

Aemilia Lanyer and the ‘first fruits’ of women’s wit

‘To All Vertuous Ladies’

In 1610 or 1611 – the exact date of the manuscript is unclear – Dudley North, third Baron North of Kirtling in Cambridgeshire, was moved to write down his opinions on the state of English poetry. Appropriately in keeping with our discussions in the previous chapter, North starts from the firm belief that ‘poetry is in truth a kind of Musick’, as indicated by ‘the fable of Orpheus’. However, he is clearly disgruntled about contemporary trends in this musical art of words; he admits his dislike of the ‘riddling humour lately affected by many’. It is likely that he had in mind the playful quips and witty conceits of the younger generation of poets such as John Donne, whose secular lyrics were circulating widely in manuscript in this period. After criticising the ‘thin, light, and empty’ nature of the verses produced by what he refers to as poetic ‘ostentation’, North notes that many of these verbal ‘airy bubbles’, particularly love poems, tend to be about women and are aimed at a female audience. This leads him into a brief digression on the subject of women, ‘whose chiefest beautie consists in being unsophisticated by Art’ and who are thus ‘the more pleasing in conversation by possessing a free puritie of unadulterated wit’ (Kinney, 684–8). It is safe to say that this view of women as the objects rather than the creators of verse, and as a species who lack the intrusive sophistication of art, was commonly held by many men (and no doubt a fair proportion of women) in 1611.

Early modern women were assigned a secondary status by all the forces of society, and notably the church, the law, and the artistic and educational conventions of the day. The chief initiator of the Fall, bringing about all the

evils of human life including the very fact of mortality itself, was perceived to have been Eve (Genesis 2–3); women were thus fundamentally and irrevocably associated with temptation, corruption and loss. In biblical and classical tradition, the female sex was seen as 'coming second', either made from the male or representing a secondary or imperfect version of him (Parker). The subordinate role of women was assumed in the metaphors of James I's first speech to the Westminster Parliament in 1604 when he declared, 'I am the Husband, and all the whole Isle is my lawfull Wife; I am the Head, and it is my Body' (James (1616), 488). Drawing on biblical precedent, in which the relationship of Christ to the church is similarly gendered (Ephesians 5:22–23), the King demanded the total obedience and allegiance of his subjects by associating them with the accustomed inferior position of women, the female body to the male 'Head'. The injunctions of St Paul that women should 'learn in silence with all subjection' and on no account 'usurp authority over the man' (1 Timothy 2:11–12) were also particularly popular among the biblically literate Protestant patriarchs of early modern England and were regularly echoed from the pulpit and in print. In 1608, a new edition of Philip Stubbes's *Cristall Glasse* (a commemoration of his late wife, originally published in 1591) had invited its readers to admire Katherine Stubbes as a 'mirroure of womanhood', exemplified by, among other attributes, the fact that she 'obeyed the commandement of the Apostle, who biddeth women to be silent' (Stubbes, A2^r, A2^v).

The requirement of female silence was generally assumed to refer not only to the spoken word but also to written texts; to wield the pen was, symbolically as well as actually, seen as a male prerogative. However, women's relationship to the word was undoubtedly more complex than the Pauline image implies. The 'silent' Katherine Stubbes was commended for her piety, which partly revealed itself in her habit of almost constant reading but was equally evident in her zealous conversations with her husband about religious practice, in which she discussed the 'word of God' and asked him to expound the 'sense' of each phrase of the biblical text (Stubbes, A2^v). Women's reading was thus encouraged, especially in relation to the Bible and devotional works, and this inevitably gave rise to the desire to interpret and respond to the text – the opposite of silence. Despite these apparent contradictions, the common factor here is that, whether in quiet obedience or eager engagement, early modern women were perceived as consumers of textual culture, not as its creators.

There was, however, a significant role for women, if not as literary creators, then at least as midwives ensuring a work's safe entry into the world. A number of women possessing wealth or status played an important part as patrons of writers or performers in the textual world of 1611, as we have seen in the case of Queen Anna, who had her own company of players and was actively involved in the commissioning and performing of masques.

Other leading women patrons in this period, including Mary Sidney, Countess of Pembroke, and Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford, acted as benefactors to the literary work of such men as Nicholas Breton, Samuel Daniel, Ben Jonson and John Donne, all of whom published poetic texts in 1611. Indeed, Dudley North's words on contemporary poetry and women's innocence of guile, with which we began this chapter, were originally written for his own patron, Lady Mary Wroth, niece of the Countess of Pembroke, to whom he planned to dedicate an early volume of poems. However, in North's view and that of his contemporaries, women were simply not involved in the creation or production of texts. He assumes that they are mercifully unaffected by knowledge of art and, if they have 'wit' at all, it is a natural gift in conversation and not the sharp insights and nimble language associated with the term as a literary skill. The irony of addressing these views to Wroth, who was herself to become a major poet, cannot be overestimated; the irony of North's expressing these sentiments on female wit in or just before 1611 is also acute. For in 1611 the poet Aemilia Lanyer published her volume of poems, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, and outspokenly claimed her work as 'the first fruits of a womans wit' (Lanyer (1993), 11). Here was a female writer, then, whose wit was not limited to that of conversation and was indeed claiming the sophistication of the poetic art: a woman who was not silent but using the pen and the printing press to make her voice heard.

Aemilia Lanyer is a hugely important figure in the history of women's poetry, and her publication of *Salve Deus* is one of the landmarks of textual culture in 1611, particularly when viewed from a modern perspective since her work does not seem to have been noticed in its own day. However, it is important not to pounce upon Lanyer as an oversimplified emblem of the early modern woman poet who, like the 'silver swan' in Orlando Gibbons's madrigal, unexpectedly and suddenly 'unlockt her silent throat' (Gibbons, A3^r). Other, very significant female poets had broken the taboo of silence before Lanyer and found a voice either by working with the Bible – legitimising their own work under the authority of the scriptures – or by publishing anonymously. Among the women's works circulating in manuscript at this time was the excellent translation of the Psalms into lyric verse, begun by Sir Philip Sidney but completed and revised by his sister Mary, Countess of Pembroke, which had been presented to Elizabeth I in 1600 and was widely admired in the early seventeenth century. One of Lanyer's female predecessors in print was Isabella Whitney, though her sharp and lively poems were credited on the title page of her 1573 collection, *A Sweet Nosegay, or Pleasant Posye*, simply to the mysterious 'Is. W.'. What is unique about Lanyer's contribution to the textual culture of 1611 is her determination to 'unlock' the hidden identity of the female poetic voice in print publication. For the first time in the history of women's poetry

published in English, a title page is remarkably specific about who the author is and from which social circles she comes: *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* is explicitly said to be 'Written by Mistris Aemilia Lanyer, Wife to Captaine Alfonso Lanyer Servant to the Kings Majestie'. This description begins with a bold assertion of authorship – no merely passive naming, but an active 'Written by' (emphasis added), drawing attention to the verb and the radical process for a woman that it identifies. The title 'Mistris' is socially radical, too, announcing to her readers that she is not a Countess or a courtly lady but a wife – someone rather like most of *them*. Although Lanyer claims a vital connection to the King and his patronage through her husband, who was a court musician, she seems to be straddling two literary worlds and enjoying the best of both of them: she allies herself with the advantages of the royal court and its cultural associations, yet also suggests a sense of speaking for, and alongside, other women.

