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## A RECONCILIATION of CONFLICTS: JOHN LYLY'S *ENDYMION, THE MAN IN THE MOON*

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### ABSTRACT

*The use of opposing elements constitutes the main grid of dramatic works, and the consolidation of antithetical forces in an array of conflicts creates unison of multiple perspectives in such works. Renaissance drama, succeeding the medieval period, predominantly hinges on the clash of antagonistic components in that dichotomies are dissolved in the end. John Lyly's Endymion, The Man in the Moon is one of the Renaissance plays in which the playwright establishes his whole work on different binary elements. This paper sets out to pinpoint three conflicting elements in terms of the use of mythology and history, the presentation of female stance and different types of love in Lyly's play.*

**Keywords:** *Renaissance drama, John Lyly, Endymion, The Man in the Moon, conflict*

### John Lyly'nin *Endymion*, *Ay'daki Adam* Adlı Oyununda Çatışmaların Uzlaştırılması

### ÖZET

*Zit unsurların kullanımı tiyatro eserlerinin esas yapısını oluşturur ve karışık güçlerin çeşitli çatışmalar içerisinde bir araya getirilmesi bu tür çalışmalarda farklı bakış açılarının birlikteliğini sağlar. Ortaçağ dönemini takiben, Rönesans tiyatrosu, çoğunlukla, ikiliklerin sonunda çözüldüğü zit öğelerin çarpışması üzerine kuruludur.*

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*John Lyly'in Endymion, The Man in the Moon [Endymion, Ay'daki Adam] adlı eseri, yazarın tüm oyununu farklı zıt unsurlar üzerine kurduğu Rönesans oyunlarından biridir. Bu çalışma, mitoloji ve tarih kullanımı, kadın duruşunun sergilenişi ve farklı aşk türleri bağlamında Lyly'nin oyunundaki üç çatışmalı unsuru irdelemeyi amaçlar.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Rönesans tiyatrosu, John Lyly, Endymion, The Man in the Moon, çatışma

One of the essential elements of drama is the use of conflict, the clash of opposing elements, which constitutes the compound of the work, expanding the contextual substance. Knox (2009: 132) once articulates that “[a] play needs to expose the intrinsic conflict of particular situations thus creating dilemmas for the lives of its characters” and further argues that “[w]ithout the conflict and dilemma, the play loses its dramatic punch and becomes uninteresting. Dilemma is what keeps the motor of the play running, sustaining suspense and curiosity. It is the substance that creates the drama” (2009: 132). Political, religious, social and internal conflicts sustain complex dynamics of the plays in that they create a polyphony of multiple forms, ideas, identities and concepts. Within the scope of Renaissance drama, one argument of the world view of the period in relation with theatrical activities of the time rests on the claim that “[t]he cosmos, like Renaissance dramatic art, created beauty through a reconciliation of opposites” (Kuritz 1988: 156), and the artist is thought to have been “a creator imitating God’s creation of the cosmos. [. . .] The theatre, in fact, was considered as a microcosm of the cosmos” (Kuritz 1988: 156). Therefore, after the medieval period, the Renaissance, the epitome of English drama, witnesses both the clash and the dissolution of opposing forces all of which are reflected in the works of the time. The Renaissance drama, nourished by the medieval dramatic tradition and challenging its norms at the same time, broadens the range of topics presented on the stage considering that the plays delve into various sources, problems and psychological dimensions. Economic, political and artistic concerns of the writers, along with their target, shape the

dichotomies contrasted in the works of dramatic creators. In a similar vein, John Lyly (1554-1606), a writer belonging to the group of university wits, builds his well-known dramatic work *Endymion, The Man in the Moon* (1588) upon the conflicting elements that he contradicts in the flow of the play in a way that the play reaches a point of reconciliation in the end.

