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John Lyly’s Mytho-Politics: Redefining Gender and Social Hierarchy through Erotic Desire

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Declaration: This submission is my own work. Any quotation from, or description of, the work of others is acknowledged herein by reference to the sources, whether published or unpublished.

Signature:

To Magda,
who let me put this work first
and was content with stolen moments.

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Abstract

Drawing extensively on Graeco-Roman mythology, John Lyly's comedies delve into love and its effects upon their characters. As a recurrent theme, love is diversified not only in its manifestations, but also in its dramatic representation (affection/lust). Its centrality to the plot is highlighted through its consistent theatrical embodiment by Cupid, who becomes the protagonist in several Lylian plays, and unfolds his evolving polymorphism through dramatic action. Cupid's portrayals as child, adolescent, and grown-up are witnessed in a linear manner in three comedies which, along with their partial textual interaction, allow their collective examination as a trilogy: *Sappho and Phao* (1584), *Galatea* (1592), and *Love's Metamorphosis* (1601). Viewing Cupid as the common thread binding the comedies together, I aim to explore the unsettlement as well as the redefinition of social and principally of gender hierarchy through their representations of love as erotic desire. Because it is perceived as a masculine privilege, desire ascribes agency to the objectified female when it is feminised, emerging thus as a politically inflected matter. In probing into issues of gender and sexuality in relation to patriarchally demarcated social roles, I use Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* to suggest that Lyly's characters perform gender to oppose the (early modern) societal and cultural norms imposed upon their sexual identities, rather than follow and, hence, abide by them. Similarly, the dramatic representation of homoeroticism and of sexual practices as alternatives to institutionalised marital monogamy becomes a conscious effort on the dramatist's part to destabilise heteronormativity, and reappraise femininity. The staging of such tropes, in turn, theatricalises desire by stimulating it through vision, which enables the investigation of the interrelationship between desire and sensory loss, especially blindness. Laura Mulvey's theoretical framework and concept of the "male gaze" is conducive to this task, facilitating an examination of the power dynamics between subject and object of desire within the process of sexual negotiation. Although such ideas are articulated halfway and are ultimately silenced due to the censorship of his time, Lyly's radicalism still lies between the lines of his plays, rendering him a proto-feminist. Therefore, this dissertation embraces as well as addresses the prospect of critically appreciating Lyly's drama, which remains overshadowed by the dramatist's canonical contemporaries.

Introduction

> ἀφελόντες γὰρ ἄρα τοῦ ἔρωτός τι εἶδος ὀνομάζομεν, τὸ τοῦ ὅλου ἐπιτιθέντες ὄνομα, ἔρωτα, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα ἄλλοις καταχρώμεθα ὀνόμασιν.
>
> (The reason is that we are picking out one particular kind of love and giving it the name which applies to all, but for the other kinds of love we use different names.)[1]
>
> —Plato, *The Symposium*

What is love? And what does it encompass? It is generally understood as a force enabling the perpetuation of all life since the beginning of time—operating and manifesting in numerous ways, and thence experienced differently. Because this is a broad definition, perhaps it is a safe one to assign to love, given the polysemy it linguistically acquires. The multi-faceted nature of love makes its definition in narrower terms a challenging if not infeasible task, which has universally preoccupied authors displaying different perceptions of it throughout the centuries. In early modern England, dramatists, among whom John Lyly and William Shakespeare stand out, seemed fully aware of this ambiguity and made use of it in dramatising desire and its thematic complexity. In his book *Conceiving Desire in Lyly and Shakespeare: Metaphor, Cognition and Eros*, Gillian Knoll probes into the interrelationship between language and eroticism in Lylian and Shakespearean drama, and discerns three main modes of love: “arousal and sensation,” “intimacy and connection,” and “lovemaking” (19). None of these erotic experiences is historically singular, since they are still highly relevant. But we should not infer the same about the cultural freight love as a generic term carries, as that is determined by the historical conditions within which the word is used.

Following that, any literary representations of the erotic in the sixteenth century need to be examined as incident to the ideologies and discourses of courtship. Especially in the case of Lyly, who had been harbouring high hopes of socially advancing as a courtier in Elizabeth’s circle throughout his life,[2] the topic of eroticism in his plays becomes just as pertinent to the Elizabethan court, which represented the higher strata of English society at the time. The court inspired a tradition which determined the gender roles to be assumed

in the process of the sexual game, but it urged its members, men and women alike, to "love without loving, and to desire without desiring" (Bates 89); in other words, to engage with amorous play, sheltered from any fallouts by the permissive ambiguity of love with regard to its mixed sensual and affective associations. Courtship includes precisely the dalliances that originate in the royal court, and it metaphorises not simply Knoll's three modes of love, but more importantly "the desire for power and authority" (Goldberg 152), which attributes to love a *par excellence* political dimension.

If we are to focus particularly on the political dimension of erotic desire, should all three modes of love Knoll theorises be taken into consideration for this study? I maintain that only the first two—commonly identified with sexual attraction (lust) and emotional attachment (affection)—serve the purpose of exploring erotic desire in the plays in question, the third (the sexual act) being extraneous, for two reasons. Firstly, "the very nature of desire is precisely what prevents its fulfilment" (Dollimore, "Desire" 369). That is to say, the consummation of erotic desire automatically either extinguishes or denatures it by changing it into a different erotic experience. Lovemaking falls by definition into consummation, and hence not into desire *per se*: however stimulated by it, lovemaking cannot be equated to desiring, and so becomes a whole new, oppositional category to it. Secondly, Lyly's drama does not focus on lovemaking, as in none of the three plays under review is it reported that the characters have sexual intercourse.[3] Even though the (pro)creative possibility the sexual act entails is inherently political, especially in a society governed by patrilineality, Lyly's plays dramatise the potential political impact of desire and the power dynamics it triggers, rather than the material outcome of it, in the form of birthing a child. On these grounds, I perceive Lylian love as erotic desire in its essence, that is either the longing to physically be or to emotionally connect with someone, and I distinguish it from eroticism, which is any thematic engagement with portraying the erotic.

Written in less than a decade and firstly performed in the 1580s, *Sappho and Phao*, *Galatea*, and *Love's Metamorphosis* engage in a textual interaction so as to inaugurate an elaborate discussion on love and chastity—on love versus chastity. The first of the aforementioned plays has most commonly been read as a complimentary allegory for Elizabeth due to her paradoxical position as a female sovereign.[4] By 1584 when *Sappho and Phao* is believed to have been staged for the first time, the cult of virginity was already

impinging upon the people of England, who were starting to embrace, however unsettlingly, the prospect of their queen remaining unmarried. After being spitefully targeted by Venus and hit by Cupid's arrows, the main heroine, who borrows her name from the ancient Lesbian poetess but becomes a thinly veiled metaphor for Elizabeth instead, is smitten with Phao, a boatman hence a man much inferior in social status. Sappho's infatuation compromises her monarchical authority and considerably so, given that her sexual desire is reciprocated by Phao. Unlike Elizabeth, who assumed the role of "the wavering, prevaricating, and normally dismissive . . . mistress" (Bates 45) in her several courtships, Sappho struggles to restrain herself from taking the initiative to woo Phao. The play emphatically reaches its closure with the breaking of love's spell on Sappho and her maternal adoption of Cupid, which not only affirms her success in taming her passions, but also promotes Elizabeth's image as "a mother to England or mother to her subjects" (Jankowski, *Elizabeth I* 43).

Galatea, initially performed in 1588 and published six years later, is perhaps to date Lyly's most popular play as far as both playgoers and critics are concerned. One of the very few plays of the Renaissance where homoeroticism finds representation, this comedy features two heroines who get enamoured with each other at first sight while under the illusion of heteroerotic attraction. To diminish the likelihood of becoming the victims of a sacrificial ritual, both Galatea and Phillida conceal their sexual identities underneath boyish clothes and try to act in accordance with their apparel when they meet each other. The setting of the play, a forest where Cupid roams and toys with the hearts of young virgins, introduces the contest between love and chastity which is effectively dramatised not in the form of an ordeal as in Sappho's case, but in the rivalry of two Graeco-Roman goddesses. Resounding Elizabeth's over-protectiveness towards her ladies-in-waiting (Fox 53), Diana tries to shield her own virgins from the calamitous effect of desire, becoming thus identifiable not only with the female monarch but also with a deified Sappho. Nonetheless, *Galatea* might as well display Lyly's "anachronistic humanist idealism" (Rose 22) best, for the homoerotic romance of the two heroines is granted permission to prosper at the end thanks to Venus's divine intervention in changing the sex of either the eponymous character or Phillida.

Partly drawing on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the last play under review was initially published in 1601 and its greatest dissimilarity to the other two is that is puts eroticism under the microscope specifically to unearth the sexual negotiation and the power dynamics registered in it. Centred on the courting of three nymphs against their will by three foresters, *Love's Metamorphosis* brings the ongoing debate between love and chastity to a final conclusion by dramatising another divine rivalry—this time, between Ceres and Cupid. The play, which is hard to classify as a comedy owing to its coercive ending, seemingly equates on the one hand women with chastity, personified by Ceres and extended to her nymphs, and on the other men with love, because of the homosocial bond obliging Cupid to gratify the foresters' wishes. This obligation eventually leads Cupid to metamorphose each dissonant nymph into a flower, a rock, and a bird, establishing in that way his authority as tyrannical and his powers as punitive.

The dramatist's recursion to the trope of love in all his comedies is well-known, yet scarcely scrutinised with respect to unravelling the intertextuality between his works. However, this is not the first time that these particular plays are studied comparatively because of the cross-references they contain. Jeff Shulman focusses on how the oxymoronic coexistence of love and chastity is maintained in the three plays in order to offer his insight into the mythological elements Lyly borrows from Ovid. More recently, Leah Scragg in her introduction of the newly-edited Revels Plays edition of *Love's Metamorphosis* propounds that "[e]choes of other items in the Lylian corpus are detectable" (2) and invites her readership to consider Cupid as the osculation between the three plays, without however elaborating on this. Neither critic, however, has either suggested the grouping of the plays as a trilogy, or has discussed their intertextuality in relation to erotic desire as a means of unsettling social structures. In this dissertation, I will attempt to fill this void by examining and negotiating the contingency that the aforementioned three plays appertain to a continuum of work, constituting episodes of a broader narrative, of a trilogy. With the aid of contemporary feminist criticism, I will argue that Lyly relies upon the polysemy, heterogeneity, and political inflection of love to promulgate as well as critique issues of sexuality and gender, which preordain to a large extent the public and/or private roles set for members of a social group. Subsequently, I will contend that the juxtaposition and collective inspection of the plays under review

critically enable the examination of the dramatist's radicalism lying in the redefinition of gender hierarchy and social order as depicted in his works.

Since this line of reasoning presupposes that the plays remain in constant dialogue with one another, the three chapters on which my analysis rests do not correspond to each part of the trilogy but are, rather, organised by thematic unit while retaining a comparative approach to the primary sources. The first chapter focusses on the dramatisation and unfolding of the multiplicity of desire, assorting its various manifestations and receptions under a gendered prism, as the feminine erotic experiences are disproportionate to the masculine ones. Nevertheless, it also demonstrates that desire is embodied in Cupid's linear development, which becomes the common thread between the three plays showcasing the growing political potential of directing the arrow and, thence, of controlling desire. Ensuing from the conceptualisation of the trilogy's focal motif, the second chapter launches a discussion shifting from theatre to drama and involving the dramatic integration of controversial practices that kindle desire, such as cross-dressing. On the whole, this section investigates the common ground between enacting roles and performing gendered acts, and from there it delves into the trilogy's reappraisal of gender order by means of dramatising erotic interactions that are disruptive to heteronormativity and openly challenge institutionalised marital monogamy. Last but not least, this dissertation conjointly touches upon issues of social class and sexuality as a means to redefine social hierarchy. This final chapter looks back to both the first one by displaying the theatricalisation of desire, and to the second one by binding together the dramatic with the theatrical, which have been by this point examined separately. Starting from the premises that erotic relations are power relations and that desire operates through vision, this chapter concentrates on the erotic theatrical gaze, which is approached from a masculine standpoint for the most part but not exclusively, and which applies to the affiliations not only between dramatis personae but also between actors and audience due to the spectating nature of playgoing. At the end of the day, erotic desire makes no discriminations as to whom it governs, torments, or transforms, be they fictional characters or breathing people, emerging thus as all-powerful. This dissertation, in short, seeks to define it and encapsulate its unfaltering impression through Lyly's playwriting.

Notes

[1] The Epigraph's translation from ancient Greek is by M. C. Howatson; *Plato: The Symposium*. Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 42.

[2] For Lyly's (hoped-for) position in Elizabeth's court in relation to his dramatic corpus, see G. K. Hunter's influential work, *John Lyly: The Humanist as Courtier*, and Derek B. Alwes's article titled "'I would faine serve': John Lyly's Career at Court."

[3] The turn Galatea and Phillida's flirtation takes in *Galatea* could be considered a debatable exception: Sarah Carter argues that the girls engage in a lesbian sexual act, although she dismisses it as non-intercourse owing to a lack of penetration (109).

[4] See Jankowski, *Elizabeth I* chapter 2 (pp. 27-52); Kesson, "Comedy" 218-219, and "John Lyly" 39; Shulman 250-259; Berry, chapter 5 and esp. 124-135; Pincombe 381-382; Best 75-76; Saccio 168; Walker 187-188; Alwes 399-400.

