

Classic Poetry Series

John Lyly

- 18 poems -

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John Lyly (1554 - November 1606)

John Lyly was an English writer, poet, dramatist, playwright, and politician, best known for his books *Euphues*, *The Anatomy of Wit* (1578) and *Euphues and His England* (1580). Lyly's literary style, originating in his first books, is known as Euphuism.

Biography

John Lyly was born in Kent, England, in 1553/1554, to Peter Lyly (d. 1569) and his wife, Jane Burgh (or Brough), of Burgh Hall in the North Riding of Yorkshire. The first of eight children, he was probably born in Canterbury, where his father was the Registrar for the Archbishop Matthew Parker and where the births of his siblings are recorded between 1562 and 1568. His grandfather was William Lily, the well-known grammarian.

According to Anthony Wood, at the age of 16 Lyly became a student at Magdalen College, Oxford, where he earned his bachelor's degree in 1573 and his master's two years later. In 1574 he applied to Lord Burghley for the Queen's letters to admit him as fellow at Magdalen College, but the fellowship was not granted, and Lyly subsequently left the university. He complains about a sentence of rustication apparently passed on him at some time, in his address to the gentlemen scholars of Oxford affixed to the second edition of the first part of *Euphues*, but nothing more is known about either its date or its cause. If we are to believe Wood, Lyly never took kindly to the proper studies of the university. "For so it was that his genius being naturally bent to the pleasant paths of poetry (as if Apollo had given to him a wreath of his own bays without snatching or struggling) did in a manner neglect academical studies, yet not so much but that he took the degrees in arts, that of master being completed 1575."

After he left Oxford, where he had the reputation of "a noted wit," Lyly seems to have attached himself to Lord Burghley. "This noble man," he writes in the *Glasse for Europe*, in the second part of *Euphues* (1580), "I found so ready being but a stranger to do me good, that neyther I ought to forget him, neyther cease to pray for him, that as he hath the wisdom of Nestor, so he may have the age, that having the policies of Ulysses he may have his honor, worthy to lyve long, by whom so many lyve in quiet, and not unworthy to be advaunced by whose care so many have been preferred."

Two years later a letter from Lyly to the treasurer, dated July 1582, protests against an accusation of dishonesty which had brought him into trouble with his patron, Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford, and demands a personal interview in order to clear his name. However, neither from Burghley nor from Queen Elizabeth I did Lyly ever receive any substantial patronage. He began his literary career by the composition of *Euphues*, or the *Anatomy of Wit*, which was licensed to Gabriel Cawood in December, 1578, and published in the spring of 1579. In the same year he was incorporated M.A.

at the University of Cambridge, and possibly saw his hopes of court advancement dashed by the appointment in July of Edmund Tylney to the office of Master of the Revels, a post at which he had been aiming. Euphues and his England appeared in 1580, and, like the first part of the book, won immediate popularity.

For a time Lyly was the most successful and fashionable of English writers, hailed as the author of "a new English," as a "raffineur de l'Anglois"; and, as Edward Blount, the editor of his plays, tells us in 1632, "that beautie in court which could not parley Euphuism was as little regarded as she which nowe there speakes not French." After the publication of Euphues Lyly seems to have entirely deserted the novel form, which was much imitated (e.g., by Barnabe Rich in his Second Tome of the Travels and Adventures of Don Simonides, 1584), and to have thrown himself almost exclusively into play-writing, probably still with a view to the mastership of revels. Eight plays by him were probably acted before the queen by the Children of the Chapel and especially by the Children of Paul's between the years 1584 and 1591, one or two of them being repeated before a popular audience at the Blackfriars Theatre. Their brisk lively dialogue, classical colour and frequent allusions to persons and events of the day maintained that popularity with the court which Euphues had won.

