

The Lady of May: a Case Study in the Rhetoric of Electronic Text

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Abstract

This paper examines the history of the print editions and the online edition of Philip Sidney's early pageant known as "The Lady of May." Electronic image scans of pages from print editions are iconically compared with the same text as typed into a computer and as coded in increasingly complex HTML code, culminating in an interactive presentation with online helps. This examination will seek an answer to the following question: Will traditional book arts continue to influence text design in the online world?

Keywords: Etext, HTML, Internet, Markup, World Wide Web, Design

Suzi Gablik in *The Reenchantment of Art* (5) reminds us that for some time now the focus of art has been on the individual acting alone, defying the gods[1], defying society. Even the reaction to this ethos in what has been called postmodernism retains this disconnectedness, or rather extends it, by proposing nihilism, the death that is final because it is individual death, denying to society the locus of what is to be called life (40). In literature this disconnectedness has been possible only through cognitive dissonance, for every act of publication is an act of making public, of making to the world the gift of the textual object, and publication has generally been a team effort in any case, as it is a complex maneuver: author, editor, publisher, designer, printer and distributor have all been required. The Internet seems to offer a new field for the play of individualism in publication, yet it is the most communal medium (Leppert 7) yet devised, as the give-and-take of communication between authors and readers becomes what is known as a "thread" or single intertwining strand of textuality. Where there is community, there is tradition, that glue of temporally conditioned expectations by which the community maintains itself through the present into the future. Traditions in text design are migrating from other media to the Internet. This paper will examine the possibility that tradition will continue to influence design in the new medium, helping to orient readers to the text at hand.

Among the many texts appearing online are those which have appeared before in print and hold enough attraction for generations of readers to have become what are called classics.

As the Internet grows, questions arise as to how best to represent classic texts online. Some, of whom Michael Hart of Project Gutenberg ([Neuman, 365](#)) is the best known, have advocated using "pure vanilla" ASCII code, the lowest common denominator of text encoding, so that no one need be left behind while those having more buying power move on to more expensive and complex systems. Others feel no effort should be spared in marking up texts for research, which may require a more sophisticated technology to use, but offers the best chance of producing new knowledge. In the forefront of this movement are the proponents of TEI, the Text Encoding Initiative ([Neuman, 367](#)). TEI is an implementation of the capabilities of the Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML), a coding scheme that permits in-depth analysis of the parts of a text. SGML is currently the best approach for providing scholarly electronic editions to those few scholars doing computer-based analyses of texts, but it is ill suited to the production of popular editions. Fortunately, there is a middle way between these extremes, offering much of the simplicity of ASCII with a glimpse of the power of SGML: HTML (Hyper Text Markup Language). HTML is a subset of SGML designed for transportation of hyperlinked documents, graphics, sound files, and motion pictures via a network such as the Internet. Users who have never otherwise attempted computer programming have discovered the ease of working in HTML. There are now more than fifty million Web-accessible documents ([HotBot](#)), of which over five thousand are classic texts traditionally presented in codex book form, ranging from Homer's *Odyssey* to James Joyce's *Ulysses* ([Ockerbloom](#)).

With software of a new type called a web browser, one can now consult a rapidly expanding library of texts in ways not possible previously. A text-only browser such as LYNX, when combined with speech software, can read online text to a visually impaired user. Browsers have search capability, so that each instance of a given word or phrase in a given work may be located and studied in context; every online edition is thus also a concordance. Selected portions of longer works in the public domain such as an act of "Hamlet" or chapter of *Lord Jim* can easily be downloaded, reformatted, printed out and used in class packets. Thus, although text read from a monitor is not as legible as from paper, electronic text is useful enough to drive a movement to provide such access. As noted above, however, there is disagreement on how to do this.

