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Gendering of the Blazon:
A case study of Isabella Whitney's and Aemilia Lanyer's poems

Jaemin Choi
Mokpo National University

I.

The word "blazon" in an ordinary context is referring to a verbal description of the coat of arms "in proper heraldic language" ("blazon," *OED*). However, in the scholarly domains of Renaissance poetry, the word is commonly understood as a poetic technique popularized by Francesco Petrarch, an Italian humanist and inventor of Italian sonnets, who employed it in a lavish description of his beloved Laura. By fragmenting her body into numerous parts and visualizing each part, one by one, in an emotionally charged language and imagery, Petrarch developed and illustrated an exemplary rhetorical model, which allowed his contemporary poets across Europe to follow his lead and to collectively establish an impressive array of love poems emblazoned with eroticized female bodies. In the last quarter of the sixteenth century England, for example, Philip

Sidney uses a blazon to convey powerfully the enchanting beauty of the female lover in Sonnet 9 from *Astrophil and Stella* (1598).

> Queen Virtue's court, which some call Stella's face,
> Prepared by Nature's choicest furniture,
> Hath his front built of alabaster pure;
> Gold is the covering of that stately place.
> The door, by which, sometimes, comes forth her grace,
> Red porphyr is, which lock of pearl makes sure;
> Whose porches rich (which name of 'cheeks' endure)
> Marble, mixed red and white, do interlace.
> The windows now, through which this heavenly guest
> Looks o'er the world, and can find nothing such
> Which dare claim from those lights the name of 'best,'
> Of touch they are, that without touch doth touch,
> Which Cupid's self, from Beauty's mind did draw:
> Of touch they are, and poor I am their straw. (1-14)

Here, under the ardent gaze of Astrophil, Stella's face is dissected into varied parts for lyrical description; her forehead is depicted as smooth as "alabaster," her hair is golden and "stately," her lips are as red as "porphyry," her teeth are likened to white and shiny "pearls," and her youthful cheeks are accentuated with rosy blush. In a similar manner, the poet of *Love's Martyr* (1601), Robert Chester, deploys the same visual analysis on the female body ("phoenix" in the poem), allowing the readers to feast their eyes to fragmented, yet erotic, body parts.[1] The beauty of the allegorical figure "phoenix" is displayed in rich detail. In one stanza, for

[1] The identification of "phoenix" and "turtledove" has been discussed among early modern scholars. Phoenix is dominantly understood as Queen Elizabeth whereas the identification of turtledove in love relationship has been debated in many different ways. For the general historical context of the poem, see page 59 in Alzada Tipton, "The transformation of the earl of the essex: Post-execution ballads and 'The Phoenix and the Turtle'."

example, "her hair" is "like to a chime of bels" when "the wind" gently blows her hair around "her necke." In another stanza, the speaker depicts her lips as "two rubie Gates from whence doth spring, / Sweet honied deaw by an intangled kisse," (qtd. in Grosart lxiii - lxiv).

In recently years, the blazon as a rhetorical device has garnered lots of scholarly interests largely due to the growing influence of feminism and new historicism in early modern studies. Jonathan Sawday, for example, convincingly reveals the close interconnections between the emergence of anatomical practices in medicine and the blazon in literary texts. He argues from the perspective of feminism that "female bodies were not just cut up" in the blazon and that "they were cut up in literary texts in order to be circulated as a specifically male knowledge of women" (212). Citing many examples of the blazon from Philip Sidney, John Donne, William Shakespeare, and many others, Sawday documents the vogue of the blazon in Renaissance England and sees it as the tool of competition among the (male) wits in "courtly world" for their literary fame and, of course, at the sacrifice of "their mistress": "the dominant conceit . . . was that of competing males exercising their wits at the expense of portioned females" (201). Emblazoned females in their poems, in other words, functioned as social currency through which male poets augmented their literary fame by entering the competition with other males over the female body.