Lyly sat in parliament as a member for Hindon in 1580, for Aylesbury in 1593, for Appleby in 1597 and for Aylesbury a second time in 1601. In 1589 Lyly published a tract in the Martin Marprelate controversy, called *Pappe with an hatchet, alias a figge for my Godsonne; Or Crack me this nut; Or a Countrie Cuffe*, etc. Though published anonymously, the evidence for his authorship of the tract may be found in Gabriel Harvey's *Pierce's Supererogation* (written November 1589, published 1593), in Nashe's *Have with You to Saffron-Walden* (1596), and in various allusions in Lyly's own plays.

About the same time we may probably date his first petition to Queen Elizabeth. The two petitions, transcripts of which are extant among the Harleian manuscripts, are undated, but in the first of them he speaks of having been ten years hanging about the court in hope of preferment, and in the second he extends the period to thirteen years. It may be conjectured with great probability that the ten years date from 1579, when Tylney was appointed Master of the Revels with a tacit understanding that Lyly was to have the next reversion of the post. "I was entertained your Majestie's servaunt by your own gracious favor," he says, "strengthened with condicions that I should ayme all my courses at the Revells (I dare not say with a promise, but with a hopeful Item to the Revercion) for which these ten yeres I have attended with an unwearyed patience." But in 1589 or 1590 the mastership of the revels was as far off as ever—Tylney in fact held the post for thirty-one years.

In the second petition of 1593, Lyly wrote "Thirteen yeres your highnes servant but yet nothing. Twenty friends :hat though they saye they will be sure, I finde them sure to be slowe. A thousand hopes, but all nothing; a hundred promises but yet nothing. Thus casting up the inventory of my friends, hopes, promises and tymes, the summa totalis amounteth to just nothing." What may have been Lyly's subsequent fortunes at court we do not know. Blount says vaguely that Elizabeth "graced and rewarded " him, but of this there is no other evidence. After 1590 his works steadily declined in influence and reputation; he died poor and neglected in the early part of James I's reign. He was buried in London at St Bartholomew-the-Less on November 20, 1606. He was married, and we hear of two sons and a daughter.

The proverb "All is fair in love and war" has been attributed to Lyly's Euphues.

Comedies

In 1632 Blount published *Six Court Comedies*, the first printed collection of Lyly's plays. They appear in the text in the following order; the parenthetical date indicates the year they appeared separately in quarto form:

Endymion (1591)

Campaspe (1584)

Sapho and Phao (1584)

Gallathea (1592)

Midas (1592)

Mother Bombie (1594)

Lyly's other plays include Love's Metamorphosis (though printed in 1601, possibly Lyly's earliest play — the surviving version is likely a revision of the original), and The Woman in the Moon, first printed in 1597. Of these, all but the last are in prose. A Warning for Faire Women (1599) and The Maid's Metamorphosis (1600) have been attributed to Lyly, but on altogether insufficient grounds.

The first editions of all these plays were issued between 1584 and 1601, and the majority of them between 1584 and 1592, in what were Lyly's most successful and popular years. His importance as a dramatist has been very differently estimated. Lyly's dialogue is still a long way removed from the dialogue of Shakespeare. But at the same time it is a great advance in rapidity and resource upon anything which had gone before it; it represents an important step in English dramatic art. His nimbleness, and the wit which struggles with his pedantry, found their full development in the dialogue of Twelfth Night and Much Ado about Nothing, just as "Marlowe's mighty line" led up to and was eclipsed by the majesty and music of Shakespearean passion.

One or two of the songs introduced into his plays are justly famous and show a real lyrical gift. Nor in estimating his dramatic position and his effect upon his time must it be forgotten that his classical and mythological plots, flavourless and dull as they would be to a modern audience, were charged with interest to those courtly hearers who saw in Midas Philip II, Elizabeth in Cynthia and perhaps Leicester's unwelcome marriage with Lady Sheffield in the love affair between Endymion and Tellus which brings the former under Cynthia's displeasure. As a matter of fact his reputation and popularity as a playwright were considerable. Harvey dreaded lest Lyly should make a play upon their quarrel; Francis Meres, as is well known, places him among "the best for comedy;" and Ben Jonson names him among those foremost rivals who were "outshone" and outsung by Shakespeare.

