The Shakespearean Connection To Aemilia Lanyer (1569-1645)

John Hudson

This paper proposes the feminist poet Aemilia Bassano Lanyer as a new Shakespearean collaborator. Already known as a likely candidate for the 'dark lady' of the Sonnets, this work attempts to bridge the gap between how she is treated in Shakespearean criticism and in the specialist area of Lanyer studies. A highly educated woman, of Jewish/Venetian and Moorish ancestry, who had close family connections to the theatre, who was herself a major experimental poet, her writings refer to the Shakespearean works, while several of the plays refer to her by name as a poet and demonstrate unusual areas of knowledge that she possessed. Aemilia Bassano Lanyer emerges as a key figure in understanding the complex pattern of inter-relationships that lies behind the works of William Shakespeare.

Much has been written in the Shakespearean literature about the so-called 'dark lady' of the Sonnets[1], which has mostly appeared quite separately from the research conducted by Lanyer scholars into the life and writings of Aemilia Bassano Lanyer.[2] This paper is an attempt to establish a bridge between the two approaches, since Shakespearean scholarship needs to take better account of the existence of a small number of highly educated women in the period. I will begin by reviewing some aspects of Aemilia's life, and then how she refers to Shakespeare in her writings, before examining how the Shakespearean works refer to her, and some unusual co-incidences of biography, concluding with some of the implications of her as a possible new collaborator in the Shakespearean works.

So what were her family and their connections to the theatre? Over the period of a century, the Bassanos and their relatives not only became established as Court musicians but also benefited from the growth of the theatre industry. Of around two hundred people who lived in England as secret Jews or Marranos (Shapiro, 76), at least nineteen men had found some protection as Court musicians. Among these, the Bassano family was one of the largest. They shared their household with some of their cousins, the Lupos (the string musicians), who had been imprisoned as Marranos under Henry VIII (Holman, 44-5). The patriarch of the family, violinist Ambrose Lupo, who was otherwise known as 'Ambrosius deomaleyex', a Latin version of the Sephardic dynasty 'de Almaliach', was certainly "in origin an Iberian Jew" (Prior, 257). Two of the Bassanos also married into the wealthy Venetian Sephardic family the de Nasis. However to outsiders the family probably appeared indistinguishable from ardent Puritans who followed Mosaic Law.

Recruited especially from Venice, in 1538-9 the Bassano brothers became established as the Court recorder troupe, and in that capacity they contributed “some of the earliest Elizabethan stage-music” (Izon, 335) to the plays and masques that were staged at Court. Other musicians included Alfonso Ferrabosco I (whose son inter-married with the Bassanos), who took a leading role in the masque to celebrate the treaty of Blois in June 1572. Not only were the Bassanos experienced in providing stage-music at Court, they were also the musical family that lived the closest to The Theatre and The Curtain which were built in the 1570s.[3] Consequently, when the playhouses were built almost in their back yard --- about 200 yards away from their home in Spitalfields ---- the Bassanos were well positioned to supply them with musical services, since any play required music before and after the performance as well as sound effects throughout. In addition, at least for small roles, in these playhouses there was no “line of demarcation between musicians and the players” and the “musicians took minor parts on the stage” in crowd scenes, armies and so on (Cowling, 80). In Ben Jonson’s *Every Man Out of his Humour* the sackbut player even delivered the prologue! So if some of the Jewish musicians had minor walk-on parts, it might explain why Hamlet oddly mentions having seen certain players who had neither the accent nor the gait of Christians (3,3,31).

The position of the Bassano family was strengthened further in the early 1580s after Aemilia Bassano became the teenage mistress of the elderly Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, the Lord Chamberlain. The Bassanos thereafter obtained two “good friends at the court” as they put it, and possessed an important influencer over the man responsible not only for the court music, but also the court entertainments and the management of the theatre industry. Aemilia knew three of the most important men in London’s theatrical life, since Lord Hunsdon would become the patron of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men in 1594, and she gave birth to his illegitimate son Henry, which was why he supported her financially until his death. His son-in-law, Charles Howard, was the patron of the acting company known after 1585 as The Lord Admiral’s Men. Finally, Aemilia also knew Lord Hunsdon’s legitimate son Sir George Carey, who would later commission three of the Shakespearean plays – *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Twelfth Night*.

