Virtue’s Friends: Patronage, Religion, and Friendship
in the Poetry of Aemilia Lanyer

Poore virtues friends indure the greatest wrong:
   For they must suffer all indignity,
   Untill in heav’n they better graced be. (42)
—Aemilia Lanyer, Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum

Amelia Lanyer made frequent appeals to the patronage, protection, and friendship of the titled women to whom she dedicates her remarkable collection of religious verse, Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum. In the nine dedications that precede Salve Deus, Lanyer acknowledges the often considerable social difference between herself and her dedicatees and even relies on it as she appeals to the duty of the socially superior patron to assist a virtuous but lower-born poet. However, she also asks her readers to temporarily move away from the social realm, in which she is marginalized by both her gender and social position, in favor of the religious realm, in which individuals are judged by their personal merit and piety rather than their social class. In other words, Lanyer attempts to carve out a space, defined by religion, in which she may speak to her potential patrons as an equal.

As we have seen, both classical and early modern writers celebrate the equality of friendship. Whether friendship demands equality or produces it is, however, often less clear. Lanyer’s recognition of the vast social inequality between herself and a group of dedicatees that includes Queen Anne, Princess Elizabeth, and the Countess of Pembroke is both keen and abiding, but as she praises the religious piety of such women and asks them to acknowledge similar piety in herself, she invokes the Aristotelian appreciation of virtue in another, a type of friendship that the socially unequal relationship between patron and poet can accommodate.

1 Mihoko Suzuki also notes that Lanyer appeals to “the privileged social position of these women as entailing a responsibility to aid and protect a woman author of lower rank” (114).
When Lanyer attempts to establish female connections based on shared religious virtue in most of her dedications to these titled women, it is their protection, patronage, and understanding that she seeks rather than their friendship in the modern sense of a close personal relationship. In the early modern period, however, the world “friend” also commonly referred to a patron or supporter—a meaning which persists even today in expressions such as “friends in high places” (*OED*, s.v.). Francis Bacon suggests that this utilitarian form of friendship is more attainable than the valorized classical ideal when he pragmatically states, “There is little friendship in the world, and least of all between equals, which was wont to be magnified. That that is, is between superior and inferior, whose fortunes may comprehend the one the other” (192; 84). Therefore, when Lanyer bids for the patronage of these aristocratic women, it is indeed a form of friendship that she seeks, albeit one that involves social inequality and the profitable exchange of services for gifts or social recognition. Aristotle recognized such friendships “based on utility” but declared them inferior to perfect friendships “between good men,” which are based on virtue rather than material benefit (265). As I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, Lanyer’s religious topic and her emphasis on female piety actually obscure the functional aspects of patronage and emphasize instead the binding power of virtue.

For example, in her dedication to Susan Bertie, the Countess Dowager of Kent, in whose household Lanyer received her education as a child, Lanyer eschews any financial reward for her literary efforts: “And since no former gaine hath made me write, / Nor my desertlesse service could have wonne, / 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?” (20). Here, Lanyer asserts she is inspired by Bertie’s “noble Virtues” rather than by any past or future monetary benefit, and she draws a causal relationship between the Countess Dowager’s virtue and her recognition of the virtue in Lanyer’s verse, thus portraying a relationship between poet and potential patron that is closer to Aristotle’s “friendship of the good” than to a friendship of utility (265). Lanyer’s encomium of Bertie’s virtues also points toward the type of virtue that she envisions as a basis for friendship between social unequals: Bertie’s first virtue is “love and feare of God,” she is patient, and she possesses “a mind . . . remote / From worldly pleasures” (18). In the narrative of the crucifixion that follows, these feminine virtues of piety, patience, and retirement are also embodied in Lanyer’s feminized Christ, who becomes an important example of low-born virtue.

Lanyer’s depiction of her chief patroness, Margaret Clifford, Countess Dowager of Cumberland, similarly emphasizes the virtues of forbearance in the face of suffering, rejection of worldly pleasures, and religious piety. As in her dedication to Bertie, Lanyer claims to have personally observed and experienced Clifford’s exemplary virtues: she reminisces fondly of the time she spent with Clifford and her daughter Anne at the country estate of Cookham, and she claims that Clifford’s devotion to Christ inspired her religious subject: “For time so spent, I need make no excuse, / Knowing it doth with thy

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2 I am not claiming that Lanyer did not hope for monetary gain from her poetic endeavors; given the multiple dedications, I think it is quite likely that she did. I am suggesting that her focus on virtue and her religious topic emphasize female connections based on shared piety rather than on financial or even social benefits.

3 Lanyer’s dedication to the Countess Dowager, “the noble guide of my ungovern’d dayes,” also depicts a semi-familial type of relationship, another recognized form of friendship (18). Lanyer apparently benefitted from the practice of placing children into service in aristocratic households in which they received education and social training.

4 Lanyer also includes a more active example of female piety in her account of Susan’s mother’s escape from England during the reign of Mary I. Susanne Woods notes a similar combination of traditional female virtues and more active forms of worship in Lanyer’s dedications to Margaret Clifford: “Lanyer’s several addresses to the countess of Cumberland in the Salve Deus portray a Christian stoicism, but also emphasize the Countess’s active rejoicing in the contemplation of Christ” (112).
faire Minde agree / So well, as thou no Labour wilt refuse, / That to thy holy Love may pleasing be” (62). In the majority of the dedications of *Salve Deus*, Lanyer asks her patrons to appreciate and protect the virtuous writing of a socially marginal female poet; she asks, in other words, for the friendship of patronage. In her dedications to Margaret and Anne Clifford, however, Lanyer adjusts the formal language of patronage in order to claim a more intimate form of friendship.5 Drawing on the time she spent in their company and on their shared victimization at the hands of arbitrary male power, Lanyer attempts to bridge the social difference between herself and these titled women by highlighting their common experiences. Moreover, in her dedication to Anne Clifford, Lanyer employs the liberty of speech granted by friendship in order to make her most radical statement against the hierarchical class system of Stuart England. This chapter will demonstrate how Lanyer uses the equalizing language of both friendship and religion to challenge the class system that places these friends above her.

Even as Lanyer invokes the privilege of friendship in her addresses to Margaret and Anne Clifford, she locates that friendship in the past. In her closing poem, “The Description of Cooke-ham,” she complains against a personified Fortune who “casts us downe into so lowe a frame: / Where our great friends we cannot dayly see, / So great a diffrence is there in degree” (134). The privilege of friendship may allow Lanyer to protest a class system that rewards birth instead of merit, but that class system ultimately isolates her from her “great friends,” thus proving a barrier to lasting intimacy. For those

5 The seventeenth-century antiquarian John Aubrey suggests that a particularly skilled piece of writing may actually produce intimate friendship between author and patron. Aubrey claims that Philip Sidney initially set aside Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, “thinking it might be such kind of stuffe as he was frequently troubled with,” but once Sidney read Spenser’s work, “there was a great friendship between them, to his [Sidney’s] dying day” (36). While Aubrey cannot be considered a reliable source regarding the actual friendship between Sidney and Spenser, his story demonstrates the close, even causal relationship people drew between patronage and friendship.
writers who portray patronage as a form of friendship, the inherent inequality of this relationship often remains a troubling presence within their works. For example, William Shakespeare’s sonnets, dedicated to his patron, W.H., often invoke the reassuring image of the friend as a second self only to expose that image as a fiction. In Sonnet 43, the speaker follows the assertion, “But here’s the joy, my friend and I are one,” with the exclamation, “Sweet flattery!” We are clearly supposed to recognize that the fantasy of oneness with a socially superior patron is just that, self-flattery.6 Indeed, what are most apparent in the sonnets are not the similarities between the speaker and his patron/friend but rather the differences: the friend is young, and the speaker is old; the friend is independent, and the speaker depends on his patronage; the friend is honored, and the speaker is “in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes” (Sonnet 24). Patronage may offer opportunities to form friendships with social superiors, but for both Shakespeare and Lanyer, the friendships that result are marked by the anxiety of inequality.

Early criticism on Lanyer focused on her attempts to create, in the words of Barbara Lewalski, a “contemporary community of good women,” with herself as its “self-appointed female poet” (220, 221).7 More recent scholars have questioned the solidarity of this community: Lisa Schnell points out that “when Lanyer writes to women of the upper classes, she is marginalized—self-consciously, it seems—both as a woman and as a member of a socially inferior class group” (26); and Su Fang Ng suggests that “the problematic status of the so-called community of good women has much to do with

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6 The speaker’s disillusionment here results not only from the patron’s elevated position but also from his sexual betrayal of the speaker. The two are related: the friend’s beauty, youth, and social position are all superior to that of the speaker, and the speaker’s inferior position and what he describes as his greater love put him in the humiliating position of rationalizing the injury that has been done to him.

7 I agree with Lewalski that Lanyer desires to create a community of women who are linked through virtue instead of social class, but I also suggest that Lanyer remains well aware that the equality she posits in the religious realm remains unrealized in the social realm.
Lanyer’s negotiation of class hierarchy in the Stuart court system and her bid for patronage in a highly patriarchal world” (435). Friendship is a helpful lens through which to view the complex and often fraught relationships with her dedicatees that Lanyer constructs in the dedications and in the text of *Salve Deus*. As I discuss in the introduction, early modern discourses on friendship usually invoke the ideal of perfect equality between two virtuous men. If we take this ideal literally, Lanyer’s relationships with her patronesses, both real and potential, do not even approximate friendship. Even as Lanyer asserts equality in the eyes of God, she remains acutely aware of inequality in the social realm. However, as Bacon indicates, the rhetoric of perfect equality in friendship was seldom realized in practice, a fact suggested by the multiple meanings of friendship in this period. As I discuss in Chapter One, Isabella Whitney takes advantage of the overlap between kinship and friendship to portray friendships that cross gender lines. Similarly, by situating herself and her text in the intersections of patronage and virtuous friendship, Lanyer attempts to form female ties of virtue across social boundaries. That such ties may ultimately prove unsustainable does not, I suggest, negate her attempt.

