

Was Shakespeare a Euphuist?

Some Ruminations on Oxford, Lyly and Shakespeare

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For Oxfordians, the fact that John Lyly was Oxford's secretary for fifteen years makes him a significant literary figure. Some Oxfordians have suggested that Lyly's plays are the works of a young Shakespeare written under a pseudonym. Oxford patronized two theater companies during the 1580s, Oxford's Boys, and Oxford's Men. Oxford's Boys were based at the Blackfriar's Theatre as well as Paul's Church. Oxford transferred the boy's company to Lyly, and Lyly went on to write many plays for them, including *Endymion*, *Sapho and Phao*, *Gallathea*, and *Love's Metamorphosis*.

John Lyly was born in 1553 or 1554. His grandfather was the noted grammarian William Lyly, famous for having written a widely utilized grammar textbook as well as for founding St. Paul's School in London. Lyly attended Oxford but left before graduating, finding life more suitable as a poet. In 1579 he published his first novel, *Euphues or the Anatomy of Wit*. Apparently Lyly's goal was to become Master of Revels, and he dedicated himself mainly to playwriting after the publication of his first novel.

It is significant that Oxford and Lyly were (and are) linked as "Italianate" figures. Alan Nelson, in his biography of the Earl of Oxford, *Monstrous Adversary*, makes it abundantly clear that Oxford's trip to Italy and his subsequent return to court flaunting his Italian clothes and manners branded him as not only Italianate, but superficial and effeminate: "His braggadocio is unmatched by manly deeds. Glorious in show, his actions are frivolous, his appearance Italianate" (226). Lyly's work was enormously popular in Elizabethan England, but its popularity waned soon after that. As Lene Ostermark-Johansen reminds us, "By 1630 the craze for Lyly's Euphuism had resulted in twenty-six editions of the separate works and

three editions of a double volume; then, for well over two hundred years, Euphues remained out of print until the late nineteenth century took a renewed interest in Lyly's literary style and reprinted his dramas and romances in new editions" (4). When Lyly re-emerged as an important literary figure in the late 19th century, he served as a whipping boy for those who disdained the sensuality and effeminacy of Oscar Wilde.

Ostermark-Johansen cites a diatribe against euphuism in the mid-1800s entitled "Fleshly School of Poetry," which was "essentially the outcry of a highly patriotic Victorian male against a whole tradition of French and Italian influence on English literature. Advocating a Wordsworthian approach to poetry, the language spoken by men to men, Buchanan perceived the influence of Romance literature as affected, effeminate, and overtly sensuous" (17). Interestingly Ostermark-Johnson attributes the lean masculinity of Walt Whitman's style to a reaction against what was perceived as the effeminacy of euphuism.

Probably because of 19th century associations between euphuism and effeminacy, Shakespeare is rarely spoken of as a euphuist; instead when links are found between euphuism and his work, it is suggested that he is parodying Lyly. There is a passage from *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, in which a servant's list of comparisons goes comically awry: "It is written, that the shoemaker should meddle with his yard, and the tailor with his last, the fisher with his pencil, and the painter with his nets" (1.2.39-41). This passage is interpreted, in the notes to Oxford School Shakespeare, as a parody of the following passage from Lyly's *Euphues* "The shoemaker must not go above his latchet, nor the hedger meddle with anything but his bill" (14). Though the quotations are similar, singling out these two similar passages reveals a limited knowledge of euphuism's relationship to Shakespeare. For one thing, Lyly's writings are littered with extended, elaborate comparisons (endless comparison is one of the central features of euphuism), so it is much more likely that in this passage from *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare is referencing Lyly's style in general, rather one particular instance.

Also, this instance in *Romeo and Juliet* is not the only place where Shakespeare's writing resembles Lyly's. There are many other examples — which I will itemize in this paper — that suggest there is a fundamental relationship between the work of Lyly and the work of Shakespeare. But I am certainly not the first to suggest this. Walter Pater, like Oscar Wilde, was accused of being a euphuist. As Ostermark-Johansen reminds us. Pater found a link between Shakespeare's work and euphuism, citing their confluence as a justification for his own experiments in the florid style:

Such modes or fashions are, at their best, an example of the artistic predominance of form over matter; of the manner of the doing of it over the thing done; and have a beauty of their own. It is so with that old euphuism of the Elizabethan age—that pride of dainty language and curious expression, which it is very easy to ridicule, which often made itself ridiculous, but which

had below it a real sense of fitness and nicety; and which, as we see in this very play, and still more clearly in the Sonnets, had some fascination for the young Shake-speare himself. It is this foppery of delicate language, this fashionable plaything of his time, with which Shakespeare is occupied in "Love's Labour Lost." . . . In this character [Biron], which is never quite in touch with, never quite on a perfect level of understanding with the other persons of the play, we see, perhaps, a reflex of Shakespeare himself, when he has just become able to stand aside from and estimate the first period of his poetry. (53)

Though Pater posits a significant stylistic link between Shakespeare and Lyly, and dismisses those who would ridicule it, he also suggests that euphuistic style resembled Shakespeare's early poetic efforts, not his mature work. If we take the precedence of "form over matter" as an accurate estimation of the essence of euphuism (and I think we might say that it is) then I would argue that Shakespeare's work is more like euphuism in the later plays, where it approaches a kind of apotheosis of the euphuistic style. Some think that Shakespeare's later plays are more profound than his earlier ones (i.e., that the "matter" is more pronounced than the form in his mature works). But what high school student would trade the stylistic complexities of *Coriolanus* or *Antony and Cleopatra* from the relatively straightforward syntax of an early effort like *Julius Caesar*?