Due perhaps in part to this high level political connection, a Bassano association with theatrical music flourished so that by the early 1600s some of Aemilia's closest relatives had become firmly established in senior positions in the provision of technical services — music composition, orchestral directing, performing and set design --- for the King's Men, both at Court performances and in the Blackfriars indoor theatre. This was a lucrative business for them. Aemilia's brother-in-law Nicholas Lanier, worked on at least seven masques involving actors from the King's Men, for which he sang the songs, designed the sets, or wrote music. Her sister-in-law's husband, Alphonoso Ferrabosco II also wrote music for seven of the masques ---- and Ben Jonson praised him in the introduction to one of them making a pledge to their friendship (Wilson, 31-2).

Her maternal cousin Robert Johnson worked on the *Masque of Oberon* (1611) in which he directed 16 musicians in the dances of the satyrs and the fairies (performed by the actors "imployed" for that purpose). He also directed 22 lutenists in the Prince of Wales' dance, for which he was paid the large sum of 30 pounds. Over ten years he specifically wrote music for the playwrights who worked with the King's Men, including Middleton, Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher — as well as several of the Shakespearean romances. Overall, Johnson created half a dozen pieces of music or dances that appear in the late Shakespearean plays. For *The Tempest* Johnson wrote 'Full Fathom Five' and 'Where the Bee Sucks'. For *Cymbeline* he wrote 'Hark hark the lark'. For *The Winter's Tale* he wrote the song 'Get you hence' (Cutts, 1955,110).

In addition, King's Men Players "almost invariably" (Cutts, 1955:115) performed the anti-masque dances of several masques, for which Johnson composed the music, and which were then transferred into the Shakespearean plays. For instance, the satyrs dance from the *Masque of Oberon* was included as the dance of the leaping men of hair in *The Winter's Tale* (4,4,319-337). The witches dance and Johnson's song 'Come away Hecate' were taken from the Masque of Queens and included in *Macbeth* (3,5,34). Finally, the rural May dance, which was probably written by Johnson for the *Masque of the Inner Temple* (1613) was included, featuring a fool and the baboon with his long tail, in *Two Noble Kinsmen* (3,5,124-136). In each of these three cases the Shakespearean play incorporates a prior piece of music created by Robert Johnson which was already in the repertoire of the King's Men (Cutts, 1960,111). Finally, by 1633, a century after the earliest family members had arrived at the Tudor Court, at least half of the musicians

who accompanied the King's Men were members of the extended Bassano family, being named Bassano, Lupo or Lanier (M.Wilson, 187-8).

During her many years of being kept in "great pomp" as Lord Hunsdon's mistress, Aemilia had an unrivalled opportunity to learn about the theatre. Furthermore, being able to act a role was critical to Court life, where the style was set by the Queen herself. The "profession of a very courtier" as Puttenham wrote in *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), was "in plain terms to be able to dissemble". It was because for the courtier "in any matter of importance his wordes and his meaning very seldom meete" that the use of allegory was essential. It enabled men to act, namely to "speake otherwise than we think." Puttenham claims that without it men cannot "thrive and prosper" "not onlie every common courtier but also the gravest counsellor." In this manner Aemilia would have learned the skills of dissembling that were not only essential in Court life but certainly required for a dark skinned Jew 'passing' in a white Christian society. Indeed, Aemilia's collection of allegorical patronage poetry *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611), which is dedicated to Queen Anne and other noble ladies, and is the first volume of original poetry published by a woman in England[4], shows great skill in dissembling — notably in the subtlety with which it satirizes those to whom it is dedicated (Schnell, 83,90-91).

So does Aemilia's poetry have any resemblances to Shakespeare? A brief overview of her poetry shows no formal similarities. In the *Salve Deus* collection two of the prefatory pieces and an afterword are prose. All the poems are in iambic pentameter, although the verse forms vary. Her book is radical in its theology and politics and could aptly be called proto-feminist. Both the prefatory poems and the epic poem argue for women's religious and social equality, and one of the prefatory poems criticizes class privilege. The volume comprises:

- a set of prefatory letters to various noble ladies;
- the 1840-line epic poem *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum (*Hail, God, King of the Jews)
- a short poem *The Description of Cooke-ham* which is the first country house poem to be published in English and
- a final prose address 'To the doubtfull Reader'.