“*This Mirrour of a Worthy Mind*”: The Dedications

In the first dedication of *Salve Deus*, “To the Queenes most Excellent Majestie,” Lanyer asks Queen Anne to “Vouchsafe to view that which is seldome seene, / A Womans writing of divinest things” (3). Here, Lanyer emphasizes her own gender, implying that the very uncommonness of a “Womans writing of divinest things” confers value on her project. Lanyer also addresses the Queen in specifically feminine terms. Anne is a “Renowned Empresse, and great Britaines Queene,” but she is also the “Most
gratious Mother of succeeding Kings” (3). By referring to the Queen’s motherhood in addition to these reminders of her sovereignty, Lanyer draws attention to at least one similarity between these two women of vastly different social levels: simply stated, they are both women, and they share some of the experiences of women in the decidedly patriarchal environment of James I’s court.  

Lanyer’s interest in the situation of women—from her dedications to female patrons, to her indictment of men who slander women, to her assertive defense of the first woman and her depiction of the women who mourn Christ—permeates her "little Booke," and she encourages her potential patrons, powerful women whose aristocratic identity might well have been more important to them than an ideal of solidarity with all women, to imagine themselves as part of an inclusive female community in which social distinctions are less important than their common virtue (15). As Lynette McGrath suggests, Lanyer “sketches for herself, her patrons and other women readers ‘in generall’ the appealing and inspiring possibility of the caring and protection of women by women” (217).

Of course, as appealing as is this vision of the poet/patron relationship as one of women helping women, it never erases the social from Lanyer’s work. However, Lanyer, who remains acutely aware of the class differences between herself and her dedicatees, attempts to turn such differences into an advantage. She asks the Queen, “To virtue yet / Vouchsafe that splendor which my meanness bars” (4). In the phrasing of this request, either the poem or Lanyer herself is “virtue,” and the Queen, by recognizing such virtue

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8 Theresa DiPasquale suggests that Lanyer’s text obliquely criticizes the misogyny of James’ court: “Lanyer conveys her disapproval of James, of his regime, and of the court culture that surrounded him through a variety of techniques, making clear that it is not just courtly debauchery or idolatry or misogyny that she condemns, but the specifically Jacobean versions of these evils” (108). As Lewalski has noted, and as this opening dedication indicates, Lanyer addresses herself instead to the alternative court culture represented by Queen Anne and other influential ladies of the court, a court of women that the dedications essentially recreate (220).
in another woman, may share the “splendor” of her social position by supporting Lanyer’s work. Lanyer thus adopts the classical claim, voiced by both Aristotle and Cicero, that friendship results from the recognition of virtue in another and applies it to women’s connections across class difference. Cicero declares that “virtue is the parent and preserver of friendship and without virtue friendship cannot exist at all,” but the type of virtue he envisions is emphatically masculine, predicated on independent self-sufficiency and political and military service to the state (131). In fact, Cicero explicitly excludes friendships based on need from his depiction of virtuous male friendship: “If people think that friendship springs from weakness and from a purpose to secure that which we lack, they assign her, if I may so express it, a lowly pedigree indeed, and an origin far from noble, and they would make her the daughter of poverty and want” (141). Lanyer’s dedications imply that need and virtue are not mutually exclusive, especially, I would suggest, in a society in which few women could claim the type of active independence that Cicero imagines in his ideal male friends. In Lanyer’s verse, friendship between women may involve both virtue and practical assistance. As she celebrates her dedicatees’ virtue in her bid for patronage, their hoped-for support becomes a sign that they recognize her virtue in return.

9 Lanyer even provides a model for such support, claiming that she has been “clos’d up in Sorrowes Cell, / Since great Elizaes favour blest my youth” (8). After praising the late Queen Elizabeth and recalling her former support, Lanyer hints that her “heavy burden” will be lightened if “such a one as shee will help to beare it” (8).
10 Given her education in the household of Susan Bertie, which “was in a tradition that valued and admired educated women,” Lanyer would have been familiar with the ideas of both Cicero and Aristotle (Woods 9). As Woods observes, “A humanist education in the tradition of Cheke, Ascham, and Wilson emphasized careful reading of specific classical texts, Latin and Greek, using the method of double translation. Ascham advocates starting the young Latin scholar off with selections from Cicero” (10).
11 Cicero emphasizes the importance of self-sufficiency in male friendship: “For to the extent that a man relies upon himself and is so fortified by virtue and wisdom that he is dependent on no one and considers all his possessions to be within himself, in that degree is he most conspicuous for seeking out and cherishing friendships” (143).
12 The feminine personification of friendship based on need as the “daughter of poverty and want” is the translator’s. Cicero uses the gender-neutral “natam.”
The virtue that Lanyer praises in her dedicatees and claims for herself differs from the type of virtue that Cicero praises in his ideal male friends in more ways than one. Just as the virtue of Cicero’s friends is realized in the masculine realm of warfare and politics (virtue with an emphasis on the vir), Lanyer’s virtue is specifically feminine. She contrasts the type of virtue that she imagines in her female readers with masculine activities in her address “To all vertuous Ladies in generall”:

And let the Muses your companions be,
Those sacred sisters that on Pallas wait,
Whose Virtues with the purest minds agree,
Whose godly labours doe avoyd the baite
Of worldly pleasures, living alwaies free
From sword, from violence, and from ill report,

To these nine Worthies all faire mindes resort” (13).

In these lines, Lanyer opposes male warfare—swords and violence that are linked, interestingly, with “ill report” (apparently slander is also a male vice that women should eschew)—with more peaceful women who live in harmony with each other and the Muses. Linking the “godly labour” of poetic production with the service of God, Lanyer both legitimates her own authorial project and imagines religious verse as a specifically feminine activity. This association of women’s religious writing with more traditional female virtues such as purity and piety reappears in her dedications to Princess Elizabeth, Arbella Stuart, and Mary Sidney. In all three of these dedications, Lanyer praises the high learning of these women as well as their devotion to Christ, and she links both of these virtues with their acceptance of her religious verse.
In fact, it is not Cicero but Aristotle who provides a closer model of the type of friendships that Lanyer attempts to form in the dedications. Aristotle may accord his “friendships of utility” a lower place on the scale of human relations than perfect friendship, which is based only on virtue, but he does recognize friendships of utility as friendship (262). Moreover, he suggests that two people of unequal social standing may attain friendship as long as their affection for each other remains in proportion to their status:

In all these friendships between persons of different standing the affection must be proportionate: i.e. the better person must be loved more than he loves, and so must the more useful, and each of the others similarly. For when affection is proportionate to merit the result is a kind of equality, which of course is considered to be characteristic of friendship. (270)

Here, Aristotle suggests that a type of equality may be realized between social unequals as long as the socially inferior friend compensates for his inferiority by offering a greater amount of honor and love. This description of friendship between unequals resembles the early modern system of patronage, in which a socially inferior poet praises his or her patron in return for recognition and monetary support. As Michael Brennan observes, the poet/patron relationship was generally viewed as a mutually beneficial one in which poets “were able to endow great figures with fame and immortality through the priceless gift of literary praise. In return for this glorification, members of the nobility were expected to support generously those who thus enabled them to transcend time and death” (9). Ideally, as Aristotle’s description of unequal friendship suggests, this mutual exchange
creates a type of parity between a noble patron and a socially marginal poet such as Lanyer.

In fact, we may view the *humilitas* topos that most early modern poets adopt when writing epideictic poetry as one aspect of the greater affection and honor that must be offered in tribute to the socially superior friend or patron. This topos, voiced by both male and female poets, was designed to preemptively deflect criticism and acknowledge the social distance between the poet and patron. For instance, Edmund Spenser, who, like Lanyer, prefaced his work with multiple dedications, refers to *The Faerie Queene* variously as: “The labor of lost time, and wit unstayd” (25); “the fruit of barren field” (28); “this base Poeme” (27); and “The unripe fruit of an unready wit: / Which by thy countenaunce doth crave to bee / Defended from foule Envies poisnous bit” (26). The last example, addressed to the Earl of Oxford, suggests that the earl’s recognition of the poem, his “countenaunce,” will protect and elevate what the poet himself describes as an unworthy work. Lanyer too speaks modestly of her work, berating her “weak Muse” (129) and “want of womans wit” (51), and, like Spenser, she asks her patrons and readers to defend her poem “from any scandall that the world can frame” (45). Both poets cast themselves as humble recipients of the noble patron’s grace and, essentially borrowing the authority of the dedicatee’s powerful position, appeal for their protection from envy and scandal.

Of course, as Lanyer’s reference to her “want of woman’s wit” indicates, the work of a woman was, given the linkage of female speech and unchastity, far more likely to give rise to “scandall” than that of a man. Therefore, while both men and women deployed the *humilitas* topos, the reservations expressed by a woman writer such as
Lanyer might represent not only a standard acknowledgement of the social distance between herself and her dedicatees but also an attempt to downplay her violation of traditional gender norms by fulfilling cultural expectations of feminine modesty. However, Lanyer balances her claims of personal unworthiness with more authoritative assertions of her work’s value. For instance, when Lanyer asks Princess Elizabeth to accept “the first fruits of a womans wit” even though her “faire eyes farre better Bookes have seene,” she at once disparages the merit of her work, deferentially alludes to Elizabeth’s extensive learning, and asks for the grace of acceptance (11). Yet, as in the preceding dedication to the queen, Lanyer also suggests that Elizabeth should accept this poem because its author is a woman: “Yet being the first fruits of a womans wit / Vouchsafe you favour in accepting it” (11). These “first fruits” may simply represent Lanyer’s first major work, but Lanyer is also one of the earliest English women to attempt to earn a living as a professional poet. Therefore, while both her social position and gender demand modesty, Lanyer implies that her unusual position as a female author also gives these female dedicatees a reason to listen to and protect her words.

Lanyer’s complex use of a familiar metaphor for the transference of a patron’s authorizing grace to a poem, the mirror, also demonstrates this mixture of humility and authority. The mirror metaphor is a favorite of Lanyer’s; it appears in many of the dedications, and it serves multiple purposes in each. In its first appearance, Lanyer asks Queen Anne and Princess Elizabeth to “Let your faire Virtues in my Glasse be seene” and declares:

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13 While Whitney predates Lanyer, many critics consider Lanyer the first female poet in England to seek a professional writing career. Certainly, Lanyer is the first woman to, as Lewalski claims, “make an overt bid for patronage as a male poet of the era might” (213). Whitney did not have the access to court and therefore patronage that Lanyer enjoyed, but I claim she does craft a professional identity as an author in the Nosgay.
Then shall I think my Glasse a glorious Skie

When two such glittring Suns at once appeare;

The one repleat with Sov’raigne Majestie,

Both shining brighter than the clearest cleare:

And both reflecting comfort to my spirits,

To find their grace so much above my merits. (8)

Lanyer also uses the mirror as a figure for her poem in her dedication to Anne Clifford:

“Then in this Mirrour let your faire eyes looke, / To view your virtues in this blessed Booke” (41). Both passages offer distinctly humble visions: Lanyer’s mirror, as a symbol of her poem, seemingly only reflects the “grace” and “virtue” of her prospective patronesses. Indeed, it can transform into something entirely different, a “Skie,” when an extraordinary reader such as the queen gazes into it. Of course, an actual mirror does not portray anything in itself but merely reflects what is placed in front of it (or whoever chooses to view herself in it); if we view the metaphor in this light, the poem claims no merit in itself but only the ability to passively reflect the virtues of the dedicatee who reads it.