As the reader moves beyond the title page of *Salve Deus*, it becomes clear that Lanyer needed all the help that she could muster for this ambitious project. The first part of the book (a third of its total length) is entirely taken up with poems addressed to contemporary women of authority, from the Queen and her daughter Elizabeth to the ladies of the court, including the letter writer Arbella Stuart and the diarist Anne Clifford. There is also a long dream poem at its centre addressed to 'the Ladie Marie [Sidney], the Countesse Dowager of *Pembrooke*' (Lanyer (1993), 21). This para-textual material is vital to our understanding of Lanyer and her purposes in publishing *Salve Deus*. It tells us, for example, about the need of a musician's wife, even one with royal connections, to find sponsors for her poetic publication or some sympathetic readers who might grant her financial support or a place in their household. The preliminary pages also indicate that Lanyer expects her readers to be women, whatever rank they may hold or authority they may exercise. In the midst of the poems addressed to named individual women is one 'To all vertuous Ladies in generall', and the long prefatory section of *Salve Deus* is rounded off with a prose epistle, 'To the Vertuous Reader', in which she offers her 'little booke' for the 'generall use of all vertuous Ladies and Gentlewomen of this kingdome' (12, 48). The accumulated effect of all the dedicatory material is to build up an image or mirror of the ideal woman: virtuous, learned, generous, creative, strong-minded. As Lanyer writes in her poem to Anne Clifford, who in 1611 was the young Countess of Dorset, 'in this Mirrour let your faire eyes looke, / To view your virtues in this blessed Booke' – blessed, she hastens to add, by 'our Saviours merits, not my skill' (41). *Salve Deus* offers, among many other things, an alternative vision of the virtuous nature and characteristics of women, a counterpoint to the assumptions of writers such as North and Stubbes. This would suggest, of course, that Lanyer could not discount the likelihood that men would read

her book too; in her final preface she refers her 'imperfect indeavours' to the 'modest censures' of both women and men, hoping that the effect on 'honourable minded men' in particular will be to encourage them to 'speake reverently of our sexe' (50).

In the course of her dedicatory poems and prose, Lanyer provides a plethora of reasons for speaking of women with reverence. Drawing upon evident knowledge of the Bible, she asserts that Christ himself had such great respect for women that, being rendered incarnate 'without the assistance of man', he was pleased to be

begotten of a woman, borne of a woman, nourished of a woman, obedient to a woman; . . . he healed woman [sic], pardoned women, comforted women; yea, even when he was in his greatest agonie . . . tooke 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. (Lanyer (1993), 49–50)

This remarkably comprehensive – and rhetorically confident – list of proto-feminist scriptural evidence underpins all Lanyer's other explorations of female virtues and qualities in the dedicatory poems. The Queen, while flatteringly told that she exemplifies the gifts of all the great classical goddesses and is personally attended by the Muses, is most importantly said to be crowned by God with all the royal virtues: 'the Naturall, the Morall, and Divine' (6). The Countess of Kent is praised for her 'love and feare of God' and advised that her 'noble Virtues' are 'the ground I write upon' (18, 20). Since the topic of Lanyer's main poem is the passion of Christ, she states confidently to the Countess of Bedford that the experience of reading it will bring grace even if the poetic work itself is insufficiently skilful to warrant praise. Here we see the benefit of 'A Womans writing of divinest things', to use the phrase with which she describes her project to the Queen: the female writer's own inadequacies, as she (and no doubt her critics) perceived them, can be repaired by her chosen subject, Jesus Christ, since 'our sinnes' are 'all purg'd by his Divinity' (3, 31).

Even in an era of patronage and panegyric, the number of Lanyer's prefatory poems addressed to the leading courtly ladies of 1611 is unusual, as is the fact that her addressees are exclusively female. This extensive paratextual material serves several functions: while evidently intended by Lanyer to win friends in high places for herself and her book, it also actively presents a new 'cristall glasse' or mirror of godly women and acts as a kind of buffer zone between the title page and the main poem, acclimatising the reader to the project and allowing the author to introduce herself and her purpose in writing. In the short poem addressed to 'the Lady Elizabeth', daughter of Anna and James and sister to Prince Henry, we learn that the

book is a 'wholesome feast' to which all the readers are personally invited; even though the princess's 'faire eyes farre better Bookes have seene', Lanyer urges her to accept it since it is 'the first fruits of a womans wit' (Lanyer (1993), 11). Despite the prevailing rhetoric of modesty governing all writers in this period, male or female, there is exceptional emphasis here on the author's 'small' skill, her 'rude unpollisht lines' and her 'barren Muse' – with the feminine pronoun much in evidence along with a strong inherited sense of the link between 'a Woman' and 'all defects' (41, 4, 10). However, through all the apologies and the tone of humility, the reader is left in no doubt of the central features of this book: it is written by a woman, largely for women, about a God who brought about redemption with the willing assistance of women.

A Tale of 'Too Much Love'

The main poem of Lanyer's collection is an extended meditation on the passion and death of Christ. Its title, 'Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum', is an appropriately impassioned exclamation that translates as 'Hail God, King of the Jews', based on the mocking words that were reported to have been affixed to the cross on the first Good Friday (Matthew 27:37). There is no question as to the centrality of this sacred theme in Lanyer's work: the poem follows the pattern of the gospel accounts of Jesus's betrayal, crucifixion and resurrection, and returns again and again to the power of 'that great almightie Lord' who, for love of humankind, gave his 'bruised body' to 'revive / Our sinking soules' (Lanyer (1993), 121, 127). However, the emphasis in this familiar narrative of redemption as told by Lanyer is unfamiliarly and defiantly feminine. The poem does not begin with praise of Christ but of the Countess of Cumberland, Lanyer's chief dedicatee, though the poet's 'praisefull lines' reflect honourably on the creator who 'made thee [the Countess] what thou wert, and art' (51, 53). In a symmetrically framing device, the poem also concludes with an address to the Countess who is commended for her 'choyce / Of this Almightye, everlasting King' as the focus of her thoughts and life (122). Flanked by these panegyrics to the Countess at either end of the poem, the central section of 'Salve Deus' offers a reading of the passion story which is profoundly woman-centred, pausing regularly to address the Countess as its chief anticipated reader, paying close attention to the women of the Bible and in history, and offering at its heart an interlude elaborating on the dream of Pilate's wife. This vivid section, identified by a marginal note as 'Eves Apologie', is an outspoken reinterpretation of the biblical account of the fall, culminating in a defiant refutation of the blame heaped upon women over the centuries. This passage is probably the best-known aspect of Lanyer's work, but it

can only be fully understood in its original 1611 publication context, as part of the extended female-focused project of the poem and within the volume sharing the title *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*.

