her birth.<sup>6</sup> Woods notes that this learned royal

cousin “managed to remain in James’s favor until her secret wedding in 1610 to William Seymour, who also had royal blood” (17). Ironically, as Sara Jayne Steen posits, Stuart married in order to escape the confinement of King James’s household. Both Arbella and William were imprisoned for their deed, and Arbella eventually died in the Tower of London in 1615 (Steen 85-86). Lanyer’s proximity to the court and its gossip means that she most likely knew of this act of betrayal when she was writing *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* during the same year—especially since the marriage, which took place on 22 June 1610, gave Lanyer ample time to make revisions before her volume was entered into the Stationers’ Register on 2 October 1610. Her recognition of Arbella’s fall from favor is further supported by the intentional omission of this (and other) dedications from her presentation copy to Prince Henry, King James’s oldest son and heir to the throne. However, five of the nine extant copies of the *SDRJ* do include “To the Ladie *Arabella*” (Woods, “Textual Introduction” xlvii-xlviii), which suggests that Lanyer certainly knew how to “work the system” as she found a way to please those in power while also subverting their authority.

In addition to Arabella’s general rebelliousness, Lanyer may have been influenced by her epistolary appeals to court, which, as Steen notes, “were considered models to be read aloud in the presence chamber and commended for style” (86). Lanyer may have been privy to these readings, and Stuart may have inspired her with “her ability to use words [as] one way to achieve her ends through the ‘good offices’ of those who had more power than she did” (87). Like Lanyer, Stuart needed the financial support of others due to the meager pension that she received from the king (87). For all

of her defiance, Steen argues, Arbella is not a proto-feminist figure because, though she believed women to be more virtuous than men, “she had little understanding of the limitations placed on Queen Anne and other women at court and little sense of affinity with them” (88). Lanyer praises Arbella’s “[t]rue honour” (5), though she asserts that Arbella can still benefit from looking “upon this little Booke” (9). Lanyer implores her to “spare one looke / Upon this humbled King, who all forsooke, / That in his dying armes he might imbrace / Your beauteous Soule, and fill it with his grace. (11-14). Maintaining her belief that her “little Booke” will be the Savior of all who read it, Lanyer fills the role of priest, through whom her dedicatees receive the body of Christ, but she may seek to educate Arbella in other matters as well.

As we have already seen, Lanyer was fully aware of the common oppression experienced by women of all ranks, and, despite her social distance from her noble dedicatees, she does claim a kinship based on their shared sex. Steen suggests that Stuart’s “creation of a deferential self [in her letters] was an attempt to exploit the patriarchal models and use the language of flattery and obedience as an indirect means of achieving control when overt power was unavailable” (95). Interestingly, whereas a woman who was brought up to be a queen and, at times, possessed a great deal of power at court merely worked within the patriarchal culture in which she lived, a lowly servant of the court, whose reputation was stained by an illicit affair with a nobleman who did not publicly recognize the son she bore him, openly criticized that culture and, disregarding class divisions, called upon noble women like Arbella Stuart to join her in a community of resistance against the oppressive system in which they *all* lived.

Although Lanyer establishes Elizabeth I as the matriarch of this community of women, it is the poet who actually populates it through her dedications and, later, in her retelling of the Fall and the Passion. In her dedicatory poems to Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke and Lucy, Countess of Bedford, Lanyer positions herself as “daughter” and beneficiary of the two most prominent female literary patrons in Jacobean England. Addressing the Lady Lucy, Lanyer constructs her book as “faire Virtue” (1), which “[h]old[s] the key of Knowledge in her hand” (3)—and the key to the Lady Lucy’s heart, through which Christ can enter her soul. The *SDRJ* is he “[i]n whose most pretious wounds your soule may reade / Salvation, while he (dying Lord) doth bleed” (13-14)—the “blessed Arke” which contains the word of God—and Lanyer again authorizes herself to administer such grace to her social superior. But the Countesse of Bedford’s “cleare Judgement farre exceeds my skil,” and the poet asks her to “entertaine this dying lover” (15-16) in her “brest” (21). Once the countess has welcomed him into her heart, her “thoughts as servants...[may] [g]ive attendance on this lovely guest” (22-23). The Lady Lucy is here a servant of Christ and, by extension, of Lanyer’s book. So the patron is again subject to the poet, who has the power to impart grace and virtue upon “you in whom all raritie is found” and who, with Lanyer’s guidance, “[m]ay be with his eternall glory crownd” (27-28). Claiming the role of host and priest, Lanyer sets herself apart from and above earthly hierarchies that, as she will demonstrate in her passion poem, are in direct opposition to Christ’s teachings.

In “The Authors Dreame to the Ladie *Marie*, the Countess Dowager of *Pembrooke*,” Lanyer describes a dream vision in which Mary Sidney is fashioned a

“faire earthly goddesse” (145) who is the very image of “love...zeale...faith, and pietie” (162). The poet awakens in “th’ *Edalyan Groves*” and asks “the Graces, if they could direct / Me to a Lady whom *Minerva* chose, / To live with her in height of all respect” (1-4). Within her thoughts, Lanyer sees this lady with the “eie of Reason” (6), and notes that “Fast ti’d unto them in a golden Chaine, / They stood, but she was set in Honors chaire” (7-8). This vision of servants bound by love rather than duty echoes Franco’s memory of the pleasure of being “tightly bound to the sides of those they love” (249) while at Fumane. However, in Lanyer’s dream, the Lady is still held above the Graces who serve her. Along with the Graces, this as yet unnamed lady is attended by “nine faire Virgins” (9), and the poet recounts that “by Eternall Fame I saw her crown’d” (16). Unsure “if I were awake, or no” (17), Lanyer is enjoined by Morpheus, “The God of Dreames,” to remains asleep “Till I the summe of all did understand” (20).

In the sky, the poet sees approaching Bellona, the “Goddess of Warre and Wisdome,” whom she describes as “A manly mayd which was both faire and tall” (35). Next, Dictina, “The Moone,” descends (45), as does Phoebus (54), the sun, both of whom are welcomed by “this most noble Lady” (43). Aurora, seeing the moon and “Lady Maie,” the spring, bids them all to go so as to “not be out-fac’d” by the lady’s great beauty (64). “[T]hese Worthies” (78) retreat to a “sacred Spring where Art and Nature striv’d” (81), a pair “Whose antient quarrel...Added fresh Beauty, gave farre greater Grace” (83-84). All of these goddesses will serve as “umpiers” (85), living forever more “In perfitt unity by this matchless Spring: / Since ‘twas impossible either should excel, / Or her faire fellow in subjection bring” (90-92). Within Mary Sidney,

Nature and Art cease to compete and live together in harmony--much as they do in Franco's description of Della Torre's estate. Again echoing Franco, Lanyer's fictional dream reflects her very real desire for a society in which all are "Equall in state, equall in dignitie" (93-94), and she depicts the great beauty and joy that may be found in a world in which no woman is subject to another.

Returning her gaze to the great lady, "Whom wise *Minerva* honoured so much" (98), the poet observes that her virtue protected her from Envy's "sting" (100). The Lady Mary is seated by Pergus, the lake by which Cupid shot an arrow into Pluto's heart, causing him to fall in love with Proserpine. Seeing this beautiful young woman, Cupid's mother, Venus, complained that "if we let hir have hir will, / She will continue all hir life a Maid unwedded still" (Ovid V.473-74). As a result, the innocent maiden, who was gathering flowers by the lake where "continuall spring is all the yeare there founde" (V.490), became the object of Pluto's desire. He "caught hir up" (V.495), and made off with Proserpine in his chariot. Pluto was stopped by Cyan, who had the "greatest fame / Among the Nymphes of Sicilie" (V.513-14). She told the god that he "should have sought hir courteously and not enforst hir so" (V.518), noting that she married her husband, Anapus, "unforst and unconstreind" (V. 522) because "[h]e was content to woo" (V.521). Pluto, of course, ignored her pleas and took her to his underworld home, causing Cyan to weep herself into "[t]he selfsame waters of the which she was but late ago / The mighty Goddess" (V.534-35). Lanyer's invocation of this myth may be yet another veiled critique of marriage—particularly involuntary marriage, a fate with which she was all too familiar. She does not, however, dwell on this allusion,

focusing instead on “those fields with sundry flowers clad” (110) and on Morpheus, who requests that the nymphs attending Pallas and the mystery lady “sit and devise / On holy hymnes” (115-16). Here Lanyer refers to Mary Sidney’s poetic translations of “[t]hose rare sweet songs which *Israels* King did frame / Unto the Father of Eternity; / Before his holy wisedom tooke the name / Of great *Messias*, Lord of unitie” (117-20)—an allusion that suggests, as many have noted, that Lanyer had read the Countess of Pembroke’s Psalm translations in manuscript.

The singing of Psalms was a continental practice that was introduced to England after Elizabeth I took the throne, and Marian exiles returned to the country (Hannay et al. 4). For Protestants in France, the Psalms “served as ‘battle hymns’ in the Continental religious wars and as personal consolation in times of persecution” (5-6). In England, “reciting vernacular Psalms could become a political statement” (6), and both Catholic and Protestant prisoners who viewed their punishment as religious persecution were known to have meditated upon the Psalms (7). Mary Sidney’s translations are distinctly Protestant in that they reflect the shared “goal of naturalizing the scriptures in her native tongue,” though “she was concerned with poetic quality as well as scholarship” (15). Psalm translation, which became a popular practice and were frequently published in England, “provided more scope for independent statement than other scriptural translation, because the ambiguous ‘I’ of the Psalms leaves a space for the reader to insert a personal voice” (8). Further, Roland Greene argues that this sixteenth-century tradition of Psalm translation and adaptation “is central to the development of the age’s religious lyric” (19). Clearly, Lanyer benefits from this literary development in her

*SDRJ*, and her very personal retelling of the Fall and the Passion reflect an adaptation of “the ambiguous ‘I.’” However, in addition to participating in this poetic tradition, Lanyer also seems to have been influenced by Sidney’s political and social use of her translations.

Mary Sidney’s brother, Philip, embarked upon the project of translating the Psalms in the 1580s, but he had only completed 43 when he died during the Dutch wars in 1586 (Hamlin 119). The Countess of Pembroke translated the final 107 and even revised some of Philip’s poems (119), completing the translations, which were dedicated to Elizabeth I, “in time for the Queen’s intended visit to Wilton in 1599” (Hannay, *Philip’s Phoenix* 84). Though the Sidneian Psalms were not published until the nineteenth century, they were widely “circulated in manuscript in the approved aristocratic manner” (84). Lanyer’s presence at Elizabeth I’s court makes it reasonable to believe her claims of familiarity with the countess’s work, as well as her recognition of the poems’ larger implications. Asserting that Sidney’s use of the Geneva Bible as the primary source for the Psalms suggests “a passionate involvement in the religious struggle symbolized by the Huguenot Psalms” (86), Margaret P. Hannay contends that the presentation of such a gift to Queen Elizabeth “could itself be interpreted as a political statement in 1599” (95). Lanyer likewise offers a potentially inflammatory Protestant text to a queen whom she believes is not fulfilling her duty to her people. If Protestant belief renders everyone spiritually equal, why must we remain unfairly divided here on earth?