Lanyer’s mirror metaphor is not as simple or as self-effacing as these lines would indicate. After asking Queen Anne to “Looke in this Mirrour of a worthy Mind,” Lanyer claims that the glass is “dym steele, yet full of spotlesse truth” (5). Her poem may be “dym steele,” forged from a humble source, but it possesses the virtue of truth, a virtue that appears to be inherent in the material and not derived from any particular reader’s reflection.¹⁴ Indeed, in the Renaissance, the mirror was also a figure for an exemplary

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¹⁴ The steel mirror was an important symbol of truth in the Renaissance. For instance, George Gascoigne’s 1576 poem, “The Steele Glas,” contrasts the appealing but false images shown by crystal mirrors with the
model or didactic example, as in the *Mirror for Magistrates*, which provided (usually negative) examples of past rulers for the instruction of contemporary officials. McGrath notes that early modern conduct books for women such as the *Mirrhor of Modestie* also often included the word “mirror” in their titles; by implication, women who read such books were expected to see not a reflection of themselves but rather an ideal woman to emulate (241). Lanyer herself evokes this didactic function of the mirror when she tells Bertie that “your rare Perfections shew’d the Glasse / Wherein I saw each wrinckle of a fault” (18). Here, she depicts women turning toward each other for exemplary models rather than toward male-authored texts. And while, in this example, Lanyer’s mirror metaphor demonstrates the difference between the two women—Bertie’s perfections highlight the young Lanyer’s faults—it also portrays a process by which they become more alike since Lanyer suggests that she corrected her youthful imperfections by imitating her early patroness.

This type of mirroring between two women echoes the mirroring of friendship. As I discuss in the Introduction, the tradition of male friendship repeatedly emphasizes the similarity of friends, as Cicero’s description of the friend as an *alter idem* indicates. According to Cicero, similar tastes, beliefs, and, most of all, similar virtue produce friendship: “nothing so allures and attracts anything to itself as likeness does to friendship. Then it surely will be granted as a fact that good men love and join to themselves other good men, in a union which is almost that of relationship and nature”

more truthful images displayed by the steel glass: “That age is deade, and vanisht long ago, / which thought that steele, both trusty was and true, / And needed not, a foyle of contraries, / But shewde al things, euen as they were in deede.”

15 For a more thorough analysis of the mirror’s significance in medieval and early modern thought, see McGrath (237-243). She argues that Lanyer’s mirror represents a space for women’s self-construction outside of men’s images of women: “The poet holds the mirror which provides a reflection of women undistorted by the male interpretation of the woman” (240). I would like to extend this reading by examining the mirror’s instructive connotations as well as its implications for friendship between women.
Cicero here emphasizes the natural attraction of like to like, and most early modern works on friendship follow his lead by depicting the similarity of friends as innate; for example, as I discuss in Chapter One, the extraordinary physical resemblance of the protagonists in Thomas Elyot’s version of the story of Titus and Gysippus highlights the naturalness of their friendship. As Laurie Shannon has noted, friendship discourses implied not just ready-made likeness between friends but also a type of becoming alike through consent: “the political logics of sameness . . . figure an explicit mode of self-construction that proves enabling to a detailed scheme of sovereignty for the self . . . Consensio will work to signify both being alike and making an agreement” (22). Indeed, as Shannon points out, Cicero’s exhortation to counsel and rebuke one’s friends places a limit on similarity (49). A corrected friend, we can assume, will actively resume the path of virtue by following his or her more clear-sighted friend’s advice. It is this type of likeness created through active self-fashioning that Lanyer evokes when she claims that she was inspired to correct her own faults by imitating Bertie’s perfections.

Lanyer also claims to have been inspired by the literary achievements of Mary Sidney, the Countess Dowager of Pembroke and the most influential female literary patron of her day. Her dedication to Sidney is the longest of Salve Deus and one of the most accomplished, involving a dream vision as well as an extended metaphor that compares the refined “sugar” of Sidney’s psalms to the less refined (but admirably natural) “hony” of Lanyer’s verse (30). Both this metaphor and the dream vision again involve depictions of likeness across difference as well as accounts of the poet learning by observing other women. In the dream vision, Lanyer frequently draws attention to the act of observing: the sleeping poet views Sidney “with Reason’s eie;” she takes “no small
delight. / To see how all the graces sought grace here;” and she declares her visions “verie pleasing sights” (25). This pleasure in looking spurs Lanyer to search for knowledge: “And now me thought I long to heare her name, / Whom wise Minerva honoured so much, / She whom I saw was crownd by noble Fame” (26, emphasis added). Treacherously, Morpheus wakes Lanyer before she can observe all she wishes, but she declares her independence from him by determining to approach Sidney: “I know I shall enjoy the selfe same sight, / Thou hast no powre my waking sprites to barre” (30). Again, Lanyer’s observation of another woman leads to knowledge and, she hopes, support for her poetic endeavors.

Therefore, after seeing the goddesses and, most significantly, the Muses attend Sidney, Lanyer declares her own intent to seek the attentions of this renowned poet and patroness:

For to this Lady now I will repaire,

Presenting her the fruits of idle houres;

Thogh many Books she writes that are more rare,

Yet there is hony in the meanest flowres:

Which is both wholesome, and delights the taste:

Though sugar be more finer, higher priz’d,

Yet is the painefull Bee no whit disgrac’d,

Nor her faire wax, or hony more despiz’d. (30)

Lanyer implies that Sidney’s success as a poet has formed a model for her own attempt at literary recognition. Indeed, as Debra Rienstra has argued, Sidney’s versification of the Psalms provides a precedent for female exegesis of the Bible and “makes possible the
woman poet devising on Scripture” (92). But Lanyer’s comparison of her own verse to Sidney’s is also tinged with class distinctions. She claims that the fine sugar of Sidney’s psalms possesses a “higher style” than her own “unlearned lines” (30). She does not deny the value of her own efforts, though; after all, her “hony” is sugar in its most natural and “wholesome” form. A few lines earlier, in her dream vision, Lanyer describes a battle between art and nature that Sidney, as the judge, declares a draw, willing “they should for ever dwell, / In perfite unity . . . here in equall sov’raightie to live, / Equall in state, equall in dignitie, / That unto others they might comfort give, / Rejoycing all with their sweet unitie” (25). Lanyer’s description of Sidney’s verse as sugar and her own as honey associates Sidney with art and herself with nature; thus, even as her metaphor points out differences in their works, it claims equal value, “equall sov’raightie,” for each. Speaking as one poet to another, Lanyer attempts to bridge the considerable social distance between Sidney and herself by suggesting that, however different their poetic styles and social status, their common literary interests may produce “sweet unitie.”

Significantly, Lanyer again uses the mirror in this dedication as a figure for her poem: “So craving pardon for this bold attempt, / I here present my mirrour to her view, / Whose noble virtues cannot be exempt, / My Glasse beeing steele, declares them to be true” (31). The image reflected by this glass is left suggestively ambiguous. On one level, Lanyer indicates that this mirror truthfully reflects Sidney’s “noble virtues,” just as it reflects the virtues of her other dedicatees. Lanyer also asserts that her mirror will present “your Saviour in a Shepheards weed,” employing the paradox of Christ’s low birth to illustrate the virtue of her own humble verse. On another level, the dedication’s emphasis on common literary pursuits, by producing a type of mirroring between the poet
and the patroness, evokes the mirroring of friendship. Deborah Shuger has suggested that the mirror, as a metaphor, “reflects” the relational nature of Renaissance self-constructions: “one encounters one’s own likeness only in the image of the other. Renaissance texts and emblems consistently describe mirroring in these terms, which suggests that early modern selfhood was not experienced reflexively but, as it were, relationally” (37). As Lanyer compliments Sidney’s poetic achievements and suggests that they played a role in inspiring her own attempts, she clearly expects the famous patroness to see a version of herself in this middle-class woman writer.

Lanyer indicates that women can serve as models not only for each other but also for the entire fallen world when she claims that her readers will be “in the eie of heaven so highly placed, / That others by your virtues may be graced” (15). This line, addressed to “all vertuous Ladies in generall,” evokes the humanist belief in self-improvement through imitation by claiming that the visibility of female virtue, placed high in the eye of heaven, will inspire others to practice those same virtues. She highlights the exemplary virtues of one particular woman, Margaret Clifford, when she suggests that the countess dowager can “heale the soules of those that doe transgresse, / By thy faire virtues; which, if once they see, / Unto the like they doe their minds addresse, / Such as thou art, such they desire to be” (110). Here, Lanyer endows her most important patroness with the almost Christ-like ability to heal the souls of sinners with her mere image. As Micheline White points out, the “Countess performs pious activities expected of women, yet in inspiring imitation she also provides spiritual healing” (326). And, of course, Lanyer’s book is the mirror that will reflect the inspirational image of Clifford’s virtues—and the virtues of all of Lanyer’s dedicatees—back upon the sinning world.
This didactic function of Lanyer’s text goes more than one way. The noble women of the dedications may teach Lanyer and her readers through their virtuous examples, but Lanyer implies that they too have something to learn from her poem. If we return to the dedication to Queen Anne, we see that when the queen gazes in the mirror, it is not only her own image she finds. Lanyer asserts:

Here may your sacred Majestie behold
That mighty 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. (5)

Lanyer’s mirror conveys an image of Christ to the queen, an image that is implicitly instructive. Emphasizing the paradox of Christ’s supremacy and his “base and meanest berth,” Lanyer draws a connection between Christ’s humble origins and her own relatively modest social position. Low birth, she counsels, may mask great virtue.

