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Review Essay: Susanne Woods. *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*

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new and old thoughts as being at war in her mind. Generally, though, in Cavendish's writings, the mind is likened to Nature, which, though various and wild, is not necessarily in conflict with herself. Nature enjoys exercising herself in multiple ways, sometimes to delude ambitious seekers after her truths. Likewise, Cavendish herself enjoys playing with diversity, letting herself be hard to follow, and tricking crabbed readers. Her sense of humor is yet to be fully understood. At its best, Battigelli's *Margaret Cavendish and the Exiles of the Mind* reminds us of Cavendish's unique ability to represent—in both her natural philosophy and in her writing style—the fascinating workings of one human mind at a particular moment in history. It is to Battigelli's great credit that, while showing the influences of other thinkers, she honors the Cavendish whose writings openly acknowledge the changeable and elusive qualities of the mind. Battigelli puts it this way: "Her candour in displaying the chaotic activity of the thinking life is no doubt one of the most striking and unsettling characteristics of her work" (58).

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Susanne Woods. *Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999. xvi + 198 pp.

The object of this excellent full-length treatment of Aemilia Lanyer's life and poetry is clearly stated by Susanne Woods at the end of her first chapter: to "[situate] the first self-proclaimed public woman poet in English among the equally ambitious men of her time" (41). To this end, Wood marshals her considerable archival skills and critical expertise to, first, shape the biography of this woman writer who lived "on the margins" of power during the last years of Elizabeth's reign and almost the first fifty years of the next century, and second, to position this writer's self-representation and literary works in a dialogue with generically similar works by several of the best known male writers of the age. In her book, Woods provides us an exemplary model for the feminist enterprise of recovering neglected women writers and for reassessing and rewriting literary history.

The skeleton facts of Aemilia Bassano Lanyer's life are generally well known: the daughter of a Venetian-born court musician and his English common-law wife, she was born in 1569. For a brief time in the early 1590s, she was the mistress of Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon. When she became pregnant with his child, she was married to another musician,

Alfonso Lanyer; her son, Henry, was born in March 1593. She visited the astrologer, Simon Forman, several times in 1597; published a book of religious verse, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, in 1611; was widowed in 1613; ran a school for two years in 1618–20; took over the care of her grandchildren in 1633 when her son died; and died herself in 1645. A. L. Rowse has identified her as Shakespeare's Dark Lady of the Sonnets, although the attribution is extremely doubtful; Woods reviews thoroughly this attribution in her third chapter, finally asserting that such an attribution "is a matter of faith" (98).

Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum, Lanyer's only extant work, is an eclectic book. It opens with eleven poem and prose dedications, nine to powerful women at court, including most significantly Margaret, countess of Cumberland, who is Lanyer's chief dedicatee. The 1840-line poem which follows is a meditation on Christ's passion from a woman's perspective that has the defense of good women as part of its structuring. The book's final piece is "The Description of Cooke-Ham," a country house poem which predates the publication of Ben Jonson's "To Penshurst" by five years, and which provides an elegiac picture of an English country home as well as a celebration of a community of women.

Woods contextualizes Lanyer's work by looking at strategies of representation and of poetics in selected texts by writers with whom Lanyer might have been familiar: specifically, Spenser, Shakespeare, Jonson, and Donne; in her final chapter, after examining Lanyer alongside Donne's poetic strategies, Woods draws some correspondences between Herbert and Milton's religious poetry and Lanyer's. Such a comparative strategy, on the one hand, prevents Lanyer from assuming the role of unique and anomalous "woman" poet, and on the other hand, demonstrates how gender is a useful tool for literary analysis. For example, we see Lanyer in a position similar to Spenser, of the court but not in it, and suing for patronage from afar. We see Jonson "learning" from Lanyer how to modify the Augustan convention of contrasting an idyllic world with a fallen human civilization, so that place and domicile can celebrate a patron and a social system. And we see Milton, recognizing as does Lanyer, the fatal attraction of beauty, but assessing responsibility for the paradisaic fall and giving Eve a voice in a very different way from Lanyer.

Lanyer: A Renaissance Woman Poet is a valuable contribution to the study of early modern literature for several reasons. First, in its comprehensive first chapter, Woods brings together the known facts of Lanyer's life, dispels the numerous myths that have received currency, and shapes the facts into a writer's biography. Second, in her literary analysis of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, Woods demonstrates both the aesthetic and historical importance of the poetry, showing how Lanyer participates in the tradition of religious poetics of her time, and how she is resistant to it. And

finally, in its balance of archival and theoretical scholarship, *Lanyer* is a model of the literary biography genre.

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Anglo-Saxonism and the Construction of Social Identity. Ed. John D. Niles and Allen J. Frantzen. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997.

This collection of nine essays, most of which began as papers delivered at Berkeley's Old English Colloquium in 1994, extends the research program envisioned by Allen Frantzen in *Desire for Origins* (1990). In that book Frantzen downplayed philological approaches to Old English works in favor of exploring the shifting cultural contexts of Anglo-Saxon studies. Like its precursor, this work focuses on the history of Anglo-Saxonism as an idea and cultural force. It is especially interested in how Anglo-Saxonism has been used over the centuries to sponsor various and sometimes surprising notions of political, religious, and racial identity. As several of these essays demonstrate, this "series of purposeful appropriations"—the editors' working definition of culture—was well underway even during the Anglo-Saxon period. This point alone disables the predictable criticism that the contributors have forsaken the investigation of Anglo-Saxon language and literature in favor of trendier cultural studies. It is more useful, perhaps, to regard this collection as a thoughtful analysis of an elusive but persistent desire for an unmediated encounter with the past and its literature.

The Reformation provides the backdrop for the first study, in which Frantzen shows how a particular notion of Anglo-Saxonism emerges from John Bale's sixteenth-century commentary on Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*. In one episode of Bede's work, itself a strong statement of eighth-century Anglo-Saxonism, Gregory the Great notices a group of boys at the marketplace in Rome. Told that they are called "Angli," or English, Gregory puns on the Latin word for angel. Following the established anti-Roman rhetorical strategies of his day, Bale implies that Gregory's interest in the boys was sexual. By doing so, Frantzen claims, Bale "queers" Bede by calling attention to the possibility of homosexual relations in the episode. At least one of Bale's contemporaries took the bait; in 1565, Thomas Stapleton's translation of Bede's *History* calls Bale a "venimous spider being filthy and uncleane himself" who deliberately injected Bede's account with "poisoned sence and meaning." Rather than vilifying Bale for this rhetorical strategy, Frantzen argues that Bale's anti-Roman diatribe "must be understood in the context of his idealization of