Chapter 1

Cupid's Arrows and the Dramatisation of Desire

Ἔρος δηὖτέ μ᾽ ὀ λυσιμέλης δόνει,
γλυκύπικρον ἀμάχανον ὄρπετον

(Eros the melter of limbs (now again) stirs me
— sweetbitter unmanageable creature who steals in)[1]

—Sappho, "130"

Love is lack. Referring to castration and penis envy, feminist theorist and philosopher Hélène Cixous seems to think otherwise: "What's a desire originating from a lack? A pretty meager desire" (891). But to love is to admit nonfulfillment, incompleteness; to pursue thereafter mutuality, in the form of either sexual gratification or reciprocation of one's feelings. Lyly's drama addresses love as erotic desire according to this rationale. However, because his plays are meant to be performed on the Elizabethan stage, which mirrors as much as it promotes social roles as demarcated by the society for its members, they unavoidably illustrate dissimilar manifestations and receptions of desire. This filters the conceptualisation of love as erotic desire through a gendered lens, meaning that males are expected to comprehend and experience it differently from females, and vice versa. In examination of eroticism in the three plays, I argue that Lyly not only disregards the prescription of a particularised experience of the erotic in relation to a character's sex, but further presents the enormously different impact sexual desire might have upon the female body depending on the sex of who fosters it. This patterned approach to the portrayal of erotic desire is greatly facilitated by the fact that there is a Cupid listed among the dramatis personae of all three plays under review, a Cupid who dramatically incarnates every manifestation of erotic desire depicted in them. In fact, the more he generates a textual interaction between the plays and encourages their classification as a trilogy, the more his consistent reappearance becomes meaningful. Accordingly, Cupid is not three characters distinguishable from one another who have been inspired by the same mythological figure but is, rather, one character featuring in all three parts of a larger work.

If we can talk about a Lylian trilogy, then it does not merely contain or explore eroticism but, rather, is structured after it, since the manner in which desire manifests itself becomes a convergence point for the three plays. The dramatist is intrigued by the workings of "natural love" and its interaction with the social and gendered stereotypes of his time (Pincombe 388), so he constructs it as a potent, even transformative force. Its first feature is its duality, of which all characters appear to be as aware as they are cautious—who can tell where sexual lust ends and where romantic affection begins?

> MILETA. Why, will you have women's love in their tongues? . . .
> PHAO. Because there was never anything in the bottom of a
> woman's heart that cometh not to her tongue's end. (*Sappho and Phao*, 3.4.30, 33-34)[2]

This dialogue from *Sappho and Phao* highlights the blurred boundaries of each aspect of love, since the two characters refer to different things. Phao thinks of love as a matter of the heart by definition, but Mileta misunderstands his words and is astounded by the thought that women might have sexual longings, much less vocalise them.

Aside from that, the dialogue divulges the second and equally vital characteristic of erotic desire: that, overall, it is rigidly gendered, and Lyly consciously depicts it as such, with some exceptions. The correspondence of either type of desire with the masculine or the feminine gender is highly facilitated—if not forced—by the courtship tradition, which positions any romantic affiliation under a strictly heteronormative lens. Because of the early modern fixation with female virginity, the courted lady must by all means be elusive and aloof, as being desired becomes a threat to her body's intactness. The proper way for women to get involved with love is articulated by Cupid himself in *Love's Metamorphosis*, where we find his most cynical and self-assertive portrayal: he demands of women that "are not in love, reverent thoughts of love; / [of women that] be, faithful vows" (2.1.109-110). In expressing the traditional Elizabethan views on love, Cupid associates the female experience of it with thoughts and words—or, with its spiritual aspect specified as devotional intimacy. The duality of desire heavily influences women's social role, because it implicates the cult of virginity and by extension their suitability to be wedded. Much more than the primary biological state of the sexed female body, virginity is the ticket for a woman's entrance into, and productive appropriation by, "the sex/gender system" of a

society that sets her being married off as a prerequisite for her social survival (Jankowski, "Redefining" 253-254).[3] The virginity cult marks the female body as penetrable and thus violable in relation to erotic desire:

> FIDELIA. . . . What is that chastity which so few women study to keep,
> and both gods and men seek to violate? If . . .
> a rare virtue, why are men so careless of an exceeding
> rareness? (*Love's Metamorphosis* 1.2.134-135, 137-138)

Having been victimised by the patriarchal ideology pervading and regulating her body, as well as by the potency of phallocentrism to arrogate it while protected by the same ideology, Fidelia classifies sexual desire as an erotic experience reserved for men on the one hand, and as a subterfuge turned against women on the other. The three foresters appearing in the same play only verify Fidelia's words, since their attraction to Ceres's nymphs is principally sexual.

Interestingly, the duality of desire does not simply mirror the early modern binary views on gender but rather the precarious state of the female body's corporeality itself; eroticism as romantic affection sustains the female sexed body's virginal state and may even lead to marriage, whereas lust can result in the female body's defloration and the loss of its so-valued chastity. Yet, Lyly both complicates and challenges gender binarism, not simply due to the cross-dressing practices employed both by the dramatis personae in his works and by the boy-actors enacting them, which will be discussed in further detail in the second chapter, but mainly because his heroines experience the erotic in divergence with their gender roles. Sappho's ailment derives from her sudden sexual desire for a boatman; Galatea and Phillida are as infatuated with each other as they are sexually intrigued; Diana's nymphs are after sensual pleasure because of Cupid's arrows; and Niobe, one of Ceres's nymphs, is comfortable with the idea of being sexually attracted to multiple potential partners. All of these instances, showing that Lyly's female characters are capable of experiencing what society condones as masculine desires, form a pattern through which the dramatist subverts gender binarism. In fact, one could even support in contemporary terms that Lyly, in his effort to socially emancipate women, creates gender-fluid characters by having them appropriate characteristics and practices atypical of their sex.

However, to fully comprehend how the dramatist defies in his drama the gendered experiences of erotic desire that are culturally acceptable, one need also examine how he treats the contingency of consummation from his non-masculinist standpoint. In *Galatea*, Diana's virgins and protégées are accused of turning "unchaste in desires, immoder- / ate in affection, untemperate in love, in foolish love, in / base love" (3.4.36-38), and thus of having abandoned their feminine space (idleness) and infiltrated a masculine one (sexual arousal). This trespassing of erotic boundaries distances them from the feminine prototype: regardless of a woman's parentage and social standing, the feminine ideal which she must pursue is marked by docility, beauty, and celibacy. Being highly influential as concerns the manner in which Lyly creates his female characters, especially his protagonists, this model is fleshed out best in *Galatea*, by the motif of the virgin's sacrifice: what is perfect must be surrendered to the gods, because perfection exceeds the flawed human sphere. The homonymous character of the play as well as Phillida, a reflection of her with little dissimilarity, are the only characters seemingly measuring up to this model. Nonetheless, neither may vie with the main heroine of *Sappho and Phao*, precisely because both Galatea and Phillida eventually yield to their desires, be they sexual or not. Unlike them, Sappho is qualified to embody the ideal female according to the Elizabethan standards not only because she possesses the aforementioned traits, but chiefly because she overpowers her own lust for Phao. Sappho is not untouched by sexual desire, as she would be socially expected to, but she is aggrandised on account of not consummating it and of retaining her virginal state. The taming and the conquering of her passion are dramatised with the adoption of Cupid, through which he confers his authority upon her, a closing image that rectifies the opposition between abstinence and desire. The harmonious resolution of this opposition is sustained throughout the trilogy, with Venus and Diana's competition taking place in *Galatea,* and with the figure of Ceres appearing in *Love's Metamorphosis*.

Conversely, the inherent clash between abstinence and desire is also manifest in the problematic position of Diana's nymphs, who are torn between their virginity—in body and in status, as the followers of the goddess of celibacy—and their erotic desires, except that in their case this conflict remains unresolved.[4] By presenting his characters as featuring such contradictions, the dramatist attempts to degenderise eroticism and destigmatise women's sexual excitement, since "If love / be a god, why should not lovers be virtuous?

Love *is* a / god, and lovers *are* virtuous" (*Galatea* 3.1.77-79; original emphasis). In fact, Cupid expresses the same belief in *Love's Metamorphosis* so as to readdress the manner in which love is defined: "Why, Ceres, do you think that lust followeth love? / Ceres, lovers are chaste! For what is love, divine love, but / the quintessence of chastity . . . ?" (2.1.138-140). It is no accident that it is Ceres to whom the statement which most unequivocally reconciles love and chastity is addressed; with Diana epitomising the eternal virgin and Venus the sensual female, Ceres stands in the middle personifying the golden mean between them. Mary Beth Rose points out that chastity may replace virginity as "the officially idealized pattern of heterosexual conduct" only on the proviso of marital fidelity and devotion (16). In spite of not having a husband to be loyal to, Ceres represents chastity on account of her sexual inactivity in conjunction with her motherhood, which implies sexual knowledge all the same. The goddess's submissiveness to Cupid's omnipotence, besides insinuating sexual desire's subduing of celibacy, further encapsulates the ideal with which the non-virgin woman must comply. Through these passages and Ceres's example, the dramatist nearly legitimises female sexual desire by proposing that its fulfilment might entail defloration of the female body but not necessarily loss of its chastity too. Following that, even if Mike Pincombe's claim that Lyly has contributed to establishing the virginity cult (388) sounds too bold, it should be safe to assume that he helped considerably to redefine and reassess it.

But how is the female body affected when masculine sexual desire is stimulated? Is its chastity, which permeates as much as it defines femininity, salvaged in the case of consummation? Contrary to female desire, which brings women to terms with their sexuality, male sexual desire in Lylian drama is externalised violently and at the expense of its object; in brief, male desire is rapacious so that it can even result and manifest itself in rape. This distinction is exemplified by Cupid's words in the opening act of *Galatea*: "Fair nymph, are you strayed from your company by / chance, or love you to wander solitarily on purpose?" (1.2.1-2). The addressee of the question in tandem with the godly status of Cupid imply that Lyly does not only draw on the thematics of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, since he also makes use of the conventionality of the *types* of mythological figures featuring within: the graceful nymph becomes an easy target for the god's lust when she stirs his passion. The anonymity of the Nymph come across by Cupid

only stresses her violability and eligibility to become the object of male (divine) desire and, by extension, a rape victim, sharing the destiny numerous nymphs suffer in Greek mythology. Additionally, the pun on "love" alludes effectively to the erotics of the play, but at the same time holds the Nymph accountable for any involvement she might have in attracting and easing male passions into release. A woman's succumbing to desire, whether hers or someone else's, "is equivalent to sin, *is* sin" regardless of the circumstances under which it is carried (Rose 18; original emphasis).

Not all female characters who attract male attention are nymphs though, as several of them are just young virgins. In spite of that, the mutual need to preserve their physical inaccessibility to men invites a parallel to be drawn between them, their sole difference lying in the reasons prescribing that need: the nymphs' chastity is sanctified by the goddesses they follow, whereas the virgins' is necessitated by the feminine prototype. Sibylla, the undead but wise seer of *Sappho and Phao,* relies on her carnal knowledge to advise the latter, having exchanged her bodily intactness for what she had hoped to be a share of Phoebus's divine immortality (2.1.51-55). Instead of having herself commodified by patriarchy, Sibylla trades her beauty, her only property and means to negotiate her living conditions and, consequently, becomes the epitome of the fallen woman as well as a persuasive foil to Sappho. The case of Protea, another virgin appearing in *Love's Metamorphosis*, elaborates on the issue of commodification, granted that she also exchanges her "maidenhead" for an alliance with the gods (3.2.27-29), and that she is literally sold to a merchant, whose being named after his profession underscores the "'exchange of women'" (Rubin 175). On a general note, whenever the female body is handled as a stepping stone for male desire to be expressed and relieved, it automatically loses its ability to be chaste, and is thus left violated. Therefore, it is the state of the eroticised female body that winnows male from female sexual desire—the former rendering corporeal materiality foul, in opposition to the latter which transmutes virginity (sexual non-knowledge) into chastity (sexual abstinence).

To display the tragic impact of fulfilling male desire as far as women are considered, Lyly schematically uses the diversified symbolism of a grown tree throughout his trilogy. Although each play inspires a nuanced and self-sufficient interpretation for the same symbol, as a plethora of critical sources attests,[5] I would argue that the tree symbolism

acquires a more wholesome significance when examined under a broader scope. *Sappho and Phao*, to begin with, lays the foundations upon which any future reference to trees may be deciphered, and does so in the form of an allegorical dream (4.3.3-24). Sappho dreams of a "tall cedar" on the branches of which a bird has built its nest, until it falls to the ground unable to fly back up again; in the meantime, insects such as ants and caterpillars feed on the cedar's leaves. In his introduction of the play, David Bevington raises the possibility that the dream constitutes yet another allusion to love and more specifically the problematic situation of a queen coveting her subject (170). While my reading accords with the first part of this interpretation, I contend that the cedar, known for its endurance, stands for the perennial allure female beauty bears and the preciousness of that quality in women. The elevated position of the bird on the tree conjures the feminine ideal, which fades away as soon as the bird falls down—a sexual fall—and on which the insects feed through erotic gratification. Sappho "pit[ies] both / the fortune of the bird and the misfortune of the tree" (4.3.18-19), so that the former represents the eternally lost chastity; the "body of the tree" cannot "bow [so] that [the bird] might but creep up" (4.3.22-23), because the fall cannot be undone and the bird cannot fly anymore.

In *Galatea*, the tree is much more central to the plot and a lot easier to understand, since Hebe informs the audience of its connotations through what is supposed to be her swansong (5.2.7-64). As early as the first couple of lines of the play, Tityrus introduces "this fair oak" (1.1.2), which is a crucial prop, and will be indicating one of the play's basic settings, the sacrificial locale for "the fairest and chastest virgin" (1.2.48). Peter Berek suggests that the destiny awaiting the virgins is "adult sexuality" (210), while Ellen M. Caldwell follows a similar path by claiming that the play looks at the disinclination of a sexually inexperienced woman to fulfil her marital duty towards her husband (23). Although I concur with both of these points, I find most pertinent Caldwell's subsequent comment that the institution of sacrifice is a forced "sexual initiation"—in essence, an actual molestation of the girls (37). If eros is traditionally reported to be nothing more than an obsession to "possess" the beauty possessed by the object of the erotic desire (Osborne 22), then this is exactly what the institution of the sacrifice grants to the gods. The oak tree, in particular, on which the girls are bound and immobilised at the time of the sacrifice

crystallises the utter submission of their feminine flawlessness to the gods, and showcases their divine sense of entitlement to conquer.