Addressed to the God of the Jews, the volume appears to be an unusually free and critical adaptation of the Gospels, focusing on the Passion. Taken together, the entire *Salve Deus* collection amounts to a substantial poetical work, around 3,000 lines, which is roughly the same length as one of the major plays. Berry notes not only that it opens

and closes with "a sense of mischief, perhaps of satire" (Berry, 212), but that the style of digression resembles the 'dilation' that has been found to characterize the Shakespearean plays. It also reflects a scholarly compositional process similar to that of the plays and is so complex and layered that it has been described as being as "intractable as Shakespeare" (Matchinske, 438).

Like Shakespeare, the *Salve Deus* collection uses several common verse forms. The letters *To Lady Susan* and *To Lady Katherine* are written in iambic pentameter in ababcc form like *Venus & Adonis. To Ladie Lucie* is in rhyme royal ababbcc like *The Rape of Lucrece,* the letter *To Mary Pembroke* uses four-line stanzas like those in *Phoenix and the Turtle*, and the Cooke-ham poem is written in heroic couplets like *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* The *Salve Deus* poem itself was written as an epic, in ottava rima*,* and has a relationship to the work of Giles Fletcher the younger, cousin of John Fletcher who worked on *Henry VIII* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*.

While the *Salve Deus* collection refers to the plays of Lyly and possibly Daniel, the greatest number of allusions are to Shakespeare. The letter to Mary Pembroke makes a unique reference to "faire Dictina" as the moon goddess who appears also as "Dictima" in *Love's Labor's Lost* (4,2,37). Each is an absolute hapax, used only once in English literature, but so closely related. Meanwhile, the entire crucifixion account in *Salve Deus* was influenced by the *Rape of Lucrece* and in the expression "no excuse nor end" (line 832) even quotes it directly (Bowen 2001, 111 and 2003,215).

Although the verse in the 'Salve Deus' epic poem is not Shakespearean in style, the Cooke-ham poem on the other hand, does have certain resemblances. It uses the unusual combination of words 'warble', 'bird' and 'ditty' and although these are common tropes, a search on the EEBO database reveals that they appear all *together* in only one other text of the period — the speeches of Oberon and Titania in Act 5 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* As for the combination of the words 'Philomela', 'ditty' and 'pretty', those appear all together in the Shakespearean poem no. 14 in *The Passionate Pilgrim.* So the language of the Cooke-ham poem neatly bridges two different Shakespearean texts. Similarly, as Caroline Spurgeon points out in her work on Shakespeare's imagery, the plays are the only ones to pay attention to how frost damages plants — for instance Titania's speech about how "The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts" (2,1,107). Yet a

similar comment appears in the Cooke-ham poem which refers to a garden in which the flowers die "their frozen tops like Ages hoarie haires" (line 143).

Other unusual uses of Shakespearean vocabulary include the word 'thoughted' which had previously appeared in only 7 texts, 2 of which were Shakespearean. Similarly the word 'umpire' used in the letter to Mary Pembroke "To which as umpires now these ladies go" appeared in 1592 at the performance of *1 Henry VI* — assuming it was the version in the First Folio — and in only one other non Shakespearean text. Another example is the word 'disparagement' employed also in the letter to Mary Pembroke, which was used in only 6 texts, 3 of which were Shakespearean. An analysis of common terms in *Salve Deus,* on the other hand, has been inconclusive (Craig, 1-42).