To view the correspondences between Shakespeare and Lyly as somehow accidental or coincidental is to misunderstand that character of Queen Elizabeth's court. As Hunter reminds us speaking in this case of Lyly (among others):

For the court of Elizabeth was neither natural nor free . . . its ritual was artificial to the last degree. . . . [T]he sovereign was a painted idol rather than a person, and the codes of manners it encouraged were exotic Petrarchan and Italianate. . . . The artifice of these writers was a serious attempt to display what were generally taken to be the deepest values of the age. (7-8)

In other words, Lyly and the Earl of Oxford (if Oxford was indeed Shakespeare) were courtiers who adopted the style of the court that was gilded and excessively style-obsessed. A comparison between their works accentuates an interdependence of form and content that is often overlooked in the academic rush to view Shakespeare as the "earliest" of early moderns. I would certainly agree with Harold Bloom that Shakespeare's finely drawn and expertly detailed characters instigated certain modern notions of interiority. But in the area of style versus content — which I would argue was for Shakespeare and Lyly an overwhelming concern — Shakespeare proves himself to be less an early modern than a very, very, late, late medievalist.

I am not necessarily suggesting that the young Oxford disguised his own writing as Lyly's. Although it is certainly possible that he may have been involved in their creation. (Interestingly, Lyly stopped writing plays sometime in the early 1590s, when he was no longer Oxford's secretary. This suggests that Oxford may

have been somehow involved in co-authoring Lyly's plays.) I am also not implying that the real Shakespeare was, strictly speaking, a euphuist. I am suggesting that what makes Shakespeare's work singular in respect to his contemporaries, and in respect to Western culture in general, is the extraordinarily delicate balance between content (matter) and style (form). When the young and/or uneducated learn to read and understand Shakespeare for the first time, they often rail against what they see as needless wordplay: "Well, why didn't he just come out and *say* that?" In other words, why all the embellishment? I would suggest that within this seemingly simpleminded critique lies a fundamental truth. Shakespeare's writing descends from a tradition connected with Lyly and the patristic medieval school of grammarians and rhetoricians, a tradition that is significantly alien to us.

Before examining both form and matter in the work of Shakespeare and Lyly it is important to take note of the pedagogical methods that prevailed in Shakespeare's time. We like to think of Shakespeare as emblematic of the literary pioneer (and indeed, he certainly is, to some degree). But in the context of the literature of his time he was deeply, deeply conservative, resisting the most radical stylistic movements (and their philosophical implications) and clinging to the old ways.

An Early Modern Education

Foucault's *The Order of Things* (1966) attempts to describe the epistemic shift in perception, epistemology and ontology that occurred between the 16th and 17th centuries, and which came to full flower in the 19th century:

The theory of representation disappears as the universal foundation of all possible orders; language as the spontaneous *tabula*, the primary grid of things, as an indispensable link between representation and things, is eclipsed....Above all, language loses its privileged position and becomes, in its turn, a historical form coherent with the density of its own past. But as things become increasingly reflexive, seeking the principle of their intelligibility only in their own development, and abandoning the space of representation, man enters in his turn, and for the first time, the field of Western knowledge. (xxiii)

I think Foucault is right to accentuate the decreasing power of language and representation, and also to suggest that the changes that occurred involved a fundamental shift in how the West processed knowledge. If this change was indeed a profound shift in our manner of thinking about almost everything (for this is what an epistemic change means) then it may be difficult for us to understand how people wrote, thought, and learned in the Middle Ages.

Marshall McLuhan's doctoral thesis *The Classical Trivium: The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of his Time*, was published posthumously in 2006, and his findings predate and somewhat predict Foucault's musings on topic of medieval

and early modern education. It's important to remember that the subject is very difficult for us to understand, as the young McLuhan pointed out: "We, inevitably, are attempting to deal with the complex and sophisticated intellectual disciplines provided by the trivium in the terms of the naïve literary and linguistic culture of our own day" (105). So any attempt to explain the education of young men like Oxford and Lyly will necessarily be at least as limited as one historical era can be when it attempts to understand another. (It's a bit like imagining life in a fourth dimension.)

What is the classical trivium? The three subjects dominating medieval pedagogy were grammar, dialectics and rhetoric. But, grammar barely resembled what we know as grammar today, and rhetoric meant much more than the study of figures of speech. As McLuhan points out, the Latin rhetorician Cicero "dominates all the Renaissance handbooks on education of princes and nobility. It is the ideal of the practical life, the service of the state and the exercise of all ones faculties for achievement of glory and success. . . .The extraordinary anti-Ciceronian movement which emerges . . . gives us our post-Renaissance world" (8). McLuhan explains that Cicero was not merely about speechmaking, but concerned himself with the principle that a man who speaks well must necessarily also be a good man.