In *Love's Metamorphosis* the metaphorical image of the tree as sexual coercion is literalised. In opposition with the previous plays, here trees are not mental images or props, but characters or personified symbols. Echoing Daphne's fate of arborification in a desperate attempt to evade Apollo's lust, as well as Myrrha's transformation into a myrtle tree for provoking her father's incestuous desire (1.2.118-122), Fidelia unintentionally stimulates a satyr's passion and suffers the same destiny. In her lengthy monologue, she mentions her fellow nymphs to clamour that beauty usually impedes chastity. On the one hand, the oppressive patriarchal society formulates the social norms with which women must comply, and on the other undermines them by allowing men to sensually crave for and assault them. The story of Daphne's end is the patriarchal endeavour to "silence women across time" (Kelley 53) and obstruct them from saying what Fidelia has been verbalising all along. Fidelia's death, in particular, committed out of "physical lust" mingled with misogynistic feelings, reaches its crescendo with the rape (Best 79) that her transformation aimed to prevent in the first place. However, her rape is only metaphorical, as patriarchy's entitlement to objectify and punish women pervades her arboreal body throughout, in the form of abuse triggered on erotic grounds.

Since tree symbolisms are diversely associated with feminine beauty as calamity and its potential to culminate in forced sexual acts, Lyly interconnects his plays around the recurring notion that patriarchal violence is deeply rooted in eroticism and is hence naturalised. Because women are capable of kindling male desire, they can always be arborified, in the sense of being "robbed of self-identity and safety" (Kelley 53) and sentenced to social abjection. That said, Cupid's answerability for killing Fidelia is not completely unfounded: "Is it thy spite, Cupid, that, having no / power to wound my unspotted mind, procures means to / mangle my tender body . . . ?" (*LM* 1.2.109-111). Even if he acts through Erisichthon's hands, Cupid is, indeed, the root of the problem.

Cupid's mythological versatility is utilised by Lyly to dramatically embody erotic desire in all its facets and manifestations. Eros's Roman counterpart, for all his popularity in Elizabethan drama, Cupid is never depicted as a supreme deity (Hunter, *Lyly* 23)—with the exception of the Lylian love trilogy's finale, as I aim to show. Despite his frequent

featuring in the plays of this period, Cupid acquires a special importance in Lyly, because he is the first dramatist to ever delve into eroticism so assiduously: in creating Cupid, he concretises the abstract concept he has been exploring in his plays and turns it into a character whose agency unsettles fixed values and structures. Cupid himself is evidential of this shift, since he is oxymoronically described as a "Fair boy" (*Galatea* 1.2.3), with the designation befitting the feminine gender and contradicting his male sex. Interestingly, "Renaissance discourses define 'effeminacy' as the 'womanish' sensuality that might cause a man to indulge an excessive desire for women or boys" (Digangi 5). As Cupid is by definition the one who stirs and impresses erotic desire upon characters belonging to either the divine or the mortal sphere, he emerges as an emblematically effeminate character.

Ephemeral though it may be, sexual desire's direction and incitement is under his absolute command, granting him political power. This also justifies Ceres's reverent statement that "Cupid was never conquered, / and therefore must be flattered; virginity hath, and there- / fore must be humble" (*LM* 2.1.52-54). The only amorous relationship developed in all three plays without Cupid's intervention is the only romance that endures and is fostered by solid reciprocation of feelings, too—the love that Galatea and Phillida share. Given the fact that any other character's erotic desire, generated by Cupid's arrows, either diminishes soon or just ceases being of consequence to the story, the dramatist is suggestive of the shallowness and, by extension, the falseness of forced love. Instead, its genuineness lies in its quality to be "transgendered" (Kesson, "Playhouses" 36), in the sense of outbalancing gender boundaries and, alongside, the erotic experiences culturally inscribed into them.

Mirroring the way in which love matures in order to evolve from physical lust to affection, and sometimes vice versa, Cupid is the only character who basically grows mentally as well as developmentally.[6] His multiple portrayals as an obedient kid, as a young trickster figure, and as an adolescent, apart from displaying the polymorphism of eroticism, also comprise three linear phases of his aging which, in turn, implicate his intellectual and behavioural development, as gods are immortal. In *Sappho and Phao*, Cupid acts out of dread for his mother's punishment (1.1.54-55), so by the end of the play he is in need of a new guardian to replace Venus and to pamper him, a role that Sappho assumes by which she reconciles the maternal and the erotic: "Thou shalt sit in my / lap; I will rock thee asleep

and feed thee with all these / fine knacks" (5.2.22-24). Cupid's rejection of Venus's motherhood is further confirmed in the next play, where she exclaims, "Sir boy, where have you been? Always taken, first by / Sappho, now by Diana" (*Galatea* 5.3.93-94). His growth is noticeable from his adoption to his thraldom, since in *Galatea* "Cupid, though he be a child, is no / baby" (2.2.6-7), while he additionally possesses enough mischievousness to toy with his arrows and with his targets' hearts. Not until he reaches adulthood does he demonstrate his power to the fullest, a maturity phase dramatised in *Love's Metamorphosis* where eroticism is no longer celebrated, but widely feared. This consistent and coordinated maturity process allegorises the complexity of erotic desire and its capability of challenging the fixity of social hierarchies by leaving a short-term or even a lasting impact upon them.

The concrete textual links which reinforce the idea that the three plays are meant to interact with one another shed light on how erotic desire operates through blindness and/or sight,[7] and, secondly, focalise the issue of capture and punishment.

> CUPID. Thou shalt *see*, Diana, that I dare confess myself to be
> Cupid.
> DIANA. And thou shalt *see*, Cupid, that I will show myself to
> be Diana, that is, conqueror of thy loose and untamed
> appetites. . . .
> I will break thy bow and burn thine arrows, bind
> thy hands, clip thy wings, and fetter thy feet. (*Galatea* 3.4.75-79, 86-87; emphasis added)

The goddess of chastity is threatened to experience and submit to the transformative effect of eroticism with a pun, because Cupid's love is mobilised by turning its subjects blind. Antithetically, Diana punishes him for the near-desecration of her nymphs by eradicating all his trademarks, including his arrows with which he is able to blind his victims. This skill is not innate of Cupid's whose aim is initially erratic (*SaP* 4.1.11), for love is blind, as the saying goes; in reality, his much-improved accuracy in striking Diana's nymphs with his arrows is owed to his adoptive mother's commitment to show him how to target more reasonably and more carefully (*SaP* 5.3.103-105). Therefore, by taking away this ability to blind from him, Diana forces Cupid to witness more clearly than ever that his remit, erotic desire, is not a game but a political matter with potentially hazardous repercussions. This

knowledge is metamorphic as well, since it annihilates Cupid's childlike playfulness and changes him into the cruel mature deity of the third play. Notably, Leah Scragg identifies a reversal in the feelings of the audience (*Galatea* 8), shifting from pity for Cupid's humiliation to trepidation—even aversion—on account of his displacing the violence that was previously inflicted on him onto Ceres's scornful nymphs.

As has already been stated, Cupid provides us with the only instance of a character where a distinct development can be acknowledged in terms of his physical, intellectual, emotional, and behavioural presence in the three plays. This comes in stark contrast with the rest of the dramatis personae who are constantly and masterfully juxtaposed with one another by the dramatist, proving thus that they lack any unique characteristics. The three foresters appearing in *Love's Metamorphosis*, for example, hardly differ from each other, since the shallowness of their desires is their most exemplary but shared trait (Best 78). Furthermore, this chapter has examined the commonality between Sappho, Diana, and Ceres with regard to their chastity and their measuring up to the feminine prototype, between the goddesses' nymphs in relation to their violability, as well as between Sibylla and Protea, who submit their virginity to the gods. All these parallelisms underscore more than anything else the centrality of Cupid to the three plays—the love trilogy.

In taking such pains to construct Cupid's character, Lyly reveals his fascination with erotic desire and its unpredictability not only in reference to how it is generated and circulated, but more importantly to its results. Rose astutely notes that eroticism consistently imperils the bedrock of Elizabethan society, and so it must be excluded from it, or at least "conquered" (24-25). After all, erotic desire can transcend the societal norms and redefine them in an arbitrary manner. Precisely because of that, I disagree with Rose's premise that the dramatist never tries to "dissociate sexual love, which he distrusts, from social order, which he idealizes" (Rose 24) and argue that the opposite holds true. More specifically, Lyly explores desire at length and realises that it can provide him with the essential space to experiment with dramatising unsanctioned erotic interactions which would destabilise heteropatriarchy. This chapter having dealt with the conceptualisations of erotic desire based on the lover's sex, the next one proceeds to unravel the types of erotic interactions formulated in the trilogy which deviate from the canon.

Notes

[1] The Epigraph's translation from ancient Greek is by Anne Carson; *If Not, Winter: Fragments of Sappho*. Vintage Books, 2002, pp. 264-5.

[2] All quotations from the primary sources are from the latest Manchester University Press editions by Leah Scragg and David Bevington.

[3] Gayle Rubin,"The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," p 159; cited by Theodora A. Jankowski in her analysis and reappraisal of virginity in Lyly's *Galatea*.

[4] On the conflicting case of Diana's nymphs, see Saccio 147; Meyer 199-200; and Jankowski "Redefining" 262; on the reconciliation between love and chastity in general, see Shulman.

[5] For the tree symbolisms in general, see Badir; Reid; Saccio 19-25; and Kelley. Particularly: in *Sappho and Phao*, see Bevington 170-1; Sivefors 201-3; Berry 125; in *Galatea*, see Scragg, "Speaking Pictures" 301-2; Best 79 Vanhoutte 5-7; in *Love's Metamorphosis*, Fox 49-57; Dooley para. 11; Jankowski, *Elizabeth I* 55-7;

[6] A contradiction arises if we accept that Sappho and her ladies-in-waiting are converted into goddess Diana and her nymphs (Shulman 261) in terms of Sappho becoming more austere and further idealised. Nevertheless, my counterargument is that the fact that the former heroine overindulges Cupid's cravings and the latter severely punishes his misconduct draws a separating line between them and disallows their complete identification with each other. In fact, Diana herself draws this line when she states that she keeps Cupid hostage "not to dandle in [her] lap, whom [she] abhors in [her] heart, but / to laugh him to scorn" (*Galatea* 5.3.47-49).

[7] This topic, vital to the notion of eroticism, will be discussed more elaborately in my third and final chapter.

Chapter 2

Gender Troubles: Performance, Attire, and Deviant Desires

> *Jupiter*. Oh, how I love thee: come, let's kiss and play.
>
> *Calisto*. How?
>
> *Jupiter*. So woman with a woman may.
>
> —Thomas Heywood, *The Golden Age*

Very often, simulated. Such is the case with anything destined for the stage, as the text of a theatrical performance produces, communicates, or sustains ideologies forwarded by the dramatist through representations of unreality. Playwriting, albeit an inventive act in itself, is theatrically translated into a different kind of creation, one which verbalises and thereby institutes various ideas and notions about the world as well as about who inhabits it. Despite the censorship to which authorship is liable on the early modern stage, dramatists are still provided with the opportunity to subvert authorities by applying their critique, and to explore unknown territories regarding social issues. The cultural interpretations of femininity and masculinity within a societal context, now comprehended as gender roles, are a territory as such, and one closely associated with erotic desire. Valerie Traub makes the important observation that "gender repression depends on erotic repression" hence it is vital to acknowledge that "a coherent erotic system" is founded and supplied primarily by gender and secondarily by eroticism (*Desire* 146). In turn, theatre plays a large part in determining gender roles, being a public space from which the sexed female body is banished, and may only be re-created by male dramatists and impersonated by male actors.[1] This banishment serves multiple purposes: it reduces the sexed female body to "its costume, or costuming," the only signifier of its presence or absence from the proscenium, and it denies it of any public role, which is a deplorable role too, granted the predication of eroticism upon sight (Daileader 78, 4). Precluding women from inhabiting the stage additionally enforces gender binarism in that, deductively speaking, femininity becomes the Other for masculinity, so by representing the former, the latter can be better understood. Most significant of all, the male dominance on the Renaissance stage authorises the drama of this era to delve into femininity while eroticising it and enclosing it in the

heteropatriarchal agenda it promotes. As a result, femininity is constructed and confined at the same time in a distinctly systematic manner.

Lyly's drama aligns with and simultaneously departs from these principles. Femininity, for one, is diligently designated by a male-dominated institution, that is the theatre: his female characters fit the norms inasmuch as "[n]ecessity causeth [them] to be sold; / nature must frame [them] to be contented" (*LM* 3.2.2-3), as a young virgin, Protea is instructed. For the early modern audience, nature is a concept arbitrarily linked with normative behaviour, whereby a double standard is promoted with regard to the two sexes. Unlike the *nature* of the female characters' obligations towards Cupid, men's obligations denote veiled discrepancies which "only shall be known to men" (*LM* 2.1.131), leaving Ceres's relevant enquiry into them unanswered. This variance emphasises the dire need for early modern femininity only to be put under the theatrical microscope, while men need not account for their actions in an androcentric community.

However, Lyly is not a conservative dramatist, as the feminisation of erotic desire and the agency he endows his heroines with, discussed in the previous chapter, firmly show. On the one hand, Protea is told how to behave by her father, who stands for patriarchy itself. On the other, Cupid's caprices may display the gender discriminations governing the early modern society, but they are scorned and disregarded to a large extent by Ceres's nymphs, whose roles in the play are principal unlike Protea's. Occasioned by such, seemingly phallocentric-compliant examples, I submit that Lyly, at risk of falling into contradictions or even worse of being censored, utilises the theatrical conventions of sixteenth-century England in order to dramatically subvert the ideologies typically registered in them. More particularly, I argue that the dramatist's subversive endeavour lies in refuting institutionalised marital monogamy for women by means of opening possibilities to erotic desire, such as deheterosexualising, or even unsexualising it altogether.