We have already seen how the poem 'Salve Deus' is preceded and guarded by a phalanx of dedicatory poems specifically directed towards Lanyer's contemporary female readers. Protected in this way, the poem is then itself framed internally by the poet's textual conversations with the Countess of Cumberland, who seems to have been her most active patron. The poem functions as a series of Chinese boxes: the enclosing presence of the Countess then opens onto the narrative of the passion of Christ, which itself reveals at its centre the defence of Eve. What these layers have in common is that each is a story of devotion, forming an interlocking whole in which definitions of love are reconfigured and celebrated. The first love centres on the Countess, who is evidently a 'deere Ladie' to Lanyer and is praised for her 'constant faith like to the Turtle Dove' (Lanyer (1993), 52, 58) in language reminiscent of contemporary love poetry such as Shakespeare's 'The Phoenix and the Turtle', republished in 1611. However, it is Christ to whom the Countess, dovelike, is faithful: the poet's aim is to 'set his glorie forth whom thou lov'st best' (52, 57). As is the case in all devotional poetry, we are reminded that this love is a mutual experience and that human adoration of God is merely a pale reflection of divine love for humankind: as Lanyer exclaims to the Countess early in the poem,

Long mai'st thou joy in this almightie love,
 Long may thy Soule be pleasing in his sight,
 Long mai'st thou have true comforts from above,
 Long mai'st thou set on him thy whole delight.

(53–4)

These repeated invocations, almost a litany of blessings, suggest the way in which the kinds of love expressed in the poem overlap and merge: the poet's love for her subject, the Countess's for God, and God's for the human beings he died to save.

Just before her account of the crucifixion, Lanyer allows her poetic narrative to be interrupted by an apparently minor incident in the Gospel accounts of the trial of Jesus, the attempt by Pilate's wife to persuade her husband not to condemn an innocent man. Lanyer turns this moment into a dramatic 'pause':

O noble Governour, make thou yet a pause,
 Doe not in innocent blood imbrue thy hands;
 But heare the words of thy most worthy wife,
 Who sends to thee, to beg her Saviours life.

(Lanyer (1993), 83–4)

The powerful plea that follows from Pilate's 'most worthy wife' – a mouth-piece for the poet's own advocacy of women – is a bold defence of Eve and her daughters, right through to Lanyer's own contemporaries. The argument is strong and radical without being so outrageous in its claims as to lose the sympathy of her readers, female or male. She concedes that women are the weaker sex (having already hinted earlier in the poem (63) that God's glory can shine more fully through a weaker vessel) but then develops the logical consequences of this position:

But surely *Adam* can not be excusde,
Her fault though great, yet hee was most too blame;
What Weaknesse offerd, Strength might have refusde,
Being Lord of all, the greater was his shame:

(85)

The power of these lines is their combination of rational debating skills with a passionate commitment to right a palpable wrong. The familiar images of the Garden of Eden are daringly reversed: Adam is now shown to have been more at fault than Eve; Adam was tempted by the beauty of the fruit, while Eve fell for the sake of knowledge; the source of subsequent masculine self-assurance and learning is 'Eve's fair hand' from which Adam took 'Knowledge . . . as from a learned Booke' (86). The only 'fault' that Lanyer is prepared to assign to Eve is 'too much love', a fascinating new layer in this poetic exploration of love. Eve's love for Adam leads her to share the apple with him; the fall is the result of a love affair in the beginning. The parallels hinted at in the poem are striking: while Eve's love leads to the fall, Christ's love of humankind – another kind of love that is 'too much', beyond the normal limits of devotion and self-sacrifice – leads to his death on the cross. Only a third kind of love, the devotion shown to Christ by believers such as the Countess and the poet, is in any way an appropriate gesture of response.

'Salve Deus', then, is a triple tale of 'too much love' – a celebration of three levels of devotion – but with a defiant rather than a romantic or purely spiritual purpose. The poem makes clear that Eve's error, to love too generously and share her bounty with Adam, was a 'small' mistake in comparison with the subsequent sin of 'wretched man' in betraying 'Gods deare Sonne' to death on the cross (Lanyer (1993), 86–7). The logical conclusion of Lanyer's argument is driven home in an urgent plea for equality:

Then let us have our Libertie againe,
And challenge to your selves no Sov'raigtie;
You came not in the world without our paine,
Make that a barre against your crueltie;
Your fault being greater, why should you disdaine

Our beeing your equals, free from tyranny?
 If one weake woman simply did offend,
 This sinne of yours, hath no excuse, nor end.

(87)

Despite her initial sense of writing for a female readership, Lanyer is undoubtedly addressing men here – the authorities in power in the city and country where she lived, wrote and published. Using the Bible as her starting point, she has engaged in a process of versified explication and reinterpretation of both Genesis and the Gospels, with St Paul's instructions on women's place undoubtedly also informing her sense of the injustices against women. The poet is here doing what Philip Stubbes commended his wife for doing – reading the Bible, discoursing about its meaning and following through the consequences of its interpretation. This is an enormously significant act of appropriation of scripture in 1611, the year in which the authority of the Bible in its new translation was so prominent and immediate. Here is a woman promulgating her own radical reading of the authorised text of society and faith in the very year that the Bible was overtly linked to the masculine royal person.

Most revealingly, Lanyer herself does not ask for instruction from a male, whether her husband, her priest, or even the King, in order to understand the 'sense' of each word in her biblical texts, as Katherine Stubbes was said to have done. Instead, Lanyer reads and observes and decides for herself, after which she sends her poem to the Queen, and not the King, for approval. In the first dedicatory poem of *Salve Deus*, Lanyer explicitly refers Anna to the core of her poem:

Behold, great Queene, faire *Eves* Apologie,
 Which I have writ in honour of your sexe,
 And doe referre unto your Majestie,
 To judge if it agree not with the Text:
 And if it doe, why are poore Women blam'd,
 Or by more faultie Men so much defam'd?

(Lanyer (1993), 6)

In a fascinating mirror image of the translators reporting back to James with their sections of the ongoing Bible translation (see Chapter 7), here Lanyer reports back to Anna with her poetic paraphrase and asks her to 'judge if it agree not with the Text', a classic definition of biblical scholarship and exegesis. There are clear signs here of Anna's having not only a rival court to James but also, potentially, a rival centre of biblical interpretation. It is possible that Lanyer was drawn to Anna because of her Catholicism (though Lanyer's own ecclesiastical loyalties are unspecified), but it seems more likely that it was gender that brought them into sympathy with one

another. Only a few years later, in 1617, Queen Anna heard the petition of one of Lanyer's dedicatees, the Lady Anne Clifford, Countess of Dorset, while James spoke with her husband, the Earl of Dorset, who was trying to get the King's support in his attempt to persuade Clifford to give up her claim on her family lands. The King ultimately held court with both the Earl and Countess present, but it is very revealing of the gendered separateness of the royal couple that each first heard the one party on its own gender-specific terms (Clifford, 45). In 1611 the separate lives of the King and Queen may already be seen as implied in their associations with two books published in this same year: the King James Version of the Bible and *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, respectively. Their involvement in the (all male) business of authorised biblical translation and the (female) poetic reinterpretation of biblical passages indicates the centrality of the King and Queen to the key issues of textual culture in 1611: the intersection of authority, gender and the word of God.