Born in Kent in the second half of the 16th century, Lyly grew up in Canterbury where he was believed to receive his primary education until his attendance to Magdalen College, Oxford University (Scragg 2003: vii). Moving to London after receiving his M.A. degree, Lyly embarked on his literary career with his first prose work entitled *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578) and later wrote *Eupheus and His England* (1580). Then, he produced dramatic works among which *Sappho and Phao* (1584-85), *Midas* (1589), *Love's Metamorphosis* (1590) and *The Woman in the Moon* (1595) mostly attracted critical attention in addition to his prominent play *Endymion*. Indeed, his plays were written for courtly performances as part of entertaining activities at the court, and it is claimed that "Lyly's object is not so much to show human beings performing more or less interesting actions, still less to show human character and emotion revealed in action – a purpose which had to wait for Marlowe to begin and Shakespeare to perfect" (Mackenzie 1971: 40). Nevertheless, his affluent component in his comedies cannot be denied on the grounds that Lyly uses a wide range of materials, and his plays can be classified into four groups as Wilson (1970: 98) suggests:

[The critics] divide the dramas into four categories: historical, of which *Campaspe* is the sole example; allegorical, which includes *Sappho and Phao*, *Endymion*, and *Midas*; pastoral, which includes *Gallathea*, *The Woman in the Moon*, and *Love's Metamorphosis*; and lastly realistic, of which again there is only one example, *Mother Bombie*.

Among allegorical plays, *Endymion* performed in 1588 at Greenwich comes to the fore with its multilayered readings. While Lyly

hinges on the mythical story of Endymion, he appears to adapt the tale for his historical context and draws on other sources, too. On the mythological level of this play, Deats (1975: 67) declares Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and Lucian's *Dialogues of Gods* as Lyly's sources whereas the critic claims that the relationship between Elizabeth I and Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester and the conflict between Mary Queen of Scots and the Queen shape its historical context. Furthermore, philosophical dimension is taken on the Neo-Platonic idea of the soul discussed in line with Castiglione's *The Book of Courtier* (Deats 1975: 68). More than this, the play is depicted to be a personal piece of work as Fussell (1975: 102) upholds that "[w]hatever specific topical allusions the play may conceal, the role of Endimion as a poet-lover in service to Cynthia surely suggests a pastoral mask for the young playwright in service to his queen". Therefore, the play can be regarded as a kind of compliment for the Queen although Lyly (1996: 78) elucidates in his prologue to the play that his work is just an invention of the mind, and this story of the man in the moon should be simply received by its audience and reader. However, an attentive analysis of the play pinpoints Lyly's careful approach, his "symmetrical grouping of parts" (Bradbrook 1973: 62) or his Euphuistic style which refers to "parallels, logical structures, and syntactic oppositions, through which a thing may be defined by its opposite, or two things may be held in equilibrium, or one thing may be seen to possess contrary properties within it" (Bevington 1996: 46). The complex dynamics between different couples and pairs of the play is constructed through a web of conflicts considering the fact that characters are juxtaposed in a string of distinct plots. Lyly's lateral predicament in the play, according to Bevington (1996: 46), "explore[s] antithetical issues of love and honour, love and friendship, carnality and chastity, perfidy and constancy, sovereignty and service, reason and passion, masters versus servants, men versus women, and the like". Although such a list of opposing elements can be extended within the analysis of the play, it should be noted that the conflicts are resolved, and the play comes to

the point of a reconciliation through Cynthia's intervention in the end. The frame of this paper is to highlight certain binaries presented in Lyly's *Endymion* in terms of the use of mythology and history, female stance and different types of love.

In the "Prologue," Lyly (1996: 78) declares that "[w]e present neither comedy, nor tragedy, nor story, nor anything, but that whosoever heareth may say this: 'Why, here is a tale of the Man in the Moon'". Yet the first part of the title already conditions the audience / reader, recalling the mythological story of Endymion. In fact, myths, fantastic narratives of people to comprehend the unknown, are a part of "nonfactual storytelling" in which "[t]he form of the tale is not produced by reality" (Burkert 1979: 3). Therefore, the playwright initially constructs his play upon a fictional figure Endymion with whom the moon goddess Selene is said to fall in love, but this love somehow leads him to sleep eternally whether upon Selene's plan or Zeus' intervention (Schuddeboom 2005: 475). Lyly's play, hence, embarks on this myth in that Endymion adores Cynthia as he tells his friend Eumenides that he is "settled either to die or possess the moon herself" (Lyly 1996: 1.1.18-19). He defines Cynthia as the moon from the very first scene of the play when he depicts his beloved with the image of the moon: "O fair Cynthia, why do others term thee unconstant whom I have ever found unmovable? [. . .] There is nothing thought more admirable or commendable in the sea than the ebbing and flowing; and shall the moon, from whom the sea taketh this virtue be accounted fickle for increasing and decreasing?" (Lyly 1996: 1.1. 35-45). Different from the tale, however, Cynthia in the play does not correspond to Endymion's love. In contrast, he is observed to involve in an affair with another woman called Tellus whose jealousy of Cynthia causes her to use black magic to make Endymion sleep for forty years. The spell is broken upon Cynthia's kiss of Endymion who grows old in such a long time span although she does not respond to his love. According to Thomas (1978: 36-38)), Lyly's portrait of Enydmiion is inspired by some versions of the same myth in that the playwright is