In her dedication to the queen, Mary Sidney compares Elizabeth to King David: “A King should only to a Queene bee sent” (53)—a “standard Protestant comparison” (Hannay et al. vol. 2 98). However, this image is used both “to flatter and admonish the queen” (98), as Sidney reminds Elizabeth that “[t]he foes of heav’n no lesse have beene thy foes; / Hee with great conquest, though with greater blest; / Thou sure to winn, and hee secure to lose” (70-72). We can see similarly direct criticism of a female monarch in Lanyer’s dedicatory poem to Queen Anne. Significantly, Lanyer also makes a similar comparison of the Countess of Pembroke to King David, conflating the original Psalms with Sidney’s translations through her marginal note attributing “[t]hose rare sweet songs with *Israels* King did frame” (117) to the countess (Hannay et al. II.50). In doing so, she may also implicitly equalize the Countess Dowager of Pembroke and the late Queen Elizabeth, which allows Lanyer to identify Mary Sidney as the “mother” of a tradition of women writers and herself as “daughter” and heir to her literary throne.

Sidney’s “holy Sonnets” (121), Lanyer declares, are worthy of being heard by the “eares of Angels” (124) and saints should “Writ[e] her praises in th’eternall booke / Of endless honour, true fames memorie” (127-28). Hearing this, the “heavenli’st musicke” (129), the poet resists waking, “Yet sleeping, praid dull Slumber to unfold / Her noble name, who was of all admired” (133-34). Morpheus reveals the lady to be “great *Penbrooke* hight by name, / Sister to valiant *Sidney*” (137-38), whose “fame doth him survive, / Still living in the hearts of worthy men” (141-42). The god of dreams adds that “he remains alive, / Whose dying wounds restor’d him life agen” (143-44)—comparing Philip Sidney to Christ and returning readers to the true subject of the *SDRJ*.

This honored sister of Sir Philip Sidney devotes herself to “virtuous studies of Divinitie” (147), which raises her “[s]o that a Sister well shee may be deemd, / To him that liv’d and di’d so nobly” (149-50). Further, the Countess of Pembroke surpasses her great brother in “virtue, wisedome, learning, dignity” (152). Because of her virtue, her soul lives “[b]oth here on earth, and in the heav’ns above” (153-54), and her godly works will imbue “the eies, the hearts, the tongues, the eares / Of after-coming ages” (160-61) and “[seal] her pure soule unto the Deitie” (164). Like her brother and Christ, Mary Sidney’s soul remains “both in Heav’n and Earth” (165). It is at this point that Morpheus concludes his praise of the countess, and the poet awakens—much to her dismay. She laments that it was only in a dream that “what my heart desir’d, mine eies had seene” (174), but she takes comfort in “[p]resenting [Mary Sidney] the fruits of idle houres” (194). As she did in her poem to the Lady Elizabeth, Lanyer acknowledges her book as “the meanest of flowers” (196), compared to the “many Books [Sidney] writes that are more rare” (195). Yet, the *SDRJ* still offers “hony” (196), “[t]hough sugar be more finer, higher priz’d” (198). The efforts of “the painefull Bee” are nonetheless respected (199), and this comparison of “natural” honey and “fine” sugar may hearken back to the conflict between Nature and Art. In these seemingly self-effacing lines, Lanyer may again suggest that her own poetic skill is the product of Nature rather than Art—a claim that she, like Franco, repeats throughout the volume. Lanyer’s “painefull” labor, which produced this “fruit” of her mind, is no less worthy of esteem than the work of the most noble of ladies. Further, she may intimate that her own “natural” talent is superior to the learned “art” of privileged women like Sidney.

Noting again the “higher style” of the Countess of Pembroke’s “Trophe” (202), Lanyer emphasizes her distance from her dedicatee while discrediting the artificial divisions that imbue Mary Sidney’s work with more value than her own. She refers ironically to her “unlearned lines” (203), which do and will continue to demonstrate the extent of her education. “And therefore,” Lanyer writes, “first I here present my Dreame, / And next, invite her Honour to my feast” (205-6). She gives precedence to her own work (“*my Dreame*”), and assumes the role of host of “*my feast*”—at which the countess would be but another of the poet’s guests. Immediately “craving pardon for this bold attempt” (209), Lanyer invokes the image of the mirror, which, “beeing steele, declares [Sidney’s virtues] to be true” (211). The inferior material of her mirror is here constructed as being better able to reflect the countess’s “noble virtues” than the supposedly enhanced reflection offered by a “chrystall glasse.” The poet assures Lady Sidney that “it is no disparagement to you, / To see your Saviour in a Shepheards weed” (217-18), because his “worthinesse will grace each line you reade” (220). Lanyer becomes priest once more, asking her dedicatee to “[r]eceive him here by my unworthy hand” (221) as she emphasizes Christ’s “meanness” in comparison to her own.

Kari Boyd McBride argues that Lanyer’s dedication Mary Sidney “ironically places Sidney so high [above other poets] as to remove her from the worldly context of patronage relationships. Sidney is displaced by the greatness of her fame and by Lanyer’s greater affinity to the subject of her poem, the abased and exalted Christ. The religious context both imprisons Sidney and authorizes Lanyer” (75). At the same time, because both of Mary Sidney’s daughters had died by the time the *SDRJ* was written,

Lanyer may be constructing herself as the Countess Dowager of Pembroke's literary daughter in the same way that she identified the Princess Elizabeth and Lady Arbella Stuart as the childless Elizabeth I's heirs. So, while Lanyer does locate Sidney in another realm so that she may "inherit" her authorial crown, she also places her volume alongside Sidney's work as a "faire impression" (163), invoking the association between human offspring and the impression of her printed book. Though Lanyer's "hony" is not the "very modell" of Lady Mary's finer sugar, "both [are] wholesome, and deligh[t] the taste" (197). Accordingly, if the Countess Dowager of Pembroke is the poet's literary mother, her position "outside of the worldly context of patronage" is only logical—she has already provided enough in preparing the way for Lanyer's volume.

Within her dedications to the Countess of Bedford and the Countess Dowager of Pembroke, Lanyer risks offending two powerful patrons in order to further her argument for women's inherent sameness through their shared oppression. Ironically, she does this by elevating her own status above that of these aristocratic women. Joining Lanyer's pairs of actual noble mothers, royal "daughters," and literary "mothers" is a pair of widows who are presented as models of feminine virtue as well as inspiring "mothers" to Lanyer's poetry. By identifying widows as ideal women, Lanyer simultaneously celebrates freedom from men while revealing, through the example of Margaret Clifford, the devastating impact of earthly marriage. The poet claims a personal relationship with both women, and, in contrast to the *SDRJ*'s other dedicatees, declares they have no need of the virtues reflected in her book. Instead, she expresses

gratitude for the support—both spiritual and financial—that they have already bestowed upon her.

Addressing “the Ladie Susan, Countesse Dowager of Kent, and Daughter to the Duchesse of Suffolke,” Lanyer again accentuates the mother-daughter relationship in addition to her dedicatee’s noble blood. She begins the poem with a reference to her personal relationship with the countess: “Come you that were the Mistris of my youth, / The noble guide of my ungovern’d days” (1-2). The poet asks the Lady Susan to “help your handmaid to sound foorth his praise” (4), because she is “pleas’d in his pure excellencie” (5), requesting that she bring her grace to “this holy feast, and me” (6). Describing the countess as “the Sunnes virtue,” Lanyer identifies herself as “that faire greene grasse, / That flourisht fresh by your cleer virtues taught” (9-10). It is through the Lady Susan’s own virtue that Lanyer learned “love and feare of God, of Prince, of Lawes, / Rare Patience with a mind so farre remote / From worldly pleasures” (14-16). The countess’s great virtue, though, was instilled by her mother, Catherine Willoughby, Duchess of Suffolk, whom Woods notes was “a renowned Reformation figure,” who, during the reign of the Catholic Mary I, “fled England, taking her infant daughter Susan with her” (19). Lanyer praises “That noble Dutchesse, who liv’d unsubjected” (24) for abandoning her worldly goods and identity in order to keep her spiritual wealth: “When with Christ Jesus she did meane to goe, / Frome sweet delights to taste part of his woe” (29-30). Catherine Willoughby, too, is a model of the feminine virtue upon which Lanyer’s volume expounds: turning away from worldly concerns and devoting oneself

entirely to Christ. The ever-virtuous Lady Susan, Lanyer proclaims, is a reflection of her mother:

Come you that ever since hath followed her,  
 In these sweet paths of faire Humilitie;  
 Contemning Pride pure Virtue to preferred,  
 Not yielding to base Imbecillitie,  
 Nor to those weake inticements of the world,  
 That have so many thousand Soules insnarled.

Alluding as she did in the case of Queen Anne and the Princess Elizabeth to the Lady Susan's birthright, Lanyer here highlights the importance of the matriarchal line. However, the Lady Susan and the Duchess of Suffolk are the very image of the spiritual virtue that is passed from mother to daughter—as opposed to earthly titles and material riches.

Unlike Lanyer's other dedicatees, the Countess of Kent needs no guidance from the poet or her text. She invites her former guide to “Take this faire Bridegroome in your soules pure bed” (42), again declaring her book and Christ to be one in the same. However, it is the Lady Susan who will bestow grace upon Lanyer rather than the other way around. Claiming no prior patronage from the countess and noting that she is unworthy of serving this great lady, Lanyer asserts that she seeks only spiritual, not monetary, patronage from her dedicatee:

Onely your noble Virtues do incite,  
 My Pen, they are the ground I write upon;

Nor any future profit is expected,

Then how can these poore lines goe unrespected? (45-48)

Because her motives are so pure, she asks, how could anyone deny the sincerity of her poetry? The dedication, then, is meant only to honor and give thanks for the great service that the countess has done her. In this way, Lanyer may be continuing her reversal of status even as she praises the Countess of Kent. If the Lady Susan has never patronized or employed Lanyer, but she has “served” as the poet’s spiritual guide, then Lanyer takes on the role of patron—“paying” the countess for her “service” with her poetry. This dedication echoes Isabella Whitney’s poem “To her Sister Misteris A. B.” in its role as a patronage poem that does not seek patronage. Whitney closes her poem of good wishes noting that her sister’s “houshold cares” (D2r) keep her occupied, while Whitney’s seeming freedom from such responsibilities allow her to devote her time to “My books and Pen” (D2r). While this comparison could certainly be read as lamenting the poet’s lack of “a Husband, or a house, / and all that longes therto” (D2r), it also suggests, as I have already noted, a critique of marriage as an institution that denies women the opportunity to pursue their own desires. Similarly, Lanyer’s praise of the Countess of Kent’s superior virtue conceals a critique of class hierarchies and the patronage system through its subtle placement of the poet above her dedicatee.