"I neither like my gait nor my garments"[2]

The conventional theatrical practice of cross-dressing, which was often frowned upon among the Elizabethans despite its practicality,[3] is strongly related to this line of argument. The assignment of female roles to males who had not yet reached manhood

renders young boys underqualified to enact masculinity, signalling not simply masculine superiority, but also the tendency for males to identify themselves as theatrical hermaphrodites, capable of living through both phases of sexual binarism (Barbour 1009). Nonetheless, Lyly is not so much interested in the imbalances between dominant and recessive genders, as he is in the degree to which gender per se is socially conceptualised and ideologically—systemically—charged. The instance of the cross-dressed boy actor is pertinent to this issue because it negotiates the very idea of (ex)changing one's gender and, basically, because it relies on acting. The performance of the cross-dressed actor is twofold: it is a theatrical performance of the dramatic female role as much as it is an attempted performance of the gender which is sexually incident to that role. Posing a rhetorical question, Jean E. Howard conditions the reliability of ascribing power to the dominant sex upon the efficiency of the cross-dressed boy actor's performance, which has the potential to diminish sexual difference (435). Indeed, what are the dynamics of a hierarchy based on gender, when its cultural markers are eradicated? As soon as gender is disentangled from sex, it reveals its constructedness and invites its perception as an autonomous artifice; as a result, "*woman* and *feminine* [might signify] a male body as easily as a female one," and vice versa (Butler 10; original emphasis).

The concept of gender performativity, akin to "gender labour" as Simone Chess calls it in her analysis of *Galatea* (156),[4] is developed by Judith Butler in her groundbreaking *Gender Trouble* and is conducive to comprehending the subversive character of theatrical cross-dressing. Butler begins from the premise that gender is "culturally constructed" (9) by what we comprehend as the agreed-upon perceptions of the sexed body within a community, and it is by extension appropriable—performative. Gender does not merely comprise the identity that it carries, nor does it originate from the anatomy of the body to which it is attached. Rather, gender identity is forged through *and* by the performativity which defines it, "the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (33). No random actions issue the "performativeness" (180) of gender though, since it takes a group of involuntary coordinated and repeated acts (re-enactments) to produce gender identity. Regardless of what these acts might typically signify, gender identity is formed by the specifics of the gender performance. As far as sex is considered, Butler counters the common understanding that it is fixed and determined biologically and anatomically, and

proposes instead that a body is non-sexed and void of any signification until it is construed in gendered terms. Sex is essentially "a gendered category," which should prevent gender from being narrowly understood as "the cultural inscription of meaning on a pregiven sex" for it "must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established" (11). In brief, gender identity as well as gender performance inform and are informed by "anatomical sex" all the same, in a relationship that contains what Butler discerns as the three aspects of corporeality (175)—each of the three is distinguishable and can coincide with or diverge from either of the other two.

The practice of cross-dressing for the stage reflects and validates the constructedness and therefore the performativity of gender. To personate an otherwise sexed body, the early modern boy actors must also assume the gender identity of that body which they help to regulate by means of their performance. However, by considering gender performativity alongside cross-dressing, I do not mean to literalise the former as mere performance, as that would violate Butler's principle according to which performativity relates to acts acted in an unprompted, even unwilled manner. By contrast, I contend that, in using cross-dressing as a ploy in his drama, Lyly questions its fixity and displays a perception of gender similar to the one Butler theorises four centuries later. The dramatist relies on the fact that the cross-dressed characters he invents are personified by cross-dressed boy actors in order to expose gender as manufactured as his dramatis personae. Concurrently, the analogy between actors and their heroines leads both to having their gender identities disputed, for these as well as the roles ascribed to them are "performed rather than innate" (Scragg, *Galatea* 2).

The appropriation and attempted performance of gender in the context of cross-dressing, should not take precedence over the code of actions that specify oppositionally masculine and feminine gender identities. Generally speaking, Butler states that the actor's identity is influenced by the performativity of "[s]uch acts, gestures, enactments" inasmuch as they expose it as a construct "sustained throughout corporeal signs and other discursive means" (173). Lyly's trilogy features a series of such actions which reflect and reproduce the prevalent gender ideologies, complying with them only to subvert them later. Enacting masculinity in contradistinction with femininity involves the actor's complexion, voice, disposition, and movement, as it is on these grounds that sexual difference emerges and

manifests itself through gender.

Attempting not to expose or, worse, delineate masculinity through theatrical performance, Lyly lists few masculine acts and lets the spectator detect more by looking into others that could be described as unfeminine. Phao is advised by Sybilla to "[l]ook pale" (*SaP* 2.4.112), since that is an index of self-composure, even when a man is under the spell of love. One of Diana's nymphs, Telusa, similarly states that she "must now put on a red / mask and blush, lest [Eurota] perceive [her] pale face and laugh" (*Galatea* 3.1.27-28). Because she has been wounded by Cupid's arrows and she is now a desiring subject, Telusa must detach herself from feminine behaviour patterns such as blushing, and act in a masculine manner by exhibiting the same equanimity that Phao must. Generally speaking, it is in conjunction with erotic desire that gendered behaviour is chiefly demonstrated, so males "must keep company with boys, and / commit follies unseemly" for women (*Galatea*, 1.3.16-21) Performing masculinity, then, permits not just an entitlement, but a necessitated tendency towards promiscuous behaviour.

Conversely, a profusion of feminine actions is catalogued in the plays, where the dramatist reproduces the gender roles which women must fulfil as well as the gendered actions with which their bodies may assert themselves. In opposition to masculine boldness in terms of sexual advances, femininity is found in utter passivity, establishing thus a "fixed-chastity / moving-desire binary" (Knoll 59). Phao's monologue is pervaded by this logic, when his way of coping with the desire he harbours for Sappho is to "blab" it (*SaP* 2.4.33), and so to circulate it through discussing it, whereas Sappho must bear her love silently and secretly as a sickness in the following act. Phillida and Galatea's hide-and-seek-like dialogue also testifies that femininity permits only "sighs" and "salt tears" (*Galatea* 3.2.23-24) as responses to erotic desire, so that women can only be passive acceptors or witnesses of it, never able to set it in motion. This role is exclusively masculine, because it is men's *actions*, ranging from "entreaties, prayers, / oaths, bribes" to other ruses (*Galatea* 3.2.27-28), which *activate* desire. It is not accidental that Sybilla recommends that Phao "[w]rite, and persist in writing" (*SaP* 2.4.96), since the pen with which sonnets are composed is a phallic symbol showcasing the male prerogative to wooing—both literally and metaphorically. Writing, then, is a phallo(go)centric tool since the beginning of history (Cixous 879) that Phao is authorised to exploit, but Diana's

nymphs are definitely not, which is also why they are admonished for fostering erotic desires (*Galatea* 3.4.55-56). Therefore, even if the actions the sexed body performs, unwittingly or even consciously, do not define its gender, they are certainly indicative of the gender ideology enforced upon the sex of that body. When Phao claims that Sibylla's decoding of such gendered behaviours is a "science" (*SaP* 2.4.136), he refers precisely to the idea that bodily performance accords with one's gender.

Such an observation is of crucial importance; since it is feasible to perform gender, it is also feasible to learn *how* to perform it. In reality, cross-dressing theatrical practices are based on this idea, in the same manner that the plotline of *Galatea*—including two instances of them—does. The homonymous character states so: "I will learn of him how / to behave myself" (*Galatea* 2.1.12-13). Resounding Phao's statement, Galatea is evidently oblivious of how to play her boyish part, on which her survival depends, and expects to acquire knowledge of how to perform masculinity by turning her attention to disguised Phillida. This move, for one, enhances the metatheatricality of the play, granted that the actor playing Galatea must additionally assume the role that his heroine must impersonate in order for her to keep her sexual identity hidden. The metatheatrical element adds to the pleasure of the theatrical experience, for the audience possesses "the knowledge of sexual difference" that the characters lack so as to be amused by their confusion over each other's identities, and to understand the play's witty verbal exchanges (Belsey 183). Secondly, the fact that Galatea chooses to study Phillida in particular to learn how to act as a man leads to poor results, due to the fact that the studied model is another ignorant actor, like herself. Trapped between a necessity to perform in view of their potential sacrifice, and their unsuccessful performances, Galatea and Phillida obtain an indeterminate gender identity, because they enact sexual in-betweenness; their male attire and its cultural significations prevents them from being identified as feminine, while they also have trouble behaving in a masculine manner. Gender indeterminacy, then, or androgyny, in the sense of combining masculine and feminine traits, is consolidated as a form of self-expression and "self-completion," and not as anomalous conduct (Rackin 31).

Interestingly, in *Galatea* the heroines are confronted with the task of dressing like men and performing masculinity, and not the other way around, as happens with the actors playing them, for whom femininity paradoxically becomes the "desideratum" (Rackin 33).

The act of appropriating the apparel of the other sex is not simply an aesthetic matter, but an inherently political one, for "costume is constitutive" (Levine 134), that is, it conveys enough gender associations to construct sex and sexual difference by its own volition.[5] The boy actor rebuilds himself in a feminine way through his costume, so that he inevitably and "indexically" borrows "the social position and profession" of his heroine (Elam 16). In the case of the cross-dressed dramatic female character though, the denotations behind clothes get more perplexed. The female body which is dressed as a male one projects itself as no longer subjugated, but "masterless" (Howard 424). Consequently, this rare occasion of double cross-dressing, the actor's and the heroine's, can only discomfit any notions of masculinity: the actor does not wear any womanish clothes, but embodies the female in male attire, and in so doing concedes all male rights and privileges. That said, more than a swapping of sexual "incompleteness," as Jonathan Dollimore argues (*Sexual* 296), attire signifies an entire dialogue on political power between the two sexes (Wixson 243).

Contrary to several women of this period who would dress and pose as men in order to exert their authority and enjoy their privileges, Phillida and Galatea are pushed to cross-dressing in order to "*escape*" that same, patriarchal authority (Saccio 156; original emphasis). Notwithstanding the common danger they face (becoming a sacrifice) which forces them into a common ploy (cross-dressing), as well as their overall symmetrical resemblance, the specific conditions under which they surrender their feminine apparel are slightly dissimilar. To put it simply, if vigour and submissiveness were to be considered the far ends of the same axis, Galatea would occupy the former whereas Phillida the latter. Displaying an acute understanding of the gender roles she is supposed to fulfil as a woman, Phillida expresses her repugnance to her male attire: "I neither like my gait nor my garments, / the one untoward, the other unfit, both unseemly" (*Galatea* 2.1.14-15). She acutely recognises the boundaries between what she is and what she must feign to be, as well as her inferior womanly position that discourages her from trespassing those boundaries. As she is compelled by her father to pose as a boy in order to evade the danger of the sacrifice, the force that prevails in persuading her to do so is ironically her daughterhood, which permeates her individuality. Unlike her, Galatea is eager to die the honorary death awaiting the most beautiful virgin, a destiny which is much preferred to meddling with her gender identity. This preference is partially an issue of visibility: Galatea

would rather cling onto her feminine gender identity in broad daylight than appropriate a masculine one secretly. In spite of everything, she does not have a say let alone agency concerning her future, therefore male attire has been fully imposed upon her, as hinted by the fact that she never appears on the stage with female clothes (Chess 154). Whereas Phillida voluntarily submits to paternal and hence patriarchal will by obeying her father's wishes, Galatea is made to submit to it. As a result, Phillida is the one who carries her manly attire off more convincingly, as compared to Galatea.

What is more, Phillida's performance of masculinity is most successful when her actions are incited by the erotic desire she experiences for disguised Galatea. In an important aside, which initially divulges her inner compliance with the normative ideology of her sex, Phillida disregards her prior gender identity and abandons the passivity ascribed to it: "But why stand I still? Boys should be bold" (*Galatea* 2.1.34). By chastising herself for her idleness as far as her assigned position in romantic relationships is considered, she subsequently urges herself to act in the opposite way, with erotic straightforwardness. The impersonation of the other sex admits her to a different gendered category, signalling her claim for an identity that is distinguishable from the gender binary pervading gender ideology, an identity that evades specification in exclusively binary terms. In other words, Phillida retains some of her womanishness, reflected in boys' effeminacy, but blends it with all prospects and possibilities opened by her male clothes. The combination of blushing, a typically feminine act associated with demureness, and of the sexual boldness conceded by her outfit discloses her "body heat and her erotic desire" (Chess 155). Phillida takes advantage of her apparel to initiate the affair developed between her and Galatea. Dressed as a boy, Phillida is given the liberty to woo the object of her desire, assuming the masculine role in the courtship. As she tells Galatea: "Seeing we are both boys, and both lovers, . . . // let me call thee mistress" (*Galatea* 4.4.3-6). This proposition does not simply substantiate Phillida's homoerotic desire; it further implicates that she refuses to take "the female denominative" in the dalliance-in-progress (Carter 109), and instead assigns this role to Galatea, who will be the "mistress" courted by Phillida. Far more crucially so, the discourse of the courtship tradition to which Phillida turns in order to establish their relationship generally presupposes its application to heteroerotic affiliations. However, by using it within a same-sex context, the heroine completely dismantles it and invites a

reappraisal of the gendered roles in the same tradition.

Yet, the blossoming romance between the main heroines is neither the only instance of cross-dressing, nor the dramatist's only purpose in using and exploring the same practice at such length in *Galatea*. Setting his play in a gynocentric society, whose members, albeit virgins, may experience erotic desires of their own (Jankowski, "Redefining" 259), Lyly creates a unique environment wherein Cupid must exert his power to stimulate love affairs without the contribution of any men. Diana's strictly female Arcadian community seals off men, mirroring women's own exclusion from the Renaissance stage. In the same way that female characters are created and animated through male intercession and monitoring, likewise men may only be admitted to this community provided that they re-create themselves in feminine terms by posing and dressing as women. To demonstrate his godly authority among the company of Diana's followers, Cupid enters the stage "*alone, in nymph's apparel*" (*Galatea* 2.2.; [stage directions]). His example is unavoidably followed by the boy actors who enact all female roles of the play too, since they, like Cupid, have to perform a different gender and adapt their attire accordingly so as to theatrically infiltrate Diana's virginal sphere. In fact, even the actor personifying Diana herself must be similarly re-invented so that the same sphere can be represented. In a way, Cupid does what Phao refuses to do when he declares:

> PHAO. I will learn anything but *dissembling*.
>
> SYBILLA. Why, my boy?
>
> PHAO. Because then I must learn to be a woman. (*SaP* 3.4.97-100; emphasis added)

Phao's word choice is noteworthy, since the verb alludes to feigning, but also to disguising oneself under a false appearance—potentially including cross-dressing. Dressing in garments unfit for one's sex should be held in contempt, and is finally perceived as a gendered, feminine act. Under this prism, Lyly further effeminises the cross-dressed boy actors, while exculpating his heroines for their efforts to perform masculinity, since they not only escape the sacrifice to Neptune, but are also aided to get married.