At Cornell University, the Library of Congress, and elsewhere ([McClung](#)), experiments are going forward in presenting the original pages of classic print editions in electronic facsimile, much as has been done through microfilm technology. Such images may contain visual information, such as marginalia in the handwriting of previous owners of the scanned print copy, which cannot be effectively presented by SGML or HTML, but have their own drawbacks. A single page scan takes from ten to a hundred times as much memory as stored text, and is accordingly slow to transport over a network. Also, an image does not easily support text searches, though dual editions are planned that will do so. For the time being, then, for networked access, SGML offers the best choice for a

scholarly edition, ASCII is still suitable for a popular edition, and HTML, with its increasingly diverse options for presentation design, offers a solution for teaching editions.

At the University of Oregon I am experimenting with design of etexts suitable for teaching use. They are of varying length and complexity, from Philip Sidney's pageant known as "The Lady of May" ([Sidney](#)) to Edmund Spenser's epic *Faerie Queene* ([Spenser](#)). As techniques become available, they are tested first on shorter works, and then, if proven useful, applied to longer ones. "The Lady of May" is a handy test bed. In effect a one-act play, it contains a variety of design elements. It also interests students of literature and history, as it contains decent poetry and was performed before Queen Elizabeth I, whose presence was material to the progress of its plot.

"The Lady of May," performed in 1578, would perhaps have been lost to posterity but for the fame of its young author, killed at Zutphen in 1586. Interest in his writings remained strong throughout the 1590's, and a version of the pageant was accordingly appended to the 1598 edition of the *Arcadia*. A facsimile of the first page ([figure 1](#)) shows the style of printing of the time ([Colaianne 570](#)). The iconographic conventions of the page are, despite the intervening centuries, largely familiar to us and would also have been familiar to medieval scribes. The header or title is long by our standards but presents the sixteenth century compositor with an opportunity to set centered lines of descending type size and length, a usually pleasing effect harking back to manuscript book design. Also of venerable origin is the ornate initial letter at the head of the main matter of the text. Some of the conventions have been abandoned in the centuries since: here, "j" is not yet in general use, and is still represented with "i", use of "u" for "v" within words, or use of "v" for "u" at the beginning of words, is still common. Spelling is richly variable: "reape," "sweete," "formallie." Note also the convention of printing verse in italic. Throughout much of the history of text, as here, economics does battle with legibility for the upper hand in design: for legibility, white paper and black ink serve to produce sufficient contrast to distinguish type easily, and type design has improved over the black letter ("gothic" type) in common use a few decades earlier. On the other hand, economics has led to the use of smaller type sizes ([figure 1](#) is reduced from a large folio page, but even for a folio the types are relatively small) than formerly, and little white space is left between the blocks of text. The wide margins (not shown) are a product more of technological than aesthetic considerations: the presses could not produce more than four folio pages per impression, so these had to be grouped together in a rectangular pattern near the center of the sheet to facilitate consistent printing from the available hand-operated platen lever. When folded and sewn, the folios show a text-page closer to the gutter than to the outside of the page, and closer to the top than to the bottom. Over the years, as printing technology has changed from hand platen presses to mechanically driven rotary presses and on to photo-offset lithography, the technical requirement for traditional page placement has been rendered obsolete, yet the tradition itself has force and non-traditional designs, while offering a momentary exhilaration of freedom,

generally have become quickly dated, while the old standard page remains. This may be due to what George Landow calls the "rhetoric of arrival" and the "rhetoric of departure" (82). Communication depends for success on the relative absence of elements that have little or nothing to do with the idea to be communicated; standardization of textual elements, from grammar and style to the use of titles, headings, running heads, and folio numbers is intended to reduce the energy expended by the reader in extracting information from the page (Carlson 62). Serious deviations from tradition pose problems for the reader. Our text in [figure 1](#) is four centuries old, yet we know our way around in it; it is familiar territory and we know where to enter and where to exit.

