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Abstract

Chapter One: Attitudes and Traditions of the Age.

In John Lyly we see the crystallization of the English comedy that had been spasmodically developed by schoolmasters and students of language in academic and didactic plays. However, before becoming a dramatist, Lyly had gained his greatest contemporary fame with his two-part novel Euphues. In both his fictional and dramatic works, Lyly was catering to the socially elevated -- and particularly the courtly -- circles of Elizabethan England, circles alive to the latest attitudes in philosophy, dress, education, and social customs in general. Among these members of the Elizabethan avant-garde Queen Elizabeth was a dominating figure. Although she was visually the best example of what the humanistically-trained woman could become, there had been other women in sixteenth century England who were fine representatives of their sex. Indeed, after Catherine of Aragon, it had become fashionable for women to have at least some pretensions to learning. Woman no longer occupied her nebulous medieval position; she had become, in a sense, an Elizabethan phenomenon. John Lyly recognized this, and in his writings woman was one of his major preoccupations.

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Chapter Two: Woman in Lyly's Works. Women occupy a principal position in most of Lyly's works. Character development in Euphues is not highly developed, but in the eight plays ~~which~~^{to} followed the two parts of this novel, Lyly displays a more than rudimentary talent for developing substantial characters. Beginning with Cam-
paspe, ~~there appears~~^{an encounter} a continuous line of memorable women -- memorable for either their virtues or their faults -- dominating queens, ladies of the court, nymphs. Significantly, Lyly's last play, The Woman in the Moone, concerns itself almost entirely with a study of woman-kind.

Chapter Three: Lyly's Achievement. The women of Lyly's works are not all of one mold, but almost all have one thing in common: they are educated members of a refined society, although as individuals they range from shrews to ~~maidens~~ to regal creatures. None of Lyly's women occupies a position subordinate to man in conversation, and critics recognize that the importance of the feminine element and the meeting of the sexes on equal terms are the bases for comedy of the higher type. Lyly was the first consistent writer in English to show that intellect, too, was a part of the feminine organism, and his women were the forerunners not only of Shakespeare's heroines but also those of Congreve and Meridith.

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