Lyly must also be considered and remembered as a primary influence on the plays of William Shakespeare, and in particular the romantic comedies.

Love's Metamorphosis is a large influence on Love's Labour's Lost, and Gallathea is a major source for A Midsummer Night's Dream. In 2007, Primavera Productions in London are staging a reading of Gallathea, directed by Tom Littler, consciously linking it to Shakespeare's plays. They also claim an influence on Twelfth Night and As You Like It.

In addition to the plays, Lyly also composed at least one "entertainment" (a show that combined elements of masque and drama) for Queen Elizabeth; The Entertainment at Chiswick was staged on July 28 and 29, 1602. Lyly has been suggested as the author of several other royal entertainments of the 1590s, most notably The Entertainment at Mitcham performed on September 13, 1598.

Works:

Euphues

The Anatomy of Wit (1578)

Euphues and His England (1580)

Endymion (1591)

Campaspe (1584)

Sapho and Phao (1584)

Gallathea (1592)

Midas (1592)

Mother Bombie (1594)

Love's Metamorphosis (1601)

The Woman in the Moon (1597)

A Warning for Faire Women (1599)

The Maid's Metamorphosis (1600)

A Dittie

Behold her lockes like wiers of beaten gold,
her eies like starres that twinkle in the skie,
Her heauenly face not framd of earthly molde,
Her voice that sounds Apollos melodie,
The miracle of time, the [whole] worlds storie,
Fortunes Queen, Loues treasure, Natures glory.

No flattering hope she likes, blind Fortunes bait
nor shadowes of delight, fond fansies glasse,
Nor charmes that do inchant, false artes deceit,
nor fading ioyes, which time makes swiftly pas
But chast desires which beateth all these downe ;
A Goddesse looke is worth a Monarchs crowne.

Goddesse and Monarch of [t]his happie Ile,
vouchsafe this bow which is an huntresse part :
Your eies are arrows though they seeme to smile
which neuer glanst but gald the stateliest hart,
Strike one, strike all, for none at all can flie,
They gaze you in the face although they die.

John Lyly

A Song of Daphne to the Lute

My Daphne's Haire is twisted Gold,
Bright starres a-piece her Eyes doe hold,
My Daphne's Brow inthrones the Graces,
My Daphne's Beauty staines all Faces,
On Daphne's Cheeke grow Rose and Cherry,
On Daphne's Lip a sweeter Berry,
Daphne's snowy Hand but touch'd does melt,
And then no heauenlier Warmth is felt,
My Daphne's voice tunes all the Spheres,
My Daphne's Musick charmes all Eares.
Fond am I thus to sing her prayse ;
These glories now are turn'd to Bayes.

John Lyly

Apelles' Song

Cupid and my Campaspe played
At cards for kisses; Cupid paid:
He stakes his quiver, bow, and arrows,
His mother's doves, and team of sparrows;
Loses them too; then down he throws
The coral of his lip, the rose
Growing on's cheek (but none knows how);
With these, the crystal of his brow,
And then the dimple on his chin;
All these did my Campaspe win:
And last he set her both his eyes -
She won, and Cupid blind did rise.

O Love! has she done this to thee?
What shall, alas! become of me?

John Lyly

Apollo's Song

My Daphne's hair is twisted gold,
Bright stars apiece her eyes do hold,
My Daphne's brow enthrones the Graces,
My Daphne's beauty stains all faces,
On Daphne's cheek grow rose and cherry,
On Daphne's lip a sweeter berry,
Daphne's snowy hand but touched does melt,
And then no heavenlier warmth is felt,
My Daphne's voice tunes all the spheres,
My Daphne's music charms all ears.
Fond am I thus to sing her praise;
These glories now are turned to bays.

