

# Amelia Bassano Lanier: A New Paradigm

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**T**his paper proposes a new approach to attribution studies, suggesting the poet Aemelia Bassano Lanier (hereafter Amelia) as a new candidate for the primary authorship of

Shakespeare's works. A. L. Rowse, Stephanie Hopkins Hughes and Martin Green have already linked her to the so-called 'dark lady' of the *Sonnets*. The new evidence is essentially literary, with supporting strands of circumstantial and historical material. The present paper reviews Amelia's biography, her work as a major experimental poet, her literary 'signatures' on the plays, and her access to social networks that match the main areas of knowledge displayed by the playwright.

## Biography

Known today as the first woman in England to publish a book of original poetry, Amelia Bassano was born in 1569 into a family of secret Jews (known as Marranos or Conversos) living in London. They shared their household with some of their cousins, the Lupos, 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 married Venetian women surnamed Nasi, suggesting a possible relationship to the wealthy Sephardic family of that name. Also a member of the Anes family (some of whom were reported to practice Jewish religious ritual) worked for one of the Bassanos as a servant (Stewart 2006). However to outsiders, the Bassanos probably appeared indistinguishable from ardent Puritans who followed Mosaic Law.

Brought to London from Venice in 1538/9, the dark-skinned Bassanos, some of whom were described in contemporary records as 'black'<sup>1</sup> and who may have been of Moroccan as well as Jewish ancestry, became established as the Court



recorder troupe. In that capacity they contributed ‘some of the earliest Elizabethan stage-music’ (Izon 335) to the plays and masques that were staged at Court. But the Bassanos’ activities were probably not limited to providing stage-music at Court. When the playhouses were built outside the northern city walls—about 200 yards away from their home in Spitalfields—the Bassanos were well-positioned to supply them with musical services.

From the age of seven, after her father’s death, Amelia was brought up in the Willoughby household, at their country house in Greenwich, and at their mansion in the city of London. She was educated by Countess Susan Bertie (a former handmaiden to one of the highly educated Grey sisters). Bertie’s elderly mother, the Duchess of Suffolk was a proto-feminist known for advocating that women should read the Bible for themselves. Then in the early 1580s, perhaps around the age of thirteen, Amelia became the teenage mistress of the elderly Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, the Lord Chamberlain. He was the most important man in London’s theatrical life, and would become the patron of the Lord Chamberlain’s Men. Before she gave birth to his illegitimate son Henry, he had her removed from Court and married off for the sake of appearances to a first cousin, Alphonso Lanier, in late 1592.

***Amelia’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.***

By the early 1600s some of Amelia’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. Amelia’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 the music. Her sister-in-law’s husband, Alphonso Ferrabosco II, also wrote music for seven of the masques. 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 Jonson’s *Masque of Oberon* (1611) and over a decade specifically wrote music for the playwrights who worked with the King’s Men, including Middleton, Webster, Beaumont and Fletcher, as well as for several Shakespearean romances. Overall, Robert Johnson created half-a-dozen pieces of music or dances that appear in the late Shakespearean plays. For *The Tempest*, he wrote ‘Full Fathom Five’ and ‘Where the Bee Sucks,’ for *Cymbeline* ‘Hark hark the lark,’ and for *The Winter’s Tale* the song ‘Get you hence’ (Cutts 1955, 110).

In addition, King's Men musicians 'almost invariably' performed the anti-masque dances of several masques, for which Johnson composed the music, and which were then transferred into Shakespeare's plays. (Cutts 1955,115) 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* (IV.iv.319-337). The witches' dance and Johnson's 'Come away Hecate' were taken from the *Masque of Queens* and included in *Macbeth* (V.iii.34). Finally, the rural May dance, which was probably written by Johnson for the *Masque of the Inner Temple* (1613), was included in *Two Noble Kinsmen* (III.v.124-136). In each of these three cases the 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, 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). These are specific links between Amelia's family and the company which performed most of Shakespeare's plays.