claimed to combine and adapt four different descriptions of Endymion. Thomas (1978: 37-38) especially focuses on the sketch of the mythical figure drawn in Pliny's *Natural History* in which Endymion is said to be "the moon's lover, not her beloved", and his interest in the moon enables him to discover lunar movements. Yet the playwright's employment of the myth can be regarded as his allegorical means to develop topical content of his play. Bond (1967: 9) suggests that "it is obvious that the materials afforded by the classical myth, the perpetual sleep and the kiss of Cynthia were insufficient for a play; and what Lyly has done is to weave around this beautiful picture and allegorical drama of Court-life whose action has no place nor counter-part at all in the myth". That is to say, Lyly digs into the historical material in a way that he appears to veil his references to the real stories of certain figures in his use of fantastic story.

To put it simply, history refers to "a form of the narration of past events" (Seters 1983: 1) and derives its source from the record of real life occurrences. As reported by Bozio (2016: 59), "Lyly's dramatic reconceptualization of the court has led [some] scholars to undertake a topical reading of *Endymion* in attempting to identify historical analogues for the play's major characters". In other words, Lyly is claimed to depend on certain factual details albeit his mythological component in the sense that he fuses historical data with artistic and aesthetic venture. Accordingly, Bond (1967) advocates the idea that

[t]he Moon-Goddess becomes a queen surrounded by her Court; the Greek shepherd, her favourite courtier. As the double subject of this Court-allegory Lyly takes the two salient features in the domestic history of the reign (1) the rivalry between Elizabeth (Cynthia) and Mary of Scotland (Tellus); (2) the Queen's perennial affection for, and temporary displeasure (in 1579) with, Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester (Endymion); a sufficient warrant for the dramatic connexion of the two being supplied in the match actually contemplated between Mary and Leicester in 1563-1565. This double subject is supplemented by two subordinate and connected subjects (1) the quarrel between the Earl and

Countess of Shrewsbury (Geron and Dipsas); (2) the relations of Sir Philip Sidney (Eumenides) with his uncle Leicester and his love Penelope Rich, née Devereux (Semele); while several other personages more or less prominent are introduced. (p. 9)

As can be observed, the court of the Queen sways Lyly's dramatic creation in which the playwright puts the powerful monarch on a pedestal in a tactful manner. Symonds (1967: 413) pinpoints that Lyly pays homage to Elizabeth I in his works, and *Endymion* particularly celebrates "her loftiness and unapproachable virginity". Indeed, Robert Dudley, a courtier in the service of Elizabeth I, is acknowledged with his intimacy with the Queen for a long time as a courtly rumour in the second half of the 16th century (Doran 1996: 45). Yet Dudley was already married although his attempt to pursue the Queen never ended. The complex relationship between the Earl and the Queen, along with his wife, is mirrored by Lyly in the love triangle of Endymion, Cynthia and Tellus. On the one hand, Endymion discloses that "[y]ou know, fair Tellus, that the sweet remembrance of your love is the only companion of my life, and thy presence my paradise, so that I am not alon when nobody is with me, and in heaven itself when thou art with me" (Lyly 1996: 2.1. 60-64). On the other hand, he cannot deny his admiration for Cynthia in that Tellus evidently expresses that "I see thou [Endymion] art now in love with Cynthia" (Lyly 1996: 2.1. 103). However, as in the real life, Cynthia does not reciprocate Endymion's love. In her association with Cynthia as the moon, Elizabeth I in Lyly's work is

Accentuated by her remoteness; her appearance is preceded by references to her distant heavenly residence. The resemblance between Cynthia and Elizabeth is central to [the play's] function as courtly compliment and to [the] self-conscious construction of an allegory about the contemporary court. Thus, in *Endymion*, Lyly inverts the mythic romance between Cynthia and Endymion – in Ovid, the goddess falls in love with the man whereas in Lyly's version, the man is

enamoured of the goddess – in order to harmonize with Elizabeth’s anti-marriage rhetoric. (McCarthy 2003: 17)

From this vantage point, Tellus stands for Dudley’s wife whereas Cynthia becomes the real object of desire for Endymion on the grounds that she represents the Queen. Although Cynthia appreciates Endymion’s devotion in the play, she aptly declares that “Endymion, this honourable respect of thine shall be christened ‘love’ in thee, and my reward for it ‘favour’” (Lyly 1996: 5.4. 177-78).