[Figure 2](#) shows the opening page of "The Lady of May" in a copy of *The/Miscellaneous Works/of Sir Philip Sidney, knt./With A life of the Author and Illustrative Notes/By William Gray, Esq./Of Magdalen College, and the Inner Temple*, dated 1860 (Gray, 265). The rhetoric of scholarship in the nineteenth century frequently called for florid titles and titled editors. Editing required editing; the effects of Mr. Gray's heavy hand can be seen throughout. Note the updated spelling on the page and the changed punctuation, especially the exclamation points. The passage used in the Renaissance for a title has been dropped into an introductory note in six-point type, and a new title, which has come into usage in the intervening years, is offered without explanation. The archaism of the piece is marked by its being given an ornate dropped initial, as before, and a headpiece, a device which was used in Sidney's time though the folio edition of our text lacks one. The editor seeks throughout to locate and isolate the narrator's voice in small type, giving to the text more of the conventions of a play-book than its original warrants. These changes might loom large in the mind of an editor, but to the average reader, not much has happened to the text. Page design basics have not really been tampered with. The compositor in the shop which produced this artifact lived by much the same rules as those who produced the 1598 edition. The technology also remains relatively little changed after 262 years: the book is laboriously composed in hand-set types as before, though the press is probably a rotary press powered by steam, using stereotype plates produced from the galleys of type, an economical advance in book production.

[Figure 3](#) shows a Cambridge University Press edition from 1962 (Feuillerat); 102 more years have passed, and editorial conventions have changed, albeit very slowly. This is actually the Feuillerat edition of 1912. The publishers caution that he had not the best copy texts or manuscripts available, yet reprint his assertion that "the text is reproduced without any deviations from the originals in the matter of spelling or punctuation." The page before us shows that much of the spelling and punctuation has in fact been restored, though the sixteenth century usage of "u" for "v" within words, "v" for "u" at the beginnings of words, and of "i" for "j" throughout, have not. Feuillerat is uncomfortable with the late title of "The Lady of May" but evidently feels it must be included, and so it appears here within square brackets, and as a running head. This shows that by 1912 the instability of text (McGann 182) has been noted, and editorial practices instituted to stem

the flow of blood, so to speak. The first three lines of the Renaissance "title" have been restored, centered, in descending type sizes, perhaps as a bit of archaism to set the mood, but the rest have been moved into page-width justified text, as if they were the beginning of the main matter. The main matter is still signified, however, by the use of a dropped initial--no longer ornate, but simply a larger type size of the same font. Gone is the headpiece, and the entire design has been constructed from a single typeface in various sizes depending upon usage. Although it does not show here, this is a scholarly edition in that variants have been recorded; they are appended at the end, by page number and by line number on the page.

The printing technology in use here is offset lithography, albeit from plates photographed from the edition of 1912, which was composed on the Monotype machine, with titles set by hand, and printed by letterpress from stereotypes as in 1860. That they have reprinted, with only their own preface and a bit of his, the entire 1912 edition is a sign that the overall book plan, page design, and type style are deemed adequate for a new printing after fifty years! The agreements on arrivals and departures made centuries ago between those responsible for producing texts and those who read them still hold true, even as lithography makes possible complete freedom in page design.

Lithography gives a blacker, more uniform letter, and is the technology of choice for conversion by scanning; [Figure 3](#) yields a more legible image than [Figure 2](#), and would produce fewer errors for OCR (Optical Character Recognition) scanning. Lithographic printing arrived in time to facilitate the wholesale conversion of canonical works into electronic texts and enable the use of new computer technology in humanities research. But just as technology has made conversion possible without the labor of retyping, so that new editions could be prepared whenever new scholarship became available, the very text pages that would support such conversion are frequently unavailable for this use, because they are still under copyright. Copyright, or text ownership, depends on when (and where) the text in question was authored: in the United States, if it was published, the copyright expires 75 years from the date of publication (if the copyright has been renewed) if authored before 1978. If authored after January 1, 1978, the author-owned copyright will last the life of the author, plus 50 years, or if owned by a publisher, 75 years from the date of publication, or 100 years from the date of creation, whichever comes first ([Benedict](#)). Nineteenth century editions are very unlikely to have copyright problems, and for this reason are frequently found among the conversions that have appeared on the Web, like the Jowett translations of Plato ([Ockerbloom](#)). If you wish to work from editions earlier than the nineteenth century, OCR becomes inefficient due to the older typefaces, irregularities in printing and stains on pages, etc. It may be necessary to type. This is the method used in converting "The Lady of May."