Although he acknowledges a case of the subversion of the typical blazon by a woman poet in a passing manner (201), Sawday never bothers to dwell on the further implications of the ways in which women poets during the Renaissance reacted to and appropriated the trope of the blazon originally employed by male poets for the construction of their masculinity. In this paper, by analyzing the ways two Renaissance women poets (i.e. Aemilia Lanyer and Isabella Whitney) were using anatomical descriptions for their lyrics, I will illustrate how the blazon, although originally invented for the service of male authorship, can be reinvented as a tool of resistance

against patriarchal order.

II.

Isabella Whitney is one of the women poets that have garnered increased attention among early modern scholars, mainly due to the rise of feminism in early modern academic fields. She is now recognized as the very first woman in English history, who published secular poems. Whitney's "Will and The Testament," our main interest here, appears in *A Sweet Nosegay or a Pleasant Posy* (1573),[2] her second publication of poems. *A Sweet Nosegay* consists of several parts, including versification of Hugh Plat's *Flowers of Philosophy* (Ulrike 103), and familiar epistles addressed to her relatives and acquaintances for their comfort and counsel. The concluding poem of this book, "Will and The Testament," has particularly sparked much interest among feminist critics because of her inventive use of literary conventions. In the poem Whitney attempts to "negotiate, at least at a literary level: a blazon (the itemized description of the female body) and the will, a contested genre for women in so far as their property rights are uncertain" (Salzman xiii). Both modes of writing (i.e. a will and a blazon) were less desirable rhetorical devices for women to use, because a blazon, as discussed earlier, has been used for a proof of masculinity at the expense of the eroticized female body. A will as a literary document was also not favorable for women to use in most of the cases, because women, unless in exceptional circumstances such as old maids or widows, were not expected to express explicitly how their wealth or valuable items should be bequeathed to their family members after death.[3]

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[2] Hereafter cited as *A Sweet Nosegay*.

[3] Although the common law and other laws of property during the early modern period did not always correspond with "women's everyday experience of inheritance, marriage, and widowhood" (4), Amy Erickson observes that "the

The way in which Whitney integrates two different literary conventions into one single narrative is very unique and original. Within *A Sweet Nosegay*, Whitney confesses the financial difficulty she was experiencing after she was "out of service," that is after she lost "a good position there with a virtuous lady" (Jones, "Apostrophe" 156). In Whitney's time, losing a position can be a death sentence to a woman, who wished to stay in London, because a "London statue" prohibited any "unmarried woman" residing in London "without serving" in a household (Jones, "Maidservants" 22). This unfriendly financial circumstances, however, did not put her spirit down. She used them as an excuse for writing her will and offering her life-experienced counsel to her readers.

> The time is come I must depart
> from thee, ah famous city.
> I never yet, to rue my smart
> did find that thou hadst pity
> . . .
> But many women foolishly,
> like me, and other mo'e,
> Do such a fixe`d fancy set
> on those which least deserve,
> That long it is ere wit we get,
> away from them to swerve.
> . . .
> Now stand aside and give me leave

common law only allowed" women "to inherit land if they had no brothers, under a system of primogeniture" and that women "lost all their personal property and control of their real property to their husbands at marriage, under the doctrine of coverture" (3). Erickson also points out that only a small percentage of wives made their wills ("Their proportion rarely rises above 3 per cent of women's wills, and never above 8per cent" 140), while more single women and widows, partly because of their different legal statuses, wrote their wills. See the final chapter, "Part IV: Widows" of Erickson's book, W*omen and Property in Early Modern England* for more details.

to write my latest will:
And see that none you do deceive
of that I leave them till. (1-36)[4]

In "Will and The Testament," Whitney choose to humorously exaggerate her departure from London as if she were in a dire situation of real death. In the introduction to the poem, Whitney states that "the Author . . . is to constrained to depart, wherefore . . . she feigneth as she would die." Personifying and addressing the "famous city" as "thou," Whitney warns "many women," who flocked to the "cruel" city without knowing its true nature, and justifies her reason for writing this poem to ensure that London would not "deceive" anyone of what she will leave them forever. In other words, it is out of her good will that Whiney writes and publishes her will: "now let me dispose such things / as I shall leave behind, / That those which shall receive the same / may know my willing mind" ("Will" 57-60).