During her many years of being kept in 'great pomp' as Lord Hunsdon's mistress,<sup>2</sup> Amelia had an unrivalled opportunity to learn about the theater and Court entertainments. However, once she left Court in 1592, her husband wasted her money, she lacked any honors, not even the title 'Lady.' To relieve their financial distress, her husband turned to the Earl of Southampton, Amelia's former next-door neighbor, who advocated on his behalf in 1604 supporting his request for a patent.<sup>3</sup> *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis* were affectionately dedicated to Southampton, but this is the only personally documented link between the Earl and a proposed authorship candidate.

Finally, Ben Jonson is the only literary figure who claimed to know the author of the plays, and his remarks are somewhat ambiguous—including the reference 'To the Memory of My Beloved the Author' in the *First Folio* which, in an oddly chosen metaphor, compares the author to a 'matron.' Although there is no direct proof that Johnson knew Amelia personally, he certainly knew her poem on Cooke-ham



Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon

because it influenced his own country-house poem. (He also knew members of her immediate family because they worked on his masques, and he counted some of them among his intimate friends).

At the end of her life, Amelia became one of the first women in England to own and run a school. It was in a converted farmhouse off Drury Lane where she pursued legal battles against her landlord, and it failed after two years in 1620. She also had a twenty-year legal battle against her husband's relatives to get the rights to his income from a tax on hay (a battle she took to the Privy Council). She died a natural death in 1645 and was buried in an unmarked grave.

### Literary Parallels

Unlike most other authorship candidates, Amelia has a substantial body of published verse. Ilya Gililov described the author of the *Salve Deus* collection 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!' He even claimed that 'Many of the stanzas may be regarded as among the highest attainments of 17th-century poetry in England' (Gililov 368, 312).

The entire *Salve Deus* collection amounts to a substantial literary work, around 3,000 lines. Looked at closely, and compared to Shakespeare's works, there are suggestive similarities of literary style, vocabulary, imagery, verse form, theology, composition, sources, dramatic devices, and use of innovation.

The Cooke-ham poem, which concludes the volume, has explicit stylistic resemblances to Shakespeare which it is possible to pin down with relative certainty. As Caroline Spurgeon points out in her work on Shakespeare's imagery, these plays are the only ones to pay botanical attention to how frost damages plants—for instance Titania's speech about how 'The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts' (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, II.i.107). Yet a similar comment appears in the Cooke-ham poem which refers to a garden in which the flowers dye 'their frozen tops like Ages hoarie haires' (line 143). Similarly the poem 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 V of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As for the combination of the words 'Philomela,' 'ditty,' and 'pretty' in the Cooke-ham poem (lines 185-90), these re-appear all together in Shakespeare's poem number XIV in *The Passionate Pilgrim*. So the language of the Cooke-ham poem neatly bridges two different Shakespearean texts.

The letter to Mary Pembroke which introduces *Salve Deus* makes a unique reference to 'faire Dictina' as the moon goddess who appears also as 'Dictima' in *Love's Labor's Lost* (IV.ii.37). Each is used only once in English literature. The

entire crucifixion account in *Salve Deus* was also 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). While the *Salve Deus* collection refers to the plays of Lyly and possibly Daniel, the greatest number of allusions are to Shakespeare. Other unusual uses of Shakespearean vocabulary which appear in the volume include the word ‘thoughted’ which had previously appeared in only seven texts, two of which were Shakespearean. Some of the words that were apparently first used in the plays and which reappear in the *Salve Deus* collection include ‘accused,’ ‘discontent,’ ‘amazement,’ ‘dawn,’ ‘design,’ and ‘embrace.’ On the other hand, an analysis of common terms such as ‘of’ and ‘you’ in two extracts from *Salve Deus* proved inconclusive, as one might perhaps expect (Craig 1-42).

