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Fictions of Authorship in Late Elizabethan Narratives:
Euphues in Arcadia (review)

Nandini Das

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(Review)

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counterarguments have done some damage to the principal thesis; there are odd contradictions. But the major themes are worth the pondering, for the forces involved in the shaping of prose fiction of those volatile decades were themselves multiple and contradictory.

In sum, this book is a valiant production, full of interesting detail, arresting in its novelty, comprehensive in the scope of the background reading, and worth the consideration of all students of early prose fiction. One can only hope that in making a contribution to the growing number of critical studies on the Lyly-to-Nashe axis, the axis itself will continue to gain in status among students of Renaissance literature.

DONALD BEECHER

Carleton University

Katharine Wilson. *Fictions of Authorship in Late Elizabethan Narratives: Euphues in Arcadia*.

Oxford English Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006. 186 pp. index. bibl. \$74. ISBN: 0-19-925253-X.

Popular prose fiction of the Elizabethan period has attracted increasing attention in recent years. Katharine Wilson's *Fictions of Authorship* aims to extend this emphasis by exploring the representations of authorship and textual transmission within Elizabethan popular fiction. As her introduction explains, "[t]he 'fictions of authorship' of my title refers to the way authors marked out ideas about writing within their novels, often through the creation of writers and readers within the text." She argues that the repetition of this theme is an indication of the "growing disenchantment with the romance" experienced by this new breed of popular writers, and of their "own uncertainty about the role of prose fiction" (4).

Wilson begins with the flurry of textual exchange that constitutes George Gascoigne's *Discourse of the Adventures passed by Master F. J.*, in which letters, poetry, and narratives continuously change hands. The chapter then proceeds to show how Gascoigne's own literary manoeuvres are appropriated by writers like Whetstone, Grange, and Gabriel Harvey, all of whom produce stories as "tribute[s] to the compulsive fascination of the story of F. J. and the games which could be played with it" (32). While the unstable nature of texts and textual exchange in Gascoigne's *Master F. J.* has been explored in detail previously by critics such as Constance Relihan and Susan Staub, it is Wilson's account of Harvey's unpublished narrative, "A noble mans sute to a cuntrie maide," which is bound to attract readers' attention with its delineation of the complicated literary ventriloquism through which the married "Milord" and Harvey's sister "Mercy" requisition Harvey's erudite persona to function as an involuntary "secretary" in their exchange of missives.

Chapter 2 introduces Lyly's archetypal Renaissance wit, Euphues. Wilson argues that Lyly's hero shares a significant trait with the protagonists of Gascoigne

and his successors: all of them run the risk of being ridiculed as text-bound fools whose written work is either misinterpreted or misused — or, worse still, revealed to be hopelessly outdated in style. As before, Wilson pairs her text with a late-Elizabethan rejoinder: Robert Greene's *Mamillia*, which offers a neat reversal of the central premise of *Euphues* by presenting a female protagonist who comes to the rescue of the duplicitous hero, Pharicles. Wilson's knowledge of this body of texts is evident throughout the discussion, although one wonders if the study could have dispensed with some of the detailed plot summaries, particularly in the case of better-known texts such as Gascoigne's *Master F. J.* and Lyly's *Euphues*.

The synopses, however, prove to be useful tools in the two central chapters of the book, which focus on the innumerable amorous tales of Robert Greene. Wilson significantly points out that Greene continues to use his female protagonists as "surrogate authors" (84) within his stories, and that his pragmatic decision to recycle themes and plots throughout his career lead to the construction of "alternative canons and literary records in which the old names and stories remain as memories of a lost literary culture" (84). This process of creating an alternative cannon that is distanced and challenged almost as soon as it is proposed, is cogently illustrated in Greene's *Menaphon*, a pastoral romance laden with allusions to narrative predecessors ranging from the classical story of the Judgment of Paris to Sidney's *Arcadia*.