On another level, the historical framework veiled by the mythological narration alludes to the political rivalry between Elizabeth I and Mary Queen of Scots. “What then would an audience in early 1588 make of Tellus, Cynthia’s chief rival?” asks Bevington (1996: 29), and he further contemplates that Tellus may impersonate Mary, Elizabeth’s enemy, since she threatened her power on the throne considering the fact that “[a]s long as Mary lived, hopes of a Catholic succession lived with her, for she was a direct descendant of Henry VII’s daughter Margaret and James IV of Scotland” (Bevington 1996: 29). Although Tellus is a lady-in-waiting in Cynthia’s court, she becomes jealous of her lady out of her love for Endymion, and when her plot is revealed by Cynthia, she has to accept the respectable woman’s punishment for her to forget Endymion and court Corsites in the end (Lyly 1996: 5.4. 250-68).

Within the encounter of Cynthia and Tellus, the play delves into the conflict between two opposite women and problematises their different female stances. First of all, Cynthia of divine spirit is an idealised female figure whose beauty is worshipped by Endymion:

Tell me, Eumenides, what is he that, having a mistress of ripe years and infinite virtues, great honours and unspeakable beauty, but would wish that she might grow tender again, getting youth by years and never-decaying beauty by time, whose fair face neither the summer’s blaze can scorch nor winter’s blast chap, nor the numbering of years breed altering of colours? Such is my sweet Cynthia, whom

time cannot touch because she is divine, nor will offend because she is delicate. (Lyly 1996: 1.1. 59-68)

Yet it is not only about Cynthia's physical appearance that fascinates those around her, but also her merits that worth praising in the play. She is actually the embodiment of perfect government and control as her influence is boundless, "always wavering in her waxing or waning, that [their] bodies might the better be governed, [their] seasons the dailier give their increase" (Lyly 1996: 3.4. 185-87). Therefore, her power is constructive, and her "virtues, being all divine, must needs bring things to pass that be miraculous" (Lyly 1996: 3.4. 190-92). In this way, she is rendered as a splendid ruler who "performs divine functions in the last act as she judges, dispenses mercy, uncovers truth, rewards, cures, and orders" (Gannon 1973: 196). Although Cynthia does not involve in a passionate affair with Endymion, this chaste woman does not hesitate to kiss the sleeping man out of a sense of responsibility, saying:

I will not be so stately, good Endymion, not to stoop to do thee good; and if thy liberty consist in a kiss from me, thou shalt have it. And although my mouth hath been heretofore as untouched as my thoughts, yet now to recover thy life [. . .] I will do that to Endymion which yet never mortal man could boast of herefore, nor shall ever hope for hereafter. (Lyly 1996: 5.1. 22-29)

After Endymion's wake up and Cynthia's restoration of his youth, the ideal woman both punishes and rewards those at her court in a way that she embodies the ideals of peace, justice and mercy in the play. Therefore, her portrait as a powerful female figure is glorified throughout Lyly's dramatic work.

On the other hand, Cynthia is juxtaposed with Tellus and Dipsas whose representations challenge perfect womanhood that the moon goddess denotes. Wilson (1970: 125) suggests that Tellus is thoroughly "Lyly's only attempt to embody the evil principle in woman – a hint for the construction of that marvellous portrait of another Scottish queen,

the Lady Macbeth, which Lyly just before his death in 1606 may have seen upon the stage”. In contrast to self-control of Cynthia, Tellus is motivated by her jealousy and hatred in that she is enraged with the idea of taking revenge from Endymion: “What revenge may be devised so full of shame as my thoughts are replensihed with malice? Tell me, Floscula, if falseness in love can possibly be punished with extremity of hate. As long as sword, fire, or poison may be hired, no traitor to my love shall live unrevenged” (Lyly 1996: 1.2. 3-7). Tellus cannot stand the idea of being deceived by Endymion who admires another woman so she is determined to retaliate for her grievance by making her beloved suffer. While such an attitude implies that Tellus is bound to ambitions and anger of humans, her portrait is quite distinct from the depiction of Cynthia who is ready to show forgiveness.