Instead of being slavish to the dictation of social reality, Whitney chooses to stay playful by taking her poverty and ill fortune as a rare opportunity to write a poem and to explore the civic space of London and to offer her knowledge of it as the legacy she will leave to her readers after departure. Indeed, if Whitney had been a high class woman, confined all the time within the walls of the domestic, Whitney would not have acquired her rich knowledge of London's streets and rich merchandise in them. As the law during the period stipulated, women were not allowed to roam freely without specific reason to do so. However, being a house maid in a gentleman's house (prior to being dismissed), Whitney could be easily excused for going outside for errands, and through these

[4] All quotes of Whiney are from Isabella Whitney, *Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney, and Aemelia Lanyer: Renaissance Women Poets,* ed. Danielle Clarke. (New York: Penguin Books, 2000).

opportunities she became naturally familiar with London streets and shops packed with diverse goods.

> First for their foode, I Butcher lea[v]e,
> that every day shall kyll:
> By Thames you shall have Brewers store,
> and Bakers at your wyll.
> And such as orders doo observe,
> and eat fish thrice a weeke:
> I leave two Streets, full fraught therewith,
> they need not farre to seeke.
> Watlyng Streete, and Canwyck streete,
> I full of Wollen leave: (33-42)

As critics point out, Whitney's blazoning of each street seems to be overall faithful to real life details. For example, "Brewer store" in the passage would be referring to "the Brewers Guild Hall," which was then "on Addle Street" and "ran down to Upper Thames Street." The names of the two fish markets Whitney says were located near the Thames can be also easily identified; according to Lanchester, an editor of the e-text edition of Whitney's poems, one was on "Fish Street Hill," "the main way to London Bridge," and the other was "Billingsgate market" on Lower Thames Street. Thus, we can observe that Whitney's "writings display familiarity with the boisterous commercial and material life of sixteenth-century London, the noise and stench of the streets, the haggling with butchers, apothecaries, and pawnbrokers, the harried contracting of petty loans, the everyday business of getting and spending" (Gregerson).

Although knowing these details about the streets in London might seem trivial or have no practical values in the eyes of modern readers, the knowledge about London Whitney imparted in a vernacular language might have been then useful, especially to non-elite readers, who visited (or

planned to visit) London for the first time either for settlement or other purposes. Exploring London without previous knowledge of it could be easily overwhelming and bewildering, as Jean Howard pointedly remarks in the following.

> People coming to London from outside the city or from outside the country would know neither its geography, its customs nor, as Peacham stresses, its particular dangers. Aids were necessary: prescriptive tracts such as Peacham's, elaborating dangers of urban life and offering advice for escaping them; networks of family or friends who could orient one and provide contracts and jobs . . . . (12)

Though it was not detailed like Peacham's tracts, Whitney's "Will and the Testament" would come handy to her readers for providing succinct descriptions of important places in London. By parceling out her knowledge of London not in prosaic style but in a humorous and entertaining way, Whitney renders her last service for her readers into something long cherished and memorable.

In the context of readerly experience, the personification of London as an unkind lover deserves more attention than it normally receives. The personification of London as an unkind lover is a clever literary trope, because it enables her readers to picture each description as a part constituting the whole body of London. In other words, the description of each street and commercial activity within a stanza does not remain isolate and discreet, but by virtue of the personified London, is now combined with other descriptions to form the unifying image of London in the minds of readers. The personification of London as an unkind male is all the more interesting when compared against her contemporary humanists' association of lands to the feminine. For example, in the frontispiece of Ortelius' *Theatrum Orbis Terrarum* (1570), "Europe" is figured as a goddess, taking "an upper stage," and beneath her the goddesses "Asia and Africa,"

stand on railings flanking the main stage, upon which America reclines, surrounded by her barbarous attributes." (Gillies 74).

According to Lawrence Manley, "cities are personified as feminine because culture recognizes that women are active participants in its special processes, but at the same time sees them as rooted in, as having more direct affinity with nature" (141-42). Thus, the habitual representation of cities as the feminine during the time was psychologically rooted in parenting roles that cities were expected to meet by giving motherly care to its citizens. By personifying London as a cold-hearted man, in this sense, Whitney implicitly betrays her disappointments with London, who refuses to "provide clothing, lodging, aid or credit" (Gordon 93).