John Lyly

Cards and Kisses

CUPID and my Campaspe play'd
At cards for kisses--Cupid paid:
He stakes his quiver, bow, and arrows,
His mother's doves, and team of sparrows;
Loses them too; then down he throws
The coral of his lips, the rose
Growing on 's cheek (but none knows how);
With these, the crystal of his brow,
And then the dimple of his chin:
All these did my Campaspe win.
At last he set her both his eyes--
She won, and Cupid blind did rise.
 O Love! has she done this for thee?
 What shall, alas! become of me?

John Lyly

Cupid and My Campaspe

Cupid and my Campaspe played
At cards for kisses;
Cupid paid.
He stakes his quiver, bow, and arrows,
His mother's doves and team of sparrows,
Loses them too; then down he throws
The coral of his lip, the rose
Growing on's cheek (but none knows how),
With these the crystal of his brow,
And then the dimple of his chin:
All these did my Campaspe win.
At last he set her both his eyes;
She won, and Cupid blind did rise.
O Love! has she done this to thee?
What shall, alas, become of me?

John Lyly

Cupid and my Campaspe play'd

Cupid and my Campaspe play'd
At cards for kisses--Cupid paid:
He stakes his quiver, bow and arrows,
His mother's doves, and team of sparrows;
Loses them too; then down he throws
The coral of his lip, the rose
Growing on's cheek (but none knows how);
With these, the crystal of his brow,
And then the dimple of his chin:
All these did my Campaspe win.
At last he set her both his eyes,
She won, and Cupid blind did rise.
 O Love! has she done this to thee?
 What shall (alas!) become of me?

John Lyly

Eurymine's Song

Ye sacred Fyres, and powers aboue,
Forge of desires working loue,
Cast downe your eye, cast downe your eye
Vpon a Mayde in miserie.
My sacrifice is louers blood :
And from eyes salt teares a flood :
All which I spend, all which I spend
For thee Ascanio, my deare friend :
And though this houre I must feele
The bitter sower of pricking steele,
Yet ill or well, yet ill or well
To thee Ascanio still farewell

John Lyly

Fairy Revels

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.
Pinch him blue-
And pinch him black-
Let him not lack
Sharp nails to pinch him blue and red,
Till sleep has rocked his addlehead.
For the trespass he hath done,
Spots o'er all his flesh shall run.
Kiss Endymion, kiss his eyes,
Then to our midnight heidegye

John Lyly

Mother Bombie

Sil.

O Cupid ! Monarch ouer Kings,
Wherefore hast thou feete and wings?
It is to shew how swift thou art,
When thou wound'st a tender heart:
Thy wings being clip'd, and feete held still,
Thy Bow so many could not kill.

Acc.

It is all one in Venus wanton schoole,
Who highest sits, the wise man or the foole:
Foolles in loues colledge
Haue farre more knowledge,
To reade a woman ouer,
Than a neate prating louer.
Nay, tis confest,
That foolles please women best.

John Lyly

Oh, For a Bowl of Fat Canary

Oh, for a bowl of fat Canary,
Rich Palermo, sparkling Sherry,
Some nectar else, from Juno's dairy;
Oh, these draughts would make us merry!

Oh, for a wench (I deal in faces,
And in other daintier things);
Tickled am I with her embraces,
Fine dancing in such fairy rings.

Oh, for a plump fat leg of mutton,
Veal, lamb, capon, pig, and coney;
None is happy but a glutton,
None an ass but who want money.

Wines indeed and girls are good,
But brave victuals feast the blood;
For wenches, wine, and lusty cheer,
Jove would leap down to surfeit here.

John Lyly

Sappho's Song

O cruel Love, on thee I lay
My curse, which shall strike blind the day ;
Never may sleep with velvet hand
Charm thine eyes with sacred wand ;
Thy jailors shall be hopes and fears ;
Thy prison-mates groans, sighs, and tears ;
Thy play to wear out weary times,
Fantastic passions, vows, and rimes ;
Thy bread be frowns ; thy drink be gall,
Such as when you Phao call ;
The bed thou liest on be despair,
Thy sleep fond dreams, thy dreams long care ;
Hope, like thy fool, at thy bed's head,
Mock thee, till madness strike thee dead,
As, Phao, thou dost me with thy proud eyes ;
In thee poor Sappho lives, for thee she dies.