Moreover, Dipsas appears to be an opposite female figure for Cynthia who uses her power for good conduct. When Tellus wants her to use witchcraft for Endymion’s love, Dipsas declares her limited and malevolent abilities and states that “I differ from the gods, that I am not able to rule hearts; for, were it in my power to place affection by appointment, I would make such evil appetites, such inordinate lusts, such cursed desires, as all the world should be filled both with superstitious heats and extreme love” (Lyly 1996: 1.4. 26-31). Accordingly, Dipsas is “called the Black Saint and darkens the world of which she is a part. Her actions lead to the ravages of time and the cruelty of mortality” whereas “Cynthia is the moon, shining light upon the earth. From her fall the effects of Truth and Eternality” (Weltner, 1971: 155). Therefore, Dipsas is related to the dark side of magical power, but she cannot surpass Cynthia’s heavenly stance and takes her place among those who submit the last decision of the fair lady.

With regards to the essence of Lyly’s mythological and historical sources as well as the motivations of the characters that determine their stance, it can be observed that the idea of love dominates the thematic concern of the play. Yet the playwright is still pledged to the dichotomical structure in that he presents two different

versions of love. The play initially advocates the idea that Endymion probably involves in a kind of physical love with Tellus as she questions his loyalty to her. Although Tellus is desperately in love, it can be realised that Endymion in this affair is “perjured, treacherous, forsworn, misogynistic, and sanctimonious. [. . .] The play hints strongly that Endymion has had a carnal relationship with Tellus; in allegorical terms, she represents the trammels of the flesh in a familiar contest of body and soul” (Bevington 1996: 19). However, his emotional tie with Cynthia goes beyond the boundaries of physical love even though his discourse is claimed to eroticise Cynthia’s image (Knoll 2014: 169). As his love for Cynthia grows deeper, Endymion isolates himself from the rest and yearns for a kind of ideal union with his beloved. Although he endeavours to possess the moon in the beginning of the play which can be redeemed as “a kind of affection that blends contemplative ambition with erotic fixation” (Bozio 2016: 56), he is later observed to go beyond bodily desires considering that his sleep for forty years enables him to develop a new phase of love. His inactive state of sleeping forms his self as an ideal lover which is indicated in the following argument:

Staidness is constancy, and it is this quality Cynthia desires to foster in Endymion just as he quests for constancy through his adoration of her. He must learn constancy through his adoration of her. He must learn constancy through being ‘stayed’, hindered in his inappropriate desire for more than ‘the compass of his fortunes can allow. The soul can learn to love God only by striving for the perfect selflessness that God represents; the ideal subject can learn how to be a perfect courtier only through self-abnegating obedience that puts aside all petty self-interest. In these terms that are at once romantic, moral, religious, and political, sleep becomes at its best a secret life of contemplation. [Only then] Cynthia at last pronounces him worthy of acceptance. [. . .] The contemplative man is finally subsumed into the complete courtier. (Bevington 1996: 24)

To put it differently, Endymion goes through the process of Neo-Platonic love and learns to adore the remote glorified lover without the boundaries of physicality. Therefore, when he wakes up from a long sleep, he immediately remembers the name of Cynthia even though he cannot recall his own identity: “Thy name I do remember by the sound, but thy favour I do not yet call to mind. Only divine Cynthia, to whom time, destiny, and death are subject, I see and remember, and in all humility I regard and reverence” (Lyly 1996: 5.1. 60-64).

On the brink of the analysis of Lyly’s *Endymion*, it can be endorsed that the playwright establishes his work on the complex web of opposing characters, contrasting ideals and fusing binaries. While the fictional ground of Endymion’s myth is converged on the historical details about the monarch of Lyly’s time, the dramatist expands on the representation of female figures, albeit their stereotypical stance. He also combines the action and characters of his play in the common ground of the theme of love where the figure of Endymion is depicted to improve himself in his approach to this powerful feeling. As all eventually ends well, *Endymion* comes to the point of reconciling conflicts and juxtapositions in the end.

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