Dialectics, the newest of the three medieval subjects that battled for superiority in the curriculum, was associated with Plato and Aristotle; it contained within it the seeds of what we now call science. (The battle between the old learning — grammar and rhetoric — and the new learning — dialectics — was not only pedagogical, but epistemological). It would be an oversimplification to say that there was no dialectical movement in the medieval era. There were in fact periods during the 12th and 13th centuries when the pedagogical pendulum swung towards the dialectics (what we now called science) only to swing back to grammar in the early modern era. But, as McLuhan says, "From the point of view of the medieval grammarian, the dialectician was a barbarianThe Grand Renaissance was in the matter of the revival of grammar, both as the method of science and of theology, not fully achieved until the sixteenth century" (7).

Essential to understanding the medieval and early modern worldview is the third element of the classical trivium: grammar. Essentially we have no words to properly describe the subject. Here Foucault attempts to define a grammarian epistemology, quoting Paracelsus:

The world is covered with signs that must be deciphered, and those signs, which reveal resemblances and affinities, are themselves no more than forms of similitude. To know must therefore be to interpret: to find a way from the visible mark to that which is being said by it and which, without that mark, would lie like unspoken speech, dormant within things. 'But we men discover all that is hidden in the mountains by signs and outward correspondences; and it is thus that we find out all the properties of herbs and all that is in stones. There is nothing in the depths of the seas, nothing in the heights of the firmament that man is not capable of discovering. There is no mountain

so vast that it can hide from the gaze of man what is within it; it is revealed to him by corresponding signs.' Divination is not a rival form of knowledge; it is part of the main body of knowledge itself. (32)

If grammar is the opposite of science, it offers the possibility of reading the world like a book. Such a reading involves not only magic, but observation of nature, and the creation of poetry.

This is a terribly difficult concept for us to grasp today, but it was hugely significant for any 16th century writer. McLuhan explains it like this: "Adam possessed metaphysical knowledge in a very high degree. To him the whole of nature was a book which he could read with ease. He lost his ability to read this language of nature as a result of the fall" (16). Just as medieval grammarians would have looked for the resemblances and reoccurrences in nature that confirmed God's plan, so they would have considered poetry to be the word of God. McLuhan quotes Salutati (the 14th century Italian humanist) on the relationship between God and poetry: "Since we have no concept of God we can have no words in which to speak to him or of him. We must, therefore fashion a language based on his works. Only the most excellent mode will do, and this is poetry. Thus poetry may be outwardly false but essentially true. Holy Writ is of this kind. The origins of poetry are in the foundations of the world" (158). Poetry was to elucidate these truths through not only the matter but form – because that is what differentiates poetry from plain, everyday speech -- what we today might term "embellishment." But what separated poetry and plain speech was not merely decoration. McLuhan cites Robin explaining Gorgian poetics – the language used in medieval sermons (which he notes was similar to euphuism): "the balance of antithetical words and sentences is a process by which the speaker breaks up his thought and develops it, in the air, as it were, on a purely formal plane" (45).

Euphuism's primary feature is often assumed to be *unnecessary* embellishment, but this is a misconception. Yes, many of Lyly's works, even the novels, were written to be spoken aloud. They thus feature rhetorical techniques that are accentuated in speech, and are related to the pure beauty of sound. It's also important to remember that the sound of words is related to rhetoric, which was thought of as a distinctly moral endeavor. Nevertheless, Lyly's work is filled with concepts, embodied in his endless use of comparison and antithesis. Undoubtedly there is a somewhat different balance between form and content in Lyly and Shakespeare, but nevertheless it is this balance that is consistently at stake in the work of both poets.

Their concerns were very different from those of Ramism. Ramism was named after the educational reformer and Protestant convert Ramus (1515-1572). McLuhan points out that Ramism was the chief challenge to medieval grammar. He credits the rise of the anti-grammarians Ramus (along with the decline of Ciceronian rhetoric) with destroying the old pedagogical forms and ushering in the new. Ramist rhetoric severed style and matter, demanding clarity of moral message. Ramist theories influenced the Puritans, who fought for clearer and more accessible English

translations of the Bible. McLuhan tells us — “the complete severance of style and matter in the Ramist rhetoric was a directly contributing influence in bringing about that deliberate impoverishment of poetic imagery after the Restoration. It cooperated with Cartesian innatism to render imaginative or phantasmal experience frivolous at best” (192-193). The Ramist critique of the marriage of style and matter suggests that those who criticized euphistic embellishment were more concerned with separating embellishment and message than they were with the superficiality of embellishment itself.

In 1579, Oxford and Sydney had a famous quarrel in a tennis court that might have led to a duel (if Queen Elizabeth hadn’t intervened). Their argument is often rumored to have been about poetry. McLuhan suggests that the rivalry between Ramist rhetoricians and old style grammarians was the subject of de Vere and Sydney’s quarrel. Their difference of opinion was reflected in later disputes, including the Martin Mar-prelate controversy, and later, the disagreement between Nashe and Harvey.