[Figure 4](#) shows the first of my efforts to introduce "The Lady of May" to the computer age. This etext edition, produced in 1993 as a term paper for Dr. Lyell Asher at the

University of Oregon, derives from the British Museum copy (Catalogue # C.39.h.8) of the 1605 edition of the *Arcadia*, pps. 570-576. Long "s" has been modernized, largely because it is unavailable for ASCII anyway (!), and catchwords and marginalia have been removed. Sixteenth/seventeenth century usage of "i" for "j" and of "u" and "v" has been retained, along with the original spelling. A few errors have been emended within brackets. Many italics, such as those used for proper names, have been omitted. Endnotes are indicated within braces. These are editorial decisions that are relatively little influenced by the medium at this point, because this is not a hypertext edition, nor is it in one of the formats determined by the visual iconography of desktop publishing, such as TEX or Postscript. This is Michael Hart's "pure vanilla ASCII," the basic character set devised originally for the 8-bit computers of the 1960's and 1970's. Aesthetically speaking, this is a bit of a step backward. Depending on the monitor available (mine had yellow characters on a black background) the viewer would see generally eighty columns by twenty-four lines of a fixed width font resembling Courier. Visually, the text of [figure 4](#) is not at all as attractive as the print editions of the previous three hundred ninety five years. Yet it represents a significant advance. Anyone can now take up a floppy disk containing the file "may.txt" and do a wide variety of things with it. Even the simplest word processors can do word counts, character counts, and what are called "string searches," in which a set of characters can be located successively in each of the contexts in which it occurs. This was the primary use envisioned by the creator of the original etext, Roberto Busa, working in the 1950's on St. Thomas Aquinas ([Raben 343](#)). Concordancing and linguistic software can do even more, and the file can also be converted into practically any format that has been or is yet to be invented, including typesetting for paper book production.

"May.txt" was not typed from the edition of 1860, as that edition seemed to me to have taken too many liberties with the text. Nor was it typed from the edition of 1598, partly because I was unaware, through faulty scholarship (!), of its existence, and partly because it was unavailable to me at the time anyway; the 1605 edition was available on microfilm, and I worked directly from photocopies. It was impossible for me to produce a truly scholarly edition, as I had no resources for comparing early editions, let alone copy-texts, on my own; others had done this, and will continue to do this, better than I. I felt that I had two new contributions to make: that I could competently produce a contemporary introduction to the text, exploring rhetorical issues raised by the work of the "new historicists," and that I could produce an electronic edition which, while it might never be the best text, would be one of the earliest Renaissance English works to appear in the new medium, useful to students all over the world who might not otherwise have access to it in paper form. I believe those aims were achieved, as I have received electronic mail from students (and scholars!) in many countries who seem glad to have had access to this and some fifteen other texts ([Bear](#)) that I have similarly produced.

Not everyone is happy to see texts like "may.txt" appear on the Internet. Periodically a

thread of heated discussion erupts in online seminars such as HUMANIST or SHAKSPER as to whether such texts are "useful" editions. The gist of the academic community's objections is that effort should be expended primarily on work produced in circumstances like those of peer-review in academic journals, i.e. on "authorized" editions for which they themselves will do the authorizing, the primary use of which will be for scholarly analysis. Even granting this authority, however, will not prevent the appearance of editions aimed at being read, and as a wider readership tends to require a more accessible text, this is where design comes into its own.

"May.txt" actually is constructed a bit like an MLA-style term paper, with a general title, note on the text, introduction, text, notes, and bibliography, in sequential order. As it is an electronic text, it is searchable, downloadable, printable, and readable, but its readability (with the exception of its being readable by speech software for the vision-impaired) is its weakness. Scrolls were replaced by codex books, beginning about AD 400 ([Manguel 127](#)), at least in part because they were accessible only sequentially. Codex books permit random access, so that a reader may readily consult a particular passage[2]. The text must be made more accessible and attractive.