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 and 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 much of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. The *Salve Deus* poem

itself was written as an epic, in *ottava rima*, and is probably modeled upon a poem by Giles Fletcher the younger, cousin of John Fletcher who worked on *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

***Salve Deus is also similar to Shakespeare’s works in incorporating fictional passages and characters into the source material. For instance, the key passages from the gospel of Matthew are incorporated into a narrative of women.***

Addressed to the God of the Jews, the epic poem is a satirical and critical adaptation of the Gospels, focusing on the Passion. Boyd Berry emphasizes that the main poem opens and closes with ‘a sense of mischief, perhaps of satire’ (Berry 212), and that the style of digression resembles the ‘dilation’ that has been found to characterize Shakespeare’s 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).

In terms of literary composition, *Salve Deus* is also similar to Shakespeare’s works in incorporating fictional passages, and characters, into the source material. For instance, the key passages from the gospel of Matthew are incorporated into a narrative of women, and new imaginary passages about Pilate’s wife and an angel are added in. Also like Shakespeare’s works, the Biblical source that is most used in *Salve Deus* is the Gospel of Matthew.

Regarding other sources, the *Salve Deus* prefaces assume a community of noble women similar to the writings of Christine de Pisan. Pisan’s work does not seem to have been referred to by any other writer during the English Renaissance, ex-

cept Shakespeare. Her *Tale of Joan of Arc* referring to Joan of Arc as a new Deborah is used in *1 Henry VI*, I.ii. 83-4, and a passage about ingratitude being like the wind from Pisan's *Epistle of Othea* is used in *As You Like It*, II.vii.175-9. In addition *Salve Deus* also draws upon other Shakespearean sources including Chaucer, Gower, Ovid and Boccaccio.

Apart from the very different verse style of the epic poetry, the most obvious difference from Shakespeare (Shell 2006), would seem that the *Salve Deus* collection is largely comprised of religious patronage poetry—and not dramatic verse.

That however, is not entirely accurate. As Lanier scholars have pointed out, the subject of Amelia's epic poem 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 Shakespeare's plays—and the religious materials are employed as a framing device. Indeed one might say that whereas *Salve Deus* has explicit religious content and latent social content, this reverses the situation in the plays which have explicit social content, but latent religious content, for instance the Biblical allegories in *Dream* identified by Patricia Parker.

Moreover, one 160-line section of the volume has dramatic qualities very similar to a Jacobean masque. Not only does it include nymphs, Juno, Flora, flowers and singing of praises, but most unusually Juno's chariot descends to Earth. This is also what it does in the 79-line masque sequence in *The Tempest* which includes nymphs, Juno, Ceres, plants and the singing of blessings (Faith 88-105). Both versions seem to be re-writings of Daniel's *The Vision of the Twelve Goddesses* (1604). Since *Salve Deus* was listed on the Stationer's Register on 2 October 1610 it would appear to either precede the writing of the play or correspond to it almost exactly.

Like the author of the plays, the author of the *Salve Deus* collection was extremely innovative—for instance, the Cooke-ham poem is the first country house poem to have been written since Roman times. Amelia innovatively combined the sacred and the secular in the same poetry, was the first woman in the country to publish an original volume of poetry, and the first to publish a critical commentary on the Gospels. Overall, there is a degree of fit, linguistically, thematically, and in terms of the psychology of innovation, between Shakespeare's canon and Amelia's writings.

### Literary Signatures

As Dorothy Kehler noted in 'Shakespeare's Emilias and the Politics of Celibacy,'<sup>4</sup> the name appears in the plays in various spellings, far more than would reflect a normal statistical name distribution. Even more significant is the appearance of both the names Emillius and Bassianus in *Titus Andronicus*.

These names reappear in the two Venetian plays: as Aemelia in *Othello* and as Bassanio (an alternate spelling of the family name) in *The Merchant of Venice*, in both cases in a Venetian context (Bassano 1997). 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 originated in the work of Ovid, and became a commonplace in Renaissance literature.