'Turning Greene Tresses into Frostie Gray': Lanyer's Cooke-ham

Aemilia Lanyer's volume was given an ostentatiously religious overall title – instantly claiming the kind of sacred subject matter that was relatively safe for a woman writer – but the long title poem is in fact followed by a slight and mainly secular work of some 200 lines, entitled 'The Description of Cooke-ham'. This poem appears rather unexpectedly, tucked in after 'Salve Deus' almost as an afterthought in the volume; 'Cooke-ham' and the commendatory poems are presumably what is modestly referred to on the title page as 'divers other things not unfit to be read'. However, 'Cooke-ham' is very much fit to be read, and it marks a bold development in English women's writing – indeed, in the history of literary genres. For 'Cooke-ham' is the first known printed poem in the mode subsequently identified as the 'country house poem' (Hibbard, Fowler), predating the publication of Ben Jonson's 'To Penshurst' by 5 years and probably appearing before Jonson's poem was drafted in manuscript (Lanyer (1993), xxxix–xl). The attraction of a poem of this kind is that it can combine the topographical description of place with a panegyric in praise of the family or individuals associated with it. In Lanyer's case, the people featured in the poem 'Cooke-ham' are her patron the Countess of Cumberland and the Countess's young daughter, Anne Clifford, who are believed to have stayed at the estate for extended periods during the decade prior the publication of *Salve Deus* (Lanyer (1993), xxiv). Once again, Lanyer manages to keep her focus on the virtuous women at the heart of her poetic project.

The poem suggests that Lanyer, speaking in the first person and apparently recounting her own experience of the estate, has spent some time at Cooke-ham with the Countess and her daughter, but they have all now departed from it. The opening words of the poem are the elegiac phrase, 'Farewell (sweet *Cooke-ham*)' and its closing section speaks of the gardens being in mourning because the noblewomen 'went away they know not whither' (Lanyer (1993), 130, 137). Typically, Lanyer appears to establish a tradition and yet simultaneously subverts it. The poem is not about the home of a distinguished aristocratic family and the values of its patriarchal head, but about the inspiring strength of two women who lodged at the house during a period of estrangement from the Countess's husband, the Earl of Cumberland (whose waywardness led to Anne Clifford's subsequent troubles referred to earlier). The Countess is, in Lanyer's view, 'Mistris of that Place', though this is more a sign of respect on the poet's part than an accurate reference to any kind of ownership or inheritance on the part of the Countess. Equally particular to Lanyer's use of the poetic trope of the country house is that 'The Description of Cooke-ham' is not so much a description of the house (even though it is a 'princely Palace') as a lovingly detailed account of its grounds, whose 'Walkes put on their summer Liveries' at the arrival of the female residents and whose 'Grasse did weepe for woe' at their departure (130, 131, 137). Perhaps the most daring aspect of Lanyer's moulding of the genre's potential to suit her needs, therefore, is the poem's tone: it is less a celebration and more a valediction, sombre and sorrowful in timbre.

'The Description of Cooke-ham' is thus unusual in many ways, combining presence and absence, positive and negative, praise and regret, all brought together in its address to a place and to the people linked with it in Lanyer's memory. Strikingly, although its subject is apparently secular, it also manages to combine a pastoral sense of the landscape – filled as it is with birdsong, the sound of '*Philomela* with her sundry leyes' (Lanyer (1993), 131) – with a profoundly spiritual mood: the views from the estate cannot but reveal 'their Creators powre' (133). The key word at the start of the poem is 'grace', meaning not only the aristocratic mien of the Countess and her gift of patronage to the poet but also the virtues associated with the ultimate grace of redemption:

Farewell (sweet *Cooke-ham*) where I first obtain'd
Grace from that Grace where perfit Grace remain'd;

(130)

This is the place, Lanyer goes on to assert, where the Countess's hospitality gave her the opportunity to write the 'sacred Storie', her poem of Christ's

saving passion; Lanyer sees her writing as a 'worke of Grace' in itself (130), a mirror of the divine gift that it seeks to commend. 'Grace' here occupies the shared ground of courtly benevolence and spiritual benefit, and the poem itself reflects this mingling of earthly and heavenly worlds. Cookeham is undoubtedly a specific place with its 'Prospect fit to please the eyes of Kings' and its panorama of 'thirteene shires', which Lanyer rather patriotically boasts is better than almost any 'delight' of 'Europe' (133). But this estate is also inhabited by biblical beings: as the Countess climbs uphill to see the vista of English counties, she simultaneously 'With *Moyses*' mounts 'his holy Hill, / To know his pleasure, and performe his Will' (133).

At the centre of the estate, as Lanyer repeatedly tells the reader, is a 'stately tree', an 'Oake that did in height his fellowes passe', obviously an emblem of national pride and a rallying point in the poem; however, it is also 'much like a comely Cedar streight and tall' (Lanyer (1993), 132), and we are immediately transported into the parallel biblical world in which cedars of Lebanon abound, and trees are generally weighted with significance. The oak that is like a cedar is also reminiscent of 'a Palme tree' that spreads its 'armes abroad', and thus the Christian symbolism is complete: this 'faire tree' is the cross on which redemption was won by the outstretched arms of Christ (132). The tree seems to be the heart of the poem as well as of Lanyer's impressions of the Cookeham estate. She recalls that the Countess would take her there in order to read and discuss 'holy Writ' – the very practice that underlies Lanyer's title poem, 'Salve Deus' – and to 'sing holy Hymnes to Heavens Eternall King' (133). In the end we learn that 'many a learned Booke was read and skand' beneath this 'faire tree' to which the Countess led her 'by the hand' (136). The echoes of Lanyer's radical retelling of the Fall in 'Salve Deus' are very strong here: there, at the fatal tree at the centre of the Garden of Eden, it was Adam who gained 'Knowledge' at Eve's 'faire hand, as from a learned Booke' (86). In both cases, the fruit of the tree in Lanyer's reinterpretation is boldly shown to be good, leading to the gain of something profoundly significant; learning and self-knowledge result, passed on in each case by a woman. Even though the country house poem is kept quite separate from 'Salve Deus' in Lanyer's own little 'learned Booke', it may be seen as a continuation of the fundamental task of reformulating Genesis and reconfiguring the gendered nature of knowledge and self-possession. As Esther Gilman Richey has observed, Lanyer revisits the tree at Cookeham in this 'last rewriting of Genesis' and finds that she is being offered 'the fruit of her own life' (Richey, 83).

Despite the empowering memories explored in Lanyer's 'Cookeham', it remains an elegiac poem, intensely unhappy with the present situation of the speaker and the estate. Both have been to a certain extent abandoned by the Countess and her daughter. Lanyer laments the cruelty of 'Unconstant

Fortune' that leaves her unable to see her 'great friends' once they have all left Cooke-ham, since there is 'So great a difference' between them 'in degree' (Lanyer (1993), 134). The grounds, too, are said to mourn the departure of Lanyer's patrons, expressing in every aspect of the estate a sad 'dismay', a sense of loss that turns 'greene tresses into frostie gray' (137, 138). These instances of pathetic fallacy appear to be more than just a way of accounting for the onset of winter. In a particularly feminine metaphor, Lanyer writes that 'Each brier, each bramble' in the grounds of Cooke-ham tried to pull back the departing guests by catching fast in their skirts, 'thinking to make you stay' (138). Similarly, the house is said to take off the 'garments' that would normally 'grace' it, putting on 'Dust and Cobwebs' instead, thereby defacing its own beauty as a response to the loss of the women who had dwelt within its walls and whom it 'held so deare' (138).