In her first of only two prose dedications, Lanyer addresses “the Ladie *Margaret, Countesse Dowager of Cumberland.*” She quotes St. Peter in acknowledgment of her lack of material wealth: “*Silver nor gold have I none, but such as I half, that give I you*” (2-3). In its place, Lanyer offers “our Lord Jesus himselfe, whose infinit value is not to

be comprehended within the weake imagination or wit of man" (7-9)—though, it appears, his value *is* comprehended by women. The *SDRJ* is the "most pretious pearle of all perfection, the rich diamond of devotion, [the] perfect gold growing in the veines of that excellent earth of the most blessed Paradice" (10-13). As such, Lanyer writes, the book "can receive no blemish, nor impeachment, by my unworthy hand writing" (24-25). However "unworthy" the author may be, her book offers "the inestimable treasure of all elected soules" (29), as well as "the mirrour of your worthy minde" (30-1)—which will outlive both the poet and her patron. Like Mary Sidney, Margaret Clifford's soul will live on in Lanyer's work "to be a light unto those that come after" (32-3). The countess's virtuous example will "[lead] the way to heaven" (34). Nonetheless, while Lanyer describes the eternal influence of both after their deaths, it is only for the Countess Dowager of Cumberland that she "pray[s] God" (34) that her patron will have a long life and will be granted "all increase of health and honour" (39). In contrast to Mary Sidney, who had no history of patronizing Lanyer, the poet's wishes for Margaret Clifford's long life may simply be a matter of her desire for continued support—especially given the fact that Clifford is the *SDRJ*'s primary dedicatee, or so it seems.

In her final dedicatory poem, Lanyer addresses "the Ladie Anne, Countesse of Dorset" and daughter of Margaret Clifford. Though the Countess of Cumberland appears most prominently in the *SDRJ*, the poet announces to Anne Clifford, "To you I dedicate this worke of Grace" (1). Lanyer claims to have written the book for the newly-named (through her recent marriage) Countess of Dorset's "faire mind" (3), presenting her volume yet again as a mirror:

Then in this Mirrour let your faire eyes looke,

To view your virtues in this blessed Booke. (7-8)

The poet, through her work, is once more the source of her superior's virtue. However, Lanyer unassumingly admits that the book is “[b]lest by out Saviours merit, not my skil, / Which I acknowledge to be very small” (9-10). Even as she performs conventional self-effacement, though, she has already established that the *SDRJ* is not only blessed by Christ but actually *is* Christ’s body. Lanyer claims divine inspiration, investing her words with authority—an influence that is especially important as she disproves and reverses misogynist interpretations of biblical narratives in her passion poem and celebrates a world without men in “Cooke-ham.” She notes that, even if she has only partially fulfilled “his blessed Will” (11) in the *SDRJ*, “[o]ne sparke of grace sufficient is to fill / Our Lampes with oyle, ready when he doth call / To enter with the Bridegroomme to the feast, / Where he that is the greatest may be least” (13-15). Returning to her concern with class hierarchies, Lanyer offers Christ as proof that those who are most humble and most virtuous rank higher than those with earthly claims to greatness.

Material wealth, the most obvious source of one’s superiority on earth, does not guarantee a place in Heaven. “God makes both even,” Lanyer writes, “the Cottage with the Throne” (19), and in paradise, “[a]ll worldly honours...are counted base” (20). She laments that, here on earth, “Poore virtues friends...must suffer all indignity, / Untill in heav’n they better graced be” (30-2). This disparity makes no sense, because such a wrongheaded system of rank did not exist “when the world began” (33). Lanyer asks her reader, “All sprang but from one woman and one man, / Then how doth Gentry come

to rise and fall?" (35-6). If every human descends from the same parents, how can one man or woman be greater than another by virtue of birth alone? She boldly notes the uncertainty of bloodlines:

Whose successors, although they beare his name,  
Possessing not the riches of his minde,  
How doe we know they spring out of the same  
True stocke of honour, beeing not of that kind? (41-4)

Many critics have observed the personal significance of this particular argument to Anne Clifford, who, along with her mother, engaged in a long battle to assert her rights of inheritance after her father's death.<sup>7</sup> Further, Lanyer's own experience in which her child with Lord Hunsdon was raised as a commoner despite his noble blood proves, in fact, that blood is *not* everything. Lamb adds that "Lanyer suggests that unworthy descendants may in fact be illegitimate somewhere along the line" (47). The paternal uncertainty that the poet invokes also speaks to the general cultural anxiety over the legitimacy of heirs. As Mark Breitenberg has noted, this anxiety demonstrates the "reciprocity between gender and status" (70). That is, "a status system dependent on the 'proper' dissemination of property and title between men literally and symbolically requires the assurance of female chastity and virginity" (70). Controlling women's bodies then, both ensured that a man's estate was passed down to his legitimate sons and maintained "the 'purity' of supposedly inherent class identities" (70). Lanyer reveals that this notion of pure bloodlines and inherent social status is faulty at best, and, throughout the *SDRJ*, she denounces this emphasis on the inheritance of earthly wealth

and titles through blood in favor of the spiritual legacy passed from both literal and literary mothers to their female heirs. Plus, mothers, unlike fathers, could *always* be secure in the knowledge that their children were their own—due to the very “nature” of the female sex. In addition to creating a multi-generational community of learned women, Lanyer’s emphasis on mother-daughter relationships throughout the volume also points toward this parental confidence. These virtuous daughters, who are the “very modells” of their mothers, are the unmistakable heirs to their “True stocke of honour.”

Anne Clifford, to whom Lanyer writes “as to Gods Steward” (57), is representative of this maternal certitude, as she is one “[i]n whom the seeds of virtue have bin sowne, / By your most worthy mother, in whose right, / All her faire parts you challenge as your owne” (57-60). As Woods notes, stewards are “officials who manage estates for their masters” (43), and this description positions the Lady Anne as God’s servant as well as stressing her right to her late father’s estate. Lanyer offers the *SDRJ* as a “Diadem...which I have fram’d for her [mother’s] Eternitie” (64). Declaring the Countess of Dorset “the Heire apparent of this Crowne” (65), Lanyer emphasizes that “[b]y birth its yours” (67), as “[t]he right your Mother hath to it, is knowne / Best unto you, who reapt such fruit thereby” (69-70). The poet labels her volume a “Monument” of the Countess of Cumberland’s “faire worth” (71), and she entrusts its care to her most lawful daughter. Lanyer’s use of the word “monument” to describe her text includes its definition as “a written document or record” (OED), but also suggests its other meanings: 1) “A statue, building, or other structure erected to commemorate a famous or notable person or event;” 2) “A tomb, a sepulchre;” 3) “Something that by its survival

commemorates and distinguishes a person, action, period, event, etc.;” and 4) “An enduring, memorable, outstanding, or imposing example of some quality, attribute, etc.” (OED). As she did in her dedication to Mary Sidney, Lanyer alludes to Margaret Clifford’s eventual death—identifying the Lady Anne as the heir to her mother’s virtue just as she identified herself as heir to Sidney’s literary throne. The theme of lineage and inheritance that runs through this poem not only asserts the Lady Anne’s rightful claim to her father’s estate, but also stresses the purity of the maternal line, which is in stark contrast to the danger that a man’s heirs may “com[e] not of that blood” (48). Additionally, as the heir to all of her mother’s greatest qualities, Anne should, Lanyer implies, follow her mother’s example of patronage.

In her continuation of the Countess of Cumberland’s “honourable deeds” (74), the Lady Anne “shal...shew from whence you are descended” (81), for which “every one will reverence your name” (84). By extension, the Countess of Dorset’s patronage will insure that “this poore worke of mine shalbe defended / From any scandal that the world can frame” (85-6). More importantly, the Lady Anne “will appeare / Lovely to all, but unto God most deare” (87-8). So, because she will receive Christ through reading the *SDRJ*, the countess’s patronage of its author is ultimately in service to God—again aligning Lanyer with divinity and constructing her noble dedicatee as a servant. The poet admits, however, that the Lady Anne needs no instruction in these matters because she “[w]as so well instructed to such faire designes, / By your deere Mother, that there needs no art” (93-4). The countess requires no artifice to construct her goodness; like Lanyer’s poetic skill, Anne Clifford’s “pure and godly heart” (92) is a

product of nature—her “birth and education” (91) make her “perfect” (90). Writing in praise of the Countess of Dorset, Lanyer continues, is a nearly wasted effort, because she cannot hope to even come close to recreating this great lady’s many virtues in verse. Within the Lady Anne, “Virtue and Beautie both together run” (99)—their “quarrell ceast” (101), much as Nature and Art cease to compete within the Countess Dowager of Pembroke. Also like Mary Sidney, Anne Clifford appears “goddesse-like” (105). She imbues the world with “Goodnesse and Grace, which you doe hold more deere / Than worldly wealth, which melts away like snow” (107-8). Therefore, because of the great pleasure the countess takes in “the word of God” (109), Lanyer “present[s] / His lovely love, more worth than purest gold” (113-14) in her depiction of “His death and passion” (116), which Christ “endure[d]...That you in heaven a worthy place might gaine” (119-20).

Meditating upon this great sacrifice and living virtuously is vital, Lanyer writes, because “this world is but a Stage / Where all doe play their parts, and must be gone; / Here’s no respect of persons, youth, nor age, / Death seizeth all, he never spareth one” (121-24). In these lines, the poet compares earthly life itself to art—a performance upon which the final curtain must fall. It is only through faith in Christ, the one man able to “orecome” (127) death, that one may find justice. Lanyer directs the Countess of Dorset “to build upon...He [who] is the rocke that holy Church did chuse” (130-1). Resuming her role as priest, the poet enlightens the Lady Anne as to her own duty to God:

Faire Shepheardesse, tis you that he will use  
To feed his flocke, that trust in him alone:

All worldly blessings he vouchsafes to you,

That to the poore you may returne his due. (133-36)

Lanyer charges the countess with leading those who would follow her example.

Because she is so blessed here on earth, she should share her good fortunes with those who must wait until they join Christ in Heaven for equality—beginning, presumably, with the poet who has written these very lines. For, in doing so, the Lady Anne will bestow her love upon Christ, and Lanyer asks, “who hath more deserv’d than he?” (138).

Further, “in recompence of all his paine” (139), the countess should excuse the “paines” caused by the “wants, or weaknesse of my braine” (140-41). After all, Christ’s “worth is more than can be shew’d by Art” (144). Given Lanyer’s continued conflation of Christ and her book, this defense of her poetry also suggests that her *natural* talent, much like Christ’s greatness and the countess’s virtues, cannot be adequately represented by *art*, given the current cultural distinction between Nature and Art. However, if Lanyer is, as she claims, the literary heir to Mary Sidney, in whom Nature and Art “dwell...[i]n perfit unity” (“The Authors Dreame” 89), then it is she who will disrupt that binary in her work as she effects the same change in hierarchies of class and gender.

### **Women’s Resistance as a Reflection of Christ**

Reasserting her earlier insinuations that women play a role in their patriarchal oppression, Lanyer, in her final dedication “To the Vertuous Reader,” chides those of her sex who, even as they “emulate the virtues and perfections of the rest,” attempt, “by all their powers of ill speaking, to ecclipse the brightness of their deserved fame” (2-4).