In terms of literary composition, *Salve Deus* is similar to the Shakespearean works in incorporating fictional passages, and characters, into the source material. For instance, the key passages of Gospel of Matthew are incorporated into a narrative of women, and new imaginary passages about Pilate's wife and an angel are added in. Like the Shakespearean works, *Salve Deus* uses Biblical typology. It also offers the discerning reader an anti-Gospel plus a rewriting of the *Book of Revelation*. The parable of the bridegroom and the foolish virgins is used four times in *Salve Deus*—which echoes half a dozen other uses in the Shakespearean plays.[5]

Like the Shakespearean works, the Biblical source that is most used in *Salve Deus* is the Gospel of Matthew. Regarding other sources, the *Salve Deus* collection models a community of noble women on the writings of Christine de Pisan — the 1521 Ansley translation of which had been dedicated to the 3rd Earl Grey, the predecessor of the deceased husband of Susan Bertie, in whose household Aemilia was educated until 1582. Although familiar at Court from the tapestries that depicted it, Pisan's work was not alluded to by any other writer during the English Renaissance, except Shakespeare who used it both in *Henry VI* pt 1,1,2,83-4 and in *As You Like It* 2,7,175-9, and possibly in *All's Well That Ends Well*. In addition *Salve Deus* also draws upon other popular Shakespearean sources like Chaucer, Gower, Ovid and Boccaccio.

On the surface, the main difference from Shakespeare would appear to be that the *Salve Deus* collection is not dramatic — but apparently a collection of religious patronage

poetry. That however, is not entirely accurate. As Lanyer scholars have pointed out, the subject of the work is not primarily religious, but rather social relationships, freedom, equality and democracy, and about unruly women trying to get the upper hand on men ---- the same kind of content that appears in the Shakespearean plays ---- and the religious materials are employed as a framing device. Moreover, one 160 line section of the volume---contained in the letter to Mary Sidney—has dramatic qualities very similar to a Jacobean masque. Indeed it employs the same unusual dramatic device of Juno's descending chariot which appeared in the 79 line masque inside *The Tempest* (Faith, 88-105). This means that Shakespeare's only use of the masque is directly preceded—a year earlier----by the same device in Aemilia's poetry, and both seem to be re-writings of Daniel's *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (1604).

Moreover there is also another link to *The Tempest*. In December 1598 Aemilia named her daughter Odillia. It was an unusual name, not found in any English literary source, but a character of that name appeared two years later as the female lead in the apocryphal Shakespearean play *The Weakest Goeth to the Wall* (1600) in which the storm scene resembles Peregrine Bertie's account of his trip to Denmark, and appears to have been a source for *The Tempest*.

Finally, like Shakespeare, the author of the *Salve Deus* collection was extremely imaginative and innovative—for instance, the Cooke-ham poem is the first country house poem to have been written since Roman times. Overall, the author of *Salve Deus* was most innovative in three respects, mixing up the sacred and the secular in the same poetry, being the first woman in the country to publish an original volume of poetry, and the first to publish a critical commentary on the Gospels.

In 2003, Ilya Gililov described the author of *Salve Deus* as "a paradoxical person, a gifted poet, erudite and intellectual, whose ideas were often ahead of her time, a person who deserved the high honor of being a literary coeval of Shakespeare!". Perhaps excessively, he claimed that "Many of the stanzas may be regarded as among the highest attainments of 17th century poetry in England" (Gililov, 368,312). However, he also denied that a woman from a lower class family of musicians could have written this verse — despite being educated from the age of seven in the household of a countess. Instead, Gililov attributed *Salve Deus* to Elizabeth Rutland, who he regarded as having

also written the works of Shakespeare together with her husband the Earl of Rutland. Although as demonstrated above, there are indeed many odd relationships to the Shakespearean works, there is no evidence that *Salve Deus* was written by anyone other than Aemilia. Indeed the evidence of the sonnets and plays themselves suggests that she, and not Rutland, had a role as a collaborator in their production.

Turning now to the question of how the Shakespearean works refer to her, the evidence that Aemilia Bassano Lanyer was the 'dark lady' of the Sonnets was first brought forward by A. L. Rowse in 1973, and has been positively supported in the last few years both by Stephanie Hopkins Hughes and by Martin Green.[6] It need not be revisited here (other than to inquire why it is assumed that those sonnets were written in the first person). More importantly, as Dorothy Kehler noted in 'Shakespeare's Emilias and the Politics of Celibacy', the name appears in various spellings, rather a lot — far more indeed than would reflect a normal statistical name distribution. Indeed, rather oddly, it is the most popular woman's name used in the plays. Even more significant is the appearance of both the names Aemelius and Bassianus in *Titus Andronicus*, observed by a descendant of the Bassano family in a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* of October 1997. The letter also noted that these names reappear in the two Venetian plays, as Aemelia in *Othello* and as Bassanio (an alternate spelling of the family name) in *Merchant of Venice*, echoing the poet's Venetian connection.