The advent of the World Wide Web presented new iconic possibilities for those who seek to produce readers' and teaching editions. This was not immediately so ([McLaurin](#)). HTML was originally devised with only one graphic design model in mind, that of the text outline with nested levels of headers, which is the model most familiar to the creators of software manuals. An outline is easily converted into a concept map and vice versa, as it is a hierarchical and sequential linking of concepts. Thus, a visual flowchart of elements could be reduced to a pre-organized verbal model for teaching new users to master a program. This is a powerful paradigm for information transmission among the hard and social sciences, as the iconic "page" that appears onscreen conveys an impression of a single culture united in a belief in causation. (Where there is causation, investigation is possible and results may be tested.) But users were not satisfied with a Web consisting of an infinity of links between black-on-gray "outlines." Images, which the author of HTML envisioned would be mostly photographs and charts exchanged among scientists across the variety of computing platforms in use, began immediately to be used as design and even typographic elements. Sensing an opportunity, Netscape Corporation ([Netscape](#)) in 1994 leaped ahead of the committees that had been entrusted with the development of HTML protocols, and introduced codes for, among other things, centering of text and font sizing. Web page designers seized upon the "unauthorized" codes immediately, and "unauthorized" texts of classic works began, within months, to clothe themselves in the graphic elements of traditional book arts, acquiring the rhetoric of those arts without, so to speak, having to pay the dues thereof[3]. Combined with the hypertextual powers of HTML, the new design elements created a workable tool for re-presenting texts in an entertaining and informative telecommunications environment that rapidly gained popularity ([Ockerbloom](#)).

[Figure 5](#) shows how the "The Lady of May" responded to the early design opportunities of HTML. A list of links, or a kind of interactive table of contents, whisks the reader to the text-matter of choice: introduction or main matter or notes or bibliography. Notation no longer merely refers to notes, but puts the note onscreen. A click of the "back" button returns the reader to the context in which the notation appeared. Typographic design is now possible, and the ritualistic richness of the Elizabethan title is restored in full. The earliest version of this file accepted the default background color of the browser (usually gray); it now specifies white (hexadecimal "#ffffff"), as do many other "books" in cyberspace ([Project Bartleby](#)). Margins also have been restored, in imitation of the white space around the text that had been dictated by printing technology in the days of hand-operated presses. As a subtle clue that this is a text transcribed by R.S. Bear, there are additional visual effects, common to all the classics I have published: "links" and "visited links" are not Netscape's default blue and purple, but brown and green, and notes appear in a dark blue text color, to differentiate them from the black of the main matter.

As HTML has evolved, more and more formatting control has gone to the information provider, with mixed results. Many, new to the idea of access to publication design, have based their documents on print advertising and television commercials, the design of which reflect millions of dollars spent on research into capturing attention. "Pages" have gaudy graphics, with blinking text, animated GIF's (Graphic Interface Format), tiled background images, banners, and clashing text colors, often masking the absence of significant content. At the other extreme are government documents containing millions of characters, with no more structure than numbered chapters, sections, and paragraphs, all on the same gray background. Those working with classic texts, however, tend to be aware of the rhetorical power of traditional book design, and their ideas on the use of HTML to translate this power to the Web are convergent. While I do not have space here to demonstrate this assertion exhaustively, I suggest that the reader examine a few texts accessible from the Books Online Page ([Ockerbloom](#)); Project Bartleby ([Project Bartleby](#)) of the University of Columbia is a particularly fine instance. Or see an egregiously obvious instance: Milton against a background of a right-hand book page, with the actual gutter at far left ([Milton Project](#))!