Moreover, the queen as a “sacred Majestie” and Christ as a “mighty Monarch,” titles juxtaposed in two successive lines, offer two very different versions of sovereignty. Lanyer reminds the queen of the limitations of her own, earthly sovereignty, also through the language of paradox, when she tells her that Christ’s “daies were spent in poverty and sorrow, / And yet all Kings their wealth of them do borrow.” Lanyer elsewhere pays homage to the queen’s royal status, but here she asks her to acknowledge the superior

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16 In its ability to show her readers another’s image, Lanyer’s mirror is similar to Merlin’s glass in Book Three of Spenser’s Faerie Queene. This connection between Lanyer’s speaker and Merlin, himself an important counselor to a sovereign, highlights the didactic function of her poem and endows her speaker with significant prophetic power.
form of sovereign power represented by the paradoxically low-born Christ over her own temporal and borrowed authority.

Lanyer’s mirror metaphor is itself paradoxical: on one level, it implies that her poem merely reflects the virtue of its readers, but on the other, it claims the extraordinary ability to deliver Christ to them and instruct them of his virtues. Poets such as Spenser and Shakespeare normally offer immortality in return for their patron’s support: Spenser asserts that “The sacred Muses have made alwaies clame / To be the Nourses of nobility, / And Registres of everlasting fame” (26); and Shakespeare famously tells his patron: “So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see, / So long lives this, and this gives life to thee” (Sonnet 18). Lanyer as well offers immortality to her most important patroness, Margaret Clifford: “To thee great Countesse now I will applie / My Pen, to write thy never dying fame; / That when to Heav’n thy bless’d Soule shall flie, / These lines on earth record thy reverend name” (51). However, in most of the dedications she conceives of the reciprocity of the poet/patron relationship in different terms. Acknowledging that her dedicatees are already famous—“Onely by name I will bid some of those, / That in true Honors seate have long bin placed” (16)—and apparently have no need to be further immortalized in verse, she offers them instead another type of immortality: that represented by the image of the Christ that she presents to them.

In fact, Lanyer often writes as if she is presenting not just an image but the actual body of Christ. She asks Bertie to “Receive your Love whom you have sought so farre” and entreats Lucy, the Countess of Bedford, to “Vouchsafe to entertain this dying lover”

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17 Interestingly, Spenser also offers to immortalize Henry Cary, Lord Hunsdon: “Live Lord for ever in this lasting verse, / That all posteritie thy honor may rehearse” (29). Lanyer had an affair with Hunsdon from approximately 1589-1592, and, as noted above, Spenser was an important influence on her own verse (Woods 16-17).
In the dedication to Margaret Clifford, Lanyer highlights her modest financial situation, providing a lengthy list of the treasures she does not possess, and then contrasts it with the one treasure her low estate does not bar her from presenting:

having neither rich pearles of India, nor fine gold of Arabia, nor diamonds of inestimable value; neither those rich treasures, Arramaticall Gums, incense, and sweet odours, which were presented by those Kingly Philosophers to the babe Jesus, I present unto you even our Lord Jesus himselfe, whose infinit value is not to be comprehended within the weake imagination or wit of man. (34)

Instead of offering the worldly goods that the wise men gave the infant Jesus, Lanyer offers Jesus himself to her patrons. As several critics have noted, Lanyer claims the priestly ability to deliver Christ to her readers. Kari Boyd McBride, for instance, claims that, “Rather than figuring herself and her book as humble supplicants for aristocratic favor, Lanyer’s poetic assumes preemptively a divine favor that is most audacious in her repeated claims to offer her readers Christ, the Word made poetry paradoxically made flesh” (61). I suggest, however, that Lanyer’s deft use of paradox allows her to position herself as both humble suppliant and priestly authority. If she is a modestly-born poet seeking noble patronage in the social realm, her self-appointed role as the provider of Christ endows her with substantial authority in the religious realm. Just as, in the Christian tradition, Christ mediates between humankind and God, Lanyer’s image of

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18 The eroticized relationship that Lanyer envisions between women and Christ, implicit in these lines, is explored by DiPasquale, who argues that “Throughout Salve Deus, Lanyer implies that a woman’s desiring Christian soul can be, and often is, in perfect harmony with her desiring body, and that union with Christ is the ultimate fulfillment of a woman’s sexual longings” (164).

19 According to McBride, Lanyer asserts priestly superiority over her dedicatees (64). I concur with White’s more inclusive reading of the dedications, in which she suggests that Lanyer implies that all women wield such priestly powers: “woven throughout her expansive celebration of female piety are passages that matter-of-factly assert that women served as founders of Christ’s healing church and that Jacobean women continue to wield hieratic healing power by fighting sin, feeding the poor, praying, reading and teaching the Bible, and writing religious verse” (324).
Christ mediates between herself and her readers. In other words, Lanyer’s religious authority as the bestower of Christ’s image allows her to carve out a space, defined by religion, in which she may speak to her dedicatees as an equal.

Moreover, by figuring her text as the body of Christ, Lanyer forestalls her readers’ potential rejection of her work. As Mihoko Suzuki claims, “By likening herself to Christ, she claims a necessary connection between her patrons’ devotion to the lowly Christ and their patronage of her as a writer” (121). In her dedication to Arbella Stuart, for instance, Lanyer conflates Christ and her text when she implores Stuart to “cast your eyes upon this little Booke, / Although you be so well accompan’ed / With Pallas, and the Muses, spare one looke / Upon this humbled King” (17). Lanyer first asks Stuart to look at her “little Booke,” but three lines later her book transforms into Christ. Stuart’s ability to see the true value of this “humbled King” implies her related ability to see the worth of Lanyer’s poem. Lanyer makes a similar move when she tells Sidney that “it is no disparagement to you, / To see your Saviour in a Shepheards weed, / Unworthily presented in your view, / Whose worthiness will grace each line you read” (31). Here, Lanyer connects Christ’s humble origins to the humble origin of her own text; just as Christ is paradoxically a “Saviour in a Shepheards weed,” so too is Lanyer’s poetry both “Unworthily presented” and full of “worthinesse.” In fact, Lanyer’s phrasing indicates that her book is the “Shepheards weed” that clothes Christ; it might appear humble because of her lower class, but it cloaks great virtue. In both of these dedications, Lanyer uses the figure of Christ to inspire her noble dedicatees to value spiritual worth over social and financial status.
It is this ability to set aside the social realm in favor of the religious, Lanyer indicates, that will enable ties of friendship among women. The community of women bound together by piety that Lanyer envisions in the dedications invokes the ideal Christian community, an ideal that came with its own version of friendship. Whereas the classical tradition of friendship—the tradition that most early modern humanists emulated and adapted—emphasized affective ties between two individuals, the discourse of religious friendship that would also have been available to Lanyer offered a significantly different vision of friendship. Ivy Schweitzer notes that Christianity effected an “important change [in the nature of friendship], directing believers away from exclusive dyadic friendships to a broader fellowship of the faithful and, finally, in a move reminiscent of the pre-Socratic idea of *philanthropia*, to a ‘brotherhood’ with all humanity” (43). This Christian “brotherhood” is still strongly gendered, but it offers a conceptualization of friendship that is more communal and more accepting of difference than the intense and intimate bond between two men—a bond defined by its very exclusivity—imagined by the classical ideal. In the Book of John, Christ on the night before his crucifixion asks his male disciples to redirect outward the friendship that he has shown to them: “This is my commandment, that ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love than this hath no man, when any man bestoweth his life for his friends” (John 15: 12-13). In the Christian tradition, the “friends” for whom Christ is laying down his life are not just the apostles but all sinners, and when she read these lines, Lanyer would almost surely have understood Christ’s exhortation to “love one another” as a call to extend his love beyond the privileged circle of the apostles to all of humanity.

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Lanyer offers a vision of this type of religious community—albeit one that is quickly interrupted—in her dedication “To all vertuous Ladies in generall.” While, as several observers have noted, Lanyer decorously arranges her dedications more or less in order of rank, honoring Queen Anne first and Princess Elizabeth second, she places this general dedication to all virtuous women third. Social distinctions in this dedication are seemingly lost in a general devotion to Christ, and Lanyer’s female readers are here imagined not as queens or countesses but as undifferentiated virgins waiting for Christ, the bridegroom. She exhorts her readers to “Put on your wedding garments every one, / The Bridegroom stayes to entertaine you all” (12). In fact, Lanyer directly alludes to the process by which grace, both the titular “Grace” of the royalty and nobility to whom she dedicates her poem and the “grace” that they will confer on her by supporting it (OED s.v.), gives way to the glory of worshiping God: “Come swifter than the motion of the Sunne, / To be transfigur’d with our loving Lord, / Lest Glory end what Grace in you begun, / Of heav’nly riches make your greatest hoord, / In Christ all honour, wealth, and beautie’s wonne” (14). Indicating that the type of wealth, honor, and beauty that her dedicatees already possess are inferior to the riches found in Christ, Lanyer asks her dedicatees to turn away from such worldly pleasures, to “flie from dull and sensuall earth,” and to enter, instead, the religious realm (15). In fact, as Susanne Woods has pointed out, Lanyer praises her dedicatees’ rejection of the world throughout the dedications: “‘Virtue’ as Lanyer presents it often derives from retirement and the

21 Lyn Bennett points out the importance of the order of the dedications, noting that “Lanyer’s practice of poetic decorum is integral not only to her attempt to persuade these women to sponsor her work (or, at the very least, to be sure that she does not offend them), it is also crucial to establishing the authenticity, and thus to effecting the persuasiveness, of the arguments her poems make” (211).

22 The image of Christ as the bridegroom comes from the parable of the ten virgins in Matthew 25: 1-13. Lanyer demonstrates her readers’ common devotion to Christ by depicting them as the wise virgins who fill their lamps with oil.
deliberate rejection of self-display” (46). This turning away from the world suggests her readers’ abilities to see beyond earthly distinctions such as wealth and social rank to the worth of Lanyer’s work.