The pamphleteering feud between the old-fashioned stylist Thomas Nashe and the more modern stylist Gabriel Harvey was a fight between the humanist school of Erasmus, as represented by Nashe (and associated with Lyly and Edward de Vere, the Earl of Oxford) and Harvey’s scholasticism. McLuhan says (quoting McKerrow): “The quarrel between Nashe and the Harveys seems in its origin to have been an offshoot of the well known one between Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, and Sydney” (210). McLuhan further explains: “Spenser was Ramistic in theology and rhetoric like Sydney, versus the Italianate Earl of Oxford, who was an obvious mark for puritans. Lyly sided with Greene and Nashe against the Ramistic Harvey. Sydney’s secretary was a Ramist — Sir William Temple. Oxford’s secretary was the patrist old style Lyly” (210). The Oxford/Sydney tennis quarrel occurred in 1579, and the Harvey Nashe quarrel occurred in the 1590s; in between the Martin Mar-prelate controversy took center stage. That quarrel, too, was between Puritans and Protestants on one side (Martin was named for Martin Luther) and those who defended the Anglican priests (Leland Carlson tells us that Puritan pamphleteer Master Job Throkmorton labeled them “pettie popes”) on the other. Oxford seems to have defended a pseudo-catholic Church of England under the pseudonym “Pasquill Cavilliero” — a suitably Italianate name. Lyly and Nashe published supporting pamphlets along with him. These complex controversies make somewhat more sense when viewed in the context of the religious “style wars” between Ramists and patrists.

It is often suggested that Shakespeare’s work allows us few glimpses of the author’s opinions. Hunter says that Lyly was “witty enough to avoid being identified with any of the views he puts forward” (31): something that has often been said of Shakespeare. But I would contend that Shakespeare, de Vere and Lyly all had very strong opinions about the interdependence of matter and form in poetry – opinions strong enough for de Vere to have risked a fight to the death with Sydney over them.

Colet, along with Lyly’s grandfather William Lyly, founded St. Paul’s, which was dedicated to a humanist philosophy, teaching students Ciceronian Latin and Greek. Hunter reminds us that students were not asked to learn the rules of

Latin speech but to practice speaking in Latin, therefore putting the form before the content: “Latin speech was before the rules, not the rules before latin speech” (20). Style comes before matter because *style* is, in a sense, matter. Hunter quotes Erasmus: “They are not to be commended who, in their anxiety to increase their store of truths, neglect the necessary art of expressing them” (21). Croll gives us Ascham: “ye know not what hurt ye do learning . . . that care not for words but for matter” (xxii).

This polarization goes back to the ancient Greek dispute between the Stoics and Sophists, between those who believe that truth is important, and those who, instead, value the art of persuasion. Certainly Shakespeare’s work seems to be in the Sophist tradition. Though the plays and poems frequently mention the dangers of art and artistry, they often come down on the side of fancy. And the plays are, after all, fictions. The stoics were dialecticians, and Stoic rhetoric (says McLuhan, here quoting Cicero) believed that “speaking well . . . is neither more nor less than speaking truthfully; for the Stoic needs only to instruct his hearer, and will not lower himself either to amuse him or to excite his emotions” (53). This is the very opposite of the sentiment expressed by Touchstone when he is teaching the naïve Audrey about love and art in act three scene three of *As You Like It*. Here Shakespeare the man speaks directly to us. This passage seems to faithfully echo the views of de Vere, Shakespeare and Lyly, when Touchstone says “the truest poetry is the most feigning” (3.3. 16).

Formal Similarities between Shakespeare and Lyly

Shakespeare and Lyly share formal similarities that are related to their groundings in humanist pedagogy, anti-Ramist rhetoric, and the medieval patristic style. Lyly’s style and Shakespeare’s are certainly not the same, but there are significant fundamental similarities.

In his introduction to *Euphues*, Croll gives us this definition: “Euphuism is a style characterized by figures known in ancient and medieval rhetoric as schemes (*schemata*) and more specifically by the word schemes (*schemata verbortum*), in contrast to tropes; that is to say, in effect by the figures of sound” (xv). Croll stresses that what separates euphuism from other rhetorical styles is vocal ornament. Croll means that through frequent use of antithesis and simile — and a plethora of comparative lists that characterize Lyly’s style — Lyly’s embellishments exist to create pleasing sounds, not to express ideas: “In Lily’s use of it . . . antithesis is purely a scheme, that is, a figure of the arrangement of words for the effect of sound. It is not meant to reveal new and striking relations between things . . .” (xvii). Here is an example of Lyly’s use of antithesis, as Eumenides describes his friend Endymion’s love for Cynthia. True, on the one hand it seems to be fanciful, yet I would argue it is not completely devoid of ideas: “When she, whose figure of all is the perfectest and never to be measured, always one yet never the same, still inconstant yet never wavering, shall come and kiss Endymion in his sleep, he shall then rise, else, never” (139). Croll’s argument is that thoughtful prose (like the writing of Francis Bacon) was anti-Ciceronian in its intent, and that a clean line can be drawn between

ornament (which is contentless) and thoughtful 'stoic' prose (which is supposedly devoid of style). I would suggest that euphuism, though obsessed with form, was not contentless, and that in Shakespeare one finds not Ramist, Stoic, moral truths, but a complex apotheosis of the melding of form and content that is the euphuistic style.

