

“NOBLE VIRTUES” AND “RICH CHAINES”: PATRONAGE IN THE POETRY OF  
AEMILIA LANYER

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ABSTRACT

Aemilia Lanyer’s *Salve Dues Rex Judaeorum* has been primarily discussed by literary scholars as a protofeminist text, one that celebrates and defends female community. While such readings have illuminated Lanyer’s radical claims of gender equality, these interpretations tend to idealize Lanyer’s utopian community, thereby effacing the historical roots of its construction.

This study aims to return to the social, political, and economic framework that shaped Lanyer’s work, in order to demonstrate how her Eden is less an allegorical utopia than a reaction to and incorporation of patronage in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. I also seek to highlight the contradictions of Lanyer’s work as reflections of her struggle to carve out a space for herself as a female writer in an essentially patriarchal realm.

Lanyer’s portrayal of her prospective patrons, and her own poetic self-fashioning, navigates the essentially masculine patronage system governing both the imaginary and actual realms of *Salve Deus*. Consequently, Lanyer reinfects issues of female alliance, marriage, and inheritance in light of her bid for patronage, and her work can subsequently be viewed as a strategy of betterment on Lanyer’s behalf.