Lanyer's volume, therefore, ends on a note of deep sorrow, inspired by her exclusion from a new Eden on the grounds of class as well as, indirectly, gender. For this new exile from paradise is not only caused by her own lack of status – her residence at Cooke-ham was dependent on the presence of the Countess of Cumberland and her daughter Anne Clifford – but is also the result of the aristocratic women's own exclusion from patriarchal society. The Clifford women were poorly treated by their husband and father, the third Earl, during his lifetime, and in his will they were prevented by their sex from inheriting his extensive northern lands. Thus, though Lanyer seems to have found in the widowed Countess a sympathetic support, the patronage she received was limited by the difficulties of her mentor's own situation. Cooke-ham was not, after all, the Countess's house, but only a temporary lodging. In the opening pages of *Salve Deus*, Lanyer praises Anne Clifford in a dedicatory poem to 'the Ladie Anne, Countesse of Dorcet' (as Clifford had become by 1611), seeing in her a reader with a 'faire minde' in which 'virtue should be settled & protected' (Lanyer (1993), 41). Sadly, Anne's husband saw no such thing and her diaries reveal that he gave her much trouble and sorrow, particularly in his attempts to force her to give up her claim to her father's estates and acknowledge the rights of her 'Uncle of Cumberland' to whom the title had passed (Clifford, 28). Thus the sense of Anne Clifford and her mother as in some way naturally entitled to the homage of the trees and flowers of Cooke-ham is a poetic device unrepresentative of their uncomfortable reality. These women, too, were in a kind of exile from paradise, and their patronage of Lanyer was quite possibly more symbolic than actual. The harsh truth of Anne Clifford's exclusion from her Cumberland inheritance is brought home by another letter of dedication written to a patron during 1611 – that of the composer William Byrd, prefacing his *Psalmes, Songs, and Sonnets* with an epistle 'To the Right Honorable Francis, Earle of Cumberland, Baron Clifford, Lord Broomfleet, Atton, Vescio, Vipont, and Lord of Westmerland' (Byrd, A4').

Byrd praises the musical mind of his patron, Anne's uncle to whom her lands and titles had passed instead of to her. Byrd honours his 'Lordships patronage in general' and his 'many Honourable favours to mee in particular' – distributed with all the magniloquence and grandeur that should have been Anne Clifford's as her father's only surviving offspring. The melancholic mood infiltrating Lanyer's 'The Description of Cooke-ham' is irrevocably linked with the exclusion of her female patrons from their rightful position and the consequence of that situation for her own impoverishment. 1611 marked a moment of achievement in women's access to textual cultures but is also an emblem of the structural injustices to women, of which both the poet and the young Anne Clifford were painfully aware.

Arbella Stuart, 'Patterne of Misfortune'

Among the many distinguished female dedicatees of Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* was the Lady Arbella Stuart, cousin to King James, one who was all too familiar with the constraints placed upon women who might otherwise have played a significant and senior role in society. During the later years of Elizabeth I's reign and after the accession of James, it was assumed by those in authority that there was a serious possibility of Stuart's being the focal point of discontent; there was a prevailing assumption that she might attract plots to oust the reigning monarch and place her on the English throne. Stuart had therefore been confined to the houses of her aristocratic relatives, including that of her indomitable grandmother Bess of Hardwick, for much of her early life, and in the first years of James's reign she was kept under the King's control particularly with regard to marriage. She had nevertheless built up a reputation for liveliness and intelligence, and is addressed by Lanyer in the dedicatory poem to *Salve Deus* as a 'Great learned Ladie' and a 'Rare *Phoenix*, whose faire feathers are your owne, / With which you flie, and are so much admired'. Lanyer invites Stuart to 'cast your eyes upon this little Booke' and, in spite of the regular company she keeps ('*Pallas*, and the Muses'), to 'spare one looke' for the poem since it is about the love of Christ, 'this humbled King' (Lanyer (1993), 17). By the time *Salve Deus* was published in 1611, Stuart herself was facing a royal 'humbling' of life-threatening magnitude.

The previous year, during which she became 35 years old and danced in Samuel Daniel's masque for the investiture of her royal cousin Henry as Prince of Wales, Stuart decided to take matters of matrimony into her own hands. Despite being aware that her marriage choice would lead her into serious trouble, in June 1610 Stuart secretly married William Seymour, a man 12 years her junior who also had royal blood in his veins. This rash decision, along with the evidence of her letters to Seymour, seems to imply

that she had a real affection for him. 'Nothing the State can do with me' she wrote to him later that year, 'can trouble me so much as this newes of your being ill doth' (Stuart, 242). Within less than 3 weeks of their clandestine marriage their secret had been discovered, and husband and wife were promptly imprisoned – separately. At the beginning of 1611 judgement was passed on them, and Seymour was to be incarcerated in the Tower of London for the rest of his life. Stuart was to be returned to house arrest in the far north of England, but she protested against this on grounds of ill health, thus managing to remain near London for the first part of the year. On 3 June 1611, in an audacious move worthy of Mary Frith the 'Roaring Girl' (see Chapter 6), or the cross-dressing heroine of a Shakespearian comedy, Stuart slipped away from those guarding her, dressed in doublet and hose and all the other accoutrements of a gentleman, including a sword (Stuart, 69). Her husband had also managed to evade his captors at the Tower, but thereafter the plan to escape to the continent went horribly wrong: the couple were unable to rendezvous and had to travel separately to the coast to make their crossing to France. Their absence was soon discovered and on 4 June, just 1 day after Seymour and Stuart's bold but ill-fated adventure, James issued a royal proclamation from 'Our Mannour of Greenewich', reminding his subjects that the couple had formerly been imprisoned for 'divers great and hainous offences' and forbidding the offer of any assistance to them in their attempt to 'transport themselves to forreine parts'. On the other hand, any help given in apprehending them would be seen as 'an acceptable service' (James, 'Whereas Wee Are Given', recto). Within a very short time, Stuart was again in custody, this time in the Tower, while Seymour remained in exile on the continent. The drama of this event was widely discussed and the subject of much gossip, with views ranging from sympathy for the couple to fear that Stuart had become a Catholic conspirator. Middleton's 1611 play, *The Lady's Tragedy*, made sympathetic allusion to Stuart's earlier imprisonment with additional dialogue inserted on slips into the manuscript – a method of evading censorship but equally a strong indication of the urgency with which stage drama could intervene in the immediate affairs of the moment (Chakravorty, 80–1). Stuart's female nature was also the subject of much debate and adverse comment: according to an anonymous pamphlet published in Hanover in response to the attempted escape, Arbella Stuart's actions revealed her above all as a rebellious and transgressive daughter of Eve (*Epistola*; Stuart, 71). Lanyer's defence of Eve in 'Salve Deus' could not have been more timely – or more ineffective.