However, while Lanyer imagines her dedicatees rejecting the world in order to join an undifferentiated Christian community of women, the world that they are supposed to reject quickly intrudes. She holds up to her readers the friendship of “all vertuous Ladies in generall” as a possibility, but that possibility remains unrealized both in the world at large and in her poem. In fact, Lanyer closes the dedication not with a vision of solidarity through the worship of Christ but with a reestablishment of social distinctions. She imagines her readers correcting her earlier temerity: “some of you me thinkes I heare call / Me by my name, and bid me better looke, / Lest unawares I in an error fall: / In generall tearmes, to place you with the rest” (15). Some women, those whom “Fame commends to be the very best,” might object to being grouped with all the other ladies, no matter how virtuous (15). Lanyer concedes that she should praise some women “by name,” and her vision of Christian fellowship among women gives way to the remaining dedications, which are duly differentiated by name and rank. However, she also declares, “Onely by name I will bid some of those, / That in true Honors seate have long bin placed” (16, emphasis added). This true honor is presumably not the type of worldly honor that, a few stanzas earlier, she compares unfavorably to the honor bestowed by Christ. Indeed, in the following dedications, she emphasizes not her dedicatees’ wealth or station but rather their virtue, which is exemplified by intellectual and artistic achievement, devotion to Christ, and a pious preference for religious above worldly concerns. These are virtues that Lanyer too may possess, and if her community of
Christian women is not ultimately realized, her evocations of female friendship based on the recognition of mirrored virtue offer, at least, a vision of friendship between poet and patron that could be achieved in this world.²³

*Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* and the Friendship of Christ

“Henceforth call I you not servants, for the servant knoweth not what his master doeth: but I have called you friends” (John 15:15).

If the dedications at once offer a vision of supportive female friendship across social difference and acknowledge the difficulty of bridging that difference, the text of *Salve Deus* provides an example of an ideal friend who does overcome such gulfs. In *Salve Deus*, Lanyer depicts Christ as the perfect friend, one who in life condescends to friendship with those beneath him and in death extends friendship, in the broadest sense of the word, to all of humanity through his personal sacrifice. Lanyer’s Christ is an exemplary model of friendship for both her dedicatees and the readers of her published work. Just as he offers friendship and understanding to those below him, she suggests, so too should they accept and support her endeavors. This portrait of Christ also rewrites classical conceptions of the ideal male friend, for Lanyer celebrates not an exclusive bond between two male friends but the inclusive love that Christ offers to all people. Lanyer’s feminized Christ overturns the gender dynamics of classical male friendship: her Christ, characterized by his gentleness, silence, and forgiveness, differs markedly from the emphatically masculine ideal male friend envisioned by Cicero and Aristotle.²⁴ The powerful men who barter over the death of this ideal friend serve as equally instructive

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²³ By all indications, Lanyer did not achieve even this more realistic form of friendship. Even though her efforts probably did not attract lasting patronage, her vision of female friendship across social class offers a compelling example of the ways in which women writers could adapt the language of friendship for their own purposes.

²⁴ As I suggest elsewhere, Aristotle’s theory of friendship offers more flexibility than Cicero’s both because he recognizes less than perfect friendships and because his ideas about virtue concentrate more on morality than on specifically masculine qualities. Still, he assumes that participants in perfect friendship are male.
examples, for they illustrate not only men’s oppression of women, as several critics have observed, but also the consequences of flawed and ill-founded friendship. These examples of friendship, both positive and negative, provide a model for the acceptance of Lanyer’s own text as well as offer a significant revision of the discourse of ideal male friendship.

The Christ that Lanyer creates in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* is closely aligned with women. Lanyer outlines Jesus’ care and concern for women in her epistle, “To the Vertuous Reader”:

> it pleased our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ . . . to be begotten of a woman, borne of a woman, nourished of a woman, obedient to a woman; and that he healed women, 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, took care to dispose of a woman: after his resurrection, appeared first to a woman, sent a woman to declare his most glorious resurrection to the rest of his Disciples. (50)

Here, Lanyer alludes to the women who surrounded Jesus in life, just as the women of the dedications and the women portrayed in “The Description of Cooke-ham” frame Lanyer’s account of Jesus’ death. In this passage, she directly connects Jesus’ sympathy for women to her subject, his crucifixion. In the poem, she goes one step further and endows her Jesus with feminine characteristics, thus making the crucifixion representative of all women’s persecution at the hands of powerful men. Within the space of two stanzas, Lanyer describes Christ as possessing the feminine qualities of “Innocencie,” “Obedience,” and “Patience” (74). When accused, Christ “no resistance
makes,” and he chastises his disciple Peter for drawing his sword against the soldiers who come to arrest him, “so much he hates Revenge” (75, 77). Refusing to defend himself both physically and verbally, he answers his accusers with silence. This nonviolent, obedient, and remarkably silent Christ embodies early modern conceptions of female virtue.

This representation of Christ as feminine has received much critical attention. Barbara Lewalski writes, “we might be tempted to suppose that the ostensible religious subject of the title poem, Christ’s Passion, simply provides a thin veneer for a subversive feminist statement,” and although she dismisses this conclusion as “wrongheaded,” she does claim that Lanyer “presents Christ’s Passion as the focus for all the forms of female goodness” (207). Similarly, Tina Krontiris claims that “Lanyer’s argument about men’s sin in the crucifixion is given force by the feminine characteristics of the Christ she portrays” (116). According to these arguments, Christ’s feminine characteristics—his silence, gentleness, and lack of resistance—highlight men’s guilt in the crucifixion and support Lanyer’s argument for the recognition of feminine virtue. Lanyer’s Christ represents not only women’s victimization at the hands of men but also a type of idealized friendship that transcends differences, a portrayal that radically rewrites classical and early modern conceptions of male friendship. Lanyer’s feminization of Christ and her focus on his participation in friendships are not unrelated. Christ, as the true embodiment of friendship, is nominally male but possesses predominantly feminine

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25 Lynette McGrath makes a similar claim: “He [Christ] is portrayed in Lanyer’s text as at once the embodiment and reflection of female virtue. Lanier draws the connection between Christ and women by emphasizing Christ’s virtues of humility, love, meekness, nurturance, giving, chastity, and suffering” (342). Janel Mueller also comments on Lanyer’s feminine Christ: “Her Christ, like the ideal woman of the Puritan manuals, is silent except when induced to speak, and modest and taciturn when he does; he is gentle, mild, peaceable, and submissive to higher male authorities” (112).
characteristics; therefore, Lanyer locates true friendship not in the Ciceronian virtue of fidelity to another male friend and service to the state but rather in a liminal figure who possesses both male and female attributes, extends friendship even to those far beneath him, and, in his sacrificial moment, creates ties of friendship among all of his worshippers.

Christ first appears in the narrative as a friend. After her introductory address to Margaret Clifford, Lanyer opens her account of the crucifixion on the night that Jesus is betrayed. As Jesus enters the garden of Gethsemane, “None were admitted with their Lord to goe, / But Peter, and the sonnes of Zebed’us; To them good Jesus opened all his woe, / He gave them leave his sorows to discusse, / His deepest griefes, he did not scorne to showe / These three deere friends, so much he did intrust” (67). Early modern writers on friendship recognized the benefit of unburdening oneself to a friend. Bacon in particular focuses on this advantage of friendship: “The parable of Pythagoras is dark, but true; ‘Cor ne edito’; ‘Eat not the heart’. Certainly, if a man would give it a hard phrase, those that want friends to open themselves unto are cannibals of their own hearts” (393). Therefore, Jesus engages in a recognized sign of friendship, the sharing of troubles with a friend, but, unlike other writers on friendship, Lanyer focuses on the apostles’ inability to ease his woes: “Beeing sorowfull, and overcharg’d with grief, / He told it them, yet look’d for no reliefe” (67). In fact, it is not just that Peter, John, and James are incapable of relieving Jesus’ burden; they are the reason for his troubles. Lanyer addresses Jesus, “Sweet Lord, how couldst thou thus to flesh and blood / Communicate thy griefe? tell of thy woes? / Thou knew’st they had no powre to do thee good, / But were the cause thou must endure these blowes” (67). As humans, “Scorpions bred in Adams mud,” the

26 James and John
apostles have contributed to the mass of sins that Jesus’ death will eradicate (67). Any friendship in which Jesus engages is, therefore, fundamentally unequal—so unequal, in fact, that he cannot benefit from the advantages of friendship.

What emerges from this picture of friendship is not perfect equality but extreme inequality in which the perfect friend, Christ, condescends to friendship with those who are far beneath him. This is the ultimate example of friendship based on love rather than advantage: Jesus can gain no benefit from the apostles’ friendship but engages in it out of love: “Yet didst thou tell them of thy troubled state, / Of thy Soules heavinesse unto the death, / So full of Love, so free wert thou from hate” (68). Cicero also asserts that friendship derives from love rather than advantage, but in his vision of friendship, that love is based upon mutual understanding and equality between a pair of male friends. In Lanyer’s account, Christ extends his friendship and love to the apostles despite the lack of equality among them. Moreover, while the apostles are certainly privileged with close access to Jesus, Salve Deus focuses on the sacrifice of love that Christ makes for all Christians: he “tooke the keys of all Deaths powre away, / Opening to those that would his name obay” (103). Friendship here is realized not between a dyadic pair of equal male friends but rather among a wide swath of humanity connected through the worship of Christ.

Lanyer’s vision of friendship thus rewrites the classical and early modern ideal by focusing not on an exclusive pair of equal male friends but rather on an ambiguously gendered Christ who extends friendship outward to all of humanity. For a woman who was attempting to form ties of patronage and friendship with social superiors, Christ offers a positive model of friendship that transcends even drastic inequality. Lanyer
further emphasizes the inequality of Christ’s friendship for the apostles by detailing the ways in which they fail him. When Christ tells the apostles that they will all deny him, Peter mistakenly asserts his fidelity—“poore Peter, he was most too blame, / That thought above them all, by Faith to clime,” Lanyer judges (66)—and when Christ is arrested, the apostles fail come to his support: “Those deare Disciples that he most did love, / And were attendant at his beck and call, / When triall of affliction came to prove, / They first left him, who now must leave them all” (78). Drawing from the Books of Matthew and Mark, Lanyer particularly emphasizes the moment Christ finds the apostles asleep in the garden after he asked them to wait for him: “But now returning to thy sleeping Friends, / That could not watch one houre for love of thee, / Even those three Friends, which on thy Grace depends, / Yet shut those Eies that should their Maker see” (69). Those to whom Christ has shown undeserved friendship, Lanyer indignantly reminds us, cannot fulfill even the most basic duties of a friend. Unlike the faithful virgins of the dedications, who fill their lamps with oil and watch for Christ, the apostles are literally found sleeping on the job.