She points out that this sort of behavior only serves as further fuel for the fires of misogyny, and she offers “this small volume, or little booke” (5-6) as a means of countering the arguments against the female sex and reminding women of the need for solidarity. Lanyer warns that those women who “speake unadvisedly” (14-15) against other women denounce themselves “by the words of their own mouths” (13-14)—making arguments better left to “evill disposed men” (19):

[Men] who [,] forgetting they were borne of women, nourished of women, and that if it were not by the means of women, they would be quite extinguished out of the world, and a finall ende of them all, doe like Vipers deface the wombs wherein they were bred, onely to give way and utterance to their want of discretion and goodness. (19-24)

Just as she discounts the rationale of inheritance through the male line, Lanyer here demonstrates that, ultimately, women are infinitely more powerful than men, whose very existence depends upon their willingness to perform their “duty.” She balks at the audacity of men’s criticisms of women, but, she notes, what more can be expected of those who “dishonoured Christ his Apostles and Prophets, putting them to shamefull deaths” (25-26)? For this reason, Lanyer explains, women need not “regard any imputations, that they undeservedly lay upon us” (27). It is in these lines that the poet reveals the subversive arguments that she will make in the volume’s title poem.

Continuing to wonder at the impudence of the accusations with which men seek to tyrannize women, Lanyer observes that “they have tempted even the patience of God himselfe” in their crimes against his son (31). Moreover, God “gave power to wise and

virtuous women, to bring downe [men's] pride and arrogancie" (32-33). Lanyer goes on to list several biblical examples of such women, noting that there are "infinite others, which for brevitie sake I will omit" (39-40)—echoing her earlier decision to omit all but the most famous of the many virtuous women to whom she might dedicate the *SDRJ*. As further evidence of the divine grace of the female sex, Lanyer offers Christ's own exclusive relationship with women:

He was "begotten of a woman, borne of a woman, nourished of a woman, obedient to a woman;...he healed woman, pardoned women, comforted women: yea, even when he was in his greatest agonie and bloodie sweat, going to be crucified, and also in the last houre of his death, tooke care to dispose of woman: after his resurrection, appeared first to a woman, sent a woman to declare his most glorious resurrection to the rest of his Disciples. (43-50)

Again noting the numerous other examples that she could list, Lanyer confidently argues that, if Jesus Christ bears women such respect, this should be "sufficient to inforce all good Christians and honourable minded men to speake reverently of our sexe" (55-56). Despite the inflammatory contentions that she makes against men, Lanyer's defense is meant to educate other women as well. The poet has faith that her readers will "increase the least sparke of virtue where they find it" in the *SDRJ* rather "than quench it by wrong constructions" (59-61). To such open-minded and open-hearted individuals, Lanyer "wish[es] all increase of virtue, and desire[s] their best opinions" (61-61). With this statement, Lanyer both compliments her readers' virtue and implicitly denounces her

detractors, in whose opinions she is decidedly uninterested and to whom she offers no apology. The poet's final (unwritten) statement before turning to her passion poem is an assertion of her own virtue and authority.

Strangely, Lanyer begins her retelling of the passion by informing her primary dedicatee, Margaret Clifford that "Sith *Cynthia* [Elizabeth I] is ascended to that rest / Of endless joy and true Eternitie... To thee great Countesse now I will applie / My pen, to write thy never dying fame" (1-10), offering another reminder of the court and the life that she once enjoyed. Achsah Guibbory posits that in Lanyer's repeated references to the late queen, she "looks back nostalgically to the reign of Elizabeth but in dedicating the volume to Queen Anne and the powerful noblewomen associated with her, Lanyer attempts to attach herself to Anne's court as it provided a female-centered alternative to James's" (193). This explanation makes much sense—especially within the context of the poet's construction of a community of women—but it does not account for Lanyer's announcement of the Countess Dowager of Cumberland's seemingly secondary status. Queen Elizabeth is depicted throughout the *SDRJ* as a model of female learning and patronage, as well as a symbol of the power a woman can wield when she is free of a man's rule. Given Margaret Clifford's recent widowhood, which Lanyer envisions as freedom from patriarchal oppression in "Cooke-ham," the comparison, rather than placing the countess *below* the late queen, may instead put forth the Countess Dowager of Cumberland as the heir to Elizabeth I's famed support of education and the arts. Moreover, Lanyer again imagines the countess's death, "when to Heav'n thy blessed Soule shall flie, / These lines on earth record thy reverend name" (11-12). This repeated

reference to Lanyer's book as a monument to Margaret Clifford's legacy recalls a similar discussion in the dedication to the countess's daughter, which cleverly places the Lady Anne in line to assume Queen Elizabeth's position as patron.

As she did in her dedication to the Countess of Dorset, Lanyer asks Margaret Clifford to "Pardon (deere Ladie) want of womans wit / To pen thy praise, when few can equall it" (15-16). This reverence is immediately undercut, however, by the poet's additional request that her patron excuse the fact that she has not written "[t]hose praisefull lines of that delightful place, / As you commanded me in that faire night" (18-19). Lanyer presumably refers here to "The Description of Cooke-ham," which she ultimately did write—though perhaps not as soon as the countess dowager had wished. She goes on to describe Margaret Clifford in much the same way as she did her daughter: she is immune to the draw of "worldly pleasures" (35); her entire being is devoted to her faith; and her "Mind [is] so perfect by thy Maker fram'd / No vaine delights can harbor in thy heart" (41-42). Whereas Anne is a product of her mother, Margaret is a product of God and requires none of the instruction that Lanyer offers her other dedicatees:

With his sweet love, thou art so much inflam'd,  
 As of the world thou seem'st to have no part;  
 So, love him still, thou need'st not be asham'd,  
 Tis He that made thee, what thou wert, and art:  
 Tis He that dries all teares from Orphans eies,  
 And heares from heav'n the wofull widows cries. (43-48)

The poet praises the countess's love of Christ (as well as his love for her), crediting this devotion for her greatness. The final couplet of this stanza unites orphans and widows as those whose sorrows are eased by Christ. Given the fact that both of Lanyer's parents had died by 1587 (Woods xviii), she may be identifying herself as an orphan who grieves for loss in the same way that a widow, such as Margaret Clifford, does. Both are equally comforted by their love for and faith in Christ and are thus equal in the eyes of God—regardless of the social distance that exists between them on earth. This desire for parity in the midst of an artificially hierarchical culture is a theme that dominates the remainder of Lanyer's text.

After an extended treatment of God's justice and more praise of the countess's unwavering virtue, Lanyer notes that Clifford "from the Court to the Countrie art retir'd, / Leaving the world, before the world leaves thee" (161-62). The binary relationship between urban and rural is here put into question as the proximity of the words "Court" and "Countrie" highlight their similar spellings—even as they are presented as opposites. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, "Court" denoted an enclosed outdoor space, "a large house or castle," a royal residence, and/or "the body of courtiers" of a sovereign (OED). "Country" signified "the territory or land of a nation," "the land of a person's birth," and/or rural (OED). Lanyer's use of the words encompasses all of these definitions. In actuality, she is most likely referring to Margaret Clifford's retreat to Cookham during her estrangement from her husband and after she was widowed in 1605 (Lewalski "Re-Writing Patriarchy" 99 n.41), noting the countess's physical absence from the court of James I. However, Lanyer also evokes the contrast between

the confining and distinctly *unnatural* way that nature is experienced in the city and the sense of freedom that one may find in the limitless and uncorrupted space of the countryside. Finally, the poet may be offering more criticism of socially-constructed hierarchies by noting the disconnect between the royal court and the nation of people that it claims to represent. Lanyer will return to and expand upon all of these divisions in the *SDRJ*'s final poem, "The Description of Cooke-ham," discussed below.

For now, Lanyer proves herself to be the kind of woman who does not begrudge another who is worthy of commendation and asserts that Margaret Clifford is immune to such attacks:

Pale Envy never can thy name empaire,  
 When in thy heart thou harbour'st such a guest:  
 ...  
 All hearts must needs do homage unto thee,  
 In whom all eies such rare perfection see. (179-84)

Lanyer proffers the countess as a model to be imitated—much as Clifford and Lanyer (within her book) imitate Christ. In fact, Lanyer's picture of the countess is nearly identical to that of Christ inasmuch as both are too great and too perfect for the poet's "weake mind" to adequately praise and both are untouched by sin and offer redemption to those who would follow their example. Margaret Clifford and Christ actually do become one when Lanyer later "gives" him to her patron as "the Husband of thy Soule" (253). This union, in contrast to earthly concepts of marriage, is non-hierarchical and is, according to the poet, the only way for a woman to love and find true happiness with a

man. Of course, Christ is no ordinary man, a fact that is as true of his divinity as it is of his gender within the *SDRJ*.

In her “*Invective against outward beauty*,” Lanyer announces that physical beauty, “which the world commends, / Is not the subject I will write upon” (185-86). Such “gawdie colours” fade with time until they disappear altogether (188). However, “those faire Virtues which on thee attends / Are alwaies fresh, they never are but one” (189-90). True beauty, Lanyer argues, can only exist when accompanied by virtue. She declares that “those matchless colours Red and White...do draw but dangers and disgrace” (193-96). Her criticism of beauty—specifically, female beauty—goes beyond making a case for virtue and extends to the objectification of women by masculine poetic conventions, which, in turn, perpetuates a hierarchical view of gender in which women are seen as “naturally” inferior. Beauty makes women vulnerable to men who “seeke, attempt, plot and devise, / How they may overthrow the chaste Dame, / Whose Beautie is the White whereat they aime” (206-8). Comparing courtship to hunting (perhaps alluding again to the conflict between “court” and “country”), Lanyer notes not only the dangers involved in such liaisons but also the fleeting quality of love that is based on physical attraction alone. Both Lanyer and Margaret Clifford were quite familiar with the unreliability of men in love, and the poet makes it clear in the *SDRJ* that all earthly lovers are fickle—only Christ is worthy of woman’s devotion. Given the speed with which court gossip spread, Clifford was no doubt as familiar with Lanyer’s predicaments as the poet was with those of her patron: the former’s affair and the resulting illegitimate child and loss of courtly privileges and the latter’s philandering

husband who, even in death, continued to cause his widow and daughter to suffer injustice. And if these immediate examples were not proof enough, Lanyer presents a list of literary women whose experiences leave no room for doubt that what she says is true.

At this point in the poem, Lanyer returns to the subject of Margaret Clifford's spiritual union with Christ, conflating his death with that of her earthly husband, both of whose "dying made her Dowager of all; / Nay more, Co-heire of that eternall blisse / That Angels lost, and We by *Adams* fall" (257-59). Of course, the countess's husband did not leave his wife her rightful inheritance, but Lanyer argues that through her purity of soul the Countess Dowager of Cumberland inherits "all." In these lines, Lanyer introduces her account of the passion with a glimpse of the arguments that she will make regarding the central role of men in the sins of humankind: Adam's responsibility for the Fall and man's ultimate sin (represented here by "*Judas* kisse" (260)) in crucifying the son of God. Once again, the "poore barren Braine" of Lanyer's Muse is "farre too weake" to write on the subject of Christ (276-77). However, the poet assumes the role of literary mother to her "poore Infant Verse," encouraging her textual offspring to "soare aloft" without fear (279).