Chapter 5 focuses on Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde*, where the eponymous female protagonist also operates as a surrogate author, challenging established literary expectations about romances and romance heroines. However, Wilson suggests that Lodge's disillusionment with romance takes a far darker turn in his *Margarite of America*, in which the Margarita's passion for the tyrannical Arsadachus blinds her to the evil hidden behind her lover's easy appropriation of courtly wit. Romance is shown to have "turned into a distorting mirror" (162) in this narrative, with ultimately destructive implications for both Margarita and Arsadachus. This troubled mixture of "satire and nostalgia" (169), noticeable in most late-Elizabethan prose fiction, also becomes the focus of Wilson's epilogue, which takes a brief look at Thomas Nashe's unpredictable and striking reworking of romance tropes in *The Unfortunate Traveller*.

It could be argued that while Wilson repeatedly emphasizes the late-Elizabethan writers' disenchantment with romance, the actual nature of this complex tradition is not explored in much depth. The discussion also leaves some key questions tantalizingly unanswered. For instance, Wilson's examination of the recurrent use of eloquent female speakers and writers in texts ranging from Gascoigne's *Master F. J.* to Lodge's *Rosalynde* inevitably invites readers to wonder why the woman in love so often becomes the persona adopted by these young male writers in their fictions of authorship. Again, while Wilson traces the repeated appearance of yet another authorial figure, the secretary, we hear little else about the implications that the adoption of this persona might have for writers moving from the world of patronage to the so-called marketplace of print. However, despite its refusal to engage with these questions at length, Wilson's study offers

readers a very useful review of a body of relatively unfamiliar narratives, and provides an engaging approach to the literary and authorial negotiations that shape this late Elizabethan genre.

NANDINI DAS

University of Liverpool

Curtis Perry. *Literature and Favoritism in Early Modern England*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. x + 328 pp. index. \$90. ISBN: 0-521-85405-9.

This new book identifies a “discourse on favorites” as it pertains to early modern English literature from the reign of Elizabeth up to the Civil War. Favorites, of course, are key political figures in English history. By their open connection to the ruler, they create a personal, interactive monarchy, one in which the monarch becomes known through his or her use of — or manipulation by — a particular favorite. In terms of discourse, the favorite comes to symbolize the monarch, the vehicle through which we, as critics of the literature that he or she inspires, can delineate a so-called public sphere, an area of discussion created by the relationship the monarch has with the favorite. The literature discussed is largely plays, but Perry also examines libels, speeches, and poems, all of which are analyzed in a historical context (i.e., how the Renaissance audience might recognize and interpret a particular character or situation as representing, say, the Earls of Leicester, Somerset, or Buckingham). But for us, as twenty-first-century critics of the literary-historical-cultural period, the discussion supplies a context through which we can appreciate the purpose for much of the literature of the period. Perry’s approach is well-argued, comprehensive, and fascinating first to last. This is an excellent book.

The heart of the question is royal prerogative, the ruler’s right to do whatever he or she wants. For the royalist, that right is ingrained into the very nature of monarchy. For the republican, it is nothing short of the problem itself. In order to govern, a monarch must be capable of self-governance. It is within this conceptual space that the wide variety of political perceptions evolve into an ongoing critical narrative on the nature of favoritism. A key figure in this narrative must be one of Elizabeth’s favorites, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester. Perry tells us that Dudley was not Elizabeth’s only favorite, but by starting with the Catholic libel *Leicester’s Commonwealth*, the book takes us through a series of writings about Dudley’s relationship with Elizabeth that tell and retell the story as convenient for whatever point of view a particular writer was espousing. Indeed, it is Leicester and what Perry calls “his ghosts” that become the swing narrative that fostered later writers to critique other monarchs by dramatizing Elizabeth’s relationship with this particular favorite. These narratives delineate the key chapter headings that structure the book: “Amicis principis, Imagining the Good Favorite,” including a discussion on the classical interpretation of friendship; the “Poisoning Favor,” obviously the