There are three references to swans dying to music in Shakespeare's plays. The first of these is in *The Merchant of Venice*—where the person referred to 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. (*The Merchant of Venice*, III.ii.43-5)

For the similarity of Bassanio to Bassano, it is worth noting that the name of what is today normally called the Bassano family was also spelt as Bassany or Bassani, an alternative spelling found in their London burial records.

Secondly there is a swan dying to a doleful 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. (*King John*, V.vii.21-22)

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

*Aemilia*: I will play the swan  
And die in music: Willow, willow, willow. (*Othello*, V.ii.245-6)

This repeats the song which is spelt 'willough' in the Folio text, the words 'Aemelia Johnson Bassanio Willough(by)' being 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 even the appearance of the two most clearly indicated names, Aemelia and Bassanio, is not likely to be a coincidence. The likelihood becomes even more improbable if the other names are included. Furthermore, the swan, to be precise the swan rampant, was also the family crest of Lord Hunsdon, and therefore one of the heraldic devices with which Amelia was associated.

Even more telling, as scholars like Walker have noted, 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. 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 is why that should have been done—a question to which there seems no good answer.

The most likely explanation is that these lines were added on. No critic has suggested that they are not in an authorial hand, yet at this date Shakespeare was dead. However, Amelia was still alive. She presumably would have had the greatest interest in having these words included, first because they form part of the underlying pattern of the dying swans that generates her full name, and second because they associate her name with the Venetians and the Moroccans of her own ancestry. Thus Amelia's names not only appear in the plays but do so in deliberate and prominent fashion by linking her name to the standard Renaissance image of the poet. This extraordinary appearance is difficult to explain if she was not herself the person who put them there.

Finally her name also appears in yet another literary puzzle across the two Shrew plays, involving her husband's name Alfonso, her father's name Baptista, and women characters one with the name Emelia, and the other treated like a falcon—which is the meaning in French of the name Lanier. It suggests that Katharina Minola, daughter of Baptista, is modeled on Amelia herself (Weiss, 177).

### **Fit with Areas of Knowledge**

Since knowledge is acquired through social networks, (even if some aspects can be acquired through books), any authorship case has to demonstrate the circumstances under which the candidate acquired the areas of knowledge that the plays display. The following analysis will focus on several main areas: the music, knowledge of Italy, falconry, law and generalship, theatrical knowledge, Denmark, girls' literature, knowledge of Judaism and Hebrew.

### **Music**

Shakespeare uses 300 technical musical terms throughout the plays, referring both to music theory and to musical technique. Many take the form of musicians' jokes that would be appreciated only by other musicians. Altogether there are nearly 2,000 musical references in the plays, including references to one hundred songs (Duffin 2004). The average Shakespearean play contains 300% more musical references than the average play by other writers (Waldo, 1974, Waldo and Herbert, 1959). The song most mentioned in the plays, where it appears four times, is 'King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid.' The reason for this extraordinary musical knowledge has never been explained.



However having a family of whom at least 15 were professional musicians, including her son, her husband, and her first cousin, the composer Robert Johnson, would fit with this background. Moreover as a young 'black' girl living with the rumored son of Henry VIII, in a princely palace, Somerset House, it is plausible to suppose why Amelia would have been especially interested in a song in which a king falls in love with a young black girl from the streets.

### **The Italian Connection**

The plays not only quote Italian in several places, they show a detailed knowledge of Italian geography, clothes, household objects, art and architecture, especially of Venice, Mantua and Padua. While many of these details could have been found in books, the author also knew about the unpublished teachings of professors in the medical school in Padua. The playwright also read Dante, Tasso, Cinthio and other sources in Italian, and was sufficiently fluent to make complex Italian puns. It is also notable that the plays do not use the Italian stereotypes usually found in English literature of the period.

That the author should have come from the Bassano family, Venetian Jews who wrote letters to the Queen in Italian and cursed soldiers in that language on the street, fits the Italian background in the plays.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the playwright's shift from writing history plays to writing Italian marriage comedies, around the end of 1592, was precisely when Amelia had to leave Court and set up a married household with her first cousin, a French-Italian Protestant.