> And now hath time me put in mind,
> of thy great cruelnes:
> That never once a help wold finde,
> to ease me in distres.
> Thou never yet, woldst credit geve
> to boord me for a yeare:
> Nor with Apparell me releve
> except thou payed weare.
> No, no, thou never didst me good,
> nor ever wilt I know: (17-26)

Whereas London is pictured as a man who is stingy with his wealth and credit, Whitney presents herself as a woman economically "weake" yet with a strong will to share everything she has, including her rich knowledge of London streets and commercial venues as noted earlier. Actually, the word "will" or "willing" in Whitney's "Will and The Testament" is one of the most commonly appearing words in the poem," thereby starkly contrasting the poet's generosity to London's selfishness. And it should be noted that Whitney's "willing mind" is not found only

in her "Will and The Testament." In the preface and other verses of *A Sweet Nosegay*, Whitney foregrounds her wiling mind and her good will to win the hearts of her potential patrons and the public. For example, in the dedication to George Mainwaring, a potential patron she hopes to form a social network with, Whitney explains the origins of her collection of poems and builds her image in the following way.

> I come to present you [i.e. George Mainwaring] like the pore man which having no goods, came with his hands full of water to meete the Persian Prince withal, who respecting the good wyll of the man: did not disdayne his simple Guift: even so, I being willingness to bestow some Present on you, by the same thinking to make part of amendes for the much that you have merited, to perfourme the dutie of a friend, to express the good wyll that should rest in Countrie folk, and not having of mine owne to discharge that I go about (like to that poore Fellow which wente into an others ground for his water) did step into an others garden for these Flowers: which I beseech you (as DARIUS did,) to accepte: and though they be of anothers growing, yet considering they be of my owne gathering and making up: respect my labour and regard my good wil, . . . (3-4)

Here Whitney deliberately employs "gift exchange as a structural metaphor" to delineate the triangular pattern of relationship among her, her potential patron(s), and her gift (i.e. *A Sweet Nosegay*) (Donawerth 14). More importantly in our context, while dedicating her book to Mainwaring and other potential patrons, Whitney likens herself to the poor man in a folkloric story about the Persian Prince, thus positioning herself as having a lower economic status. In addition to this modest self-portrait, Whitney goes further to acknowledge her verse as not genuinely belonging to her. Using the feminine metaphor of flower to refer to her poetic piece, Whitney says the collection of her verse came from "others garden," almost forfeiting her claim for authorship. Obviously, this way of building an

authorship is strange and risky, but her modesty of every aspect makes her "labour" and "good will" all the more impressive and surprising. While Whitney through her rhetoric is reduced to being an impoverished woman, her willing mind looms larger and stronger across the pages; and in the concluding poem of London, the bountiful spirit of the poet accordingly more stands out, set against the cold-hearted London.

So far I have examined the ways in which Whitney rewrites London in her own way, mainly focusing on how her writing takes advantage of and yet at the same time subverts Petrarchan blazon, a literary technique dominantly employed by male poets during the time. By personifying London and blazoning its various parts, Whitney is able to impart her rich knowledge of London more effectively to her readers, helping them form a conceptual map of London for future use. However, Whitney does not simply use a blazon without altering its nature. By placing the male figure (i.e. London) as the target of anatomical practices, Whitney subverts the conventional way of blazoning and points to another possible development of the technique, which is no longer yoked to serve voyeuristic male gaze. Whitney's blazoning of London also encourages us to reconsider the primary definition of the word blazon, which basically refers to the act of showing off to the public what one possesses for the glory of fame. By bequeathing, although only in her fictional world, to others what she claims to own, Whitney unmasks a possessive tendency lurking behind the blazon.

III.