Beginning with the numerous signs that forewarned of this great betrayal, Lanyer addresses Christ in one of many digressions,<sup>9</sup> asking him why he ever confided in mortal men, who are "the Scorpions bred in *Adams* mud" (381), when he knew that they would deceive him. She praises his obedience to and faith in his Father, admiring the "Kingdom wonne" (413) by "this great purchase" (412)—contrasting once more

material and spiritual wealth, and identifying true value in the latter. Lanyer marvels at the cruelty that Christ endured from man after “all the Sinnes that ever were committed, / Were laid to thee, whom no man could detect” (450-51) and the peace and love with which he accepted his death. Equally astounded by man’s failure to recognize Jesus as the son of God, Lanyer characterizes his murderers as “blinde,” “dull,” “weake,” “stony hearted,” “void of Pitie,” and “full of Spight” (505-9). Of his Disciples, the poet observes that in their desertion of him, “[t]hey do like men, when dangers overtake them” (632), criticizing again the absence of loyalty, honesty, and love in the male sex as a group. Having constructed man as the enemy, Lanyer goes on to align Christ with women, describing his response to his accusers in conventionally feminine terms. Though he is “charg’d by tongues impure” (664), Christ “answers not, nor doth he care, / Much more he will endure for our sake” (669-70). In his silence, he performs one of the social expectations of the ideal woman, enduring injustices without complaint. When he finally does speak, it is with “so mild a Majestie” (697) and a “harmelesse tongue” (699), and his words, though true, are given no authority (709). The poet reproaches his attackers for their “malice” (707) and “wicked counsels” (722), specifically Caiphas, Pilate, and “Caytife,” or Judas (727). Lanyer urges Pontius Pilate, before he passes judgment upon “faultlesse *Jesus*” (746), to “heare the words of thy most worthy wife, / Who sends to thee, to beg her Saviours life” (751-52). Here, as Guibbory has noted, Lanyer’s voice merges with that of Pilate’s wife, another woman “whose knowledge came from divine illumination,” investing both with “not only interpretive power but the right and responsibility to speak publicly” as they “violate the codes of their respective

societies that encourage the silence of women and their subordination to the authority of husbands” (198). Guibbory also suggests that, by including the wife’s words, which do not appear in any biblical text, Lanyer may be seeking to correct “the silencing of women’s words by the men who wrote the Gospels, or their blindness to their importance” (198). These two voices then unite with Eve’s in Lanyer’s feminist retelling of the Fall.

In the text, Pilate’s wife commences her defense of Eve by advising, “Let not us Women glory in Mens fall, / Who had power given to over-rule us all” (759-60), immediately highlighting the difference between man’s desire to oppress and punish and woman’s desire for freedom from such domination. “Till now,” she continues, “your indiscretion sets us free, / And makes our former fault much lesse appeare” (761-61). As Sue Matheson has observed, this argument differs dramatically from prior responses to anti-woman tracts that invoke Eve as a model of women’s natural tendency to sin: “Male and female writers generally countered the arguments of such tracts by producing Old and New Testament models of feminine virtue to refute illogical and often emotionally charged generalizations about the nature of the feminine” (55). The Wife, on the other hand, claims that man’s deliberate sin against Christ surpasses that of Eve’s innocent curiosity, thereby absolving women of any wrongdoing. Further, it is Adam who should bear the blame, because Eve offered him the fruit out of her love for him—she “[w]as simply good, and had no powre to see, / The after-coming harme did not appeare” (764-65). It was her “undiscerning Ignorance” that succumbed to the Serpent’s plot (769). Adam, on the other hand, “can not be excusde” (777). “What Weaknesse offerd,” she

argues, “Strength might have refusde, / Being Lord of all, the greater was his shame” (779-80). Just as Lanyer gave voice to Pilate’s wife, she here gives Eve the opportunity to defend herself and, by extension, all women. Together, the three women, as Boyd Berry asserts, “not only utter subversive claims on behalf of women, they do so publicly, directly addressing patriarchal authority. That is, they refuse to behave verbally in the ways in which the publicly silent Jesus behaves; they refuse to be silent in the ways which male writing shaped for ‘virtuous’ women” (216-7). They form a second community of women within Lanyer’s passion poem and serve as further evidence of the revolutionary effect that such solidarity among women of all classes could have on the tyrannical and hierarchical culture in which they currently live.

The defense of Eve continues to emphasize her feminine weakness of mind, claiming that if she “did erre, it was for knowledge sake” (797). The speaker(s) state(s) that, in Adam’s case, “The fruit beeing faire perswaded him to fall” (798). Whereas Eve sought wisdom, Adam was seduced by Beauty—but not the manipulative beauty that men charge women with using against them. However, man’s lust for Beauty is once again the cause of woman’s grief—regardless of her innocence. And Eve, “whose fault was onely too much love” (801), is another example of a woman whose suffering is the result of her love for a man. In a bold move, Lanyer turns Eve’s error into a gift: She sought to share the fruit with “her Deare, / That what she tasted, he likewise might prove, / Wherby his knowledge might become more cleare” (802-4). She chastises Adam for not telling Eve of God’s warning, then proposes that woman is the true source of man’s “Knowledge, which he tooke / From Eves faire hand, as from a learned Booke”

(807-8). In making this argument, Lanyer undermines texts like Vives's *De institutione Feminae Christianae*, which dictate how, whether, and to what extent women can or should be educated. If woman is the origin of human knowledge, then men are indebted to her for all of "their" achievements.

In a final effort to clear Eve's good name, Pilate's wife concludes that if Eve is evil, then "[b]eeing made of him, he was the ground of all" (810). With this, she effectively reverses the hierarchy that men claim was a result of the Fall: women possess knowledge and, therefore, authority, while men are naturally sinful and are to blame for any moral weakness in women. She returns to the initial argument that Eve's sin was the result of "weaknesse" (815), but men "in malice Gods deare Sonne betray" (816). So, if Pilate and the other accusers murder Christ, "[t]his sinne of yours, surmounts them all as farre / As doth the Sunne, another little starre" (823-4). At this point, Pilate's wife declares, "Then let us have our Libertie againe, / And challenge to your selves no Sov'raightie" (825-26). She repeats her earlier claim that men should respect women, without whom they would not exist in this world. "[W]e never gave consent" to man's sin against Christ, she asserts, "Witness thy wife (*O Pilate*) speakes for all" (833-34). In addition to the general argument against man's domination of women, Lanyer here addresses the topic of marriage. The negative experience of marriage that Lanyer shared with Margaret Clifford makes her demand for "Libertie" from a husband's "Sov'raightie" particularly important. With the example of Pilate's wife, Lanyer demonstrates the horrible consequences of a man's disregard for his wife and her wishes (or, in this case, pleas). As a woman and a wife (the repeated identification of "Pilate's

wife” by her marital status must be intentional), she “speakes for all.” This “all” suggests a shared identity, which is central to the argument of the *SDRJ*. All women—regardless of class or other social division—are subject to men’s tyranny. Once they recognize this, Lanyer asserts, they can form a united front against their oppressors. But Pilate does not heed his wife’s warnings, and, as Lanyer’s narrative voice emerges, she describes the scene of the passion from the point of view of a witness.

Once Christ has been found guilty, Lanyer turns to a report of his “holy march” (947) to the site of his crucifixion. She lists the men who accompany him on his journey, condemning them all for the wrongs that they commit. Alongside these men who sin against the son of God, “the women cri’d” (968). Whereas none of his accusers could make him speak, and though he is walking toward his death, Christ acknowledges the weeping women “[a]s not remembering his great greife and paine, / To comfort [them]” (972-73). “Your cries,” Lanyer writes, “inforced mercie, grace, and love / From him, whom greatest Princes could not moove: / To speake one word, nor once to lift his eyes” (975-77). Demonstrating her claims that women are favored by God, Lanyer notes that what the greatest men could not accomplish, mere women were able to prompt without force or art. Their unwavering faith and their recognition of the crime being committed did “[b]y teares, by sighes, by cries intreat” (996) to no avail. Men’s “hearts more hard than flint, or marble stone” were unmoved by the women’s appeals. Joining these “daughters of Jerusalem” in their grief, the Virgin Mary is “wayting on her Sonne, / All comfortlesse in depth of sorrow drowned” (1009-10). The Virgin is presented as *the* mother, whose loss of both “Sonne, and Father of Eternitie” surpasses all others

(1016). Her grief protects Christ from defilement: “Her teares did wash away his pretious blood, / That sinners might not tread it under feet” (1017-18). Her sole consolation is the knowledge that the death of “Her Sonne, her Husband, Father, Saviour, King...killed Death, and tooke away his sting” (1023-24). Lanyer lauds Mary as the “Deere Mother of our Lord” (1031) and the “most beauteous Queene of Woman-kind” (1040).<sup>10</sup> In her examination of the literary uses of the mourning woman, Patricia Phillippe notes that, in Lanyer’s passion poem, “female lamentation is depicted as a group activity in which a community of women...joins together to mourn” (78). This mourning, she argues, is represented by Lanyer “both as the means of establishing a privileged relationship between women mourners and Christ, and as sanctified by that communion” (98). Mourning further unites women in opposition to the men who killed Christ and establishes their “special fellowship with Christ based upon their empathetic suffering with him” (102-3). In addition to her role as a mourner, the Virgin Mary serves as bridge that connects the community of women represented by Elizabeth, Margaret, and Anne with the Daughters of Jerusalem, who are likewise joined to the community of learned women assembled in the *SDRJ*’s dedications. The poet recounts the Lord’s salutation of the Virgin, “blessed among women” (1047), in which he reveals that she will “beare a Sonne that shal inherit / His Father *Davids* throne, free from offence” (1051-52). Christ, “[t]he onely Sonne of God” (1072), has no earthly father, so his lineage is purely maternal and spiritual and thus free from man’s weaknesses. Likewise, Mary, “a Virgin pure” (1064), must submit only to God: “Farre from desire of any man thou art, / Knowing not one, thou art from all men free” (1077-78). Her “chaste desire”

(1079), rather than being a sign of man's control of a woman's body, is her source of freedom from such oppression. The Virgin Mary's liberty hearkens back to Lanyer's earlier praise of the Virgin Queen, who, rejecting calls for her to marry, chose instead to devote herself to her children: the people of England. Her freedom from the rule of a husband allowed Elizabeth I to retain her autonomy as well as her power. The late queen, in Lanyer's poem, becomes the Virgin Mary's female heir and another "maiden Mother" (1083).