John Lyly

Song

Gran.

O For a Bowle of fatt Canary,
Rich Palermo, sparkling Sherry,
Some Nectar else, from Iuno's Daiery,
O these draughts would make vs merry.

Psyllus.

O for a wench, (I deale in faces,
And in other dayntier things,)
Tickled am I with her Embraces,
Fine dancing in such Fairy Ringes.

Manes.

O for a plump fat leg of Mutton,
Veale, Lambe, Capon, Pigge, & Conney,
None is happy but a Glutton,
None an Asse but who wants money.

Chor.

Wines (indeed,) & Girles are good,
But braue victuals feast the bloud,
For wenches, wine, and Lusty cheere,
Ioue would leape down to surfet heere.

John Lyly

Spring's Welcome

WHAT bird so sings, yet so does wail?
O 'tis the ravish'd nightingale.
Jug, jug, jug, jug, tereu! she cries,
And still her woes at midnight rise.
Brave prick-song! Who is't now we hear?
None but the lark so shrill and clear;
Now at heaven's gate she claps her wings,
The morn not waking till she sings.
Hark, hark, with what a pretty throat
Poor robin redbreast tunes his note!
Hark how the jolly cuckoos sing
Cuckoo! to welcome in the spring!
Cuckoo! to welcome in the spring!

John Lyly

Syrinx

Pan's Syrinx was a girl indeed,
Though now she's turned into a reed;
From that dear reed Pan's pipe does come,
A pipe that strikes Apollo dumb;
Nor flute, nor lute, nor gittern can
So chant it as the pipe of Pan:
Cross-gartered swains and dairy girls,
With faces smug and round as pearls,
When Pan's shrill pipe begins to play,
With dancing wear out night and day;
The bagpipe's drone his hum lays by,
When Pan sounds up his minstrelsy;
His minstrelsy! O base! this quill,
Which at my mouth with wind I fill,
Puts me in mind, though her I miss,
That still my Syrinx' lips I kiss.

John Lyly

Trico's Song

What bird so sings, yet so does wail?
O 'tis the ravish'd nightingale.
Jug, jug, jug, jug, tereu! she cries,
And still her woes at midnight rise.
Brave prick-song! Who is't now we hear?
None but the lark so shrill and clear;
Now at heaven's gate she claps her wings,
The morn not waking till she sings.
Hark, hark, with what a pretty throat
Poor robin redbreast tunes his note!
Hark how the jolly cuckoos sing
Cuckoo! to welcome in the spring!
Cuckoo! to welcome in the spring!

John Lyly

Vulcan's Song: In Making of the Arrows

MY shag-hair Cyclops, come, let's ply
Our Lemnian hammers lustily.
By my wife's sparrows,
I swear these arrows
Shall singing fly
Through many a wanton's eye.

These headed are with golden blisses,
These silver ones feathered with kisses,
But this of lead
Strikes a clown dead,
When in a dance
He falls in a trance,
To see his black-brow lass not buss him,
And then whines out for death t'untruss him.
So, so : our work being done, let's play :
Holiday ! boys, cry holiday !

John Lyly

What Bird So Sings, Yet So Does Wail?

What bird so sings, yet so does wail?
Oh, 'tis the ravished nightingale.
Jug, jug, jug, jug, tereu, she cries,
And still her woes at midnight rise.
Brave prick-song! Who is't now we hear?
None but the lark so shrill and clear;
How at heaven's gates she claps her wings,
The morn not waking till she sings.
Hark, hark, with what a pretty throat
Poor robin redbreast tunes his note;
Hark how the jolly cuckoos sing
Cuckoo, to welcome in the spring,
Cuckoo, to welcome in the spring.

John Lyly