Lyly, like Shakespeare, not only utilizes vocal ornament — i.e., sounds that are pleasing to the ear — but also relies heavily on similes and antithesis to express ideas. One only need look at the following passage from *Endymion*. Here, the leading character, in typical euphuistic manner, offers a list of natural occurrences that display inconstancy, in order to praise Cynthia (a character inspired by Queen Elizabeth). The idea the passage attempts to convey is complex; the comparisons do not exist merely to provide opportunities for vocal ornament. Endymion's list relates, through extensive comparison, the notion that what is deemed changeable or inconstant may simply be in a state of movement, and that movement is an aspect of nature that is necessary, natural and beautiful:

O fair Cynthia why do others term thee unconstant . . . There is nothing thought more admirable or commendable in the sea than the ebbing and flowing; and shall the moon from whom the sea taketh this virtue, be accounted fickle for increasing and decreasing? Flowers in their buds are nothing worth til they be blown, nor blossoms accounted til they be ripe fruit; and shall we then say they be changeable for that they grow from seeds to leaves, from leaves to buds, from buds to perfection? (81)

Lyly does not use comparison only to create pleasing alliterative sounds. Though the above argument certainly provides an opportunity for vocal ornament, that is not all that is afoot. The comparative list not only allows Lyly to utilize alliteration with the words "buds," "blown," and "blossoms," and to create an echoing pattern in the words "increasing and decreasing," but it is an expression of a complex idea. The use of vocal ornament, combined with simile, antithesis, and quasi-philosophical argument, is what typifies the verse of both Shakespeare and Lyly. And these elements are combined in such a way that the very diverse elements that constitute style and form seem to be wrestling for supremacy. One is never quite certain whether one is being wooed by the style or the content; indeed most often it seems that the two are working in complex conjunction.

Lyly and Shakespeare are of course not the only early modern English poets who employ vocal ornament, antithesis, similes, or the judicious weighing of ideas to create their effects. But I would suggest that Spenser and Sydney (for instance) share a different focus. This is supported by the fact that Sydney and de Vere almost fought a duel over the issue of style versus content. Sydney along with the anti-Ramists, Protestants, and dialecticians alike were all intent on clearing the verbal and syntactical jungle that constituted the dense and complex style that was so much in vogue. They wanted to lay bare the moral message beneath the words, so that the ideas might be heard understood as clearly and simply as possible.

A fondness for the enjambment of form and content is not the only formal similarity to be found in both Shakespeare and Lyly. Lyly's favorite rhetorical devices are much the same as those utilized by Shakespeare. The rhetorical technique most typical of the euphuist style is the absence of obvious rhymes (Croll is quick to point out that this is also typical of the patristic style associated with medieval sermons). Instead of rhyme, the pleasing subtle "schemes" involve highlighting the sometimes nearly invisible similarities between words, including, as Croll notes: "Isocolon — successive phrases of about the same length, secondly Parison . . . corresponding members of the same form...noun to noun, verb to verb . . . Paromoion — similarity in sound of words" (xvi). The blank verse that typifies Shakespeare's verse plays rarely features rhyme but instead relies on subtler, balanced similarities between words. In fact I would suggest these devices are the essence of Shakespeare's poetic technique—which is often described as having a heightened sensitivity to echoing sounds.

Medieval sermons during the golden period of medieval English sermonizing, the 14th century, were written in a style that combined Latin and Middle English. In 1215 the Catholic church urged that churches preach to their flocks, and in England the rhetorical devices associated with Latin sermons began to make their way into the vernacular. As Croll notes, "the vernacular was thought to be too crude to bear the ornaments associated with the ancient tongue; and they were first employed with regular and conscious art at the time when modern poetry was born, -- in the fourteenth century" (lvi). As Croll also mentions, the patristic rhetorical devices common in Lyly (and I would suggest also common in Shakespeare) were criticized as being "wanton." Croll tells us Wilson speaks of "'Minstrels elocution' which in lieu of 'weightiness and gravitie of wordes' has nothing to offer but 'wantonness of invention'" (xl). Shakespeare was likely aware of this criticism—Viola, in an extensive discussion about the dangers of language in *Twelfth Night* says: "They that dally nicely with words may quickly make them wanton" (3.1. 14-15).

Over-embellished language was viewed in the 19th century as effeminate, and even as signaling sexual perversion; it seems likely that in Shakespeare's time there were also dangerous associations with sexuality. In the dialogue between Viola and the clown the fear is that language has the ability to draw people away from the church. It was precisely this fear that lay behind anxiety behind the use of the use ornamental vernacular in sermons.

Other stylistic similarities between Shakespeare and Lyly are, I would suggest, directly related to the body. David Bevington, in his introduction to *Endymion*, rates the characters according to their relationship to the carnal: "Endymion and Cynthia are at the apex of the play's structure by virtue of Cynthia's regal stature and the spiritualized nature of Endymion's love. Below them, [are the other characters] on the Neoplatonic ladder from contemplative union down towards fleshiness" (38). The device is Neo-platonic because it separates different pairs of lovers by their specific relationship to the soul or the body; in that way referencing Neo-platonism's concern over how the soul could be housed in the body, or how two such opposite things could ever be related to each other.

In Lyly's *Endymion* the characters are separated as are so many in Shakespearean comedies — Endymion and Cynthia, as well as Endymion and his best friend Eumenides, sit at the top of the heap, being possessed of the most soulful wit, while characters like Sir Tophas and Dipsa (comic figures) are at a more grossly physical level on the scale — and their humor reflects it. In Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* there is a similar stratification of characters, from Olivia and Orsino down to Sir Toby, Andrew Aguecheek, and the servant Maria, at a baser carnal level. In *As You Like It* Rosalind and Orlando represent the highest permutations of the soul, whereas Phoebe and Silvius are still chaste but less witty, while Touchstone and Audrey share an obscene bodily passion.