Traditional page design is still authoritative because of its familiarity. The reader, reassured as to the points of arrival and departure, is free to concentrate on the matter being communicated. There are, however, other traditional models besides those we have considered up to this point, and some of these might be worth examining as we consider the future of etext. Elements of HTML not previously available will make it possible for notes and glosses to pop up onscreen when their key, or referent, is clicked (as a hypertext link). It is already possible to foreshadow this technique by using "frames"--more than one window opened by the browser at one time. Figure 6 shows one way in which traditional design and frames can be brought together to create a teaching edition, with an interactive

sidebar. In [figure 6](#) we are at the point of arrival. Both the page title and the HTML header proclaim that centuries-old "title" of the piece not found in the original, orienting the modern reader upon arrival. The paragraphs following the header explain how to use the notes, introduction, and bibliography, as well as making available a non-frames version of the text, for access from older browsers. I have retained white as the background color of the main matter, along with the brown and green links, but the Notes window has a tan/ivory background and a (very) dark blue text color, to distinguish it easily from the main matter.

Much of the information once found at the head of the file, including text source and acknowledgements, I have moved into the note that appears when the text is first accessed. Other information, including links to my home page and to the Edmund Spenser Home Page, the gateways to "The Lady of May," I have moved to the bottom of the file in the main (left) window, as newly arriving readers are apt to click on these, leaving the frames environment abruptly and becoming disoriented[4]. The aim here is to make a variety of reading and study strategies available to the reader without unduly distracting from the narrative continuity of the text, an aim that echoes that of the modern pedagogical codex textbook.

[Figure 6](#) serves as our point of departure from this present narrative, presenting an edition of "The Lady of May" separated by four centuries of technology and editorship from the first edition, yet retaining an iconic likeness that is not accidental. The rhetoric of arrival, of presence within a text, and of departure still follows an ancient law: that of conservation of energy. In social behavior, such conservation is known by the name of tradition, and we are not unwise when we pack our traditions with our other belongings when seeking out new lands.

Footnotes

1. Prometheus, the popular symbol of the artist working alone, steals fire from the gods and is punished, but this theft is undertaken on behalf of his people, and is a social act.
2. May.txt permits this also, but as members of my audience at two lectures on the Internet which I gave for the Oregon Humanities Center in the early nineties assured me, many potential readers will be put off by the steepness of the learning curve in becoming comfortable with their software's capabilities. They will tend to "page down" interminably through the Introduction (which is as long as the text itself!), thinking all the while that the

only way to read this pageant is to get a copy from the library and curl up with it in front of a fire.

3. I am aware that there is no inherent virtue in "samizdat" publishing of classic literature; my own first outing, probably still available in a few places as "ballads.txt," was a disaster of poor proofreading, and I was rightly taken to task in a number of postings to scholarly lists for releasing it in such condition. With freedom comes responsibility, and the publisher must rise to the occasion or leave well enough alone!

4. These changes were suggested by beta testers of the file, who responded to a request for participation posted on three Internet discussion groups (also known, somewhat inaccurately, as "listservs"): RENAISS-L, SPENSER-L, and HUMANIST. Several of the responses are reproduced below:

To: RBEAR@OREGON.UOREGON.EDU

Subject: Lady of May

I thought that it worked very well. Perhaps a little bit of instruction in the initial notes column might make it easier to use, but this might only be relevant to "cold-calls" on the internet and not affect use by your students. One design suggestion: display the notes in a smaller font. One usability suggestion: provide a consolidated notes file in case students want to download or print the notes (this may be contrary to your goals in the project). As far as using HTML rather than TEI SGML, an SGML purist might look down their nose, but if you ever need the functionality of TEI SGML, it shouldn't be much problem to convert if you've done things well in HTML. Please let me (or the whole list) know how this feedback request worked for you. I've made a synopsis of the five major gospels and might ask for quick reviews in a similar manner.

To: rbear@OREGON.UOREGON.EDU

Subject: Lady of May/presentation of texts

Dear Risa,

I've visited your site and feel that this is precisely the kind of material that need to be put up on the Web. From a design point of view though, I would say that you need some kind of visual differentiation between links targeting the "Notes" frame, and links to "unframed" pages. (I DO think that your use of the Notes frame to contain concise supplementary material is very intelligent.) It is a bit disconcerting to click on the first four links: R.S. Bear, University of Oregon, Introduction and Bibliography, and be whisked completely out of the frames environment back to the single page. Solutions?: Target these links to load in the main text frame or (gulp) create a third frame containing the introductory material with its links to unframed pages. The former is probably preferable given most people's visceral reaction against a multiplicity of frames. (Isn't Netscape's frames version of its homepage the worst implementation of frames you ever saw?)