### **Falconry**

Although some knowledge of falconry was widespread among those involved in hunting, the plays show unusual expertise. They show a detailed knowledge of falconry, using technical language about the way to raise and manage the birds, their health, their flight patterns, their slang names, and even how to repair a broken feather. The author also seems to have a special interest in falcons. Having lived with the Royal Falconer for a decade provides a precise background fit, as is Amelia's married name, Lanier, which is the French for falcon.

### **Law and Generalship**

Although some knowledge of the law was important for every educated person in Elizabethan England, the author has more than this. The plays provide descriptions of 25 different trials, and refer to issues like 'summer's leases having too short a date,' or querying why a short lease should be so expensive. The author uses 200 different legal terms in 1600 different places. In addition to this legal vocabulary the author has been very close to soldiers and to generals planning military strategy, because they use 340 words of military vocabulary such as the reference to a 'petard' in *Hamlet*, a special explosive device for blowing up gates.

Having lived with Lord Hunsdon, who held multiple generalships, might explain Amelia's military knowledge. He also held three judgeships, and having visibility of the legal work being done in his office—in Somerset House where she lived—might explain how Amelia developed the legal knowledge to take her law-suits to the Privy Council.<sup>6</sup>

### Theatrical Knowledge

Shakespeare's works display sophisticated theatrical and dramatic skills. It has previously been assumed that in order to gain them, he necessarily had to be an actor in the public playhouses. That assumption is not correct. The author's primary knowledge of plays was not of those performed in the public playhouses during the previous five years—which represent under 15% of those alluded to—but rather dramas that had to have been read because they were in foreign languages, and/or were not known to have been publicly performed in the playhouses.<sup>7</sup>



The sophisticated theatrical skills displayed by the playwright did not derive from observing the dramas of the pre-Shakespearean playhouses, but rather from the more sophisticated dissembling of performances at Court. For instance, the mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* parody episodes in court entertainments staged at Elvetham, Kenilworth, and Ditchley, while other aspects parody royal events at Whitehall, Warwick and Stirling Castle. Similarly the Princess's hunting arrangements in *Love's Labor's Lost* allude to the Queen's deer-killing at a royal entertainment at Cowdray. Furthermore, the many formal masques, pageants and plays-within-the-play are modeled on the dramatic interludes that formed a key part of Court life.

### Knowledge of Denmark

One of the odd pieces of knowledge in the plays is the description of the castle and port in *Hamlet*. These include the layout of the castle, the platforms where the guns were located (I.ii.213), the arrangement of the rooms including the 'Queen's Closet', the 'lobby' (II.ii.161), which is reached by going up stairs (IV.iii.36-7), the floral garlands worn at Ophelia's funeral and the 'Switzers' (IV.v.97), the

Danish royal guards who wore Swiss uniforms. From the age of seven, Amelia was looked after by Countess Susan Bertie, whose brother Peregrine Bertie, Lord Willoughby, was Ambassador to Denmark. He was a friend of Tycho Brahe, references to whose astronomy and relatives appear in *Hamlet*.

### Girls' Reading and Language Uses

The author of the plays was also rather oddly familiar with girls' literature. For *The Taming of the Shrew* the playwright used *The Knight of La Tour-Landry and His Book for His Four Daughters* (1484), which was available at Court as a manual of etiquette for girls. The playwright also used *Penelope's Web* (1587), which 'in a crystal mirror of feminine perfection represents the virtues of women.' For *The Winter's Tale* the author used *Mamillia: A Mirror or Looking-Glass for the Ladies of England* (1583). The author of the plays is also one of a handful of writers to draw upon the *Heptameron* (1558) by Margaret of Navarre—the most popular book among the ladies at Court—and Montemayor's *Diana* (1559) which was favorite reading among Elizabeth's ladies in waiting. Finally the plays are remarkable for depicting musical and literate young women.