"commit[ting] follies unseemly for my sex"[6]

Cupid's cross-dressing is overall a thought-provoking instance; one that, above all,

gives the dramatist the opportunity to make use of the boy actors in order to accommodate female sexuality (Barbour 1017) and to feminise erotic desire all over. As has been argued, Cupid is the only evolving character in the trilogy so the alteration of his gender does highlight an existent "causal relation among sex, gender, and desire" (Butler 30). To that end, the circumstances created by the dramatist are favourable to paving the way for eroticism to be contemplated outside gendered principles. More specifically, as a legitimate practice, cross-dressing "represents part of a legal discourse on sexual misdemeanor" (Gorman) and Lyly makes use of it in *Galatea* squarely on this ground, in order to create a play that probes into erotic possibilities and pairings as discordant to heteronormativity as they are disruptive.

Drawing on the Shakespearean classic *Romeo and Juliet*, Valerie Traub comments on the "legacy" it bequeaths, as it allegedly emblematises unending love—particularly, "an individual, monogamous, heterosexual romantic love that finds its fulfilment in mutual physical passion" (*Desire* 3). This description accords perfectly with heteronormative culture and even encroaches upon erotic interactions dissimilar to the canonised male-female ones. According to Traub, this happens through the gender roles that determine one's position within the power relations contracted by eroticism: in homoerotic affiliations, men occupy "a 'feminized' passive position," while women use desire to counterbalance their own sexual incompleteness. Desire is thus construed in "a structurally heterosexual mode of operation based on the duality of passivity and activity" so that the masculine eroticises the feminine and vice versa (*Desire* 101).

The beginnings of the amorous relationship between Galatea and Phillida falls into this theoretical framework, for it is firstly stimulated as heteroerotic attraction. Both girls, disguised as men, have no awareness of each other's biological sex and are beguiled by the clothes denoting the dressed body. Not until they are disabused of gendered clothing thanks to each other's poor gender performance, do they come to the realisation that the desired object's biological sex is irrespective of her clothes, and get to confront their homoeroticism as well as the fact that it is surprisingly requited (Walen 134). The manner in which the revelation occurs is worthy of some scrutiny:

> GALATEA. If I had but one [sister], my brother must needs have two.
>
> But, I pray, have you ever a one?

> PHILLIDA. My father had but one daughter, and therefore I
> could have no sister. (*Galatea* 3.3.41-44)

The anagnorisis between the heroines, which is at the same time a self-recognition granted that each one awakes to her homoeroticism, is carried out in female identificatory terms, that is sisterhood and daughterhood; this emphasises the purity of their female-female relationship, safe from the violence of sexual penetration. The development of their flirtation into a prosperous affair is not linear, but comes full circle: for either of them, their interaction begins as female-male erotic interest, is then subsequently queered by the discovery that it is geared from female towards female, and is finally heteroeroticised with the anatomical transformation of one of them, whose identity is never revealed. From that point of view, the fact that Galatea and Phillida's attraction to each other—first hetero- and later homoerotically—remains unabated, attests to an early conceptualisation of bieroticism, the possibility to be erotically allured by both sexes.

In her article "'Virgins' and 'Not-Women': Dissident Gender Positions," Theodora A. Jankowski presents the titular feminine categories as the sixteenth-century equivalent to contemporary lesbians, and goes on to argue that female homoeroticism is an expected, if not common, romantic interaction among them ("Virgins" 84).[7] Galatea and Phillida can be curiously classified in both—ostensibly exclusive—categories. Dressed in men's clothes and projecting themselves as such before an all-female community, they nearly disown their sex. On the other hand, each girl is still a virgin under her boyish guise, essentially because she has not engaged in penetrative intercourse. If there has been any sexual indulgence among the girls, it has been based on a novel "economy of pleasure" wherein the lovers' genitals are no longer synecdochal for one's sexuality (Jankowski, *Elizabeth I* 80). Erotic pleasure thus derives from the lovers' completeness, not from their sex organs and their reproductive functions, which is a critical divergence point between homoerotic and heteroerotic relations.

Nonetheless, the eventual integration of Galatea and Phillida's affair into the heteronormative canon does not overshadow the same-sex undertone which pervades their affiliation throughout the play. Rather, *Galatea* provocatively celebrates what Denise A. Walen assorts as "utopian female homoeroticism," inhering with the projection of female-female desire as natural in "idealized relationships" (121), before it cancels it by means of

the anonymous transgenderising of either Galatea or Phillida. The play concludes with a wedding which cancels and discontinues sexual difference, as Phyllis Rackin (37) and Catherine Belsey (170) propose respectively in reference to the cross-dressed boy actors' impersonation of cross-dressed female roles. On the dramatic level, however, sexual difference is crystallised so that it exposes the discrepancy between performance and discourse in a manner which aligns with the social conventions of sixteenth-century England:

> VENUS. . . . Is your loves unspotted, begun with truth, con-
> tinued with constancy, and not to be altered till death?
> GALATEA. Die, Galatea, if thy love be not so!
> PHILLIDA. Accursed be thou, Phillida, if thy love be not so! (5.3.146-149)

The heroines' marriage does not take place after the end of the play; instead, I contend that it is conducted in these lines, since they contain their vows to eternally cherish one another. In *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800*, Lawrence Stone affirms that "[a]ny sort of exchange of promises before witnesses . . . was regarded in law as a valid marriage" (31). In fact, this is the second in a series of five stages of authenticating matrimony in the early modern era, followed by the legal arrangement of the finances between affluent families, and preceded by the reiteration of the vows in public. The last stage of validating a marriage would be the sexual intercourse between the wedded couple. Therefore, the dramatisation of this second stage by the dramatist indicates that he relies on the rites of the dominant institution of his time, marriage, in order to institutionalise same-sex romantic relations in a ceremony administered by the goddess of love. In light of the strict censorship and harsh penalties implicated, this union conforms to the heteroerotic economy upon which early modern society is structured, yet one cannot miss the fact that the vows are exchanged while neither of the heroines has by that time undergone sexual transformation, and while their bond is still homoerotic, as is the relation between the boy actors impersonating them.

The joyous atmosphere of the wedding ritual in *Galatea* is in stark contrast with the ending of *Love's Metamorphosis*, which is "an enforced marriage play" (Bromley 425). The latter work is a play about homosocial alliances and coercive control: three young virgins, nymphs of Ceres, are courted by three foresters whom they disdain but whom they

end up marrying whatsoever against their will. Instead of Venus, it is now Cupid who officiates and officialises the male-female matches, in a dramatisation of the same second stage described earlier:

> CUPID. But do you, Ramis, continue your constant love? And
> you, Montanus? And you, Silvestris?
> RAMIS. Nothing can alter our affections, which increase
> while the means decrease, and wax stronger in being
> weakened. (*LM* 5.4.34-38)

Unlike *Galatea*, where the couple confirms their devotedness to their union freely and without any external intervention, here the weddings are arranged exclusively by men. Worse, the brides are not in human form let alone in attendance at the time of the marriage vows, so that their involvement in the matrimony is adjudicated without their consent; the verdict has been given by a mighty Cupid and sealed by a submissive Ceres (*LM* 5.4.53-54). Recalling the political regime of Renaissance England, Cupid poses as the king who makes decisions on behalf of all his subjects, and has the power to punish disobedience. The nymphs' expostulation to their required submission is steadfast and unanimous: their triple cry, "Not I!" (*LM* 5.4.60-62), is a fitting response to the "banns in church" to be iterated "three times" for the sanctioning of the matrimony (Stone 31).

Between the lines of the play, a proto-feminist idealism is halfway articulated, yet it remains utopian, since the nymphs are coerced into accepting their matrimonies. Their relinquishment is reminiscent of the sacrificial institution laid out in *Galatea*, which uses the virgin's body to sustain the "alliance" between the divine and the human sphere, and which allegorises the feminine experience of consummation, the final stage of a marriage (Jankowski, "Redefining" 257). Ceres's three nymphs symbolically take Galatea's and/or Phillida's place in surrendering their chastity to the beast(s). From that standpoint, *Love's Metamorphosis* does not simply allude to their transformation into rock, bird, and flower by Cupid, but their metaphorical metamorphosis into expendable beings, obedient wives, and women of the dramatist's era by systemic sexual exploitation. That said, if heteroerotic relations entail a transformation, is Galatea and Phillida's heteroeroticised love going to suffer a similar fate? One could assume no, based on the fact that "there is no preexisting identity" according to which gender performativeness can be calibrated (Butler 180). Since

the bond is officialised in a homoerotic phase, and since the impending transformation to be carried out by Venus pertains to biology/anatomy and not to gender, it should be safe to hypothesise that the transformed-to-be heroine's behaviour, acts, and habits will not be altered.

Even though Galatea and Phillida's dalliance exemplifies same-sex love between women as well as bieroticism in the trilogy, both interactions are indirectly portrayed in *Sappho and Phao*, where the name of the titular heroine is in itself a hint at female homoeroticism according to some critics.[8] The myth Lyly adapts following Ovid and his *Heroides* is often linked with Sappho the Greek Poetess, whose name and place of origin have nonetheless become synonymous to female-female desire although her sexual involvement with both men and women is still widely debated. In *Sappho and Phao*, perhaps the strongest textual reference to same-sex love is found at the closure of the play, when the heroine discloses that, in her view, love is "a toy made / for ladies, and I will keep it only for ladies" (5.2.104-105). Having adopted Cupid, hence assuming a maternal authority over him and his arrows, Sappho is brought closer to her ancient namesake, in that love "is redefined more or less as lesbian" (Pincombe 392), as is the power she wishes to exert. Interestingly, Sappho desires a man and not a woman, although the latter case would underscore the homoerotic element echoed in her name. Second, the fact that the dramatist transfers the course of action from Mytilene, Lesbos, to Syracuse suggests a wish to defocus from the same-sex allusions intertwined with Sappho's name.[9] Instead, it is likely that Lyly uses the Sapphic figure only to create a queer allegory with regard to Elizabeth; being "a manly queen" but a symbol of virginity as well, two incompatible qualities which obfuscated the issue of gender in late sixteenth century (Cressy 451), could only render Elizabeth a queer persona but in a disparate manner than that in which the Sapphic tradition is marked as queer; Elizabeth amalgamates feminine and masculine traits, whereas Sappho exemplifies female homoeroticism.

In fact, I would argue that the queen's queerness matches in kind that of Lyly's Sappho. If the play is read as an allegory for the French Duke of Alençon's abortive courting of Elizabeth (Pincombe 381), then the events of the story address the monarch's individual dilemma of yielding to love along with the ensuing, public fallouts of changing the political scene, as imagined by the dramatist. In the opening scene of the play, it is

reported by Cupid that Sappho "hath her thought in a string, that / she conquers affections, and sendeth love up and down / upon errands" (*SaP* 1.1.45-47). Without yet having appeared on the stage, Sappho has got a reputation which precedes her in terms of her continence; the establishment of her name as tantamount to chastity and restraint clashes with the sexuality tied with the Lesbian poetess. In the dramatist's hands, Sappho's image is reinvented in a way that contradicts everything with which the Sapphic tradition affiliates. The heroine warns her ladies-in-waiting of "how it cutteth a woman to become a wooer" (*SaP* 1.4.10), by which she abides even while under the transforming effect of Cupid's arrows, and nowhere is she amenable to being wooed herself. As a consequence, she consciously precludes herself from being defined as either a desiring subject or a desired object, acquiring through her consistent erotic idleness the position which "non-marrying virgins" occupy (Jankowski, *Elizabeth I* 13). Because in so doing Sappho becomes unusable to the sex/gender system in power, which organises social units based on marital relations, and which commodifies, utilises, and finally sexually gratifies its subjects (Rubin 159), the heroine renders herself an-erotic,[10] and subversively so. Similar to engaging in female-female erotic relationships, being an-erotic—much more so if a virgin—turns the intactness of a woman's sexed body into a menace to patriarchal society. As Jankowski argues, virginity is valued due to the fact that it can safeguard the stability of the patrilineal system of inheritance ("Virginity" 128); if it cannot serve this purpose, it simply becomes an aberrant self-imposition of sexual inactivity. However, Sappho is a virgin who is at the same time a queen, so that this transgressive behaviour prevents not only her body from being capitalised by patriarchy, but also her political power from being accessed and wielded by men. Unequivocally, Elizabeth I's strategy for establishing herself as the powerful monarch she was is evoked. If by imposing erotic desire upon Sappho through Cupid's design Lyly dramatises the momentary disruption of an unmarried queen's an-eroticism, he does so in order to expose on the one hand the political ramifications Elizabeth's wedding would instigate, and to praise her on the other.

Under the same prism, an-eroticism is likewise typified by the figure of Diana, the emblematic non-marrying virgin deity of the trilogy, who has been identified before with Sappho (Shulman 261). Sappho's overpowering of her erotic desires, a victory metaphorised by her adoption of Cupid, enables her to "conquer [her] own affections" (*SaP*

5.2.29), while the same set of words is curiously used by Telusa to refer to her guardian goddess (*Galatea* 4.2.92). The fact that both female characters appear perfectly capable of asserting themselves against desire indicates that an-eroticism finds representation both in the mortal and in the godly spheres. It is mostly the latter's description by Venus which promotes her portrayal as an-erotic:

> VENUS. . . . [Diana] envieth
> loving desires, masketh wanton eyes, stoppeth amorous
> ears, bridleth youthful mouths, and under a name, or a
> word, 'constancy', entertaineth all kind of cruelty. (*Galatea* 5.3.32-35)

Diana's envy is related to the utmost hostility with which she treats erotic desire, since Venus uses the word with its obsolete meaning, and it is supported by the series of actions listed in the next lines. In fact, her "constancy" is a reference to this same hostility: apart from her eternal chastity, it also involves the fixity and the studiousness with which her deity is delineated in contradistinction with erotic passions. As Sappho aims to preserve the virginity of her body politic by distancing herself from erotic relations, so does Diana perpetuate her own divinity by shutting every lover outside her an-erotic arcadian space. Her consistent effort to expunge any signs of love is neither evidence of oppressing her followers, as Venus insinuates, nor a mere prohibition imposed upon them regarding the eroticisation of their bodies. Instead, it is an invitation for the young virgin to defy paternal authority over her and voluntarily join the goddess's community (Jankowski, "Redefining" 258), which is nothing less than a site of female sexual inactivity.