The faulty friendship of the apostles also stands in contrast to the sympathy that the women of Salve Deus consistently show Christ. Lanyer details the mourning of the daughters of Jerusalem, the grief of Mary, and, in a much-studied passage, Pontius Pilate’s wife’s attempt to save his life. Opposing the unfailing friendship and clear-sighted virtue of these women, whose “Eagles eyes” recognize Christ’s innocence, to the failure of the apostles to comfort Christ and the active malice of the men who accuse him, Lanyer clearly identifies the crucifixion as a sin carried out primarily by men (94). This point is central to her argument, for, as Pilate’s wife points out, men’s sin in the
crucifixion far outweighs Eve’s original sin of disobedience: “If one weake woman simply did offend, / This sinne of yours, hath no excuse, nor end” (87). The poem’s gendered divisions between guilty men and sympathetic women have long been noted. As Janel Mueller points out, *Salve Deus*’ “schematic gender opposition first links the women with Christ in action and utterance and then sets them as a group over against the other males” (112). Certainly, Lanyer’s critique of the apostles’ failure in friendship is heavily gendered. When they deny Christ after his arrest, she scornfully notes, “Though they protest they never will forsake him, / They do like men, when dangers overtake them” (78). Unlike male-authored writings on friendship, which often use women as foils to virtuous male friends, Lanyer displays the weakness of Christ’s male friends to highlight the virtue of the women who remain faithful to him.

While it is certainly true that Lanyer emphasizes men’s guilt in the crucifixion and argues for the recognition of women’s virtue and innocence, *Salve Deus* is by no means a blanket condemnation of men. As I note above, Christ himself is ambiguously gendered, possessing a male body but traditionally feminine characteristics. Indeed, Lanyer’s account of Christ’s crucifixion has as much to do with class as with gender.\(^{27}\) As flawed as the apostles are in their friendship to Christ, Lanyer saves her harshest condemnation for the powerful and highly-placed men, the “High Priests and Scribes, and Elders of the Land,” who form their own friendships by negotiating Christ’s downfall. Lanyer carefully outlines the process of Jesus’ trial and sentencing as he is exchanged among the powerful leaders, Caiphas, Pontius Pilate, and Herod, who will decide his fate. These men represent the antithesis of the selfless friendship offered by Christ: they are

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\(^{27}\) Lanyer’s celebration of Mary, for instance, focuses not only on female virtue but on Mary’s humble station: “For the Almightye magnified thee, / And looked downe upon thy meane estate” (95).
concerned only with self-promotion, and they exchange Christ among themselves to form strategic alliances: “their private gaine cares not to sell / The Innocent Blood of Gods most deere elected” (83). Unlike Christ, who extends his friendship to those beneath him and sacrifices himself for others, these leaders sacrifice the virtuous but low-born Christ in order to form misbegotten friendships among themselves. In this way, at least, Lanyer concurs with contemporary male writers on friendship: she opposes virtuous friendship to tyranny and condemns friendships based on the abuse of power, counseling, “If thou must make thy peace by Virtues fall, / Much better ’twere not to be friends at all” (89).

Lanyer’s account of the process of Jesus’ trial and condemnation closely follows Scripture. Jesus is first lead “To wicked Caiphas,” the high priest of Jerusalem, whose “malice will not let him live” (79, 82). Caiphas sends Jesus to Pontius Pilate, who receives Lanyer’s most scathing indictment because he receives the truth from his wife but still condemns Jesus to execution (88):

Three feares at once possessed Pilates heart;
The first, Christs innocencie, which so plaine appears;
The next, That he which now must feele this smarte,
Is Gods deare Sonne, for any thing he heares:
But that which proov’d the deepest wounding dart,
Is Peoples threat’nings, which he so much feares,
That he to Caesar could not be a friend,
Unless he sent sweet JESUS to his end.

Lanyer here suggests the value of a wife’s counsel, a topic that I explore more fully in Chapter Three on Elizabeth Cary’s *The Tragedy of Mariam*.  

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28 Lanyer here suggests the value of a wife’s counsel, a topic that I explore more fully in Chapter Three on Elizabeth Cary’s *The Tragedy of Mariam*. 
Pilate sends the condemned Jesus to Herod as a means of political reconciliation, and the two leaders make their “peace by Virtues fall” (89). As Lanyer depicts it, the death of Christ is clearly the result of the machinations of powerful men and the political alignments that exist between them. Most troublingly, such alliances have the power to make even a well-intentioned leader such as Pilate sacrifice his integrity. Lanyer’s final judgment of Pilate is damning: he is a “painted wall, / a golden Sepulcher with rotten bones” (91). Paint, of course, is another term for cosmetics, and the “golden Sepulcher,” an appealing exterior with a rotten interior, echoes misogynistic criticism of women. Thus, Lanyer levels expressions used against women at a male leader. If most classical and early modern discourses on friendship excluded women and identified friendship as male, Lanyer criticizes the political alliances of powerful men. Indeed, these friendships, based on self-advancement and the sacrifice of virtue, are the polar opposites of the virtuous and mutually supportive female alliances envisioned in the dedications.

Lanyer may have chosen to emphasize the culpability of powerful men in the death of Jesus because she too was disposed of by a highly placed man. According to the records of Simon Forman, an astrologer Lanyer visited in 1597, she was the mistress of Henry Cary, Lord Hunsdon, the Lord Chamberlain and a very powerful figure in Queen Elizabeth’s court (Woods 16). This affair gave Lanyer access to high court circles where she probably made the acquaintance of many of the aristocratic women to whom she dedicates *Salve Deus*, but this access to court apparently diminished after she became pregnant and Hunsdon arranged a marriage for her. Forman writes, “She was paramour to my old L. of huns-Dean that was L Chamberline and was maintained in great pride and yt seemes that being with child she was for collour married to a minstrell” (Woods xviii).
Forman’s records indicate that Lanyer was nostalgic for the life she led with Hunsdon and socially ambitious, inquiring whether “she shall be a Ladi. & how she shall speed” (Woods 23). As Woods observes, “To be suddenly married to a musician . . . was an abrupt, rather dramatic change from life in the world of the lord chamberlain” (21). After losing the protection of the aristocratic and politically powerful Hunsdon by becoming pregnant, Lanyer probably had few options beyond the marriage he arranged for her. Her known experience fits in with the problematic nature of friendship between men and women and between the powerful and the less powerful, and we may hear the echoes of this life event in her indictment of powerful men as they use the life and death of the low-born and humble Jesus as a political pawn.

Of course, the aristocratic women of the dedications also functioned as objects of exchange within marriage although they perhaps had more family protection than the middle-class Lanyer. As McGrath writes, “in this instance, Lanyer exemplifies the prevailing reality for all women of her period—but especially non-aristocratic women like herself—that their material situation depended on male identification and male protection” (336). The leaders who exchange Christ in order to form alliances offer a negative example of friendship by illustrating the abuse of power against the low-born and powerless. Lanyer cautions her aristocratic readers against such friendships and encourages them to align themselves instead with the low-born but virtuous Christ (and, by extension, the low-born but virtuous poet). However, her condemnation of the exchange of Christ also identifies a way in which she, Christ, and her aristocratic dedicatees are all alike: to varying degrees, they are all subject to more powerful men. By asking her female readers—both the aristocratic readers supposed in the dedications
and those who will buy her printed book—to identify with the humble Christ rather than with the powerful authority figures who conspire against him, Lanyer emphasizes the commonality between the reader, the poet, and Christ.

Lanyer’s relationship with the lord chamberlain could also be read as a form of patronage, a recognized form of friendship. One could argue that it is this patronage that she seeks to replace in the dedications with supportive ties among women. Forman’s records, however, reveal another connotation of friendship, one that Lanyer’s poetry explicitly rejects. Forman writes that Lanyer “is nowe very nedy and in debte & it seams for Lucrese sake wilbe a good fellow for necessity doth co[m]pell” (Woods 25). In other words, he supposes that she will grant him sexual favors in return for financial assistance. Apparently, he was disappointed. After visiting her house while her husband was at sea with the Earl of Essex, Forman records, “she was familiar & friendlie to him in all things. but only she wold not halek.29 yet he felte all p[ar]tes of her body willingly. & kyssed her often. but she wold not doe in any wise wher upon he toke some displesure & soe dep[ar]ted [i.e. stopped being] friends” (Woods 26). Forman’s version of friendship involved sex in return for money, and he was unwilling to accept the terms of Lanyer’s friendship as she offered it, which apparently involved some level of physical intimacy without intercourse. Although he later states that “they were frinds again aferward,” he angrily writes that he “never obteyned his purpos & she was a ho[re] & delt evill with him after” (Woods 26). Ironically, Lanyer is a “ho[re]” because she refuses to have sex with him. In sum, Forman’s primarily sexual—and exploitative—conception of friendship between men and women is a far cry from the type of supportive female friendships that

29 Forman’s euphemism for intercourse (Woods 26)
Lanyer attempts to form in the dedications and the ideal of perfectly altruistic friendship that she depicts in the figure of Christ.

In fact, Lanyer overtly rejects such friendships based on sexual exploitation in *Salve Deus*. Unmasking the violence underlying the Petrarchan metaphor of the hunt, she asserts that beauty draws the attention of predatory men: “For greatest perills do attend the faire, / When men do seeke, attempt, plot and devise, / How they may overthrow the chastest Dame, / Whose Beautie is the White whereat they aime” (60). Lanyer follows this claim with examples of famous women such as Helen, Cleopatra, and Rosamond whose beauty drew them into peril and disgrace. Even chaste beautiful women, it seems, are not free of danger, for “Lustful King John” pursues the virtuous Matilda although “Friends disgrace, nor Fathers banishment, / Nor Death it self, could purchase her consent” (61). As Woods writes, “Instead of indulging in the description of female beauty, or in the pathos of female passivity, she rejects beauty as a topic precisely because it makes women so vulnerable” (90). We know that Lanyer herself engaged in a long-term relationship that ended in pregnancy and an arranged marriage, and, based on the evidence from Forman, at least had to fend off men who attempted to become “friends” on sexual terms. Thus rejecting beauty as a topic and, with it, the type of sexual relationships with men that it attracts, she tells Margaret Clifford that she will focus on other qualities, the “Grace” that “makes thee pleasing in thy Makers sight” (62). Christ, Lanyer indicates, sees a woman’s true beauty in her virtue.