As a woman who had been educated in a family committed to women reading for themselves, and then being at court for a decade, Amelia's biography and social network are a precise fit. Her authorship might also explain why the plays oddly contain as many examples of women cross-dressing as men as had previously appeared in the whole of English drama (Freeburg 1915).

Similarly, the language in the plays can be almost entirely matched to Amelia's biographical context. Seemingly around a dozen words of Warwickshire dialect, place and plant names derive from Mr. Shakespeare.<sup>8</sup> For instance, in *The Taming of the Shrew* (*Induction* 2,18 and 21), the locations Burton-heath and Wincot (Wilmcote)<sup>9</sup> where Mr. Shakespeare's aunt and mother lived, link him to the drunkard, whose allusion to William/Richard the Conqueror (*Induction* 1,4) refers to Shakespeare's adulterous escapade described in John Manningham's diary.<sup>10</sup> Like the better-known William parodies in *As You Like It* and *Merry Wives of Windsor*, this perhaps suggests the playwright's opinion of Mr. Shakespeare.

### Judaism and Hebrew

However the most peculiar feature of the plays is the familiarity that their author demonstrates with Judaism and Jewish texts. Such knowledge was extraordinarily rare in Elizabethan London. After all Jews could not legally live in England at the time and there were only 200 Marranos/Conversos in the whole country. Surprisingly, the subject has attracted only a handful of investigators. Schoenfeld in a paper published in *Shakespeare Survey*, argued that a Hebrew source lay beneath *The Merchant of Venice*. Alan Altimont in *Notes and Queries* has identified a clear reference to the Mishnah in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. David Basch has

found other allusions to the *Pirkei Avod* and to the Talmud, which was almost inaccessible to non Jews. Florence Amit has identified a few words of spoken Hebrew in the plays, notably in *All's Well That Ends Well*. Finally, the playwright also uses the work of Fernando de Rojas, the Marrano author of *La Celestina*.

Coming from a Marrano Jewish family—Italian Jews spoke Hebrew as their first language (Belkin 23)—Amelia Bassano is a precise fit for these uses.<sup>11</sup> In addition, both the plays and *Salve Deus* describe Jews using the same unusual metaphor. Drawing on a passage in the *Gospel of Matthew*, *The Merchant of Venice* refers to the ‘dog Jew’ (II.viii.14) and the ‘currish Jew’ (IV.i.292) which was a common term of Christian insult (Stow 2006). But uncommonly, Shylock is described as being a reincarnation of the soul of a wolf, whose ‘currish spirit/ Govern’d a wolf’ (IV.i.133-34) and whose ‘desires/ Are wolvis, bloody, starv’d, and ravenous’ (4,1,137-38). In *Salve Deus* Amelia uses the same odd metaphor referring to ‘Jewish wolves’<sup>12</sup> and she also uses imagery from *La Celestina*.

### Conclusion

*Salve Deus* appears superficially to be a spiritual autobiography, but is really a theological satire. In it Amelia adopts the role of a priest distributing the body at the feast and interpreting scripture, which was tantamount to heresy. Indeed, in some respects this poem on the Passion narrative constitutes a radical rewriting of the sacred Gospels, and Amelia effectively equates herself with the Gospel writers. In terms of the religion of Elizabethan England this was completely heretical, but quite compatible with the equally heretical parodies of the Passion story that appear in the plays, such as the death of Bottom/Pyramus.<sup>13</sup>

Like many philosophers writing at a time of persecution (Strauss 1988), the author of the plays used literary techniques to conceal their deeper meanings. Several scholars have already suggested that the plays contain an underlying deep structure of esoteric, and explosive, anti-Christian allegories, such as those in *Dream* (Parker 1998) and the ‘impious parody’ in *Julius Caesar* (Sohmer 130). This helps explain the remaining critical issue of motivation. Amelia would have had the strongest possible motivation for needing to conceal her authorship of these plays during her lifetime (Patterson 1986). If their hidden allegorical content and her Marrano identity had been discovered, she would unquestionably have been executed. These factors explain the great care that the author took not to be suspected of being a playwright, and to use a play-broker.