Diana's logical rival, Venus, represents the position occupied on the opposite side of the sexual spectrum, moving from an-eroticism to hypersexuality. From a misogynistic perspective, Diana is unnatural and constant in the preservation of her virginity, whereas "Venus is a woman" (*SaP* 4.4.63), and thus inconstant, owing to her eagerness to copulate and to procreate.[11] If Diana's perennial virginity is an aberration for the sex/gender system in power on account of its unavailability for that system's maintenance, then Venus's multiple erotic interactions and her sexual over-availability are bound to trigger patriarchal anxiety all the same. This anxiety is well-justified, since the latter's sexuality cannot be contained and, accordingly, it is potentially dangerous to patrilineality. Venus embraces her eroticism and candidly communicates her stance to her own husband:

> VENUS. Be not angry, Vulcan; I will love thee again when I
> have either business or nothing else to do.
> CUPID. My mother will make much of you when there are no
> more men than Vulcan. (*SaP* 4.4.64-67)

In this scene, Vulcan's sexual potency is devalued, and he is additionally divested of his male authority over his wife because she has cuckolded him. In so doing, Venus admits to her nonmonogamy despite their matrimonial relation, and casts aside the stigma with which adultery is associated. Cupid, being the mediator of all erotic relationships, greatly contributes to the latter: in bolstering and thereby approving of his mother's attitude, he positions nonmonogamy side-to-side with sanctioned heterosexual monogamy. To this effect, nonmonogamy—including adultery—however queer in the Renaissance audience's mentality (Bromley 420), is partially standardised here by the god of love himself. Cupid's involvement here, in particular, is an interesting choice on the dramatist's part, and aims at taking the spectator a step further towards the normalisation of nonmonogamy.

The practice of pursuing one's desires unrestrained by the number of one's partners is articulated more clearly in *Love's Metamorphosis* by one of Ceres's nymphs. Niobe shares Venus's openness in being intimate with more than one man, yet she does not partake of the power the goddess draws from her divinity, even if that entails her subordination to male deities such as Neptune in *Galatea*. Rather, Niobe sets herself against male alliances to defend the possibility of having multiple erotic relations, being sheltered only by a guardian goddess who has already succumbed to Cupid's rule and to his imposition of heterosexual monogamous love. Following that, her weak social status as a young virgin whose bodily materiality and individuality are commodified because they appertain to patriarchal control, is in effect the reason why her stance outweighs Venus's; the goddess is up to an extent entitled to desire and to trifle with various partners, whereas Niobe commences from scratch a sexual negotiation concerning her own acquiescence to the type of the erotic bond in which she is to get involved.

This negotiation is carried out in juxtaposition with examples from nature as well as mythology. Each time, Niobe follows her suitor's line of argumentation to refute his reasoning:

> SILVESTRIS. . . . Turtles flock by couples, and breed both

joy and young ones.

NIOBE. But bees in swarms, and bring forth wax and honey. . . .

SILVESTRIS. The whole heaven hath but one sun.

NIOBE. But stars infinite. (*LM* 3.1.105-107, 119-120)

The heroine wins the debate concerned with the natural world, which is perhaps more important than the rest of the debates between the two characters, between institutionalised heterosexual monogamy and alternative erotic interactions. If the universe is large enough to accommodate pluralism, and if nature has made provisions for the animal kingdom to function in a nonmonogamous erotic mode, then the same should hold true for humans. Therefore, it is not merely nonmonogamy that is naturalised in this verbal exchange, but, in substance, the formation of multiple concurrent erotic bonds. The second and third debates are closely related, since they both belong to the mythological realm, interweaving giants and deities, and they emphasise the radicalism as well as the practicality of Niobe's proposition. Erotic desire is once more linked with eyesight via her reference to Argus Panoptes, the all-seeing mythical giant (*LM* 3.1.108-111). In parallelising female eroticism with Argus's hundred eyes, Niobe establishes women as sexual beings, and finds self-assertion in her inconstancy towards romantic relations. Her response is radical because it claims ownership of women's own bodies and minds (*LM* 3.1.123-124), and because it constitutes a declaration in favour of female self-dependence and erotic independence at the same time. Besides that, Niobe's envisioned nonmonogamy is essentially a self-defense mechanism. In the myth, Juno employs Argus's sharp-sightedness to guard Jove's marital constancy; likewise, Niobe wishes to have the ability to interact with several partners so that she can protect herself from "men's lightness" (*LM* 3.1.118), and by extension from desertion and sexual exploitation. Aware that she is a young virgin, the heroine comprehends her sex's inability to put up an effective fight against male lust, so that her "fall" and her possible social death become imminent. Nonmonogamy, then, paradoxically ensures female survival through that fall: even if Niobe is sexually conquered and subsequently abandoned by Silvestris, she has the opportunity to save herself in replacing him before she gets replaced.

In spite of her firm resistance to Silvestris's courtship, Niobe is forced into a loveless marriage with him, sharing the same fate with Celia and Nisa at the end of the play.

Ironically, her surrender to a monogamous matrimony is the final stage of negotiating nonmonogamy, since she sets her potential infidelity as a prerequisite to be wedded. Silvestris's response is surprisingly concessional: "fly whither thou wilt all day; so I / may find thee in my nest at night" (*LM* 5.4.168-169). By the time these words are uttered, Silvestris has already secured the actualisation of the matrimony, especially since the wedding vows have been exchanged. Consequently, his words should be received with scepticism, as Lyly never specifies what ensues after the closure of the play: does Silvestris's compromise really set the foundations of an effectual "heteroerotic arrangement" which is deviant at its core (Bromley 440), or is it simply reneged? Whether or not the couple's (pre-)nuptial agreement is implemented, perhaps one should focus on the very articulation of Silvestris's concession, rather than its verity. Granted Silvestris's homosocial alliance with Cupid on account of which the wedding takes place, the former's acceptance of Niobe's proviso signals patriarchy's inclination to negotiate and to recognise an erotic bond which deviates from the institutionalised monogamous romantic love developed between man and woman. Regardless of what happens between Niobe and Silvestris, nonmonogamy has been entrenched at least on the discursive level.

All things considered, should one appose all erotic interactions, it seems that the dramatist follows a pattern which promotes (female-) homoerotic, an-erotic, and nonmonogamous affiliations as pure, substantive and powerful in terms of the associated characters' self-determination. Antithetically, heteroeroticism is always understood to be oppressive in the trilogy, as Silvestris's statement that "[e]nforcement is worse than / enchantment" (*LM* 5.3.18-19) confirms. The determinative which effects such important differentiations between erotic bonds is gender. Apart from concealing that heteroeroticism, its constructedness, as well as its standardisation by the matrimonial institution are in reality "not *natural* categories, but *political* ones" (Butler 161; original emphasis), gender also forges a sexual hierarchy which outranks the sociopolitical one. Both of these hierarchies are sustained through "gender asymmetry" and the constraint of female eroticism (Traub, *Desire* 146), so that women are deemed doubly inferior. That said, because homoerotic, an-erotic, and nonmonogamous relations are either exempted from or adaptable to social discriminations, it makes sense that they are much more likely to prosper, in contrast with the heteroerotic ones, wherein the persons involved are

differentiated from one another on both gendered and social criteria. This chapter having been devoted to the gender and sexual hierarchies of the trilogy, the following one illustrates the impact the operation of erotic desire through visual stimuli has upon overturning the *social* hierarchy in relation to the early modern audiences, as well as to the lovestruck characters themselves.

Notes

[1] Professional playwriting, that is the composition of plays written with the purpose of being performed, was exclusively men's business in the early modern period. The first women dramatists that started appearing around this time were aristocrats who wrote closet dramas, not to establish themselves professionally, but to entertain their small familial and social circles (Rubik 6). For more, see Margaret Rubik's *Early Women Dramatists 1550-1800*, chapter 1 (pp. 6-16).

[2] Line taken from *Galatea*, 2.2.14.

[3] See Howard, esp. 419-22; Cressy 440-2 and 458; Rackin, esp. 29; and Gorman para. 9 and 14.

[4] It would be a fallacy to use gender performativity and gender labour interchangeably though. The latter concept cedes intention, and describes the individual effort to act in accordance with a gender identity. By contrast, Butler's coined term alludes to involuntary and repeated acts that one does without realising it so that gender performance, in that sense, acquires some autonomy.

[5] I find equally compelling Peter Stallybrass's statement that clothes construct gender as well, by "prosthetic" means; that is, by relying on "an imagined deficiency" which attire can make up for (59). On attire's impact upon gender, see Stallybrass esp. 58-9; Levine 131-4; Chess 149-54; and Howard 421-4.

[6] Line taken from *Galatea*, 1.3.19.

[7] Jankowski's suggestion would be extremely convenient to studying non-heteronormative sexuality in the early modern period without succumbing to anachronistic inconsistencies. However, her wording is generalised and thence historically unfounded. Valerie Traub, in her important article entitled "The (In)Significance of 'Lesbian' Desire in Early Modern England," refutes the very existence of her subject (17), although there have been recorded female-female cases in the early modern period, which would be historically inaccurate to label as lesbian whatsoever. According to Traub, female homoeroticism was not regarded as normative sexual behaviour, yet it was not regarded a serious threat to the heteronormative system due to the fact that it could not disrupt it. Unless women were unwilling to perform their

assigned gender roles, which involved their marriage and procreation, any instances of female homoeroticism were mostly ignored by society (Traub, "(In)Significance" 127). This kind of evidence, however, does not validate Jankowski's claim. For female homoeroticism in the early modern period, see Traub's article, esp. 121-7; Stone 483-4; and Digangi 92.

[8] On Sappho's homoeroticism based on her sharing the Lesbian Poetess's name, see Kesson's "Was Comedy a Genre in English Early Modern Drama?" 219; Jankowski's *Elizabeth I, the Subversion of Flattery, and John Lyly's Court Plays and Entertainments* 28; and Sarah Carter's *Ovidian Myth and Sexual Deviance in Early Modern English Literature* 113.

[9] Mike Pincombe seems to have missed this topographical shift between the myth as recorded by Aelian and Ovid's later version of it, from which Lyly reconstructs the story, as he misidentifies the setting of the play to be "the island of Lesbos" (392) instead of Syracuse. Contrary to that, it is reported in the very first lines of *Sappho and Phao* that Venus and Cupid "will to Syracusa" (*SaP* 1.1.36), where Sappho reigns. This divergence from Aelian's earlier version of the myth is crucial, if we accept the strong possibility that Lyly focusses on his heroine's queenly status to pass his judgement on the female monarch's ruling.

[10] In absence of an alternative term, I use this hyphenated compound word as an epithet to describe the subject *not* as incapable of stirring sexual desire and of responding to erotic stimuli overall ("anerotic"), but as innately uninterested in doing so. Etymologically speaking, the "a-" prefix indicates in this case the absence of the subject's interest in erotic interaction. With that in mind, the creation of this epithet helps to avoid confusing its meaning with other relevant but historically inaccurate words such as "asexual," or "aromantic," which refer to lack of sexuality or sexual drive, and lack of romantic feelings correspondingly.

[11] Critics have argued before that Lyly's misogyny is evident in his drama (Berry 119; Bevington 167). In my viewpoint though, the playwright projects the misogynistic ideas of the time, rather than his own feelings in suchlike statements, so as to dismantle and subvert them.

Chapter 3

Social Shifts: The Erotic Gaze and the Theatricalisation of Desire

> Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;
> And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.
>
> —William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

But always subversive. The political dimension of desire has been only discussed in reference to gender politics so far, but it is in its influence upon the social hierarchy of the trilogy where it chiefly manifests itself. The world depicted in the trilogy is not heavily stratified in the sense of consisting of multiple socio-economic layers, yet it is a rigidly hierarchised one. Rather, the trilogy features a community divided between the divine and the human presence, the former naturally outclassing the latter, with rare instances of overriding the fixity of this division (Meyer 194). Social rank is redefined by erotic relations as much as it is redefined by sexual desire, due to the fact that both the individual experience of the erotic and its shared externalisation negotiate power before anything else. As Christopher Wixson notes with regard to societies such as the Elizabethan one, "the articulation of gender, sexuality, and class involves complex interactions which, when examined together, can illustrate more fully the material and historical anxieties of the period via its drama" (254).

The inspection of social order and its redefinition in this chapter is carried through in direct relation to issues of gender and sexuality, since love as in sexual urge is more about submission than it is about sentiments or emotions. Phao's declaration that "to yield to / love is the only thing I hate" (*SaP* 2.1.131-132) consolidates desire as a political game of conquer-or-surrender played by sexual rules. For this reason, every erotic relation involves a desiring subject and a desired object. These two positions are at the same time gendered as long as the erotic relation under review is formed within a heteropatriarchal context, which renders the desiring subject male and the desired object female. This type of discourse, involving a subject and an object, interestingly accommodates the subversive nature of desire too, since the subject who desires is far from merely an individual who experiences sexual attraction. Instead, the desiring subject is at the same time an individual

who is *subjected* to their desire. This ambiguity discloses in a striking manner the illusive nature of desire, since the subject who desires hardly is aware of their subordination, which will be investigated in more detail shortly.

Lyly highlights the desiring subject's lack of agency by associating so closely sexual desire with blindness. In the Elizabethan thinking, desire is inherently dependent upon seeing since "[it] is said to be caused by the first sight of the beloved, the image entering the eyes and passing through the veins to the liver" (White 15). The definition Lyly gives to love is affected by the manner his contemporaries perceived it, therefore in the trilogy it is projected as "a staring blindness, and / a blinding gaze" (*LM* 3.1.26-27), a force maintained through sensory loss and especially through visual impairment. Eroticism operates in correlation with gazing so that, apart from the subject/object positions related to desire, a second dichotomy of activity/passivity is imposed by the erotic gaze, a dichotomy between casting it and emanating what Laura Mulvey calls "*to-be-looked-at-ness*" ("Visual" 837; original emphasis). If looks stimulate sexual attraction, it makes sense that the object of desire is simultaneously the gazed object of because of the passivity connoted in both cases. In this chapter, I maintain that Lyly plays upon the underlying power of sexual desire and diagnoses it with blindness and its own politically charged undertones in order to create a solid motif via which he may attack and unfix social hierarchies. This happens in a double-edged manner which concerns the fictional and the real, the dramatic and the theatrical, the interplay between characters and the interaction between audience and actors. I contend that the dramatist's means to re-envision society is to establish an imbalance between the uniform roles ascribed by the erotic gaze; if the active subject is subdued and the passive object galvanised, the dichotomies are bound to be overturned.