More important however, is the *way* in which these names appear, in connection with the imagery of a dying swan. As a metaphor for the poet, the swan dying to music originates in the work of Ovid. It became a commonplace in Renaissance literature and was used by sonnet-writer Sir Thomas Wyatt in *Lyke as the Swanne*, by Erasmus referring to the 16th century poet/lutenist John Skelton, by Thomas Watson referring to himself in his translation of the *First Set of Italian Madrigals*, by Thomas Lodge referring to himself in *Sonnets to Phyllis,* by Phineas Fletcher referring to himself in *Purple Island*, by the author of *Groatsworth*, by John Davies referring to the poet in an epigram in *Wits Bedlam*, by Simion Grahame referring to himself in *The Anatomie of Humors*, by Matthew Roydon referring to Sir Philip Sidney in *The Phoenix Nest*, and in the introduction to the works of John Weever. Almost all the references to a dying swan in English Renaissance literature are references to a poet, and many are self-referential.

This seems the appropriate context in which to understand the dying swans when they appear in Shakespeare.

There are three references to swans dying to music in the Shakespearean plays. The first of these is in *Merchant of Venice* — where the person who dies is a man whose name is **Bassanio**;

> [PORTIA] Let music sound while he doth make his choice;
> Then, if he lose, he makes a swan-like end,
> Fading in music. (3,2,43-5)

The family name of what is today normally called the Bassano family was also spelt as Bassany or Bassani, an alternative spelling found in the London burial records. Secondly there is a swan dying to a doeful hymn in *King John* in which **John's son** Henry says;

> [HENRY] I am the cygnet to this pale faint swan
> Who chants a doleful hymn to his own death. (5,7,21-22).

The third example is in *Othello* where the person who refers to herself as dying like a swan is **Aemelia;**

> [AEMELIA] I will play the swan
> And die in music: Willow, willow, willow. (5,2,245-6).

This repeats the song which is spelt **'willough'** in the Folio text. These names AEMILIA JOHNSON BASSANIO WILLOUGH(BY) are the baptismal name, mother's name, father's name, and childhood 'adopted' name of the author of *Salve Deus*. Because the total number of Elizabethan names is known, it can be easily shown statistically that this is not likely to be a co-incidence.

Furthermore, the passages in *Othello* about the willow song and Aemelia dying a death like a swan did not appear in the 1622 Quarto at all, but were part of an extra 163 lines that appeared in the First Folio of 1623 — as if added on — as Walker has argued. Even if these lines were part of a separate longer play script, they were still highlighted by the decision not to include them in the Quarto but to do so in the Folio. However, since they amount to only 8% of the lines there would have been little dramatic reason to cut them out. Alternatively, if they had survived until 1623 as a separate piece of paper, the question that needs to be answered is why. The most likely explanation is that they were added on. No critic has suggested that they are not in an authorial hand, yet at this date Shakespeare was dead, as were several suspected collaborators. However Aemilia

Bassano Lanyer was still alive. She presumably would have had the greatest interest in having these words included in *The Tragedy of Othello The Moor of Venice* firstly because they form part of the underlying pattern of the dying swans that generates her full name, and secondly because they associate it with the Venetians and the Moors of her own ancestry. Whereas the names of any other collaborators never appear in the texts of the plays at all, Aemilia's names not only appear but do so in deliberate and prominent fashion by linking her name to the standard Renaissance image of the poet.