With the very significant exception of this relationship between her female readers and Christ, most of the relationships between men and women that Lanyer depicts in *Salve Deus* are antagonistic. Men pursue beautiful women to catastrophic effect, Pilate
ignores his wife’s good advice, and male leaders kill Christ while women mourn him. While it is certainly true that Lanyer emphasizes men’s guilt in the crucifixion and rejects sexual relationships between men and women based only on the pursuit of outward beauty, the divide between men and women in the *Salve Deus* is perhaps not as deep as such examples may indicate. In fact, after several stanzas in which she praises biblical women, such as Judith and Esther, who thwart evil men, she provides an example, also derived from Scripture, of a friendship between a man and a woman, King Solomon and Queen Sheba. This friendship, she indicates, is based on the mind instead of the body, and she prefaces her account of their meeting by praising Clifford for spending her “pretious time that God hath sent, / In all good exercise of the mind” (118).

Queen Sheba, like Clifford, seeks out wisdom: “From th’utmost part of all the Earth shee came, / To heare the Wisdom of this worthy King; / . . . / Yea many strange hard questions did shee frame, / All which were answer’d by this famous King” (118-119). Sheba, attracted to Solomon’s reputed wisdom, intelligently questions this great king and engages him in scholarly conversation. To describe this friendship derived from wisdom, Lanyer employs the likeness topos of friendship rhetoric:

- Spirits affect where they doe sympathize,
- Wisdom desires Wisdome to embrace,
- Virtue covets her like, and doth devize
- How she her friends may entertaine with grace;
- Beauty sometime is pleas’d to feed her eyes,
- With viewing Beautie in anothers face:
  - Both good and bad in this point doe agree,
That each desireth with his like to be.

Since both are virtuous and wise, Solomon and Sheba find their like in each other. Even beauty, it seems, is redeemed in a virtuous friendship that is reciprocal instead of predatory and based on the pursuit of wisdom rather than physical pleasure. Solomon and Sheba provide a model of friendship between men and women, created from the urge to “see, to heare, and understand,” that replaces the uneven sexual relationships, listed earlier in the poem, that prove dangerous to women (119). Even if this type of beneficial friendship of the mind proves the exception rather than the rule in Lanyer’s verse, it holds out hope for a type of friendship that overcomes the divisions between men and women that seem so vast elsewhere in the poem.

Lanyer asserts that even the friendship between Solomon and Sheba is “but a figure” of the friendship between Christ and Margaret Clifford (120). While Sheba sought out an earthly king, Lanyer tells Clifford, “a greater thou hast sought and found / Than Salomon in all his royaltie; / And unto him thy faith most firmely bound” (123). Moreover, Clifford’s allegiance to Christ demonstrates her rejection of earthly concerns—“Him hast thou truly served all thy life, / And for his love, liv’d with the world at strife,” Lanyer praises—as well as her clear-sighted embrace of lowly virtue. For Christ does not appear to Clifford as a glorious king like Solomon but rather as a “seeming Trades-mans sonne, of none attended, / Save of a few in povertie and need” (124). Clifford, who is neither in poverty or need, has the perception to see the virtue in this lowly figure: “Then how much more art thou to be commended,” Lanyer asks, “That seek’st thy love in lowly shepheards weed?” (124). In her dedication to Mary Sidney, Lanyer indicated that her book is the shepherd’s weed that clothes Christ; therefore,
Clifford’s ability to see Christ’s virtue beneath his shepherd’s weed indicates her ability to see the virtue of Lanyer’s writing. But the relationship between Christ and Clifford in *Salve Deus* does much more than provide a model of acceptance for Lanyer’s poem. It, like the friendship between Solomon and Sheba but to a greater degree, redeems sexual desire between men and women. Christ is Clifford’s “dearest Love,” and Lanyer’s description of Christ’s crucified body is clearly erotic: “This is that Bridegroom that appears so faire, / So sweet, so lovely in his Spouses sight, / That unto Snowe we may his face compare, / His cheekes like skarlet, and his eyes so bright” (107). Lanyer, who earlier criticizes and rejects the violent Petrarchan metaphor of the hunt, here redeems the Petrarchan colors of red and white by identifying them with Christ, an appropriate object of desire. As DiPasquale suggests, Lanyer “opens up an alternative definition of heterosexual love as the fulfillment of a woman’s desire for the perfectly responsive man, who neither pursues her nor lords it over her, but mirrors her and is mirrored by her desire” (184).

As all of this mirroring perhaps indicates, friendship is the context in which this redemption of sexual desire, achieved through the example of Christ, takes place. Lanyer’s poem seeks not only to redeem women and display feminine virtue but also to place contemporary relations between men and women on a different, less combative footing. As Mueller claims, Lanyer seeks “to find and articulate transformative possibilities in gender relations” (183). Friendship, including friendship among women, friendship between men and women, and friendship with Christ, allows such transformations to take place. In Lanyer’s poem, friendship is a relationship in which the recognition of virtue in another bridges difference, whether that difference is sexual or
social. Christ is the ultimate example of such a friend: his altruistic friendship for humanity provides a model for less perfect but still beneficial friendships among individuals. In Lanyer’s verse, Christ is not only the perfect friend but also the perfect maker of friendships, and in the end, Lanyer connects Clifford’s friendship for Christ to her friendship and patronage for herself by claiming that Clifford’s “excellence hath rais’d my sprites to write, / Of what my thoughts could hardly apprehend” (129). If the friendship between Lanyer and Clifford has more in common with early modern patronage relationships than with Ciceronian friendships of equality, Lanyer’s verse suggests that devotion to Christ and a commitment to following his example, can, if not overcome, at least bridge such inequality. Of course, as in the end of the dedications, Lanyer remains acutely aware of the difference between the possibilities for friendship that she envisions and the social restrictions of the world in which she lives, and the last major work in the volume is not the story of the perfect friend, Christ, but “The Description of Cooke-ham,” an elegy for female friendship lost to social distance.

**Lasting Friendship?: “The Description of Cooke-ham.”**

“O my friends, there is no friend.” (att. Aristotle)³¹

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³⁰ This idea of Christ as the creator of friendship has precedent. Ivo, one of the speakers in Aelred of Rievaulx’s *Spiritual Friendship*, states, “I should like to be instructed more fully as to how the friendship which ought to exist among us begins in Christ, is preserved according to the Spirit of Christ, and how its end and fruition are referred to Christ” (133). Indeed, the first line of the dialogue disrupts the typically dyadic conception of male friendship by imagining Christ as a third party within friendship: “Here we are, you and I, and I hope a third, Christ, is in our midst” (131).

³¹ Jacques Derrida discusses the paradoxical nature of this quotation in *The Politics of Friendship*: “these are the two disjoined members of the same unique sentence. An almost impossible declaration. In two times [deux temps]. Unjoinable, the two times seem disjoined by the very meaning of what appears to be at once both affirmed and denied: ‘my friends, no friend.’(1) . . . It is “an apostrophe always uttered close to the end, on the edge of life—that is to say, of death” (5). In other words, perfect friendship can only be imagined in its absence, and discourses of friendship are often predicated on the absence or death of the friend. By placing her depiction of perfect friendship in the past, Lanyer is in good company: both Cicero’s *De Amicitia* and its early modern descendent, Montaigne’s *On Friendship*, celebrate friendship in the context of mourning a deceased friend.
Throughout the collection, Lanyer is quite clear about the nature and extent of her relationship to her dedicatees. Some, like Bertie, she has known for many years; some, like Arbella Stuart, she has “not knowne so much as I desired” (17); and some she does not know at all. She admits to Katherine Howard, the Countess of Suffolk, for instance, that “it may seeme right strange, / that I a stranger should presume thus farre, / To write to you” (36). Lanyer attempts to initiate the friendship of patronage with all of the women she addresses in the dedications, but such friendships apparently encompass a rather broad range of familiarity. By far the greatest amount of intimacy she claims is with her chief dedicatee and patroness, Margaret Clifford, and Clifford’s daughter, Anne. Situating her relationship with the Cliffords somewhere in between the useful but potentially distant friendship of patronage and the intimate equality of Ciceronian friendship, Lanyer both celebrates her connection to the Cliffords and rails against the social boundaries that make that connection so fraught. In “The Description of Cooke-ham,” the first country-house poem in English, Lanyer depicts an idyllic time of female friendship across social boundaries and mourns its passing. This elegy for female friendship is the last poem in the volume, and while this position does not negate the transcendent possibilities of friendship made possible through Christ imagined in the earlier poem, it does highlight the differences between friendship as Lanyer imagines it should be and friendship as it is actually realized in the world. Even friendship with a

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32 Scholars differ on the credence they give to Lanyer’s claims of friendship with her aristocratic dedicatees. For example, while Lewalski suggests that it would not be productive for Lanyer to “falsify too outrageously the terms of a relationship” (220), Lisa Schnell concludes that “the only relationship Lanyer had with any patroness occurred in the realm of wish-fulfillment fantasy” (31). Given Lanyer’s time at court and her frankness in admitting she does not personally know some women, I see no reason not to take her at her word regarding the extent of her familiarity with her dedicatees.
woman as devoutly religious as Margaret Clifford, whom Lanyer depicts as the bride of Christ in *Salve Deus*, cannot, it seems, permanently overcome the divisions of class.

“Cooke-ham” takes an elegiac tone from the first line: “Farewell, (sweet Cooke-ham) where I first obtain’d / Grace from that Grace where perfit Grace remain’d” (130). As in the dedication “To all vertuous Ladies in general,” Lanyer plays upon the multiple connotations of grace: Margaret and Anne Clifford have demonstrated grace to Lanyer by hosting her and encouraging her poetic endeavors, but as nobility, “Graces,” their social station eventually separates them from the middle-class poet. Lanyer seems sure that her time at Cooke-ham is not to be renewed: “Never shall my sad eies againe behold / Those pleasures which my thoughts did then unfold” (130), she asserts, and she urges her memory to “retaine / Those pleasures past, which will not turne againe” (135). “Cooke-ham” therefore both portrays an affectionate friendship between the poet and her patronesses and expresses frustration at the limitations imposed by the social distance between them. However, rather than directly blaming these important patrons for this distance, Lanyer blames “Unconstant Fortune . . . / Who casts us downe into so lowe a frame: / Where our great friends we cannot dayly see, / So great a diffrence is there in degree” (134). Like Whitney, Lanyer casts herself as a victim of fortune. While Whitney’s complaints demonstrated the reciprocity of friendship (misery loves company), Lanyer displays herself as a victim of fortune in order to highlight the absence of her friends.

