

**Classic Poetry Series**

**Richard Barnfield**  
**- poems -**

**Publication Date:**

2004

**Publisher:**

Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

# Richard Barnfield(1574-1627)

Richard Barnfield (1574–1627) was an English poet.

Barnfield was born at Norbury, Staffordshire, and brought up in Newport, Shropshire. He was baptized on 13 June 1574, the son of Richard Barnfield, gentleman. His obscure though close relationship with William Shakespeare has long made him interesting to scholars. In November 1589 Barnfield matriculated at Brasenose College, Oxford, and took his degree in February 1592. He performed the exercise for his masters gown, but seems to have left the university abruptly, without proceeding to the M.A.

It is conjectured that he came up to London in 1593, and became acquainted with Watson, Drayton, and perhaps with Edmund Spenser. The death of Sir Philip Sidney had occurred while Barnfield was still a school-boy, but it seems to have strongly affected his imagination and to have inspired some of his earliest verses. In November 1594, in his twenty-first year, Barnfield published anonymously his first work, *The Affectionate Shepherd*, dedicated with familiar devotion to Penelope Rich, Lady Rich. This was a sort of florid romance, in two books of six-line stanzas, in the manner of Lodge and Shakespeare, dealing at large with the complaint of Daphnis for the love of Ganymede. As the author expressly admitted later, it was an expansion or paraphrase of Virgil's second eclogue *Formosum pastor Corydon ardebat Alexim*.

Although the poem was successful, it did not pass without censure from the moral point of view because of its openly homosexual content. Two months later, in January 1595, Barnfield published his second volume, *Cynthia*, with certain Sonnets, and the legend of Cassandra, and this time signed the preface, which was dedicated, in terms which imply close personal relations, to William Stanley, 6th Earl of Derby. In the preface Barnfield distances himself from the homoeroticism of his previous work, writing that some readers "did interpret *The Affectionate Shepherd* otherwise than in truth I meant, touching the subject thereof, to wit, the love of a shepherd to a boy". He excuses himself by saying he was imitating Virgil. The new collection, however, also contained poems which were "explicitly and unashamedly homoerotic, full of physical desire", in the words of critics Stanley Wells and Paul Edmondson. The book exemplifies the earliest study both of Spenser and Shakespeare. *Cynthia* itself, a panegyric on Queen Elizabeth, is written in the Spenserian stanza, of which it is probably the earliest example extant outside *The Faerie Queene*.

Some claim that Barnfield now married and withdrew to his estate of Dorlestone

(or Darlaston), in the county of Stafford, a house romantically situated on the River Trent, where he henceforth resided as a country gentleman. In 1605 his *Lady Pecunia* was reprinted, and this was his last appearance as a man of letters. It is further claimed that his son Robert Barnfield and his cousin Elinor Skrymsher were his executors when his will was proved at Lichfield; his wife, therefore, doubtless predeceased him. Barnfield, it has been supposed, died at Dorlestone Hall, and was buried in the neighbouring parish church of St Michaels, Stone, on 6 March 1627. However it now appears that this death was in fact his father, and that Richard Barnfield had died a few years earlier.

He was for long neglected; but his poetry is clear, sweet, and musical, although lacking in range and extremely derivative. The sonnet sequence, in particular, can be read as one of the more obviously homoerotic sequences of the period. His gift indeed is sufficiently attested by work of his having passed for that of Shakespeare, albeit for only one ode. *The Affectionate Shepheard* and the *Sonnets* appeared as limited-edition artist's books in 1998 and 2001, illustrated by Clive Hicks-Jenkins and produced by the Old Stile Press.

Barnfield's *Lady Pecunia* and *The Complaint of Poetry* were used as sample texts by the early 17th-century phonetician Robert Robinson for his invented phonetic script.

# Against The Dispraisers Of Poetry

Chaucer is dead; and Gower lies in grave;  
The Earl of Surrey long ago is gone;  
Sir Philip Sidney's soul the heavens have;  
George Gascoigne him before was tombed in stone.  
Yet, though their bodies lie full low in ground,  
As every thing must die that erst was born,  
Their living fame no fortune can confound,  
Nor ever shall their labors be forlorn.  
And you, that discommend sweet poetry,  
(So that the subject of the same be good)  
Here may you see your fond simplicity,  
Sith kings have favored it, of royal blood.  
The King of Scots (now living) is a poet,  
As his Lepanto and his Furies show it.

