

# John Lyly's *Galatea*: Memes, Cross-Dressing, and Likeness\*

Hsin-Yi Hsieh

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures  
National Chung Hsing University  
No. 145, Xingda Rd., South Dist., Taichung 40227, Taiwan  
E-mail: [hyhsieh@dragon.nchu.edu.tw](mailto:hyhsieh@dragon.nchu.edu.tw)

## Abstract

John Lyly's *Galatea* (1584) is a court comedy of virtue, which was written specifically to be performed before Elizabeth I. Composed after *Campaspe* (1583) and *Sapho and Phao* (1584), *Galatea* is the third in Lyly's first series of court comedies, and situated within the author's successive approaches to the cult of Elizabeth I, who was worshipped as the Maiden Queen of England and the Virgin Mother of her nation. Furthermore, after the playwright's first prose fiction work, *Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit* (1578), *Galatea* is also Lyly's first play to revise the motif of father-daughter disagreement and to

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rethink conflicting male likenesses. Through double cross-dressing, two females' love of being alike is thus dramatized in response to the dysfunction of patriarchal authority. Accordingly, this article explores the way in which certain figures or ideas are reproduced, even mutated through imitation, as memes in the play relating to the queen's virtue. Given the presence of the queen at the play's performance, this article explores how far Lyly redefines the subordinate relationship of the on-stage subjects to the off-stage Queen Elizabeth I: examining how the sacrificial virgins, vagrant boys, and cross-dressed maidens of *Galatea* seek various routes to the same shelter under the eye of the constant and multidimensional queen who stands in as an exemplar of divine perfection.

**Key Words:** Galatea, memes, likeness, cross-dressing, Queen Elizabeth I