Even though Lanyer nostalgically depicts the time that she spent with the Cliffords at their family estate as one of familiarity and inclusion, touches of resentment at their failure to return her level of devotion become evident in the poem. For instance,
Lanyer claims that she “did alwaies beare a part” in “beauteous Dorset’s former sports, /
So far from being touched from any ill reports” (135). Contrasting her present isolation
with her former inclusion in Anne Clifford’s innocent activities, she depicts a happy past
of cross-class friendship. However, her concern with “ill reports” intrudes rather
jarringly on this affirmative vision of female friendship; if the idyllic past needs such a
disclaimer, perhaps it was not so idyllic after all. Lanyer’s description of her friendship
with Margaret Clifford also demonstrates this mixture of nostalgia for female friendship
and frustration at its boundaries. She describes walks she took with the Cliffords after
which they would rest underneath a great oak “Where many a learned Book was read and
skand / To this faire tree, taking me by the hand, / You did repeat the pleasures which had
past” (136). Once again connecting female friendship with intellectual pursuits, Lanyer
here portrays herself as a third companion in these mother and daughter outings.
Margaret Clifford even extends a physical gesture of friendship toward Lanyer when she
takes her by the hand.33 Yet, the poet remains unsatisfied, for, upon departing, Clifford
kisses the oak tree instead of Lanyer. Lanyer is thus forced to steal her kiss from the oak,
“Scorning a sencelesse creature should possesse / So rare a favour, so great happiness”
(137).34

It is appropriate that Lanyer steals her kiss from a tree, for the animate natural
world of Cookham reflects the poet’s inner state. In what was to later become a
convention of country-house poetry, Cookham bedecks itself in greenery when the
Cliffords approach and mourns when they depart: “each thing did unto sorrow frame: /

33 For a discussion of the importance of physical demonstrations of friendship in Renaissance England, see
34 Lanyer here appears not only as a devoted friend but also as a frustrated lover. Revision note: further
discuss erotics of female friendship as another form of friendship explored in Salve Deus.
The trees that were so glorious in our view, / Forsooke both flowres and fruit, when once they knew/ Of your depart” (135). The natural world also reflects the tenuous nature of Lanyer’s friendship with the Cliffords. Like Lanyer, who claims to crave a closer familiarity with her noble patrons than they may be willing to offer, the “pretty Birds would oft come to attend thee, / Yet flie away for feare they should offend thee” (132).35 In sum, even though Lanyer appears to be on relatively familiar terms with the Cliffords, she remains in the subservient position of waiting for any signs of affection they choose to extend to her, and while I do not go so far as to claim, as Schnell does, that “Lanyer has written not an encomium to but an indictment of the myth of aristocratic generosity and fairness” (34), it is certainly true that “Cooke-ham” demonstrates deep ambivalence between the speaker’s gratitude for the Cliffords’ friendship and her resentment at its limitations. Lanyer concludes that the low-born always feel more love toward their social superiors than they can expect to receive: “Many are placed in those Orbes of state, / Partners in honour, so ordain’d by Fate; / Neerer in show, yet farther off in love, / In which, the lowest alwayes are above” (134). Of course, Aristotle would agree with this assessment. In his examination of unequal friendship, he concludes that a greater amount of love on the part of the inferior party produces a type of equality. However, Lanyer’s greater love for her “great friends” produces not settled equality but disappointment at its absence.

35 Contrast this, for instance, with Ben Jonson’s more confident self-portrayal in “To Penshurst.” Jonson, like Lanyer, is a middle-class guest at a noble home, but he depicts himself as an always-welcome participant in the house’s activities. As Pamela Hammons observes, “early modern male poets fashion more explicitly possessive representations of their speakers in relation to dwelling places than do women poets despite differences in rank or riches. Bricklayer’s stepson Ben Jonson creates a speaker in “To Penshurst” who feels right at home at Sir Robert Sidney’s table” (398).
The disappointment that Lanyer expresses in “Cooke-ham” serves a particular political purpose, one that she makes clear in her dedication to Anne Clifford. Both this dedication and the dedication to Margaret Clifford demonstrate Lanyer’s greater familiarity with the Cliffords than with her other patronesses—Lanyer writes her dedication to Margaret in prose, for example, lending it a more conversational, less formal tone—and she employs this greater familiarity to make her most trenchant criticism of the hierarchical class system of Jacobean England. Of course, Lanyer questions the validity of class distinctions throughout the dedications and the text of Salve Deus through the example of the low-born Christ. She begins her dedication to Anne Clifford by asking her to “enter with the Bridegroom to the feast, / Where he that is the greatest may be least,” once again employing the unimpeachable authority of Christ to legitimize a potentially radical reversal of hierarchies, but she soon dispenses with this mediating figure and directly questions the class system that places Clifford above her:

What difference was there when the world began,

Was it not Virtue that distinguished all?

All sprang but from one woman and one man,

Then how doth Gentry come to rise and fall?

Or who is he that very rightly can

Distinguish of his birth, or tell at all,

In what meane state his Ancestors have bin,

Before some one of worth did honour win? (42-43)

Here, Lanyer hits at the heart of the class system by essentially exposing class distinctions as arbitrary: when seen through the lens of Scripture, everyone came from the
same source, and aristocrats merely inherit their titles from an ancestor who happened to win some honor. Honorable ancestors do not guarantee personal worth, she asserts. If all such titles are essentially meaningless, Lanyer may speak to her noble friend as an equal. Rather than inherited titles, Lanyer argues, virtue should determine worth: “Titles of honour which the world bestowes, / To none but to the virtuous doth belong,” (42).

Throughout *Salve Deus*, Lanyer suggests that virtue may produce friendship across class boundaries, but here she makes the more radical claim that virtue should *replace* class as a marker of value. Kari Boyd McBride claims that Lanyer here implies “Clifford’s lack of virtue *because* of her title,” but I would argue that Lanyer most directly challenges class distinctions in these lines not to insult a woman who seems, by all indications, to have been a friend and patroness, but rather because the liberty of friendship allows her to speak more freely in this dedication than in the others (72). Moreover, Anne Clifford’s family history gives her good reason to champion the claims of virtue over those of inheritance. Clifford was disinherited by her father, who left his extensive estates to his brother Francis “in direct opposition to an entail made by King Edward II to an earlier Clifford, in which it was clearly stated that the Clifford lands should always descend to the direct heir, whatever the sex” (Clifford 2). Clifford defied pressure from her husband and King James to renounce her claims to the land, and she and her mother devoted themselves to fighting the disinheritance. Therefore, when Lanyer asserts that titles of honor belong to the virtuous and complains, “when they are bestow’d upon her foes, / Poore virtues friends indure the greatest wrong: / For they must suffer all indignity, / Untill in heav’n the y better graced be” (42), she is both sympathizing with Clifford’s disinheritance and pointing out that the court musician’s
daughter and the countess have in much common: they, “virtues friends,” are both disadvantaged by the system of inheritance.

In fact, Anne Clifford’s alienation from her own lands offers another reason for the elegiac tone of “Cooke-ham.” The estate, which was leased from the king by Margaret Clifford’s brother, did not actually belong to Clifford, so in a sense, both Lanyer and the Cliffords were guests at Cookham. Certainly, Lanyer implies that Margaret is sad to leave Cookham, and she counsels her to renounce such worldly pleasures and focus instead on the religious realm: “Vouchsafe to think upon those pleasures past, / As fleeting worldly Joyes that could not last: / Or, as dimme shadowes of celestiall pleasures, / Which are desir’d above all earthly treasures” (130). Of course, as we have seen, the religious realm is one in which Lanyer may imagine friendship between women of different classes and, theoretically, speak to them as an equal. Even as Lanyer advises the Cliffords to value virtue above worldly titles and place their hopes in heaven, the poem never manages to erase the social distance between these friends. In fact, Margaret and Anne Clifford researched and recorded “over three hundred years of Clifford history” to validate Anne’s claim to the Clifford estates (Clifford 2). In other words, they sought to prove Anne’s right to her father’s lands through the same inheritance and class system that Lanyer seeks to replace. The liberty of friendship allows Lanyer to protest that system, but she cannot ultimately overcome it.

In the end of her dedication to Anne Clifford, Lanyer returns to the conventions of epideictic poetry: in praising Clifford, she does “but set a candle in the sunne, / And adde one drop of water to the sea” (45). She makes a similar move at the end of “Cooke-ham.”
As the estate sinks into desolation and decay, Lanyer makes her final farewell to her patron and friend:

This last farewell to Cooke-ham here I give
When I am dead thy name in this may live,
Wherein I have perform’d her noble hest,
Whose virtues lodge in my unworthy breast,
And ever shall, so long as life remaines,
Tying my heart to her by those rich chaines. (138)

Again, Lanyer employs the *humilitas* topos of the patronage-seeking poet: Margaret Clifford’s virtues will live on in the poem and in Lanyer’s unworthy but still-devoted heart. Despite the disappointments she has experienced in her connection with these social superiors, she declares her lasting friendship for them, and the poem itself, which preserves the Countess of Cumberland’s memory, becomes the permanent sign of that friendship. After failing to permanently establish an intimate friendship with her social superiors, Lanyer falls back on the type of friendship that can attain permanence: the friendship of patronage.

“Cooke-ham” may be seen as a record of Lanyer’s attempt to actualize the transcendent possibilities of friendship she envisions in the rest of *Salve Deus*. With the universal friendship and love of Christ as a model, how can pious women who are devoted to his example fail to create lasting friendship among themselves? Friendship across gender and class difference clearly was a reality in early modern England, but the poetry of Whitney and Lanyer indicates that, at least for women, gender may have been more easily crossed in friendship than class. Patronage may result in a supportive and
productive—and indeed, even an affectionate—relationship, but Lanyer’s speaker does not seem able to achieve the level of intimacy and equality with her social superiors that she craves. Even though *Salve Deus*’ last representation of friendship ends in disappointment, Lanyer’s vision of friendship based on religious virtue rather than social equality provides a significant intervention in the discourse of early modern friendship. Moreover, it is worth noting that “Cooke-ham” is not Lanyer’s last word. She closes the volume with a short note to “the doubtfull Reader,” claiming that the title of her work, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, was delivered to her in a dream. This dream vision, she asserts, is “a significant token, that I was appointed to performe this Work” (139). In a work so devoted to exploring the possibilities of connection and friendship, the poet ends with a solitary assertion of poetic authority. If this final solitude represents a failure of lasting friendship, it does not represent a failure of her poetic vision.