To: rbear@OREGON.UOREGON.EDU

Subject: Lady of May

Dear Risa -

Saw the announcement of Lady of May (your framed version) on

Humanist. Terrific - frames are the way to go! But am curious... you talk

about comparing print versions; I didn't see that; I presume it is

still to come; and will there be two frames with each text

version.

Wouldn't three columns crowd the screen too much and hamper reading? Good work.

To: RBEAR@OREGON.UOREGON.EDU

Subject: Page Design

I found the page design to be a very useful adaptation of hypertext design within the limitations of current html standard. In the near future, Windows type help (popups and jumps) will be introduced to Web pages but for now, your design provides for the integration of notes and text.

To: rbear@OREGON.UOREGON.EDU

Subject: Lady of May

As I recall, you wanted feedback on the site, so this: the text of The Lady of May is beautifully done, but I see no reason at all for the frames, which just sit there occupying almost half the screen. As it stands, the side frames just disrupt the visual pleasure of the screen. The version without frames is much nicer. In short, frames are amusing gadgets and sometimes useful, but I don't see a justification for them on your site.

(This one failed to discover the linkage between the textual keys and the notes. That is an important clue; and I plan further clarification in the header to prevent this problem.)

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This paper was authored and hand-coded with BBEdit Lite by [R.S. Bear](#) at the [University of Oregon](#), November 28, 1996.



HER MOST EXCELLENT MAIESTIE VVALKING IN VVANSTEED GAR- DEN, AS SHE PASSED DOWNE INTO THE grove, there came suddenly among the traine, one apparelled like an honest mans

*wife of the country, where crying out for iustice, and desiring all the Lords and
Gentlemen to speake a good word for her, she was brought to the pre-
sence of her Adversarie, to whom upon her knees she offered a sup-
plication, and vsyd his speech.*

The Suiuer.



Oft faire Lady; for as for other your titles of state statelier per-
sons shall giue you, and thus much mine owne eies are witness
of, take here the complaint of my poore wretch, as deeplie
plunged in miserie, as I wish to you the highest point of hap-
pinesse.

One onely daughter I haue, in whom I had placed all the
hopes of my good hap, so well had she with her good parts re-
compenced my paine of bearing of her, and care of bringing
her vp: but now alas that she is come to the time I should reape my full comfort of
her, so is she troubled with that notable matter, which we in country call matri-
mony, as I cannot chuse but feare the losse of her wits, at least of her honesty. O-
ther women thinke they may be vnhappily combred with one maiister husband,
my poore daughter is oppressed with two, both loving her, both equally liued of
her, both straining to deserue her. But now lastly (as this ieaalousie for looth is a vile
matter) each haue brought their partakits with them, and are at this presene,
without your presence redresse it, in some bloody controuersie; now sweete
Lady helpe, your owne way guides you to the place where they encomber her;
I dare stay here no longer, for our men say in the country, the sight of you is in-
cessious.

And with that she went away a good pace, leauing the supplication with her Ma-
iestie, which very formallie contained this.

Supplication.

Most gracious Sueraigne,

*To one whose state is raised ouer all,
Whose face doth oft the brassest fort enhaunce,
Whose mind is such, as wisest minds appail,
VV be in one selfe these diuerse gifts can plant,
How dare I wretch feele there any woes to rest,
VV hatz eares be burnt, eyes dandled, hart oppressed?*

*Your state is great, your greatnesse is our shield,
Your face begets oft, but still it doth delight,
Your mind is wise, your wisdome makes you mild,
Such planted gifts enuie to euen beggers fynd,
So dare I wretch my busshfull care subleue,
And fonde mine eares, mine eyes, my hart in you.*

Herewith



THE LADY OF MAY,
A MASQUE.