Stuart's own words are preserved in a remarkable series of extant letters that often recall the cruel ironies of a stage tragedy. In 1610, for example, she had written to Seymour that she would consider herself to be 'a patterne of misfortune' if she could only enjoy 'so great a blessing as you so little a

while' (Stuart, 242) – a comment filled with poignant foresight. Early in 1611 she was engaged in writing a series of letters pressing the case for their marriage to be considered lawful; she began to sense that 'every one forsakes me but those that cannot helpe me' and wrote to the Lord Chief Justice urging that she might be allowed 'the ordinary reliefe of a distressed subject' (255, 256). In a letter to Viscount Fenton, written during the second half of March 1611, she refers eloquently to her 'most discomfortable and distressed estate' (257) and, with remarkably persuasive self-consciousness, evokes her situation as a writer and the recipient's as a reader:

I wish your lordship would in a few lines understand my misery for my weaknes is such that it is very paynfull to me to write and cannot be pleasant to any to read . . . (258)

Painful or not, Stuart continued to correspond; it was her only outlet and defence. Her ability to match her tone to suit the correspondent never deserted her: in an appeal to the King she asks for the restoration of the 'comforts' she has lost, 'the principall whearof is your Majesties favour' (263). In other letters from the spring of 1611, however, before her attempted escape, Stuart appears to sink deeper into sickness and depression: she refers to the possibility of 'hastning' her own death by 'voluntary action' and counts herself among 'the most miserable creatures living' (264, 263). As she had written at an earlier stage of her troubled life, her correspondence gives a picture of her 'travelling minde' – a phrase that encompasses both 'travailing' (labouring) and 'travelling' (wandering) – and in her letters she finds an outlet for her 'scribling melancholy' or 'a kinde of madnesse' (168). Sadly, none of her letters survive from after her failed escape in June 1611, but if any were written they would undoubtedly have been full of such bitter 'travail'. Arbella Stuart remained imprisoned in the Tower and died there in 1615.

Women and Manuscript Culture

The survival of a hundred letters written by Arbella Stuart between 1588 and 1611 is not only a remarkable phenomenon in its own right but hints significantly at the otherwise lost wealth of social and personal writing in manuscript by women from this period. As James Daybell and others have shown, letters played a disproportionately important role in the lives of literate women, but just three further examples from 1611 must suffice. The first, like so much correspondence then and now, concerns money: Joan Thynne, widow of John Thynne of Longleat, was engaged in correspondence with her son Thomas during this year, urging him to pay his sister, her

daughter Dorothy, her share of their father's inheritance. The parallels with the situation of Anne Clifford's diverted inheritance are disconcerting, suggesting that the denial of women's financial or legal dues was a recurring aspect of gentry and aristocratic families at the time. Joan Thynne's tone becomes more and more frustrated as the year 1611 progresses, moving from an initial statement that 'these bearers by authority from your sister are coming to you to receive her money' to a subsequent letter containing more outspoken criticism of his repeated failure to keep his promise to pay her, 'which gave both her and myself much discontentment' (Wall, 83). In the second brief example of female epistolary rhetoric from this year, the well-connected Anne Newdigate writes to her 'harts all honoring' friend Elizabeth, Lady Grey, who formed part of a social network of correspondents nurtured by Newdigate from her home in Arbury, Warwickshire, during the first two decades of the seventeenth century. Newdigate's manner is much more amicable than Joan Thynne's, which is only to be expected from a letter whose purpose is friendship rather than negotiation. Anne Newdigate writes to Lady Grey to assure her that, in what Newdigate describes as her own 'pore lives pilgrimages performance', one of her central concerns is that 'our merciful redimer' would pour 'many blessed comforts . . . upon his best beloved', her correspondent Lady Grey (Larminie, 97). The language may be effusive and the spelling suspect, but letters such as this played a crucial role in the developing personal and social expression of women: emotion and experience were being given shape in words and, as Vivienne Larmonie rightly points out, 'important ties were being nourished' by this correspondence even if it may seem to be 'all rhetoric and no news' (Larminie, 93).

One of the most important female correspondents in English from the early and mid-seventeenth century, Elizabeth Stuart, daughter to James and Anna, sister to Prince Henry, was just emerging into adulthood in 1611. As the century progressed, she proved to be a writer who could combine both rhetoric and news in her unique epistolary style. Aged only 15 in 1611, Princess Elizabeth was the second woman, after her mother the Queen, to be honoured by Aemilia Lanyer with a dedicatory poem on the opening pages of *Salve Deus*. Lanyer addresses Elizabeth as a 'Most gracious Ladie' whose 'Name and Virtues' recall those of 'our famous Queene'. Elizabeth I had been dead for 8 years but her memory and 'worth' were often invoked, as here – for she had been, in Lanyer's phrase, 'The *Phoenix* of her age'. The poem adds that, although the Princess's 'yeares be greene', she herself is already blessed with 'goodly wisdom' (Lanyer 11). Elizabeth's marriage to Frederick V, the German Elector Palatine, head of the Protestant Union on the continent and later the ill-fated King of Bohemia, was informally agreed in the spring of 1611. Their first actual meeting and the official betrothal took place the following year, and their wedding ceremony –

which proceeded in spite of the intervening death of her elder brother, Prince Henry – was celebrated on 14 February 1613. Elizabeth's earliest extant letter was written in 1603, and as a very young girl she was primarily exchanging letters with her brother. Although most of these early letters are undated, it is clear that she was writing regularly to him – in French – in 1611. Her letters from this period tend to acknowledge the 'exquisite happiness' that his visits brought her, or thank him for the 'new gift of a beautiful and gentle horse' (Akkerman, #612, #640). Elizabeth's youthful metaphors are elaborate, but she is already learning to use them to good effect in the letters dating from around 1611. She speaks, for example, of the 'sweetness' of her brother's conversation and the 'sour taste' of his absence (#636), but also reports to him her frustration with the inadequacy of language: 'if my pen could explain what is inside my heart she would release a thousand rivers' (#637). There is fascinating evidence that her 'pen' did indeed wield some power, even as early as 1611. She writes from her palace at Kew to her 'noble brother', asking on behalf of 'a Lady' who has, in turn, written to her seeking a place for her son in Prince Henry's household. Elizabeth wittily notes that the young man, Edmund Verney, is disadvantaged by having a disgraced brother, Francis, whom she likens to the biblical outcast Cain (presumably because he had by this time turned to piracy and converted to Islam). However, she urges Prince Henry not to let his image of Edmund, a 'good Abel', be coloured by 'the faults of his unworthy brother Cain' (#630). Clearly Elizabeth's biblical rhetoric had the desired effect, since Edmund Verney joined Henry's household before the year was out.

As we have seen, Aemilia Lanyer dedicated *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* to this young Princess among her other female 'muses', and in her poem to Elizabeth Stuart she describes the work that she is offering the Princess for her perusal as 'the first fruits of a womans wit' (Lanyer (1993), 11). While Lanyer took the unprecedented step of making her 'first fruits' available in printed form, Elizabeth of Bohemia (as she came to be known) shared her 'womans wit' in a manuscript web of correspondence spanning the whole of Europe and virtually her entire life, sustaining her and building contacts through several decades during her exile (both physical and political). Lanyer had one brief poetic flourish in print; there is no evidence of any response to *Salve Deus* in its own day, including from her dedicatees, and the work was not republished until 1993. Elizabeth, on the other hand, used letters to exert influence on a significant scale, whether in politics, philosophy, religion, financial matters or the marriages of her children, for more than 50 years. As Peter Beal has commented, in the early modern period, in spite of the enormous growth of print culture, 'it was by means of *manuscripts*' – letters, reports, warrants, wills – that 'you corresponded with your fellow human beings at long distance' (Beal (1998), 3). Princess Elizabeth

succinctly expressed this in a letter to her brother, tentatively dated 1610–1612: ‘These lines come to you to kiss your hands on my behalf’ (Akkerman, #613). Letters, though slight and ephemeral, are powerful substitutes for direct human contact; as material objects they are charged with the task of touching another person’s ‘hands’, and life. Elizabeth’s letters, as well as those of Arbella Stuart, Joan Thynne, Anne Newdigate and many besides them whose correspondence has been lost, assert the vital role played by women in this manuscript culture of making and developing connections in the textual world of 1611.