Having already established Margaret Clifford as heir to Queen Elizabeth's literary throne, Lanyer makes her the monarch's spiritual heir as well. Though the Countess Dowager of Cumberland took an earthly husband, her devotion to "the Husband of thy Soule" invests her with an authority that surpasses that of any man on earth. Further, the countess's widowhood effectively releases her from the dominion of her husband. The Virgin Mary, Lanyer writes, is Christ's "Servant, Mother, Wife, and Nurse," and the birth of her miraculous child "freed us from the curse" (1087-88). Margaret Clifford is then described throughout the *SDRJ* as imitating both Christ and Mary, who are "crown'd with glory from above, / Grace and Perfection resting in thy breast" (1089-90). Mary's and, by extension, Margaret's "Child [is] a Lambe, and thou a Turtle dove, / Above all other women highly blest; / To find such favour in his glorious sight, / In whom thy heart and soule doe most delight" (1093-96). Lanyer may also be comparing the Lady Anne with Christ. As heir to her mother's virtue, the Countess of Dorset likewise emulates Virgin and Son, so Lanyer's praise of the countess dowager is simultaneously praising her daughter—in whose service the poet hopes to be. Linked by

their common spiritual and maternal lineage, originating with the Virgin Mother, all three women act as models of virtue. As each provides her own inspiration for Lanyer's volume, they also compose a historiography of literary women.

### **Echoes of a Lost Utopia**

In the concluding lines of her passion poem, Lanyer assures the Countess Dowager of Cumberland that “All what I am, I rest at your command” (1840). One of the countess’s commands, in fact, is Lanyer’s “The Description of Cooke-ham,” which immediately follows the passion poem and concludes the volume. Like Veronica Franco’s *Capitolo 25*, “Cooke-ham” is an elegy for a lost Paradise: “Farewell (sweet Cooke-ham) where I first obtain’d / Grace from that Grace where perfit Grace remain’d” (1-2). Lanyer credits her experience of this country estate “where Virtue then did rest” (7) with inspiring her to write the *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. As Lewalski has noted, though Lanyer identifies Margaret Clifford as “Mistris of that Place” (11), the manor at Cookham actually belonged to the crown, which explains the absence of the house in Lanyer’s country-house poem (“Re-writing Patriarchy” 104). Whether “Cooke-ham” is the “first English country-house poem” or not, Lanyer’s praise of the estate differs significantly from other examples of the genre.<sup>11</sup> In her meditation on the house’s natural surroundings, Mercedes Maroto Camino suggests, “Lanyer merges the real, the imaginary and the transcendental at the same time that [she] highlights the intricate relationship between landscape and ownership. Needless to say, landed property was normally beyond the control of most women, who were themselves associated with the

land and with the master's properties" (113). Whereas Franco assumes possession of Della Torre's estate through her description of its magnificence, Lanyer calls attention to women's lack of autonomy by overlooking the house in her depiction of Cookham and reminding Clifford of her own inability to claim ownership of what is rightfully hers (and her daughter's).

Though Franco and Lanyer approach their country-house poems from differing positions of authority (or lack thereof), both writers remember their experiences in the countryside as a glimpse of a utopia in which class hierarchies cease to exist. Franco, whose addressees are primarily men, imagines a world in which men and women live together in harmony, but her authorial control of Fumane privileges the feminine voice even as it seeks to deconstruct the gender binary. Lanyer, on the other hand, addressing only women and effectively erasing men (not just their voices) altogether, desires to emulate the Virgin Mary, who is "from all men free." Cookham becomes the location of the kind of non-hierarchical community of women that Lanyer imagines in her dedicatory poems. For both poets, the union of art and nature is representative of the social equality that they remember experiencing while visiting these rural estates. As I have already noted, there is no documented evidence that Lanyer had heard of Franco or read her work, but the striking similarities in genre and content suggest that it is a possibility. Further, if Benson's arguments regarding Lanyer's Italian background and the nature of her relationship with Lord Hunsdon are correct, then the poet could certainly have known of the Venetian courtesan, whose fame had spread well beyond her city.

Just as Franco joins art and nature in her praise of Della Torre and his estate, Lanyer merges the two seemingly incompatible forces in the person of the Countess Dowager of Cumberland as she describes in verse the estate's response to Clifford's presence:

Oh how me thought each plant, each floure, each tree  
 Set forth their beauties then to welcome thee:  
 The very Hills right humbly did descend,  
 When you to tread upon them did intend. (33-36)

Like Lanyer, nature submits to the Countess Dowager of Cumberland's high rank. Nature bows and reveals its beauty to the virtuous countess with an enthusiasm that works in direct contrast to the later sorrow at Margaret's and Anne's departure. Clifford inspires complete submission in Cookham's garden—a power that echoes that of Della Torre's ability to show that "Art does not yield to nature" (127). Reading "Cooke-ham" as a critique of the patronage system and its unreliability, Lamb posits that, at the end of the poem, Lanyer "depicts the countess of Cumberland and her daughter as treating the creatures, both vegetable and animal, as soon-to-be unemployed servants" (55). Throughout the *SDRJ*, Lanyer is an unemployed servant seeking patronage, and Nature's dejection at being deserted clearly reflects the poet's own sense of abandonment by women whom she viewed as a sort of family.

Of course, they were not family, and it is the social hierarchy against which Lanyer writes that prevents her from continuing to be a part of their lives. Like Clifford, Della Torre is effectively worshipped by the flora and fauna that populate his estate,

which “perform as much as he requires” (516). Franco, too, draws attention to her position as a servant to her patron(s), concluding her praise of Della Torre’s estate with a description of his household servants, who, like Fumane’s plant life, are “ready to wait on their lord from all sides” (546). However, while Franco concludes her volume with an assertion of authority, Lanyer seems to undo much of the equalizing work performed throughout the *SDRJ*. The social distance that exists between Lanyer and Clifford, Richard Duerden observes, “enforces a spatial distance” (135). She ultimately laments her lack of agency within the context of the poet/patron relationship as well as within the personal relationship that she desires to have with Margaret and Anne Clifford. In “Cooke-ham” then, Lanyer’s emphasis on boundaries (or the lack thereof) re-asserts all of her previous arguments against class, gender, and geographical divisions that, together, prevent women as a group from having real social power. Once again, Lanyer’s poem stands in marked contrast to Franco’s, in which the poet realizes her dream of social equality on earth. Claiming the inability to sufficiently describe this Paradise, Franco silences her own voice. We might read Lanyer’s poem as a sort of response to this ending, exposing the realities that prevent such a utopian vision from coming to fruition. However, Lanyer’s emphasis on Christian virtue leads her to locate her true Paradise in Heaven, where these isolating social distinctions cease to exist.

Continuing with her praise, Lanyer describes Margaret Clifford as a Phoenix, making yet another comparison to Elizabeth I and continuing her representation of the countess as a goddess of nature: “Each Arbor, Banke, each Seate, each stately Tree, /

Thought themselves honor'd in supporting thee" (45-46). Lamb argues that the natural world in "Cooke-ham" stands for the patronage relationship:

The emotionally overwrought flowers and trees of Cookeham represent a literalization of the gardening metaphor in Lanyer's prefatory dedication to Anne... This metaphor was implicitly tied to patronage by the early modern usage of the word 'plant' to mean 'to set up a person or thing in some person or estate' (OED). Like the streams and the birds, the flowers and the trees share a goal: to please the countess of Cumberland and her daughter. (54)

This is a goal that Lanyer shares as well, but her identification with the natural world also distances the poet from the social injunctions that she associates with urban life. Having scanned the flora and fauna that beautify the estate at Cookham, Lanyer turns her attention to "that stately Tree" (53), an oak tree that surpassed all other in height. She writes that the tree is "[m]uch like a comely Cedar streight and tall" (57) and that it "[w]ould like a Palme tree spread his armes abroad, / Desirous that you there should make abode" (61-62). The centrality of this tree, as Lewalski has noted, recalls "that other Eden," though it "offers no temptation, only contentment and incitement to meditate upon the creatures as they reflect their Creators' beauty, wisdom, love, and majesty" ("Of God and Good Women" 222). Beilin posits that Lanyer's comparison of the oak to the cedar and the palm "suggest[s] that the oak is not merely a notable item of landscape, but the representation of an idea" (204). "Patristic commentary," she explains, "interpreted both [the cedar and the palm] trees as the Church and the disciples

of Christ" (204). Micheline White adds that the oak tree "marks the place where the profane world intersects with the divine, and while the oak remains subject to temporal corruption, it reveals sacred realities" (328). Identifying Margaret Clifford with the oak tree, Lanyer continues to hold her up as a representation of the sacred on earth and further emphasizes the physical and social distance between poet and patron.

Pointing to a sixteenth-century literary tradition in which "[g]ardens, women, and poetry had long been associated...by men...as sources of analogous pleasures," Christine Coch claims that the garden is both "an extension of the public dimensions of the household" and "a more intimate sphere apart" (98)—a liminal space in which Lanyer can both imagine a classless society and recognize "this vision's limits" (99). "Ultimately," Coch argues, "Lanyer rejects the garden as an analogue of her art to protest her subjection to that order's inequities" (99). As a representation of what could have been and what will never be, Cookham and its garden are a lost Eden in which Lanyer's imagined non-hierarchical community of women is revealed to be but another dream in which "what my heart desire'd, mine eies had seene" ("The Author's Dreame" 174). The poet is again left to mourn that "Sencelesse" sleep was "not to admit me powre, / As I had spent the night to spend the day" (171-72). Starting out as a *locus amoenus*, Cookham, like Fumane, provides a comforting refuge from the social divisions that dominate the urban, courtly world outside. However, this female utopia in which servant and patron lived as equals is disrupted by the intrusion of patriarchal culture in the form of class divisions. Lanyer praises the Lady Anne, "sprung from *Cliffords* race, / Of noble *Bedfords* blood" (93-94), emphasizing her "race" and "blood" as markers of

earthly nobility. In contrast to her earlier descriptions of the Clifford women, Lanyer does not attribute their aristocratic rank to their spiritual virtue. Instead, she highlights the (base) physical source of their social standing.

Lanyer goes on to suggest that Anne's previous exemplary piety has been lost because she is “[t]o honourable *Dorset* now espows'd” (95). “In [Anne's] faire breast,” she continues, “true virtue then was housed” (96). Coch comments that “Lanyer's wistful praise of Anne intimates that Cookham's moral fabric starts to unravel at the point when she submits to social convention” (108). The Lady Anne's marriage has devastating consequences for the poet, who has argued throughout the *SDRJ* that earthly marriage can only cause a woman sorrow. In fact, as Guibbory contends, “The rejection of marriage in the Salve is an integral part of Aemilia Lanyer's socially radical understanding of the meaning of Christ's Passion. To reject marriage is to undo the hierarchical social order in which men rule over women, thus freeing women from bondage to men and thus fulfilling the redemptive significance of Christ's Passion” (204). Further, Lanyer ultimately blames the marriage for the dissolution of her paradise at Cookham:

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. (103-106)

“Fortune” here may not only signify destiny or circumstances but also wealth, since it is, after all, wealth and title that drive aristocratic marriages and which distance Lanyer

from both Margaret and Anne. Unlike Franco, who admittedly depends upon men for personal and professional support, Lanyer's happiness and livelihood rest in the hands of the powerful women to whom she speaks. She gives extended consideration to the issue of women's roles in their own oppression that Franco briefly criticizes in her Letter 22. Lanyer and the Clifford women have a relationship, but it is unequal: "Neerer in show, yet farther off in love, / In which, the lowest alwayes are above" (109-10). Whereas Franco's disapproval is focused on men and the sex trade, Lanyer broadens the scope of her censure by identifying a number influential noblewomen and "all virtuous ladies in generall" as her intended audience. Throughout the *SDRJ*, Lanyer stresses women's common oppression over their class differences, urging her readers to do the same so that they may effect social change. In "Cooke-ham," she reveals both the personal effects of such divisions and the powerlessness of the solitary woman—again calling upon her female readers to form a collective that reflects the non-hierarchical world imagined by Christ. While her social separation from Margaret and Anne may be "ordain'd by Fate" (108), Lanyer notes that Heaven, though "it is so farre above, / May in the end vouchsafe us entire love" (115-16), allowing Lanyer to reunite with her beloved Clifford women as a true peer.