Finally, there is one aspect of both Lyly and Shakespeare's style that has an elliptical relationship to sex and sexuality. It is a technique that frustrates many a theatergoer, and seems somewhat counterintuitive to the idea of drama. In both writers, the complex syntax often slows down the narrative, and can hinder understanding of the ideas. Lene Ostermark-Johnansen quotes Devon Hodges on the fact that antithesis itself, as a rhetorical technique, naturally interrupts the movement of the story: "Though antithesis provides an authoritative and obvious method of organization, it also frustrates the linear development of the narrative and its ethical goals" (13). Antithesis is not the only interruptive technique employed by both Shakespeare and Lyly. These devices frustrate not only the progression of the plot, but the audience's need to find the moral center of the work (which so often is connected with the story's ending). Shakespeare and Lyly's favorite syntactical device embodies an aesthetics of delay.

Ostermark-Johansen comments on this device as utilized by the self-confessed late euphuist Walter Pater: "But perhaps the most striking characterization of Pater's syntax and refined style is Linda Dowling's concept of Pater's 'aesthetic of delay': 'Pater . . . puts off the moment of cognitive closure, not least because it is a little emblematic death. And he does this not simply by writing long sentences, but by so structuring his sentences as to thwart— at times, even to the point of disruption — our usual expectations of English syntax'" (8). Critics have commented on Shakespeare's tendency to place the object at the beginning of the sentence and the subject at the end, thus keeping us in suspense about the most important element. Polonius, in *Hamlet*, says "These blazes, daughter/Giving more light than heat, extinct in both/ Even in their promise as it is a-making/ You must not take for fire" (1.3. 117-120). Any page of Lyly's *Endymion* will reveal several sentences that have a reverse construction, either beginning with the object or a subordinate clause: "And welcomest is that guest to me that can rehearse the saddest tale or the bloodiest tragedy" (131). This technique — combined with Lyly's use of very long sentences and extensive comparisons, makes him a master of what Dowling calls "the aesthetics of delay." Dowling also suggests that the reason Pater doesn't wish to reach the end of the sentence is because it is an "emblematic death." To coin a reverse syntactical sentence of my own — what is another emblematic death, but the orgasm? I don't think it too much of a stretch to suggest that such delaying tactics are connected with the pleasure of sentences, the pleasure of reading, and with pleasure in general. Such

concern with beauty and pleasure — for Ramists and Protestants — (the foes of Lyly and Shakespeare) might have seemed not only to detract from the moral message of the work, but to indicate a kind of decadent immorality that was related to ornate, Italianate Catholicism.

Concurrences of Subject in Shakespeare and Lyly

What makes Shakespeare our contemporary is not only the somewhat naturalistic interiority of his well-observed characters, but also the fact that it is not always easy to understand what the overarching moral of each play might be. Such vagueness seems very modern in a post *Waiting for Godot* era, but constituted a somewhat scandalous aporia for critics in the past, and led to extensive revisions of Shakespeare. For instance, 18th century actor/director David Garrick provided Shakespeare's works with the neat, Christian-style moralizing that they so obviously lack. Our inability to pin down the slippery moral of these ornate plays is another aspect of Shakespeare's euphuism.

So "concurrences of subject in Shakespeare and Lyly," is not about deciphering the moral messages in Shakespeare. Whether in the comedies, tragedies, histories or problem plays, Shakespeare's work seems to touch on the deepest and most fundamental questions of our very humanity — without offering pat answers. And yet Shakespeare often hangs his plays on more mundane topics, that were, I expect, important to him and his daily life. Bertolt Brecht chose socialism as the subject for his works, and, true to form, his plays seem *on the surface* to be about issues that our related to shared wealth and the division of labor. But in fact Brecht's work is timely because it is really, in a larger sense, about people and their foibles, their physical bodies and their vices, and the possibility (or not) of morality in a materialist world. Similarly, although Shakespeare's overarching human concerns go beyond the more obvious subject matter of his great plays, nevertheless, certain persistent subjects keep cropping up. Some subjects are particularly interesting in terms of the authorship question. For instance, one of Shakespeare's favorite subjects is jealousy; usually a man is jealous of his wife, but — before the play ends — he sees the error of his ways. For Oxfordians, this choice of subject matter may or may not have to do with the real life issues between Edward de Vere and his first wife concerning what eventually proved to be her imagined infidelity.

I am not the first to suggest that Shakespeare and Lyly shared ideas. A comprehensive bibliography would mention several articles, including M. Mincoff's "Shakespeare and Lyly" (1961), and "Shakespeare, Lyly and Ovid: The Influence of Gallathea on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*" (1977). Of particular interest is Rushton's book *Shakespeare's Euphuism* (1871)— a slim volume, mainly comprised of quotations from both writers. It claims that "Shakespeare and Lyly have often the same thoughts, use the same language and phrases, and play upon the same words" (1). Rushton is able to find more than one hundred instances of similarities in not only word usage, but subject matter.