In practice, the subversive effectuality of desire cannot but be examined in accordance with the spatial environment within which the performance takes place. Similarly to sexual desire's operation through the gaze, theatre is by definition predicated on seeing and being seen. This analogy validates Richmond Barbour's claim that theatres as spaces constitute "houses of erotic display" (1006), which is to say that the specific environment introduces a cause-and-effect pattern when it comes to performing desire. Stephen Gosson's *The Schoole of Abuse* follows a similar line of argumentation to promote

its fierce polemics against playgoing:

> Looking eies have lyking hartes; lyking hartes may burne in lust. . . . though you go to Theaters to see sport, Cupid may cache you ere you departe. . . . Desire draweth his arrow to the head, and sticketh it uppe to the fethers, and Fancy bestireth him to shed his poison through every vayne. If you . . . joyne looks with an amorous gazer, you have already made your selves assaultable. (Gosson, *Schoole* 49)

Because the efforts of Gosson and other anti-theatrical writers of the period give prominence to the connection between desire and the theatre, another connection immediately emerges, that between desire and the gaze. It is the latter that appeals to Lyly, hence he invests in the fact that the dramatisation of desire entails its theatricalization: to perform eroticism instantly translates to eroticisation in that staging the erotic triggers the watching audience's own sexual desire. Barbara Freedman's point that "[t]he desire in theater is a desire for the subversion of the look" (67) implicates that the look returned to the audience is eroticised. *Galatea*'s epilogue is exemplary of implementing this undertaking at the point where the audience is urged to indulge in desire (5.4.5-8) and follow the paradigm the main characters have set in the play. What is fascinating in this prodding is that it is not just articulated but it is also enacted, since the titular heroine addresses the audience and thereby returns their gaze. Lyly's drama is fertile ground for expanding Freedman's thesis not only because of the numerous allusions to blindness but mainly due to the fact that, in my viewpoint, his plays heavily rely upon the erotic gaze as engendered by and during performance.

Laura Mulvey's theoretical account of the "male gaze" and its leading role in cinematography will be anachronistically, yet constructively used in an examination of how the erotic gaze functions in another art form, theatre and especially in Elizabethan theatre.[1] The Freudian concepts of castration anxiety and female bodily incompleteness owing to the lack of a phallus become the premises for Mulvey's theory used to symbolically instate woman as "bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" and thereby as the passive object of the gaze ("Visual" 833-834). Activity, on the other hand, that is the casting of the gaze, inevitably encompasses "the 'masculinisation' of the spectator position" (Mulvey, "Afterthoughts" 69) and the confrontation of the castration anxiety which woman as the

object of the gaze signifies. To outface this anxiety, the spectator's gaze subsequently becomes either scopophilic or voyeuristic, but it is not their entitlement to sexual pleasure which makes the gaze masculine. When gazing is involved, masculinity should more importantly be understood as a "'point of view'" (Mulvey, "Afterthoughts" 69), the capability of being the gazer and having one's own perspective. For Mulvey, the male gaze is scopophilic because it entails the objectification as well as the fetishisation of the gazed female. The object of the gaze attracts the subject's exclusive attention to her sexualised physicality to the degree that it becomes a fetish, and the subject consciously derives erotic pleasure from this process (Mulvey, "Visual" 840).

What is described as fetishistic scopophilia in the cinema may similarly apply to theatre too, since both art forms are intrinsically based on spectacle despite their special differences. The male spectator of a film gazing at the carefully eroticised image of the female body can be identified with the Elizabethan male playgoer looking at the actors on the stage; except that in the second case the object of the gaze is not a sexed female body but by all means a male one. This variance is crucial because the object of the scopophilic gaze (*and* the object of desire) is either an actor playing a male character, in which case it divulges an overt homoerotic interest, or a cross-dressed boy enacting a heroine, in which case it perplexes further the gender identity of the actor. Unlike men, whose gaze is objectifying, fetishistic, and scopophilic, I argue that women's falls more fittingly into what Mulvey, drawing on Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, describes as narcissistic scopophilia, which implicates the spectator's identification with the performer as "the reflected body of the self" and the arbitrary convergence of "image and self-image" ("Visual" 836). The female playgoer has two potential objects of desire: the cross-dressed boy actor, whom she gazes at because he enables her to acquire the masculine active position in the erotic relationship, and the banished female represented onstage, who epitomises her own seclusion to the private sphere and the desired possibility of becoming a public individual.

My interest, however, lies in men spectators chiefly because it is the male gaze which Mulvey discusses. On the Elizabethan stage, the youths who were assigned the female roles by virtue of their characteristics yet to be developed in a masculine way constituted "a cultural fantasy of sight" precisely because they signified "sexual difference as a site of indeterminacy" (Stallybrass 50). Apart from the heroines' gender fluidity and "an in-

between doubleness," the cross-dressed boys also personified their imminent metamorphosis into a being whose newly-acquired appearance would at last make them classifiable as masculine or feminine (Gorman).[2] Lisa Jardine's designation of them as "potentially rapeable" (8) is illustrated by their sexual inactivity and thereby their semblance to virgins, as well as by the desires their clothes would stimulate among the audience. Theatrical cross-dressing was not dispraised simply due to the appropriation of the gender and social indexes inscribed to the clothes, but additionally due to the palpable effect the clothes of the other sex could have upon the dressed body. John Rainolds claims in his *Th'Overthrow of Stage-Players* that "a womans garment being put on a man doeth vehemently touch and move him with the remembrance and imagination of a woman: and the imagination of a thing desirable doth stirr up the desire" (96). Regardless of whether involved in amorous play during his performance or not, the boy actor is expected to visually trigger the audience's erotic desires all the same. Besides sexual excitement though, the cross-dressed boy also triggers the anxiety of the idea that feminine attire has the capacity to literalise effeminisation by thwarting the boy's masculine development—an actual unmanning before they even get to become men and their eventual transformation into women (Levine 121). The staged image of the male sexed body dressed in transvestite apparel justifies this anxiety and instils in the audience the Freudian fear of castration typically associated with women.

In light of the mixed feelings which boy actors incite, namely anxiety and excitement, it becomes necessary for sexual desire to operate through the boys' fetishisation as women, even if not in the flesh but as in fictitious representations of them. What is striking, however, is that the playgoer is cognizant of the fetishisation to which he subjects the actors, since he is aware of watching a theatrical performance, a representation of unreality, and yet he still becomes erotically aroused. Since both the gazing and the fetishisation of the looked-at object are conscious acts, the male playgoer has to turn a blind eye to the real circumstances within which either of these acts is carried out; unless the male playgoer is in this sense self-blinded, he cannot see the actor and the enacted character as one, and he cannot by extension fetishise the object of his gaze as well as be erotically affected by the performance. As a result, the subject of the gaze is forced to experience a sort of blindness before his sexual desire for the gazed object is stirred.

Phillida, one of the two protagonists in *Galatea*, is a compellingly pertinent case of a dramatis persona because she is self-blinded in like manner. The infatuation she and the eponymous heroine share is reciprocated as an end result, but the way in which it operates through vision is dissimilar. Galatea declares, "[Phillida's] love is engraven / in my heart with her eyes" (*Galatea* 5.3.135-136), which implies that she has become the object of Phillida's gaze, a gaze returned and hence subverted. It is possible that Galatea is the only one of the pair who has been successfully deceived by the poor performance of gender in appearance as well as in comportment to which they both resort. Conversely, Phillida recognises instantly Galatea's femininity when she says "[h]e might well / have been a woman; but because he is not, I am glad I / am" (*Galatea* 2.1.21-23). In this first encounter of the girls, Phillida's perceptiveness alerts her to the attraction she feels to masked Galatea's feminine traits, to which she turns a blind eye and instead concentrates on her unfeminine attire in order to avoid confronting her homoerotic drives. Phillida's self-blindness, or what Simone Chess terms "gender labour of forgetting" in view of the fact that the heroine purposely sees not Galatea but Galatea's boyish apparel (157), crystallises her desire as much as it exacerbates it. Perhaps the most concrete sign of Phillida's self-blindness is found in her short monologue where her disillusionment takes place (*Galatea* 4.4.40-48) and she faces openly for the first time the eventuality of the truth: that regardless of whether the boy in the woods is "him, or her" (*Galatea* 4.4.47), Phillida must accept the person and not the sexed body so that her desire may exceed physicality, and flourish. In spite of the dramatist's painstaking efforts for perfect structural symmetry in the play, no counterbalancing monologue by Galatea precedes or follows as happened, for example, in the second act where each of the last two scenes is devoted to each protagonist. Consequently, Phillida's extra stage time serves to shed light on the resolution of her self-blindness, the manner in which she is erotically stimulated and at the same time the greatest disparity between her and Galatea.

It is on this ground that Phillida is identified with the male playgoer, an analogy suggesting the possibility that Lyly is interested in imitating the erotic game in which the audience is caught by gazing at the actors. Besides the enhancement of the theatricality, the dramatist's aspiration exposed here is to mirror in his drama the theatricalisation of desire, the potentiality of eroticisation, affecting dramatis personae and audience alike. Notably,

Galatea is not objectified by Phillida's look like the actor by the male playgoer's scopophilic gaze, yet she is just as fetishised because of the importance her attire acquires over her being in the eyes of the gazer. Phillida's self-blindness impedes Galatea from being considered outside what her clothes signify socially and gender-wise, which immediately renders her an exciting, but anxious spectacle as well: however blinded, Phillida is still aware of Galatea's identity, and is thus fearful of seeing her with different clothes, which would concretise the latter's womanhood. Nonetheless, what is fascinating in the anxiety Galatea triggers in comparison to the boy actor enacting a female role is the complementariness they produce: cross-dressed and fetishised as they both are, Galatea is feared to be found a non-man, while the boy actor provokes the anxiety of being found castrated, like the woman he impersonates. While in the first case this would establish a female-female homoerotic relation, in the latter it would disrupt the male homoeroticism between the playgoer and the actor.

Allowing a parallelism like this one transposes the weightiness from one's sex and gender to their quality of being the object of the gaze. Because the desired object has influence over the desiring subject (Galatea over Phillida, the boy actor over the male playgoer) it is granted the active position in the erotic game, which incidentally accords with the preoccupation of both objects studied here—Galatea is in itself a role to be played, while the boy actor is literally acting onstage. In contrast, the scopophilic subject acquires the passive position in the same game, since his activity is limited to casting an idle and skewed gaze in order to convey his erotic interest. Gosson lists the dangers behind this "idlenesse" (*Plays* G8v) and condemns the passivity of the playgoer, who is "star[ing] on the head of Mædusa and [is] turned to stones, [who] freeze[s] unto ice in [his] owne follies" (Gosson, *Plays* E7v). If these "follies" refer to sexual desire, then Gosson, almost scandalised by the playgoer's inactivity, his total lack of control over what is being represented and communicated to him onstage, validates the reversal of the active and passive positions occurring between the subject, who gazes and gets stimulated, and the erotic object, who is being seen and who titillates. The male spectator, then, blinds himself by clinging onto the illusion that the casting of the look is about exerting control over the object rather than granting control over himself, a practice which reminds Phillida's efforts to persuade herself that Galatea's apparel vouchsafes her masculinity.

An alternative to equating the exposed woman to her physical attractiveness, hence to a fetishised object, is voyeurism. According to Mulvey, the principal difference between scopophilia and voyeurism is that, while the former is completely contingent upon seeing, the latter presupposes a storyline as well—and theatre, as Freedman puts it, happens to offer "not only spectacle but narrative" (117). The castration threat women pose anatomically is handled with their incorporation into a narrative wherein they are sadistically scrutinised; a storyline which is constructed by the voyeur and transcends the plot of the play, where women seek to be either punished or forgiven in order to make up for their biological incompleteness (Mulvey, "Visual" 840). The male spectator becomes a voyeur when his erotic pleasure becomes dependent on sadism, and when it stems from his (baseless) sense of controlling the object of his gaze. Indeed, the Elizabethan stage functions as an "active arena for male voyeurism" (Daileader 11), especially since the erotic fantasies of the audience for authority are underpinned by the actual control male dramatists and actors have over the representation of the feminine, and the exclusion of women from the proscenium.

Voyeurism alongside its associations with sadism may be traced twofold in Lyly's drama inasmuch as the voyeur is identified with Cupid as well as with the male playgoer on a dramatic and on a theatrical level respectively. The more Cupid grows and acquires his identity as god Eros, the more he enjoys using his arrows either for the fun of it or to exert his power: "[I will] play such pranks with these nymphs that, while they aim / to hit others with their arrows, they shall be wounded / themselves with their own eyes" (*Galatea* 1.2.35-37). Similar to the spectator who gains erotic pleasure by looking at the boy heroine, Cupid establishes himself by casting his own gaze, that is his arrows, at his targets. Unlike the male playgoer, Cupid need not experience sexual desire himself, since he *is* desire. His sadistic pleasure derives from avoiding coercing Diana's nymphs into lust, and using their sight instead as a subterfuge to misguide them into self-inflicted blindness. In turn, he makes use of his voyeuristic position as masked and hidden in the woods to tamper with the social hierarchy and promote himself: Galatea would rather surrender to Neptune than be "a slave to Cupid" (*Galatea* 2.4.4-7), yet she is subjected to the power of love; Telusa is willing to "forsake Diana for him" (*Galatea* 3.1.101-103), referring to cross-dressed Phillida, but at the same time she chooses Cupid instead of her guardian goddess.