In addition to these invaluable caches of letters, there were several other elements of manuscript culture to which women contributed in 1611, including the developing field of self-expression in genres such as journals, conversion narratives and confessional memoirs. This textual revolution was cultivated by the post-Reformation emphasis on introspection, encouraging personal alertness for evidence of election or, more generally, for signs of providence at work in individual lives. Although writings such as these formed a growing trend as the seventeenth century progressed, there are a small number of extant female-authored manuscripts from approximately 1611. (Precise dating of such non-printed material is often problematic, as we have already noted.) These personal documents by women are particularly to be treasured, written as they were in spite of the contemporary obstacles of widespread illiteracy, disapproval, modesty and absence of opportunity, and surviving as they have against all subsequent threats, including mutability, neglect, misogyny, fire and flood. One early modern woman writer who left a vast personal legacy of manuscripts – well over a thousand folios – is Lady Grace Mildmay (1552–1620), whose documents contain an absorbing mixture of daily spiritual meditations, family history, medical remedies and events local to Apethorpe, Northamptonshire, where she and her husband lived (and were twice visited by James I, in 1603 and 1612). Mildmay gathered together many of her writings in the final stage of her life, sometime after 1603, and at one point in her meditations she refers specifically to having been allowed to live for ‘three score years’ (Pollock, 165), suggesting a date of 1611/12. Close to this comment in the manuscript, she describes herself in spiritual terms as ‘a stranger in this world’ whose life is lived in the anticipation of a ‘place’ prepared for her by Christ ‘in his kingdom after this life’ (75). This perspective is dominant in Mildmay’s extensive papers and ties in with the devout day-to-day pattern that she describes in her memoir. Each morning began, in true Protestant fashion, with Bible reading (four books, two from each Testament, plus the Psalm appointed for the day) followed by music practice (lute and voice), the administering of medical care (using her ‘herbal and books of physic’), and the design and ‘execution’ of embroidery (34–5). Her life was apparently ordered, creative and

full of activity, particularly the selfless promoting of 'physic' among the sick in her household and community. For instance, though she herself only had one daughter, she clearly cared for many a 'sucking child'; among her extensive collection of remedies is 'cordial julep' for such an infant, with ingredients that include 'conserve of black pear plums', 'fine powder of ivory and hart's horn', and 'syrup of red field poppy and cowslips' (115). The foundation of her purposeful writing and commitment was her biblical Protestantism, which she regarded as 'the only stability of my mind' and her ultimate 'stay and comfort' (35).

Mildmay's journals suggest a relatively ordered world in which matters temporal and spiritual were well under control. By contrast, the surviving manuscripts of Dionys Fitzherbert paint a picture of a woman undergoing the severe torments of doubt and fear. In her late 20s, this daughter of a gentry family from Oxfordshire began to show signs of extreme religious affliction comparable to what might now be described as depression or a nervous breakdown; to Fitzherbert it was the spiritual experience of those who are once sure of their faith but suddenly 'shake, stumble' and are 'ready to fall' (Hodgkin, 161). The dread of damnation led her to endure what she describes as 'intolerable torments', which onlookers might have found 'in some sort . . . ridiculous' but for those who suffer them 'no tongue can express their force of violent working in a mazed sense' (163). This statement, that 'no tongue can express' what she has been through, contains a profound irony, since Fitzherbert's manuscripts are eloquent evidence to the contrary. She is indeed able to convey in her own words the terrified imaginings of her 'mazed sense', a phrase that in itself expressively combines the idea of amazement with an image of losing her wits in a bewildering 'maze' – recalling Arbella Stuart's reference to her 'travelling minde' (Stuart, 168). However, while Stuart's mind was 'travelling' under the malicious influences of political oppression and personal imprisonment, Fitzherbert's 'sense' was being led through a treacherous maze by religious angst and the terror of divine judgement.

As is the case with Arbella Stuart's letters and Grace Mildmay's manuscripts, an unusually substantial quantity of Dionys Fitzherbert's writings has survived, poignantly and graphically recounting the misery of her condition:

And doubtless they that did see me could not but think I was pressed above measure; yea, I assure myself they thought it almost impossible many times for me to live an hour, but that my heart must needs split and rent in pieces with the unutterable groans and sighs that were continually poured forth, being neither able by tears nor speech to express the unspeakable dolour and torment of my soul. (Hodgkin, 167)

However, the very fact that she is writing this suggests that Fitzherbert did survive these afflictions – she was exceedingly 'pressed' but not, in the

end, tortured beyond the 'measure' with which she could cope. Having come through this traumatic ordeal, she chose to write about her 'unspeakable dolour' in order to give comfort to others who might suffer a similar experience and to make clear that her sufferings were spiritual in origin rather than a physical melancholy or madness. The first draft of her account is dated 1608, soon after her breakdown, but in 1610 or early 1611 she added a seven-page prefatory statement beginning 'Unto all the true mourners in Sion' (159), from which the above quotations are taken. As Elspeth Graham has commented, Fitzherbert's manuscripts depict 'a self looking back on its own near dissolution' (Graham, 226). The purpose of Fitzherbert's preface is to explain why she has been moved to recount this experience of 'near dissolution', which she believed she had undergone in order to show the working of providence and demonstrate the 'inestimable mercy of God' in bringing her to a happy outcome (159). She envisages her readers as 'beloved partakers of the same sufferings and afflictions', for whom her experience can serve as an example. If God has granted recovery to 'so vile and wretched a sinner' as Dionys Fitzherbert, then others can be reassured that he will also extend his 'infinite mercy and faithfulness' to them (169).

Fitzherbert's preface is a fascinating text for many reasons, particularly its awareness of a readership, its intensity and the levels of abjection it depicts: social withdrawal, sickness, fears of nakedness, dread of fire, destructive and suicidal longings. It may be said to epitomise the extremes of Calvinist dread and joy as experienced in a woman's mind and body. But the preface ends confidently with a valedictory prayer for her readers – 'fare ye well, and be strong' in the 'power' of the Lord as well as his 'sweet peace' – after which it is signed, 'Wales 1610' (Hodgkin, 171). As with so many works from this period, in print as well as in manuscript, '1610' can in fact refer to the first 3 months of 1611 (since the system of dating the start of the year from 25 March was still widely used), and the reference to Wales suggests that Fitzherbert wrote this retrospective introduction while staying with her mother and sisters near to several other family members in Glamorgan. It appears, then, that Fitzherbert wrote this commentary on her autobiographical narrative when removed in both place and time from the actual events recounted in the original version. This gives the advantages of distance and clarity to her analysis of the confusing and terrifying events of her recent past; as she admits, she is 'anatomizing' her own experience (159), laying out and dissecting, as it were, her innermost fears and reassurances. When she invites her readers to 'consider attentively the nature and manner of the trials and temptations I was tossed and afflicted withal' (161), she is also going through the same objective experience, 'considering' herself 'attentively' in writing the preface. In its exemplary function, Fitzherbert's account becomes almost Psalm-like as she highlights

the unsupportable burden of sin and the fearful apprehension of God's eternal wrath for the same. Yea, this was it that made the sovereign and kingly prophet David lament so bitterly: Will the Lord absent himself for ever, and will he show no more favour? (161)