Richard Barnfield

# An Ode

As it fell upon a day  
In the merry month of May,  
Sitting in a pleasant shade  
Which a grove of myrtles made,  
Beasts did leap and birds did sing,  
Trees did grow and plants did spring;  
Every thing did banish moan,  
Save the nightingale alone.  
She, poor bird, as all forlorn,  
Lean'd her breast up-till a thorn  
And there sung the doleful'st ditty,  
That to hear it was great pity.  
Fie, fie, fie, now would she cry,  
Teru, teru, by and by;  
That to hear her so complain,  
Scarce I could from tears refrain;  
For her griefs so lively shown  
Made me think upon mine own.  
Ah, thought I, thou mourn'st in vain;  
None takes pity on thy pain;  
Senseless trees, they cannot hear thee;  
Ruthless bears, they will not cheer thee;  
King Pandion, he is dead,  
All thy friends are lapp'd in lead;  
All thy fellow birds do sing,  
Careless of thy sorrowing;  
Whilst as fickle fortune smil'd,  
Thou and I were both beguil'd.  
Every one that flatters thee  
Is no friend in misery:  
Words are easy, like the wind,  
Faithful friends are hard to find;  
Every man will be thy friend  
Whilst thou hast wherewith to spend,  
But if store of crowns be scant,  
No man will supply thy want.  
If that one be prodigal,  
Bountiful they will him call;  
And with such-like flattering

Pity but he were a king.  
If he be addict to vice,  
Quickly him they will entice;  
If to women he be bent,  
They have at commandement;  
But if fortune once do frown,  
Then farewell his great renown;  
They that fawn'd on him before  
Use his company no more.  
He that is thy friend indeed  
He will help thee in thy need:  
If thou sorrow, he will weep;  
If thou wake, he cannot sleep;  
Thus of every grief, in heart,  
He with thee doth bear a part.  
These are certain signs to know  
Faithful friend from flatt'ring foe.

Richard Barnfield

## Cherry-Lipped Adonis...

Cherry-lipped Adonis in his snowy shape,  
Might not compare with his pure ivory white,  
On whose fair front a poet's pen might write,  
Whose rosiate red excels the crimson grape.  
His love-enticing delicate soft limbs,  
Are rarely framed t' intrap poor gazing eyes;  
His cheeks, the lily and carnation dyes,  
With lovely tincture which Apollo's dims.  
His lips ripe strawberries in nectar wet,  
His mouth a hive, his tongue a honeycomb,  
Where muses (like bees) make their mansion.  
His teeth pure pearl in blushing coral set.  
Oh how can such a body sin-procuring,  
Be slow to love, and quick to hate, enduring?

Richard Barnfield

# The Nightingale

As it fell upon a day  
In the merry month of May,  
Sitting in a pleasant shade  
Which a grove of myrtles made,  
Beasts did leap and birds did sing,  
Trees did grow and plants did spring;  
Every thing did banish moan,  
Save the nightingale alone.  
She, poor bird, as all forlorn,  
Lean'd her breast up-till a thorn  
And there sung the doleful'st ditty,  
That to hear it was great pity.  
Fie, fie, fie, now would she cry,  
Teru, teru, by and by;  
That to hear her so complain,  
Scarce I could from tears refrain;  
For her griefs so lively shown  
Made me think upon mine own.  
Ah, thought I, thou mourn'st in vain;  
None takes pity on thy pain;  
Senseless trees, they cannot hear thee;  
Ruthless bears, they will not cheer thee;  
King Pandion, he is dead,  
All thy friends are lapp'd in lead;  
All thy fellow birds do sing,  
Careless of thy sorrowing;  
Whilst as fickle fortune smil'd,  
Thou and I were both beguil'd.  
Every one that flatters thee  
Is no friend in misery:  
Words are easy, like the wind,  
Faithful friends are hard to find;  
Every man will be thy friend  
Whilst thou hast wherewith to spend,  
But if store of crowns be scant,  
No man will supply thy want.  
If that one be prodigal,  
Bountiful they will him call;  
And with such-like flattering



Pity but he were a king.  
If he be addict to vice,  
Quickly him they will entice;  
If to women he be bent,  
They have at commandment;  
But if fortune once do frown,  
Then farewell his great renown;  
They that fawn'd on him before  
Use his company no more.  
He that is thy friend indeed  
He will help thee in thy need:  
If thou sorrow, he will weep;  
If thou wake, he cannot sleep;  
Thus of every grief, in heart,  
He with thee doth bear a part.  
These are certain signs to know  
Faithful friend from flatt'ring foe.

Richard Barnfield

# To His Friend Master R. L., In Praise Of Music And Poetry

If music and sweet poetry agree,  
As they must needs (the sister and the brother),  
Then must the love be great 'twixt thee and me,  
Because thou lov'st the one, and I the other.

Dowland to thee is dear, whose heavenly touch  
Upon the lute doth ravish human sense;  
Spenser to me, whose deep conceit is such  
As, passing all conceit, needs no defence.

Thou lov'st to hear the sweet melodious sound  
That Ph{oe}bus' lute (the queen of music), makes;  
And I in deep delight am chiefly drown'd  
Whenas himself to singing he betakes.

One god is god of both (as poets feign),  
One knight loves both, and both in thee remai

Richard Barnfield