Sometimes it seems that Shakespeare and Lyly may have just stumbled on the same common proverbs, for instance, by accident. Both quote “a friend in the court is better than a penny in the purse” (10) — which might very well have been so common that the concurrence then becomes somewhat accidental. Rushton also picks out the instances in which the same words are used by the two authors. But the correspondences between the works prove most interesting when Rushton compares the ideas in the works. For instance, there is the stunning instance where both Shakespeare and Lyly make poetry of the Renaissance notion that chameleons eat air. Rushton quotes Hamlet “Excellent ‘i’ faith, of the chameleon’s dish : I eat the air, promise crammed; you cannot feed capons so” (3.2. 95-97). This significantly resembles Geron’s simile in *Endymion*: “Love is a chameleon, which draweth nothing into the mouth but air, and nourisheth nothing in the body but lungs” (137). The comparisons also spread beyond words, imagery, and proverbs to ideas, for instance, as Rushton notes: “Euphues says . . . ‘to a wise man all lands are as fertile as his own inheritance’ and Shakespeare says, ‘All places that the eye of heaven visits are to a wise man ports and happy havens’” (28).

But I would like to move beyond Rushton and suggest that there are ideas both writers share that deserve to be labeled as tropes. For instance, some of Shakespeare’s plays (including *Twelfth Night*, *Coriolanus*, and *Romeo and Juliet*) seem significantly concerned with male effeminacy. The Early Modern period was somewhat preoccupied with issues of effeminacy, especially in relation to the rise of the new courtier, as described in Castiglione’s *The Book of The Courtier*. The Italianate Earl of Oxford exemplified this revolutionary creature, who was both a warrior and a poet. In Lyly’s *Endymion*, the errant knight Sir Tophas (his name brings to mind Sir Toby Belch in *Twelfth Night*) is a knight who is not very knightly, and like Andrew Aguecheek (Sir Toby’s friend in *Twelfth Night*) he is more obsessed with romantic concerns than fighting. Sir Tophas falls in love with an old woman, Dipsas, and is quite unmanned by it — much to the consternation of his loyal sidekick Epiton: “Love hath, as it were, milked my thoughts and drained from my heart the very substance of my accustomed courage. It worketh in my heat like new wine....first discover me in all parts, that I may be a lover, and then will I sigh and die. Take my gun, and give me a gown” (122-123).

Like Sir Tophas, Shakespeare’s Romeo is unmanned by love. It’s interesting that when he first appears in the play, he speaks in euphuistic antithesis “Oh heavy lightness! Serious vanity!” (1.1. 176). He then is contrasted against warring males in the play, for the aggressive Tybalt, is described as “the very butcher of a silk button” (2.4.22-23) and “the pox of antic, lipping, affecting, fantasticoes” (2.4.28-29), whereas Romeo is greeted by his enemies as a foreign fop: “Signior Romeo bon jour! there’s a French salutation to your French slop” (2.4.42-44). The list of Shakespeare’s effeminate warriors goes on and on, and includes Coriolanus — who is dominated by his mother and finally unmanned by a military defeat, as well as the brave Achilles in *Troilus and Cressida* — who is accused of spending too much time languishing with his “male varlet” Patrocles.

Effeminacy is something that is associated, in modern minds, with the construction of homosexuality. Interestingly, both Shakespeare and Lyly not only deal with male effeminacy but also the issue of love between men. Each playwright features characters who idealize male romance and extol its superiority over heterosexual love. Eumenides' love for Endymion in Lyly's play of the same name surpasses the love of women (as David's love for Jonathan famously does in the Bible). In a long scene in which he discusses his love for Endymion with his father, Eumenides says "The love of men to women is a thing common, and, of course, the friendship of man to man infinite and immortal" (136). This echoes Bassiano's love for Antonio in *The Merchant of Venice* when he says "Antonio, I am married to a wife Which is dear to me as life itself; But life itself, my wife, and all the world Are not esteemed above thy life. I would lose all, aye sacrifice them all Here to this devil, to deliver you" (4.1. 281-286). Bassanio's feelings for Antonio resemble another Antonio's feelings for Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*, and the love between the young Leontes and Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale*. Of course it might be argued that all these 'loves' are friendship and have nothing to do with romance – but if so, then why are they compared with heterosexual romance, and held to be of more value?

Another trope common to both Shakespeare and Lyly is the reverse blazon; the anti-Petrarchan ode that itemizes a woman's ugliness instead of her beauty. The most famous version of this is in Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 that begins "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun." But Olivia touches on the reverse blazon when she sarcastically minimizes her charms when speaking to Viola in *Twelfth Night*: "O sir, I will not be so hard hearted. I will give/ out divers schedules of my beauty. it shall be/ inventoried, and every particle and utensil labeled to my will: as, item, two lips, indifferent red; item, two grey eyes, with lids to/ them; item, one neck, one chin, and so forth. Were you sent hither to praise me?" (1.5. 244-250). Launce has a full strength reverse blazon when he describes the ugly, unsuitable woman he is in love with, in *The Two Gentleman of Verona*:

Speed. 'Item: She doth talk in her sleep.'

Launce. It's no matter for that, so she sleep not in her talk.

Speed. 'Item: She is slow in words.'

Launce. O villain, that set this down among her vices! To be slow in words is a woman's only virtue. I pray thee, out with 't and place it for her chief virtue.

Speed. 'Item: She is proud.'

Launce. Out with that too. It was Eve's legacy, and cannot be ta'en from her.

Speed. Item: 'She hath no teeth.'

Launce. I care not for that neither, because I love crusts

Speed. 'Item: She is curst.'

Launce. Well, the best is, she hath no teeth to bite.