Cupid emerges victorious in *Sappho and Phao* as well, although he is far from the supreme deity of the play. Rather, this role is assumed by Venus who, having influence over and managing Cupid's arrows, should be examined as the actual voyeur of the play who finds sadistic satisfaction in her targets' misery: "I will yoke the neck that / never bowed, at which, if Jove repine, Jove shall / repent" (*SaP* 1.1.37-39). In effect, Venus resembles the male playgoer/voyeur for two chief reasons: firstly, because she centres her gaze upon Sappho, whose pride poses a threat to the goddess of beauty, and whose struggle to counteract her desire pleases Venus; secondly, because she shares with Sappho the same overwhelming desire for Phao—a misdirected desire, given that her successful wooing of him would further distress Sappho and thereby produce more pleasure for her. Venus's visual fascination with Phao showcases the fierceness of sexual desire as well as its potential to shake the foundations of a society without taking anyone's rank into consideration, and without discriminating between immortals and humans. However powerful she might seem, Venus acknowledges her demotion in the social order since the object of her desire is permitted to overpass any cultural and class barriers which had been defining the power relation between them before: "I entreat / where I may command; command thou, where thou / shouldst entreat" (*SaP* 4.2.26-28).

Undeniably, Cupid's most sadistic portrayal in the trilogy is when he becomes the punisher in *Love's Metamorphosis*. What differentiates Cupid from the rest of the characters is that while several are engrossed in "defining, negotiating, and exerting" their authority (Reid 80), it is he who triumphs. Unlike Ceres or Erisichthon who devote themselves to the same task, namely gaining control, Cupid's strategy involves the power dynamics of eroticism and more particularly how it is necessary that an erotic exchange operate in a polarising or imbalanced manner, so that it becomes a power relation more than anything else. Insofar as desire relies on sight, and insofar as vision (the ability to see) and visibility (the state of being seen) co-operate, erotic desire may develop mutually, thus effecting a balance between the two sides. Sappho and Phao's first encounter results in the development of mutual desire:

> PHAO. . . . I am spurblind; I could scarce
> see.
> SAPPHO. It is pity in so good a face there should be an evil eye.

PHAO. I would in my face there were never an eye. (*SaP* 2.2.21-24)

Although Phao is Sappho's royal subject, he becomes erotically subjected too as soon as he looks at her and acknowledges his instant blindness. Sappho, in turn, not only accepts her role as his desired object with her reference to the evil his eyes have done her, but additionally returns his look and casts her own erotic gaze upon him. In this way, she assumes control over him, but at the same time experiences a desire which jeopardises the integrity of her queenly status.

Cupid aims at sabotaging the necessity of either vision or visibility so that desire may function unevenly. His supremacy is established through the threat of metamorphosis, which is realised in the third play and which uncovers an effort to impair one's eyesight as a means of asserting control over them. Metamorphosis into bird, whether figuratively speaking or not, is a central option throughout the trilogy, and one linked with desire and with Cupid's sadistic voyeurism. The unyielding god realises his threat by turning, among others, a nymph into a bird but, whereas Ceres offers two doves to his temple, a perennial symbol of devotional love, as well as an eagle, a symbol of ascendancy, Niobe is changed into neither. Sappho, by contrast, compares herself to an eagle (*SaP* 3.3.87-88), the king of birds. Far from visual impairment or blindness, which would pave the way for erotic desire to operate and for control over oneself to be forfeited, the eagle's perfect eyesight signalises his dominance in the sky, reflecting the firmness with which Sappho restrains her physical need for love and manages to fulfil her royal duties. At the end of the play, Sappho comes out as solitary an animal as the eagle is, with just as good sight in reference to her potential to wield political power by means of being desired and by keeping her subjects under control, like the historical figure to whom she alludes, Elizabeth I. Instead of an eagle or a dove, Niobe is transformed into "that bird that liveth only / by air, and dieth if she touch the earth, because it is / constant: the bird of paradise" (*LM* 4.1.94-96). The mythical bird, into which she is changed, was believed to remain aloft at all times, impossible to be captured, and to be a rare but fortunate spectacle (Batislam 193).[3] As the bird-of-paradise remains hidden in the skies, notoriously inconspicuous to the human eye, Niobe's comparison to and "actual" metamorphosis into it suggest the cancellation of her visibility, the possibility to her being gazed at. Niobe's eyesight during her metamorphosed state remains intact, but she is prevented from enticing and exciting, hence of negotiating erotic

control by being desired.

Similarly, Diana's nymphs are metaphorically turned into birds by their guardian goddess due to their unprecedented desires for masked Galatea and Phillida. Diana compares them to a different type of a bird, "[t]he birds ibes, / [who] lose their sweetness when they lose their sights" (*Galatea* 3.4.39-40), as the nymphs tarnish their most-valued virtue, virginity, which inevitably defines them. Although Diana's statement appears to be unfounded (Bevington 85n39-40), the parallelism she draws between the girls and the birds insinuates the former's loss of vision, which in this context suggests their subordination primarily by desire itself and secondarily by their craved-for object. In getting blinded by their lust, the nymphs denounce their virginal status and relinquish control of themselves, from which their sexual as well as their social fall expectedly ensues; even if they are not really metamorphosed into ibes, they are turned into passive, desiring subjects.

Excepting the case of Sappho, Cupid has generally achieved forestalling desire in the sense that either vision or visibility is hampered and the nymphs are denied access to power and social advancement through eroticism. All the while, he has been observing the events, deriving as much pleasure as he is asserting his authority throughout the female characters' torments, despite having been the instigator of all three metamorphoses—Sappho's, Niobe's, and Diana's nymphs'. Apart from the heroines, however, Cupid has been posing as the voyeur of the playgoer's erotic fascination with the actors and their enacted roles' problems. Whether through scopophilic or voyeuristic gazes, love as desire is solidified as not the end, but the means to gain control and transcend one's social confines. In meddling with the dramatis personae's relationships by eroticising them, Lyly engages the audience in an immediate way, since the theatricalisation of desire requires the sexual provocation of the spectator while it simultaneously triggers it. In opposition to cinema, which is illustrated by the possible manipulation of the look (Mulvey, "Visual" 843), theatre as the space where the erotic gaze is cast and returned enables the subversion of the look. Lyly opens up the very possibility to subversion on the dramatic and more importantly on the theatrical level, therefore his plays are far from "conservative," as Christopher Wixson claims (245). Rather, the male playgoer is necessarily caught in the erotic contest taking place onstage because, by exposing him to the dramatist's ideas and appropriating "the erotic body [as] a material site for inscriptions of ideology and power" (Traub, *Desire* 9),

theatre can unseat him from his social, active position and redefine his sexuality and his gender roles.

Notes

[1] The expansion of Mulvey's cinematographic theory on the gaze to theatre and drama in general is a wider topic up for discussion in which I choose not to participate though and focus specifically on Elizabethan theatre instead for brevity and relevance purposes.

[2] See para. 8.

[3] Straying from Roman and Greek mythology, Lyly displays his infatuation with myth by alluding here to a legendary creature originating from Persian mythology and encountered in Divan poetry, also known as the Huma or Homa (Batislam 187). See Batislam's full article, for the translation of which from Turkish into English I am very grateful to my dear friend, Rana Doğan.

Conclusion

> Where there is desire, the power relation is already present: an illusion, then, to denounce this relation for a repression exerted after the event.
>
> —Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*

Love, then, can be a lot of things, or it might as well be an empty word. Either way, it is all about possessing enough fortitude to dare forfeit self-control and invite the beloved to take over; it is, and always has been, about power and should therefore be explored under this light. Whether externalised as physical or substantiated as affective, desire necessitates that lovers lose a bit of themselves in quest for fulfilment, forcing them thus to stray, to a greater or lesser extent, from their social and gender roles. While each of the plays under review is thematically informed by the heterogeneity of love all the same, it is in their consideration as constituents of a trilogy where they immerse in the subversive potential of desire with regard to issues principally of gender and secondarily of class, occasioned as much as they are aided by practices, ideologies, and circumstances of the era. For Lyly, theatrical cross-dressing attends to patriarchal autocracy but at the same time can be utilised to undermine masculinity. The normalisation of marital monogamy aims at obliterating any erotic interactions which do not serve the perpetuation of the sex/gender social system in power but inevitably acknowledges the possibility of deviating from the canon. Love as desire operates through the casting of the gaze making one feel in charge of the interaction, yet it instantly subordinates the gazer because it hands over control to the desired object. And the stage, finally, accommodates eroticism as contained in any dramatic work, yet it also transmutes it into eroticisation in the same way that it turns the playgoer into a scopophiliac or a voyeur. Overall, these Lylian plays consolidate comedy as an instrumental and convenient genre for the communication of ideologies which are at times subversive, at other times outright contentious, owing to the effortless dismissability of jokes, for their recipient can always laugh off any depth they might have.

However much Lyly seeks ways to undercut and critique, his endeavour to subvert eventually (re)turns to his person. Andy Kesson poignantly points out that "Lyly not only writes for a woman," but overall presents himself as "inappropriately feminine" ("John

Lyly" 34), and I find his remark interesting in reference not to Lyly's gender, but to his identity as a dramatist (and an author). The balanced manner in which issues of gender and sexuality are carefully tackled so as to offer women representation before an androcentric space suffices to describe the trilogy as a feminine written text even if the author's sex is male (Karaman 170). Instead of cancelling or erasing differences, the dramatist consciously "stirs them up" (Cixous 884) for the purpose of redefining social roles and gender identities. As a result, Lyly should be in Cixousian terms classifiable as an author of bisexuality, whose meticulous undertaking to achieve the perfect symmetry in his plays' structure divulges his undimmed interest in giving women a voice in an environment which systemically shuts them out. More significantly, however, his effort to evaluate femininity anew and in alignment with masculinity, not beneath it, reveals regardless of its outcome a radicalism that should be conceded as proto-feminist. In agreement with the claim that "[h]e gave English drama shape" (Bradbrook 5), this dissertation has inspected at length some of Lyly's revolutionary ideas on gender, so that its contribution concentrates on retracting his drama from the shadow of other canonical dramatists of the Elizabethan period, and fostering its critical appreciation.

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Περίληψη

Αντλώντας το υλικό τους εκτεταμένα από την ελληνορωμαϊκή μυθολογία, οι κωμωδίες του John Lyly περιεργάζονται τον έρωτα και τις επιδράσεις αυτού στους χαρακτήρες των έργων του. Ως επαναλαμβανόμενο θέμα, ο έρωτας διαφοροποιείται τόσο ως προς τις εκφάνσεις του όσο και ως προς τις δραματικές αναπαραστάσεις του (αγάπη/πόθος). Ο κεντρικός του ρόλος στην πλοκή υπογραμμίζεται μέσω της συνεκτικής θεατρικής του ενσάρκωσης του από τον Cupid (Έρωτα), ο οποίος πρωταγωνιστεί σε αρκετά έργα του Lyly και αναδιπλώνει την εξελισσόμενη πολυμορφικότητά του κατά τη διάρκεια της θεατρική δράσης. Οι απεικονίσεις του ως παιδί, νέος και ενήλικας διαδέχονται η μία την άλλη σε τρεις κωμωδίες οι οποίες, σε συνάρτηση με την μερική κειμενολογική τους αλληλεπίδραση, επιτρέπουν την εξέτασή τους σαν τριλογία: *Sappho and Phao* (1584), *Galatea* (1592), and *Love's Metamorphosis* (1601). Θέτοντας τον Cupid ως τον συνδετικό κρίκο μεταξύ τους, η εργασία αυτή ερευνά την αποσταθεροποίηση καθώς και τον επαναπροσδιορισμό της κοινωνικής και κυρίως της έμφυλης ιεραρχίας μέσα από τις αναπαραστάσεις του έρωτα, υπό την έννοια της ερωτικής επιθυμίας. Επειδή αποτελεί ανδρικό προνόμιο, η ερωτική επιθυμία προσδίδει αυτενέργεια στην αντικειμενοποιημένη γυναίκα με αποτέλεσμα να αποκτά πολιτική χροιά. Εξετάζοντας το *Gender Trouble* της Judith Butler για να εστιάσω σε ζητήματα τάξης και σεξουαλικότητας, υποστηρίζω ότι οι χαρακτήρες του Lyly επιτελούν τους πατριαρχικά οριοθετημένους έμφυλους ρόλους όχι για να συμμορφωθούν, αλλά για να εναντιωθούν στις κοινωνικοπολιτιστικές νόρμες που τους έχουν επιβληθεί ανάλογα με το γένος τους. Με παρόμοιο τρόπο, η δραματική αναπαράσταση του ομο-ερωτισμού και διαφόρων άλλων σεξουαλικών πρακτικών ως εναλλακτικές στην θεσμοθετημένη συζυγική μονογαμία συνιστά συνειδητή προσπάθεια του θεατρικού συγγραφέα να αψηφήσει την ετεροκανονικότητα και να επαναπροσδιορίσει την θηλυκότητα. Η σκηνοθέτηση τέτοιων θεμάτων, ακολούθως, θεατρικοποιεί την ερωτική επιθυμία διεγείροντάς την μέσω της όρασης, κάτι που ανοίγει τον δρόμο για την διερεύνηση της σχέσης μεταξύ επιθυμίας και απώλειας των αισθήσεων, ειδικότερα της όρασης. Το θεωρητικό έργο της Laura Mulvey και η έννοια του «ανδρικού βλέμματος» εξυπηρετούν αυτόν τον σκοπό, διευκολύνοντας την εξερεύνηση της εξουσιαστικής δύναμης που εμπλέκεται στην σεξουαλική διαπραγμάτευση ανάμεσα στο υποκείμενο και το αντικείμενο της ερωτικής επιθυμίας. Παρόλο που τέτοιες ιδέες εκφράζονται κατά το

ήμισυ και καταλήγουν να αποσιωπώνται από την λογοκρισία της εποχής, ο ριζοσπαστισμός του Lyly αναδύεται πίσω από τις λέξεις και τις γραμμές των έργων του, καθιερώνοντάς τον ως πρωτο-φεμινιστή. Η εργασία αυτή αφενός παρακινεί την κριτική εκτίμηση του έργου του Lyly, που επισκιάζεται από αναγνωρισμένους θεατρικούς συγγραφείς της ίδιας περιόδου, αφετέρου θέτει την προοπτική αυτή ως έναν από τους στόχους της.