In preparation for this meeting, Lanyer asks her "sweet Memorie" to "retaine / Those pleasures past, which will not turne againe" (117-18), specifically describing the young Anne's "sports" (119), innocent diversions "[w]herein my selfe did alwaies bear a part" (121). "Hating blind Fortune, careless to relieve" (126), Lanyer addresses "sweet Cooke-ham" again, identifying the estate as another "whom these Ladies leave" (127).

Returning to the natural world that celebrated the Countess Dowager of Cumberland's presence, Lanyer describes the response to the Cliffords' departure, which reflect Lanyer's own sorrow:

The trees that were so glorious in our view,  
 Forsooke both flowres and fruit, when once they knew  
 Of your depart, their very leaves did wither,  
 Changing their colours as they grewe together. (133-36)

Like the poet, though, the inhabitants of Cookham were unable to prevent this loss, despite their weeping and begging. Their efforts were useless because "your occasions call'd you so away, / That nothing there had power to make you stay" (147-48). These "occasions," of course, are "the patriarchal arrangements pertaining to Margaret's widowhood and Anne's subsequent marriage" (Lewalski, "Seizing" 55). The countess reveals that she has not lost her true nobility, however, as she "[f]orget[s] not to turne and take your leave / Of these sad creatures, powreless to receive / You favour when with grief you did depart, / Placing their former pleasures in your heart" (151-54).

Unlike Della Torre, the Countess Dowager of Cumberland does not own "her" estate, and she has no choice but to leave. So, while Franco experiences her longing for the perfection of Fumane alone, Lanyer shares with both the countess and the estate at Cookham a sense of grief inflicted upon them by the external force of patriarchal law. Lanyer's description of Margaret Clifford's sadness emphasizes that she is not leaving of her own volition, and the poet goes on to describe the countess's final good-bye to "that faire tree" (157). This great oak was the "first and last you did vouchsafe to see" (158),

Lanyer writes, describing the many pleasures it offered the countess, who enjoyed the tree as a place “to take the ayre, / With noble *Dorset*, then a virgin faire” (159-60). Here Lanyer reasserts the contrast between the once virtuous Anne and the now married Countess of Dorset, a change of state that the poet blames for all of the sorrow and lost joy that she is recording. Beneath this tree, “many a learned Booke was read and skand” (160), a memory that suggests that, as a wife, the Lady Anne has not only lost a devoted friend but also the freedom that had allowed her to pursue knowledge—which is, of course, the key to overcoming oppression.

Lanyer narrates her final exchange with Margaret Clifford, as she, “taking me by the hand” (162), went to bid the tree farewell. The countess, “with a chaste, yet loving kisse tooke leave, / Of which kisse I did it soone bereave” (165-66). Much has been made of this stolen kiss between Lanyer and Margaret Clifford, which Bowen asserts is the *SDRJ*’s “emblematic moment,” noting that “even when Lanyer comes closest to contact (spiritual and intellectual as much as sexual) with another woman, the connection has to be displaced, secret, at least until it becomes public in the poem” (293). Judith Sherer Herz describes the kiss as “ludicrous” (128) and “absurd” (132), claiming that “[t]he problem is, there is no available courtship language for Lanyer to appropriate...For her to write and to love is to live in the world that she has written but from which she is excluded at the very instant her writing ceases” (132). Michael Morgan Holmes argues, “It is not coincidental, however, that Lanyer’s stealing of the kiss, her fantasies of Christ’s embrace and oral delectableness, and her dream of a woman-only pastoral bower, all pivot on homoerotic intimacy. Her actions and vision,

in fact, involve a recognition that not all women's desires are exclusively heteroerotic or are oriented toward marriage and procreation" (182).

Expanding upon such readings, Amy Greenstadt argues that, in "Cooke-ham," nature and poetry are used both to authorize the female poet and to represent female homosexual desire, stating that the stolen kiss "implies that she...expected to receive this gesture of love from Clifford and feels that it rightly belongs to her" (69). She adds, "The very fact that Lanyer feels it necessary to describe her patron's 'sweet kisse' as 'chaste' suggests the possibility that the kiss could be *unchaste*" (71). Suggesting that the phallic tree operates within the poem as a dildo, Greenstadt interprets the displaced kiss as the countess's refusal "to acknowledge the poet's labor," and "[w]hat Lanyer appears to censure [here and in the *SDRJ* in general] is not women's propensity to emulate men *per se*, but the possibility that they could do so in order to subjugate other members of the female sex" (82). In withdrawing her support, Margaret Clifford effectively silences Lanyer's poetic voice, and the poet's theft of the countess's kiss may be an effort to reclaim that support—even if it is without her consent. "Yet this great wrong I never could repent" (174), Lanyer declares, explaining that her action was intended "[t]o shew that nothing's free from Fortune's scorne" (176). Though she is referring to the tree, Lanyer is also reminding Clifford that she is also subject to Fortune. As a woman in early-seventeenth-century England, Clifford is as vulnerable to and controlled by oppressive social dictates as Lanyer is. However, the countess does have a great influence over the poet and Cookham, both of which "[put] on Dust and Cobwebs to deface" themselves (202). With a sense of dejection and defeat, Lanyer writes, "This

last farewell to *Cooke-ham* here I give, / When I am dead thy name in this may live” (205). Claiming no fame for herself, Lanyer seems to be leaving behind not only Cookham but her writing as well. Without the countess’s patronage, the poet has neither the inspiration nor the means to pursue her art. However, because Margaret Clifford’s “virtues lodge in my unworthy breast” (208), Lanyer’s heart is forever “[tied]...to her by those rich chaines” (210). In this final line, Lanyer alludes again to her dream vision in which Mary Sidney is “Fast ti’d unto them [the Graces] in a golden Chaine” (7). In addition to declaring her love and devotion for the Countess Dowager of Cumberland, Lanyer also implies that Clifford is also dependent upon her (as are her other dedicatees) to impart virtue and grace through her poetry.

In the end, despite the *SDRJ*’s lengthy arguments against women’s submission to an earthly patriarchal authority, Lanyer realizes with great sadness that one woman poet cannot affect the kind of change that she seeks. While this seems a very hopeless ending to a hopefully subversive volume, the poet’s loneliness and ineffectiveness may actually serve as a final call for female solidarity. Throughout the *SDRJ* Lanyer has constructed multiple communities of women, ultimately uniting them in their shared devotion to Christ. “Cooke-ham” illustrates the powerlessness that results when women are separated by patriarchally-defined hierarchies. In the volume’s final poem, these hierarchies—and the system that they constitute—lead to the Lady Anne’s loss of virtue, Margaret’s loss of autonomy and peace at Cookham, and Lanyer’s loss of friendship and poetic inspiration. The Edenic surroundings described in “Cooke-ham” represent for Lanyer’s female readers the freedom and joy that can be obtained when women unite

against patriarchal oppression. The loss of that paradise represents the consequences of allowing artificial social distinctions to separate them. The *SDRJ*'s concluding epistle, "To the doubtfull Reader," explains that the volume's title "was delivered unto me in sleepe many years before I had any intent to write in this manner." Lanyer claims that she did not remember this dream until she "had written the Passion of Christ." It was in this dream that she "was appointed to performe this Worke," which she then named accordingly. By ending with this particular dream, Lanyer alludes to the *SDRJ*'s other dreams: the dream in which she becomes Mary Sidney's literary heir and the dream of a non-hierarchical women's community of resistance to patriarchal oppression. Because her original dream was realized through the publication of the *SDRJ*, Lanyer may be suggesting that the dreams contained within the volume may also be given the "powre, / As I had spent the night to spend the day" ("An Author's dreame" 171-72).

Whether they were aware of it or not, Isabella Whitney, Veronica Franco, Marie de Romieu, and Aemilia Lanyer participated in an international community of resistance that had the common goals of rewriting women's history and investing women's voices with authority in an effort to deconstruct accepted social hierarchies. Such resistance required a (re)education of women—an education that these poets both endorse and provide to their readers within their texts, revealing the power of female learning as they deconstruct misogynist arguments. This community in many ways owed its existence to Christine de Pizan, whose influence—which was probably also unknown to these writers—is apparent in their conscious rejection of misogynist discourse, their creation of imagined communities of the oppressed, and their systematic deconstruction of the

arguments used to maintain patriarchal rule. All four women add to Christine's City of Ladies the recognition of the arbitrary and problematic nature of imposed social hierarchies, exposing their weaknesses and identifying spaces of resistance within dominant culture.

## Notes

1. For more on women publishing in sixteenth-century Italy, see Diana Robin, *Publishing Women*.
2. See John Freccero, “The Fig Tree and the Laurel,” for a discussion of the tree in Petrarchan tradition.
3. Princess Elizabeth’s mother, Anne of Denmark, was married to James I, who was Elizabeth I’s 2nd cousin. His mother, Mary, Queen of Scots, was Henry VIII’s sister’s (Margaret) granddaughter.
4. Lanyer may have also known that Arbella was dismissed in disgrace when the queen saw her talking to the Earl of Essex, Elizabeth’s favorite (Marshall)—Lanyer may have felt a sort of kinship of shame with Arbella.
5. See Gristwood, p. 93, and Lewalski, *Writing Women*, p. 68, for discussions of Arbella’s Protestantism.
6. Arbella was the daughter of Margaret Douglas, Margaret Tudor’s daughter.
7. See Lewalski, “Seizing;” Miller; Woods, Lanyer.
8. The issue of bloodlines and inheritance was the subject of much debate in regards to James I’s succession after Elizabeth I’s death in 1603. The question of James Stuart’s right to the throne was finally settled by the Succession Act of 1604, in which Parliament declared James I “lineally, justly, and lawfully next and sole heir of the blood royal of this realm” (Tanner 12). See also Howard Nenner, *The Right to Be King*.
9. See Berry for discussion of Lanyer’s use of digressions in her passion poem.

10. Miller notes, “Lanyer’s select choice of titles for Mary succeeds in conjoining maternity and sovereignty in the context of divinity. Writing in Protestant terms, Lanyer finds a way to appropriate the Virgin Mary as a model, not as a Catholic intercessor but as exemplary mother” (158). Also see Holmes, who argues that “Catholic devotional and symbolic traditions, especially as they relate to conventional companionship, likely appealed to [Lanyer] because they offered a way to imagine happiness with other women devoted to Christ” (178). Tying Mary to Lanyer’s role as host, Guibbory asserts, “In what is perhaps a Protestant revision of Catholic Mariolatry, the Virgin Mary becomes a pattern for the individual woman’s unmediated connection with the divine...Finding in Mary a precedent for a female priesthood, for woman’s worthiness to contain and offer up God for human salvation, Lanyer thus assumes for herself something like the public, priestly power denied to women within the institution of the Christian church. In this assumption of a priestly function, she turns to women’s advantage the Protestant emphasis on the priesthood of all believers” (206-7).
11. See Lewalski’s “The Lady of the Country-House Poem” for a closer examination of Lanyer’s departure from the conventional country-house poem.

## CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: IMAGINING A GLOBAL FEMINIST COMMUNITY OF  
RESISTANCE IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The community of resistance that Isabella Whitney, Veronica Franco, Marie de Romieu, and Aemilia Lanyer comprise, as I have argued, presents women's education as a way to combat culturally-prevalent misogyny and to appropriate the power to (re)define themselves as women. As an international community of resistance, the works of these women (along with other authors participating as defenders in the *querelle des femmes*) may be seen as prefiguring contemporary debates about gender, community, and globalization. Writing specifically about and from the point of view of women, all four of these early modern writers both resist and reify the construction of women as a group. They do not, however, propose that this group of women is homogenous—recognizing class, state of employment, and nationality as categories of difference. All write from positions both within and outside of dominant culture, and they use this combination of proximity and distance to articulate individual (though similar) critiques of oppressive social hierarchies. Each woman, all claims of modesty aside, demonstrates her impressive learning and poetic skill as she exposes and deconstructs the contradictions inherent in an artificially-divided culture. Further, they acknowledge both men and women as potential readers and explicitly condemn the behavior of those in power—even as they seek patronage from the very same.

Early modern women writers' seeming acceptance of their dependence upon men, as well as their adherence to injunctions of virtue and chastity (if not silence and

obedience), has been used as evidence against identifying their ideas as feminist. However, this criticism fails to take into account the historical context of their works, which, in turn, obscures the subversiveness of the content. Applying the term “feminist” to the literary efforts of early modern women is, of course, problematic, though many scholars of the period have described the *querelle des femmes* as a form of early feminism, beginning with Joan Kelly’s 1982 essay, “Early Feminist Theory and the *Querelle des Femmes*, 1400-1798.” Other critics use the terms “proto-feminist” (Coles 151; Jones, *The Currency of Eros* 6; Rosenthal 64) or “pro-feminist” (Woodbridge 109; Benson 9) to differentiate the early modern “woman question” from that of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. However, Margaret W. Ferguson argues that even these terms are “debatable,” as they “imply that feminism has a single, linear history” (“Feminism in Time” 8). Though I employ these “debatable” terms throughout this study, I do not assume a linear history of feminism any more than I assume a linear history of women’s writing.

Margaret J. M. Ezell asserts that “the use of the term ‘tradition’ implies the existence of common ground and continuity in literary works—in terms of subject, genre, style—and in the authors’ lives, their education, social class, and literary activity” (19). In the case of this particular community of women, I submit that they do share the common ground of cultural oppression, even as their specific concerns differ. In their individual constructions of communities of women, each writer recognizes both the similarities and the differences among the individual members. They define “woman” in opposition to “man” because, as Mark Breitenberg has noted, “early modern masculinity

relies on a variety of constructions of woman as Other—on the perceived necessity of maintaining a discourse of gendered difference and hierarchy—that reveal in their most excessive moments a deeper suspicion that the model itself may be merely functional rather than descriptive of inherent truth” (11). It is clear that Whitney, Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer were all conscious of this instability within gender hierarchies—appropriating masculine discourse for the feminine voice, assuming both masculine and feminine identities within their poetry, and usurping the power of the male gaze by turning the male body into an object of desire. In doing so, all four women create what bell hooks calls a “counter-language,” which “[w]hile it may resemble the colonizer’s [or oppressor’s] tongue, it has undergone a transformation, it has been irrevocably changed” (“Choosing the Margin” 150).

Access to a humanist education is what made it possible for Whitney, Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer to give rise to this counter-language, for they needed to be able to read and understand dominant misogynist discourse in order to challenge it. Efforts to deny or control the education of women suggest an awareness of this threat, and the scathing critiques offered by all four poets illustrate the results of such an education. Grace Kyungwon Hong, drawing upon the work of Barbara Christian, observes that the dominant culture’s jurisdiction over the access to and content of education continues to serve as a means of assimilation:

The western European model of the university was integral to this process, as an institution that, as the repository of all validated knowledge, represented Western civilization, and that disseminated

through the curriculum its norms and ideals. While institutions of higher education undoubtedly had a variety of functions and while all universities did not operate similarly, the epistemological structure of Western university education was based on a sense of progress toward a singular and universalizable notion of civilization, represented by a canonical notion of Western culture. (99)

However, Hong, who is specifically discussing the presence of black feminism in Western universities, hopes (much like the early modern poets) for a better future: “In its redistributive project, black feminism imagines a university in which a less disciplining definition of knowledge allows more black feminists to enter, and makes the university a less hostile place for black feminists. This is the work that black feminism does now and in the future, for the future, and is the work that we must take up in solidarity” (108).

Like Whitney, Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer, Hong locates power in unity, calling for collective resistance in order to achieve change. My argument that four women, living in different cultures, occupying different positions within their respective cultures, and who are, most likely, unaware of each other’s work engages in an ongoing *querelle*, if you will, regarding the validity of common identity—particularly within the context of nationalism and globalization.

The concept of “Nationalist” or “Global” feminism is one that generates often heated debates about “Woman” as a universal category. Just as Amelia Lanyer used the image of the mother and maternal legacy to create a community of learned women, “Female figurations such as ‘mother India,’ ‘lady liberty,’ and ‘mother church,’ ”

Elizabeth Shüssler Fiorenza observes, “symbolize in many cultures and religions the identity of the community or collectivity” (112). However, she argues, “[s]uch national/religious identity is rhetorically constructed and often articulated in the interest of hegemony and the control of wo/men” (112). Of course, these cultural constructions can be appropriated by the oppressed, as we have seen, and used to resist that hegemony. Tracy Sedinger notes, “One response to the hegemonizing of feminist demands via nationalist discourse has been to reject nations as inevitably male dominated and to imagine women as forming their own nation,” citing Virginia Woolf’s declaration in *Three Guineas* that “as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world” (53). Yet women cannot be described in terms of nation, she asserts, because “[w]omen...do not constitute a collective that could be metaphorized by the nation-trope because, as psychoanalysis reveals, femininity is not an identification at all...[therefore] because women form a paradoxical class whose solidarity cannot be forged through symbolic identifications, the nation-trope remains unsuitable for the representation of women as a social collective” (53-54). Whitney, Franco, Romieu, and Lanyer all identify with their home cities and/or countries, and their specific concerns are with their respective cultures. Nevertheless, each recognizes that she, like other women, does not “fit in” with a culture that is not hers but rather is imposed upon her. Of course, within the context of twentieth- and twenty-first-century debates about nationalism and globalization, these early modern poets are part of the same (privileged) Western culture. Within the context of early modern European culture, on the other hand, their “national identities” and, in some cases, their religions

were most definitely not the same in the view of their countrymen, and these differences must be considered when speaking of these writers in comparative terms.

For Third World feminists, who, as Ranjoo Seodu Herr explains, “point out that the Eurocentrism of Western feminism, which tends to see all women, regardless of race or ethnicity, as victims of a common enemy, patriarchy, blinds white feminists to the fact that colonized women suffer from qualitatively different oppressions of colonialism and racism,” women’s freedom from oppression “is possible only when the sovereignty of their nation is achieved” (141). Herr asserts that this is a problem because national interests and feminist interests are not often the same, and she proposes a nonessentialist conception of nationalism, in which “nation” is “understood as a large community whose members differentiate themselves from others through their possession of a common ‘pervasive’ or ‘societal’ culture. Such a community is undoubtedly ‘imagined,’ because the community is not based on actual face-to-face acquaintance amongst the members” (142). This nonessentialist nationalism is expanded in Niamh Reilly’s theory of “cosmopolitan feminism.” The growing interest in this approach, she notes, is the direct result of the influence of “antiracist, Third World, and postcolonial theorizing … the surge in transnational feminist organizing… and a growing recognition within feminism of the need to address the gendered impacts of globalization and refocus attention on the interplay between economic, social, and political arenas…” (181). Reilly contends, “Feminist cosmopolitanism has as its driving process a commitment to action-oriented networking among women across boundaries of class, race, ethnicity, religious and

cultural identity, sexual orientation, and so on—both within states and across geopolitical divides” (188).

Such recognition and transcendence of difference is at the heart of global feminism, as Allison Weir has posited. She points out, “We have learned, and continue to learn, crucial lessons about the dangers of collective identities and identity politics. But perhaps we have too often forgotten, or trivialized, or ironized the importance of being held together” (111). Suggesting that “feminist theorists have tended to draw back from the identifications with each other and with shared values that are essential for solidarity, in part because of a false belief that these identifications commit us to a conformity to some preexisting identity category,” Weir argues, “I think the reverse is true: our identifications, our commitments and values—our solidarities—shape our designations of identity. For we participate in the constructions of our identities” (111). Weir proposes “a noncategorical conception of identity: not identity as sameness, but an ethical-relational and political model of identity, defined through relationships with other people and through identification with what is meaningful to us, with what we find significant” (116). Feminism can only benefit from a collective identity, she asserts:

Identity politics has always been a complex process involving finding ourselves identified as belonging to a particular category (women, blacks, gays), and identifying with these particular “we’s,” and constructing our identity through active processes of resistance, of making meaning, through political struggle, through identifications with each other,

through creating new narratives, and thereby (re)creating ourselves, and our identities. (119)

Global identity, therefore, need not suggest an inherent sameness among all women. Rather, by “understanding our relationships in webs of power” (126), Weir stresses, “we” can participate in “questioning and critique, [in order] to continually rethink, and thereby reaffirm, the basis of our attachment” (128).

Following (however indirectly) in the footsteps of Christine de Pizan, the women writers included in this study certainly “understand their relationships in webs of power”—and they understand that their subordinate role is the result of the misogynist and hierarchical cultures in which they live. While they may not have been familiar with each other, their work reveals that they were aware of other writing women, and they sought to communicate with women (as well as men) in an effort to instigate social change in their respective cities/countries. Though they lived very different lives, Isabella Whitney, Veronica Franco, Marie de Romieu, and Aemilia Lanyer share the common identity of “woman” in early modern Europe—an identity that each writer imagined as a new and inclusive female identity “through active processes of resistance, of making meaning, through political struggle, through identifications with each other, through creating new narratives, and thereby (re)creating [them]selves, and [their] identities.” Describing these writers as feminist need not suggest them as precursors within a linear “tradition” of feminism or even of women writers. Whether defending “Mother” Nature, the “Deere Mother of our Lord,” literary mothers, learned sisters, commoditized daughters, abandoned maidservants, or aging courtesans, all four of the

women in this study imagine and construct a classless, ageless, timeless community of women whose purpose is to invest the female sex with agency in opposition to a dominant misogynist culture.

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