Ben Jonson implies, in his diary *Timber*, that Mr. Shakespeare gave unblotted fair copies of the scripts to the admiring actors, who in their ‘ignorance’, believed them to be his own originals.<sup>14</sup> So, presumably, did Sir George Buc and others. Yet some were not convinced and by 1687, theatrical rumors were in circulation among those ‘anciently conversant with the stage’ that *Titus Andronicus* at least, was ‘not originally’ Mr. Shakespeare’s but was ‘brought by a private author to be

acted' (Velz 1985). The present paper proposes that this 'private author' was Amelia Bassano Lanier.<sup>15</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> London Public Records Office, SP12/173, nos. 25 & 47.

<sup>2</sup> Bodleian, Ms. Ashmole 226, ff 95v, 110v, 201, as she told Simon Forman

<sup>3</sup> London Public Records Office E112/28/436 Letter from Bishop Bancroft to Robert Cecil 24 August 1604

<sup>4</sup> Dorothea Kehler. "Shakespeare's Emilias and the Politics of Celibacy." *Another Country: Feminist Perspectives on Renaissance Literature*. Eds. D. Kehler and S. Baker. New Jersey: Metuchen, 1990. 157-78.

<sup>5</sup> London Public Records Office, SP 12/181, no. 48.

<sup>6</sup> Court of Chancery Case. Public Records Office C2/James 1, L11/64.

<sup>7</sup> my unpublished analysis based on Gurr, Chambers and others, relating the date of each play to the known performance data for the previous 5 years.

<sup>8</sup> My unpublished analysis of the work of Onions and Bradley, cross-tabulated against *The English Dialect Dictionary* and published uses listed in *Early English Books Online*.

<sup>9</sup> This identification is suggested by a verse alluding to the *Shrew*, written by Sir Aston Cockain to Sir Clement Fisher, the largest landholder in Wilmecote, which begins: 'Shakespeare, your Wincot ale hath much renown'd', and which appeared in Cockain's collection in 1658.

<sup>10</sup> In this anecdote Richard Burbage (then playing Richard III) had an assignation with a woman, but Mr. Shakespeare arrived there first and enjoyed her favors, declaring that William the Conqueror was before Richard III. This anecdote therefore associates Richard and William with the Conqueror, precisely as in the compound allusion in the play.

<sup>11</sup> The definition of a Jew remains a complex question. The Government's view, as shown in their torture of John Traske in 1618, was that being a Marrano Jew was not a matter of whether one had passed through a *mikveh* nor even ethnicity, but rather of holding anti-Christian beliefs, keeping kosher and following Hebrew ceremonies.

<sup>12</sup> Although the reference to Jews as wolves derives presumably from the gospel passage about going as sheep among wolves (Matthew 10,16), a search on the EEBO shows these are the only explicit examples to appear in English literature before 1611. The reference could allude to the executed royal physician Dr. Lopez (Doctor Lopus as Marlowe calls him) or her relatives the Lupo family, who both were Jews whose surname meant wolf.

<sup>13</sup> in the death of Bottom/Pyramus, references to stabbing in the side, the light disappearing, and the playing of dice are sandwiched between a rhetorical *inclusio* of two mentions of the word 'passion' (5,1,277 and 303), in a crucifixion parody, see Hudson (2008).

<sup>14</sup> Diana Price has drawn attention to Jonson's complaint that Shakespeare was to be 'most faulted' and wished he had 'blotted' a thousand lines, implying that if the actor had not blotted (i.e. revised or corrected) those lines he was not their creator. I follow alternative authorship critics in supposing that in this passage Jonson is conflating a description of the actor Shakespeare and another account of the author.

<sup>15</sup> My thanks to Dr. Catherine Alexander, Dr. Saul Rosenberg, Joseph Atwill, Andree Aelion Brooks, Ellen Brodie and Kelly Morgan for their comments on previous versions of this paper, and to the V &A for use of portrait P8.1945.

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