Aemilia Lanyer (1569-1645) is comparable to Isabella Whitney in many ways, although a temporal gap of roughly twenty years exists between their births. Most of all, both of them were the very first group of women poets in history, who took advantage of the burgeoning print market to

build their authorship in the hope of receiving financial support from their potential patrons and public. The print culture was just emerging during the Renaissance and was still looked down as inferior to the manuscript culture favored by elites and nobles. As one critic points out, during the Renaissance, "the stigma" was still attached to printed materials because of the prevailing "perception that publishing was not intrinsically worthy, and that the printing of works required justification" (Peacey 65). In tandem with the stigma of print that writers had to negotiate with when they entered the print market, women were further handicapped by gender roles and expectations during the time. As Tita Baumlin observes, "the behaviour manuals of the time period" emphasized "that it was only prudent to silence a woman, given the consequences of Eve's conversation with the serpent; and the proscription on female speech had roots in Aristotle, as well as in interpretations of the Bible" (144 Baumlin). Clearly "linking silence to chastity and obedience" strongly discouraged women from trying to pen their thoughts on paper and have them published (144 Baumlin).

Whereas extraordinary economic failure was the basis of Whitney's rationale for entering into the print market, it was in the name of Jesus Christ that Lanyer boldly excused herself for publishing a volume of poems, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611).[5] Going against the grain of women needing to feel inferior, Lanyer unapologetically declares her feminism in "To the Vertuous Reader" in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* by arguing that women should feel proud, not shameful, for being women. The book she wrote is for making "known to the word, that all women deserve not to be blamed," although "evil disposed men," "forgetting they were born of women, nourished of women," "like Vipers deface the wombs where they were bred, only to give way and utterance to their want of discretion and

[5] As for a brief description about the contents of *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, see page 302 in "Aemilia Lanyer" by Lisa Mary Klein; page 373 in "'An Emblem of Themselves': Early Renaissance Country House Poetry" by Nicole Pohl.

goodness" (48).

Lanyer's dedicatory poems to noble ladies is another component of the paratexts in *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, which warrants further scrutiny to appreciate her blazoning of Jesus Christ. Her dedicatory epistles in the preface show that Lanyer tries to solidify the communal sprit by placing her book under the authority of notable female patrons (e.g. Anne of Denmark, Princess Elizabeth, Arbella Stuart, Mary Sidney, and Lady Lucy, Countess of Bedford), and, by doing so, her efforts to rewrite Christian history becomes an instance of facilitating a collective bond among women rather than of fashioning an individual authorship. As critics often point out, Lanyer attempts to make her book as a literal embodiment of Jesus Christ; the book not only talks about his life and his drama of passion, but also attempts to mimic a communal body of Jesus Christ.[6] This communal body is unique because it consists of exclusively female Christians. The whole design of the book, whose operative mode can be generally characterized as reciprocal and collective, enables Lanyer to use the Petrarchan blazon not for an individual fame but for an affirmation of a communal devotion.

> That is that Bridegroome that appears so faire,
> So sweet, so lovely in his Spouses sight,
> That unto Snowe we may his face compare,
> His cheeks like skarlet, and his eyes so bright
> As purest Doves that in the rivers are,
> Washed with milke, to give the more delight;
> His head is likened to the finest gold,
> His curled lockes so beauteous to behold;
>
> Blacke as a Raven in his blackest hew;

[6] See, for example, page 319-21 in Wendy Wall, "The Body of Christ: Amelia Lanyer's Passion," *The Imprint of Gender* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1993).

His lips like skarlet threeds, yet much more sweet
Than is the sweetest hony dropping dew,
Yea, he is constant, and his words are true,
His cheeks are beds of spices, flowers sweet;
His lips, like Lilies, dropping downe pure mirrhe,
Whose love, before all worlds we doe preferre, (1305-1320)

One of the common tropes in the Bible is a depiction of Jesus Christ as the church's bridegroom. For male poets such as John Donne in his holy sonnets,[7] this trope is potentially problematic because the speaker in the poem has to accept a feminine role to honor the biblical figuration of the world and its order. On the other hand, for Lanyer, the gender politics of Jesus Christ in the image of bridegroom makes it much easier to express her feministic vision of the Church, a community exclusively of female devotees. In fact, Lanyer points out in earlier parts how women, unlike men, had been faithful to the teachings and life of Christ. According to her, "our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," "from the time of his conception, till the houre of his death" was "begotten of a woman, borne of a woman, nourished of a woman, obedient to a woman; and that he healed woman, pardoned women, comforted women" (49). And women, in turn, witnessed Jesus' resurrection before any men did, and "indured most cruel martyrdome for their faith in Jesus Christ" (50).