What possible motivation could anyone else have had for concealing Aemilia's names in the plays in this deliberate fashion? But if Aemilia herself were responsible, why would she not have wanted to have her name more publicly associated with such great works of entertainment? A plausible answer is that she wanted her name to be associated with them---but not in her lifetime---which is why the names were buried so deeply. Yet the convention that women did not write plays was weakening—at least for closet drama[7]---so what would she have had to fear from such recognition? Again, a possible answer to this question is found not in the surface meaning of the plays, but in what lies beneath in the allegorical structures, which State Decipherers sat in the playhouses trying to detect. Take for instance, the work by Professor Steve Sohmer which argues that the death of Caesar in *Julius Caesar* is modeled on the gospels and represents an anti-Christian parody which sets out to "interrogate the truth of the gospels" (Sohmer, 28,188). Similarly, Professor Patricia Parker has shown that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* conceals an anti-Christian religious allegory. When the allegorical Wall between heaven and earth falls down, it brings about the Apocalypse and Peter Quince's playlet comically concludes with the mock crucifixion death-scene of Bottom/Pyramus *(*Parker, 200-202*)* followed by the spirits escaping from their graves, as in the gospel account. Both of these examples extend across entire allegorical plots, which is rather different from the ad hoc Christ symbolism that commentators used to identify in the 1930s (Vickers, 1993;372-84). So if anti-Christian allegories exist beneath the surface of these, and perhaps other plays, whoever was responsible would have had very good reason indeed to conceal their identity. This allegory would however, have been almost impossible to detect from merely attending one or two performances---but only by extensive comparative study of the printed text—which was precisely what the First Folio would make available to a "great variety of readers". It was not indeed until March 2007, that the Jewish character of the satire in *Dream* was highlighted in performance by the Dark

Lady Players, in a unique allegorical New York production (Merwin, 56-7).[8] It does however, resemble the satirical crucifixion parody which Amelia provides in her account of the passion narrative in *Salve Deus.*

Finally, this paper now turns to the biographical areas in which an involvement by Aemilia would explain certain unusual kinds of knowledge in the plays. For instance, her relation to Lord Hunsdon is a plausible personal source of the stories of the Northern Rebellion of 1569, used in the composition of *1 Henry IV*, and familiarity with his garden of rare plants could explain the appearance in several plays of the potato and other unusual plants—including one that did not apparently exist but which was described in a publication by Hunsdon's gardener. Since Lord Hunsdon was the Royal Falconer, it may be postulated that she thereby had familiarity with a falconer's perspective, which appears throughout the plays. Equally, as the General in charge of London, and Chief Justice both of the Army and of one of the forest courts in Trent, Aemilia's relationship with him might have been one source of the military and legal knowledge in the plays.

Earlier her 'adoption' into the Willoughby family, headed by Lord Peregrine Bertie, Ambassador to Denmark and a friend of Tycho Brahe's, gave Aemilia first-hand access to some of the information used in *Hamlet*, as well as to the unpublished writings of Bertie's follower Sir Roger Williams which were used in composing *Henry Vth*.[9] The household also included two powerful, literate women, whose surviving letters indicate their strength of character. Lord Peregrine's sister, the dowager countess Susan Bertie, who took charge of Aemilia's education, was a former handmaiden to one of the highly educated Grey sisters, and had been tutored by Miles Coverdale the Bible translator. Another indication of the intellectual climate of the household is the character of Catherine, Duchess of Suffolk, the mother of the Bertie siblings. She was a strong supporter both of women's education and of Biblical study, and was the person who persuaded Henry VIII to allow women to read the Bible for themselves in private. She was also patron to Anne Loke, the daughter of the Bassano family's closest neighbours, who was the inventor of the sonnet sequence and described as one of the four best educated gentlewomen in the country (Felch, 14). Since women's education was rare in Elizabethan London, it is plausible to suppose that Aemilia's influence is reflected in the unusual proto-feminism found in the plays. For instance, the plays use several sources written primarily for women including stories in *The Taming of the Shrew* from *The*

Knight of La Tour Landry and His Book for His Daughters, the standard book at Court for training girls in etiquette. Several plays also use Margaret of Navarre's *Heptameron,* the favourite reading for ladies at Court, which was drawn upon by only a handful of Elizabethan writers. The plays also show well-educated, assertive female characters, and *Othello* even attributes what has been described as "the first feminist manifesto" to a character called Aemelia (*Othello*, 4,3,83-102).

Although the plays are imaginative works, rather than transpositions of any individual's life history, nevertheless Aemilia's biography does correspond to several events in the plays. For instance her upbringing by a dowager countess parallels the situation depicted in *All's Well That Ends Well,* and the household shown in *Twelfth Night* has been thought to be based on that of Lady Anne Clifford—who Aemilia taught as a private tutor – and to whom one of the prefatory letters of *Salve Deus* is dedicated (Lamb, 1-25). Finally, it can be postulated that a collaboration by Aemilia might also explain some of the other unusual features of the plays, including their references to Judaism and Hebrew, their references to Italy, in particular Venice, and their extraordinary two thousand musical references.