By quoting the 'blessed psalmist' here, Fitzherbert not only objectifies her own self in the parallels between her situation and that of David but also draws attention to the influence of the Bible on her own spiritual experiences. Indeed, in this most textual of years, Fitzherbert writes a work founded upon what Tuvill referred to as 'the omnipotency of the word' (Tuvill, 18; see 'Introduction'). Her 'first calling' came from 'searching and reading the holy scriptures', and she explains to the readers of her preface that she was subsequently 'born anew of the immortal seed of the word of God' (Hodgkin, 163). Symbolically, her afflictions arise from the dread of abandonment by God that is often voiced in the Bible, and her recovery is signalled by her own return to coherent speech:

For also, almost in the midst of thoughts of atheism, mistress Carter perceiving by some speeches I then uttered (the which I do not now remember) that I did apprehend aright of God, 'Why then', said she, 'there is a God'. 'Yea', replied I, speaking with great vehemency and lifting up my eyes and hands unto heaven, 'there is a God, and a most just God'. (Hodgkin, 169)

This dramatic moment marks Fitzherbert's recovery of spiritual and physical health; the verbal interaction recounted here reinstates the suffering narrator as a participant in society, capable of verbal interaction and the lucid use of language. Her 'strange and fantastical imaginations' (165) have been banished, along with the speechless despair that they induced, and significantly she encourages others to treat 'any little ones which by occasion are fallen into any fault' with compassion and, above all, 'a hearty speech' (171).

In 1610/1611, Dionys Fitzherbert was writing this preface to her already-existing narrative of the disturbing afflictions she experienced in 1607–1608; at the same time, in 1611, another Englishwoman in her late 20s, Mary Ward, was undergoing visionary encounters that she too would later record in a remarkable manuscript account. However, the many striking coincidences linking the two women – the year, their ages, their desire and ability to write about their own lives, their vulnerability to sickness and their perhaps consequent openness to spiritual experience – should not be allowed to mask the fundamental contrast between the contents of their visions. Whereas Fitzherbert came from a Protestant background and was testing the limits of the Calvinist doctrines of human depravity and divinely ordained predestination, Ward was a young nun, the daughter of a recusant

Catholic family (with three uncles implicated in the Gunpowder Plot in 1605), who felt that she was being called to take an active part in spreading the ancient faith as promoted by the Jesuits. Dionys Fitzherbert was tentatively developing a manner of writing about the self that would become widespread in a more formalised confessional mode among lay Protestants in the mid and later seventeenth century (including, among others, Hannah Allen and John Bunyan). Mary Ward's account, by contrast, echoes a long Catholic tradition of mystical writing (including the *Revelations* of Dame Julian of Norwich) emerging from devotional meditation practised as a contemplative discipline. But Ward, too, though associated with pre-Reformation Christianity, was moving into new territory both geographically and symbolically. By 1611 she had moved from her home in Yorkshire to France, and having left the two French convents with which she had already been associated, she set up a small independent community of English Catholic women in St Omer, with the support of the Jesuits, to teach and live a religious life.

Ward's restless and pioneering spirit did not stop there, however. As she wrote in a letter of 1620,

About this time, in the year 1611, I fell sick in great extremity, being somewhat recovered by a vow made to send myself in pilgrimage to our Blessed Lady of Sichem, being alone in some extraordinary repose of mind, I heard distinctly, not by sound of voice but intellectually understood, these words, 'Take the same of the Society', so understood as that we were to take the same both in matter and manner, that only excepted which God by diversity of sex hath prohibited. (Miola, 163)

The heart of this passage is the intriguing phrase 'intellectually understood'; this is not a vision that strikes the senses but an instruction of divine wisdom that energises her intellect. The command – 'Take the same of the Society' – is interpreted by Ward to mean that her new female community should be founded upon the same principles as the Society of Jesus – that is, the Jesuits, the male priestly order founded by Ignatius Loyola that formed the backbone of the counter-Reformation. These 'few words' gave Ward 'so great measure of light' as well as 'comfort and strength' that she reported her 'whole soul' to be 'changed' by it. Like Fitzherbert, Ward uses her own words to recount how her entire outlook is transformed by words, so that it was 'impossible' for her to doubt that they came from God. Unlike Fitzherbert, however, Ward hears words that are not biblical, and the instructions they give do not concern her own soul but the work and organisation of the devout community to which she belongs. Words are not the heart of the matter for Ward, as they may be seen to be for Fitzherbert in her Protestant religion of the word; for the Catholic Ward, they are the

means to an end, being a message from God, 'whose words are works' (Miola, 163).

The stark command, 'Take the same of the Society', as 'intellectually understood' by Mary Ward, gave this intrepid woman a radical purpose that she spent the rest of her life attempting to fulfil. Putting into practice the 'words' that must lead to 'works' – by, in effect, establishing a female branch of the Jesuits in 'matter and manner' – caused Ward and her spiritual sisters 'extreme troubles', as she put it in 1620 (Miola, 164). They were openly criticised as the 'Jesuitesses' and the 'galloping girls' (Peters, 341) for attempting to combine a life of contemplative prayer with active teaching outside the walls of their institute. In 1631 they were condemned by the Inquisition, their schools were closed down, and Ward was imprisoned for 9 weeks. She died in 1645, remaining loyal to her daring interpretation of women's role in the Catholic church; it took until 1911, exactly 300 years after her initial vision, for her inspiration to be fully recognised and upheld by the church authorities (O'Brien, 5).

1611, textually speaking, was thus a year of bold women in print and in manuscript: Aemilia Lanyer, responding to the minor role of Pilate's wife in the Gospel and giving her a central place in a daring poetic reinterpretation of the Fall and the Passion; the Countess of Cumberland and her daughter Anne Clifford, acting as patrons to Lanyer and enabling her to write at and about Cooke-ham in ways that would quietly change literary history; Lady Arbella Stuart, expressing herself from prison, attempting to defend her actions in epistolary rhetoric and devising an escape worthy of drama or fiction; Joan Thynne and Anne Newdigate, writing letters that fine-tune their social world and the place of women and their children within it; Princess Elizabeth, setting out on a lifetime of letter writing across Europe; Lady Grace Mildmay, leaving her family a legacy of memoirs, meditations and remedies; Dionys Fitzherbert and Mary Ward, recounting their life-changing spiritual experiences at opposite ends of the doctrinal spectrum, redefining themselves in relation to the given 'word'. As Ward herself later wrote, in her 1617 *Conference on Fervour and Verity*, 'I would to God that all men understood this verity, that women if they will, be perfect, and if they would not make us believe we can do nothing and that we are "but women", we might do great matters' (Miola, 167). The depth and variety of writing by women in 1611 goes a long way towards justifying Ward's outspoken confidence.