Lanyer depicts the crucifixion scene, as quoted above, as if she were there with other female mourners and witnessing first hand the most profound event of Christianity. She "makes Christ the object of a description in which his dying, passive body is a spectacle for female desire" (McBridge 145); in this way, Jesus Christ is visually anatomized and

[7] For example, the speaker of *Holy Sonnet 18* adopts a woman's voice, while portraying Christ as a bridegroom and the church as a bride: "Show me, dear Christ, thy spouse so bright and clear./ What! is it she which on the other shore/ Goes richly painted? or which, robbed and tore,/Laments and mourns in Germany and here?" (1-4).

his body parts are eroticized into aesthetically pleasing objects primarily for the sake of female audience.[8] The whole purpose of this blazon is sharing and affirming a collective or communal identity, bringing forth the figure of Corpus Christi to readers' minds. In this context, it is not surprising to find that Layer's individual voice is minimized for the solidarity of Christian women, as the plural pronoun "We" suggests.

The ways in which Lanyer uses the blazon for communal bond and reciprocity attests how fluid and flexible the use of blazon was during the early modern. In other words, the Petrarchan blazon, mostly used for the affirmation of individual fame and ownership, is not the only way of using the literary trope. As Whitney similarly showed in her use of the blazon for London streets and stores, early modern women poets in middling status resisted the idea of using it for the praise of (individual) ownership. Of course, seen from the historical context, the reason for their different use of the same literary device could be traced back to the property system prejudiced against women; "the legal systems operating in early modem England generally discouraged female property ownership," (Crosswhite 1122). In tandem with this, it is noteworthy to remember that the estate of Cookham in "The Description of Cookham" at the end of *Salve Deus Rex Judae4orum* is a "royal manor in Berkshire," a "temporary accommodation" that her then patrons, Margaret and Ann Clifford temporarily stayed in "between 1603 and 1605" (Pohl 373). Unlike noble manors in typical country house poems, therefore, the estate of Cookham was not fit for the praise of ownership, and the lack of her patrons' legal ownership over the estate naturally encouraged Lanyer to focus on the spiritual inspiration and teachings that her ladies gave to the "female community" at the time she served them (Pohl 373).

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[8] Elizabeth Clarke states that Lanyer's blazon of Christ closely resembles "the Song of Songs" from the Bible in which "the beauty of Christ is celebrated from an explicitly feminine perspective" (Clarke 393).

IV.

The blazon had been favored during the Renaissance by many humanists who wanted to confirm their literary mastery over an eroticized female body. Whitney's and Lanyer's appropriations of this technique, which we have examined here, show clearly how differently conditioned female authorship can modify and put pressure on the gender dynamics behind the blazon. Of course, this does not mean that only women could bring changes to the ways the blazon is deployed. Shakespeare, for example, in his "Sonnet 130" illustrated how easily he could get away from the conventional way of blazoning the woman's body to entertain his readers in a witty manner. It should be also noted that the blazon is found neither solely in poems nor in the early modern times but in other literary genres and periods. A case in point here would be the lavish description of the girl on the beach in James Joyce's novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Youngman*.

> A girl stood before him [Stephen Dedelaus] in midstream: alone and still, gazing out to sea. She seemed like one whom magic had changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful seabird. Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a crane's and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh. Her thighs, fuller and softhued as ivory, were bared almost to the hips where the white fringes of her drawers were like feathering of soft white down. Her slate-blue skirts were kilted boldly about her waist and dovetailed behind her. Her bosom was as a bird's, soft and slight, slight and soft as the breast of some dark-plumaged dove. But her long fair hair was girlish: and girlish, and touched with the wonder of mortal beauty, her face. (Joyce 150)

Though written in prose, the description is dictated by the male gaze (i.e. Stephen Dedalus) and the female body is fragmented and aesthetically

beautified, serving as the medium for Dedalus' intellectual awakening often called "Joycean epiphany." The blazon by Joyce thus reminds us how versatile and transformative this literary device has been across literary genres and periods.