It is only surprising that this suggestion of Aemilia's contribution has taken so long and that as recently as the late 1990s scholars like Gililov denied it solely on grounds of class and colour. Today however, many of the Shakespearean plays are increasingly understood as having been created collaboratively (as work by Brian Vickers and others has clearly shown), although published under Shakespeare's name. It is therefore proposed that Aemilia should be considered among those collaborators. This might finally explain how she developed the literary sophistication to later create *Salve Deus,* which, as a collection of Jacobean patronage poetry, necessarily uses a completely different style--- as would any author who wrote both pseudonymously and under their own name for differing communities of interpretation. A highly educated woman, of Jewish/Venetian and Moorish ancestry, who was herself a major experimental poet, whose writings refer to the Shakespearean works, who had close family connections to the theatre, and who is mentioned in the Sonnets and identified by name as a poet across multiple plays, Aemilia Bassano Lanyer is emerging as a key figure in understanding the complex pattern of inter-relationships that lies behind the works of William Shakespeare.

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Notes

[1] Past candidates include Mistress Davenant identified by Arthur Acheson (1913) because the (white) producer Davenant claimed to be Shakespeare’s son; the brown haired and white skinned Mary Fitton, identified by Thomas Tyler (1884) on the assumption that the Sonnets depict a three way ménage, that Mr. W. H was the Earl of Pembroke William Herbert, and that the woman he had an affair with was therefore the ‘dark lady’; and the brothel keeper Lucy Negro or Lucy Morgan identified by Leslie Hotson (1933) on the grounds that she was known to be a sexually active woman of colour in Elizabethan London; Mistress Florio identified by Jonathan Bate (1997) for reasons that are unclear; and Florio’s daughter Aurelia Florio identified by Olive Wagner Driver (1991). Hardin Craig (1965) suggested Elizabeth Vernon, Countess of Southampton. Others like Susanne Woods, do not accept Aemilia Bassano Lanyer as the ‘dark lady’, but offer no better alternative.

[2] For instance, neither Schoenbaum (1980), Bevington (1998), nor Green (2006) cover the literary analysis of *Salve Deus*, and among Lanyer scholars, Barbara Bowen (2001, 2003) is almost alone in relating *Salve Deus* to the Shakespearean canon.

[3] Aemilia's father Baptista Bassano had three long term leases on houses in Spitalfields and owned several pieces of land there and in Norton Folgate, as did several other Bassanos. Other members of the family also owned property elsewhere in London.

[4] Isabella Whitney's *A Sweet Nosegay* from the 1550's is an adaptation, and her other poetry appears as part of a volume by multiple poets.

[5] *Romeo and Juliet* 4.4.27-8; *1 H6* 2.5.8; 2.5.8-9; *Richard II* 1.3.221; *Antony and Cleopatra* 4.15.85; *Henry V* 3.3.10; *Timon* 1.2.6-7.

[6] Rowse wrongly read the diary of Simon Forman, her doctor, which Rowse claimed stated that she was rather "brown in her youth". Stanley Wells has pointed out that this was a misreading. The evidence of the colour of her skin lies in the legal records of the conflicts her cousins had with the law, in which they are described as "black", which is not a use of the term to refer merely to their hair colour (as it was sometimes employed of women). The dark lady of the Sonnets is described as having 'dun' coloured breasts.

[7] Elizabeth Cary's *The Tragedy of Mariam* (1613) had been written a decade before, and Mary Sidney had earlier done a play translation.

[8] This is available on DVD from DarkLadyPlayers@aol.com

[9] It was conventional for members of the nobility to be educated in another noble household, but was much less usual for members of the gentry who might be sent to a school such as Westminster, and it was extremely unusual for a girl. In Aemilia's case the relationship with Countess Susan Bertie lasted from 1576 to at least 1611, when she was the dedicatee of one of the prefatory poems to *Salve Deus*.