(3.1.320-332)

Endymion too has its own reverse blazon, when Sir Tophas describes his beloved Dipsas, detailing her ugliness and the advantages of being in love with an old woman. It shares much with the above passage, in tone, humor and content:

Oh what fine thin hair hat Dipsas! What a pretty low forehead! What a tall and stately nose! What little hollow eyes! What great and goodly lips! How harmless she is, being toothless! Her fingers fat and short, adorned with long nails like a bittern! In how sweet proportion her cheeks hang down to her breasts like dugs, and her paps to her waist like bags! What a low stature she is, and yet what a great foot she carrieth! How thrifty she must be in whom there is no waste! How virtuous she is like to be, over whom no man can be jealous!

(124-125)

I think it is significant that all of these subjects, which become tropes for Shakespeare and Lyly, have one thing in common: By challenging the usual assumptions of masculinity in men and beauty in women, they challenge the typical gender binary — our usual assumptions about what is male and what is female.

But for those unimpressed by an analysis of sexual politics in the work of both writers, there is simply the music of their language. For writers so steeped in rhetorical figures this is perhaps the most important aspect of their work. One can find similarities in the rhythmic patterns and word usage of the two writers. In fact, each wrote descriptions of the beguiling effects of music and the passages are markedly similar. From *Twelfth Night*, there is the famous “If music be the food of love, play on, Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting The appetite may sicken, and so die. That strain again! It had a dying fall” (1.1.1-4). From *Endymion* comes an echoing passage spoken by Eumenides: “Father, your sad music, being tuned on the same key that my hard fortune is, has so melted my mind that I wish to hang at your mouth’s end till my life end” (131). Hamlet’s famous melancholy musing on sleep and death (“To die, to sleep — No more — and by a sleep to say we end The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks That flesh is heir to! ‘Tis a consummation Devoutly to be wished. To die, to sleep — To sleep — perchance to dream” [3.1.60-65]) certainly finds its echo (if not its meaning) in the poetic music of *Endymion*’s melancholy thoughts on sleep and death: “No more, *Endymion*! Sleep or die. Nay die, for to sleep it is impossible; and yet, I know not how it cometh to pass, I feel such heaviness in mine eyes and heart that I am suddenly benumbed. It may be weariness, for when did I rest? It may be deep melancholy, for when did I not sigh?” (113).

For sheer music there is nothing quite as remarkable as the echoes between the fairy chants in *Endymion* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. There is this from Shakespeare, as the fairies dance around Falstaff:

Fie on sinful fantasy!
Fie on lust and luxury!

Lust is but a bloody fire,
Kindled with unchaste desire,
Bed in heart whose flames aspire,
As thoughts do blow them higher and higher,

Pinch him fairies, mutually
Pinch him for his villainy,
Pinch him, and burn him, and turn him about,
Till candles and starshine and moonshine be out.

(5.5.93-101)

This finds its match as the fairies put Endymion to sleep:

All. Pinch him, pinch him, black and blue,
Saucy mortals must not view
What the queen of stars is doing,
Nor pry into our fairy wooing.

First Fairy. Pinch him blue

Second Fairy. And inch him Black

Third Fairy. Let him not lack

Sharp nails to pinch him blue and red

Til sleep has rocked his addle head.

(155-6)

So many echoes. Comparing Shakespeare and Lyly is something like shouting into a very deep well. Which brings us to “bottomlessness.” The trope is much remarked upon by Ron Rosenbaum in *The Shakespeare Wars*. Rosenbaum suggests that the wealth of meanings and associations that we are confronted with when we hear or read Shakespeare is endless: “When we call down the corridors of Shakespeare, do we continue to hear back deepening ramifying echoes, or at some point will we have heard all there is to hear? Can we get to the bottom of Shakespeare or is he in some unique way bottomless?” (22-23). Rosenbaum’s suggestion is that Shakespeare’s work is so resonant that there is no end to the number of interpretations and associations that reverberate from it.

What inspires Rosenbaum’s musing on bottomlessness are Shakespeare’s own references to the concept. Rosenbaum mentions two passages in which Shakespeare makes particular reference to bottomlessness, though he indicates that there are many more references to the notion to be found in the canon. For instance, Rosalind, in *As You Like It*, refers to a fabled body of water that has no bottom, when she says “My affection hath an unknown bottom like the Bay of Portugal” (4.1.197-198). And then of course there is Bottom in *Midsummer Nights Dream*. When talking about his own dream he intones: “It shall be call’d ‘Bottom’s Dream,’ because it hath

no bottom.” (4.1.213-214). *Endymion* too offers us its share of bottomlessness. When Dipsas is revealing her powers as a witch she says “I can restore youth to the aged and make hills without bottoms” (96). And finally, when Geron and Eumenides are discussing how Eumenides might awaken his friend Endymion from a deep slumber (the sleep of Eumenides, by the way, is very like the sleep of Hermoine in *The Winter’s Tale*), Geron suggests that Eumenides visit a famous fountain. Lovers who cry into the fountain can read the answers to their problems at the bottom it — except that — “For often I have seen them weep, but never could I hear they saw the bottom” (133).

This discussion of the similarities between Shakespeare and Lyly may have landed us at the bottom of a hill with no bottom, or a bottomless fountain, or a bottomless bay or a bottomless dream — it could certainly go on and on. Though I have perhaps not answered the rhetorical question “Was Shakespeare a Euphuist?” it was not really my intention to do so. But I hope that I have indicated some of the implications that a comparison between Shakespeare’s work and Lyly’s work might have for future research.

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