However, admitting the wide range of possibilities in the use of blazon, as briefly adumbrated here, should not excuse us from making light of Whitney's and Lanyer's contribution to the development of the blazon. They should be duly appreciated not simply because such a sophisticated literary trope was unlikely to be attempted by women during the early modern period. Rather, a more important reason would be that Lanyer and Whitney radically re-deployed the blazon for the service of building the relationship with readers on the principle of reciprocity and mutuality. As critics observe, this "interpersonal relationships" characteristic of the gift culture started to be weakened and challenged as the market economy, more driven for competition and individualism, gained its momentum (Fontaine 88). An important ramification of this change can be found in Ben Jonson's self-aggrandizing folio publication of "his" dramatic works in the title of *The works of Benjamin Jonson* in 1616. By publishing dramatic performances (e.g. *Volpone*, *The Alchemist)* under his name, which was originally presented to the theater audience as group works involving everyone of theater companies, Jonson reclaimed what was once collaborative and collective actions into individual achievements.

As shown in Jonson's publication of dramatic works, desiring the fame as an individual author by means of commercial publication was one of the primary motivations that also drove sonneteers to circulate their poems through the print market. In *The imprint of Gender*, Wendy Wall discusses in length how "blazoning" helped commercial writers to enhance their literary fames by figuring lyrical verses into a female body, making them as eroticized objects of exchange between a (male) author and (male) readers. The lyrical verses, which had been once considered as something

ephemeral and occasional within a context of manuscript/gift culture, were laboriously collected and transformed into one main body of the book through a technical help of blazoning. In this process, Wall points out, the fluidity and openness of the text came to prevail no longer. Instead, the controlling power of an individual author upon the text (imagined as a female body) and, as a consequence, the fixity of textual meaning increased: "In the case of the sonnet, [. . .], writers, publishers, and printers chose as one option to transform the textuality of the open manuscript coterie culture into a protoliterary masculine closed authority when they commercialized Renaissance poetic texts" (109).

Whitney's and Lanyer's blazoning, although their purpose for doing it was different from each other, shared the same repulsion against the use of the female body as the leverage for individual authorship. In short, both poets not only gendered the blazon by figuring their lyrical objects into something masculine (the masculinized London in the case of Whitney; Jesus Christ as a bridegroom in the case of Lanyer), but also they used the trope to strengthen the communal bond with others, which was very different from the ways in which male poets used the blazon. Regrettably for them, of course, the interpersonal relationship originally anchored in "the ethics of classical gift exchange" (Scott 20) was losing its ground in the increasingly commodified society. And to some degree their short-lived writing careers clearly stated what direction England was heading to. After all, casting their wistful glance on the fast-fading communal spirit, as they felt familiar with, by wielding their pens to stop it from slipping away from their sight was not enough to turn the historical tide.

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ABSTRACT

Gendering of the Blazon: A case study of Isabella Whitney's and Aemilia Lanyer's poems

Jaemin Choi

This paper attempts to reveal the gender politics behind early modern sonneteers' blazoning of the female body and to discuss how Lanyer and Whitney as women poets appropriated the male-centered literary form in their respective poetic works. By blazoning London's streets and vendors, Whitney displays her rich knowledge of London and stresses her willing mind to share the (imaginative) wealth of London with her possible patrons and the public. A desire to strengthen an emotional bond with readers through the act of blazoning is also evident in Lanyer's religious poems. In her poetic world, Lanyer deploys the blazon to put the body of Jesus Christ under the gaze of female mourners at the crucifixion, and by means of her feministic vision to turn it into a communion among Christian community exclusively of females. Both Whitney's and Lanyer's blazoning thus exemplifies how creative women poets can be in the appropriation of male-centered literary conventions to the extent of offering an alternative model free from individualistic and male biases. More theoretically put, they showed another possible development of the blazon as a trope by choosing to deploy it to serve for the mutual and good-will based friendship with their readers, instead of using it as a triumphant moment of their literary achievements as the male counterparts often did in their times.

Key Words | Isabella Whitney, Aemilia Lanyer, *A Sweet Nosegay*, *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, Blazon, Gender Studies

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