Her most excellent Majesty walking in Wanstead Garden, as she passed down into the grove, there came suddenly among the train one apparelled like an honest man's wife of the country; where crying out for justice, and desiring all the lords and gentlemen to speak a good word for her, she was brought to the presence of her Majesty, to whom, upon her knees, she offered a supplication, and used this speech.

THE SUITER.

MOST fair lady! for as for other your titles of state, statelier persons shall give you, and thus much mine own eyes are witnesses of; take here the complaint of me, poor wretch! as deeply plunged in misery, as I wish to you the highest point of happiness.

I Only one daughter I have, in whom I had placed all the hopes of my good hap, so well had she, with her good parts, recompensed my pain of bearing her, and care of bringing her up: but now, alas! that she is

[Continue...](#)

[THE LADY OF MAY]

HER MOST EXCELLENT

MAJESTIE WALKING IN WANSTEED GAR-

DEN, AS SHE PASSED DOWNE INTO THE

grove, there came suddenly among the traine, one apparelled like an honest mans wife of the country, where crying out for justice, and desiring all the Lords and Gentlemen to speake a good word for her, she was brought to the presence of her Majestie, to whom upon her knees she offered a supplication, and used this speech.

The Suiter.

MOst faire Lady, for as for other your titles of state state-lier persons shall give you, and thus much mine owne eies are witnesses of, take here the complaint of my poore wretch, as deeplie plunged in miserie, as I wish to you the highest point of happinesse.

One onely daughter I have, in whom I had placed all the hopes of my good hap, so well had she with her good parts recompenced my paine of bearing of her, and care of bringing her up: but now alas that she is come to the time I should reape my full comfort of her, so is she troubled with that notable matter, which we in countrey call matrimony, as I cannot chuse but feare the losse of her wits, at least of her honesty. Other women thinke they may be unhappily combred with one maister husband, my poore daughter is oppressed with two, both loving her, both equally liked of her, both striving to deserve her. But now lastly (as this jealousie for sooth is a vile matter) each have brought their partakers with them, and are at this present, without your presence redresse it, in some bloody controversie; now sweete Lady helpe, your owne way guides you to the place where they encomber her: I dare stay here no longer, for our men say in the countrey, the sight of you is infectious.

And with that she went away a good pace, leaving the

[Continue...](#)

Here we may see a radical paradigm shift in text treatment from preceding technology. The text was typed from the 1605 edition with a word processing program into an XT computer and uploaded to the U of O Vax cluster via Kermit, and to the Oxford Text Archive from the U of O via email. From Oxford it spread to many places around the world, at a time when very few scholars had access to World Wide Web technology. Although not as attractive as preceding editions, this one has the advantage that it can be consulted with a search function on keywords, and hence is both text and concordance, a significant advance. Also, with speech software, it has suddenly become accessible to the visually impaired. Note the effort to restore the "physical style" of the sixteenth century title.

Her most Excellent Maiestie
WALKING IN WANSTEED

GARDEN, AS SHE PASSED DOWN INTO THE
GROVE, THERE CAME SVDDENLY AMONG THE TRaine,
one apparrelled like an honest mans wife of the countrey, where
crying out
for iustice, and desiring all the Lords and Gentlemen to speake a
good word for her, she was brought to the presence of her
Maiestie to whom vpon her knees she offered
a supplication, and vsed this speech.

The Suitor

Most faire Lady, for as for other your titles of
state statelier persons shall giue you, and thus much mine owne eies
are witnesses of, take here the complaint of me poore wretch, as
deeply plunged in miserie, as I wish you to the highest point of
happinesse.

One onely daughter I have, in whom I had placed all the hop[e]
s of
my good hap, so well had she with her good parts recompenced my paine

of bearing her, and care of bringing her vp: but now alas that shee
is
come to the time I should reape my full comfort of her, so is shee
troubled with that notable matter, which wee in the countrey call
matrimonie, as I cannot chuse but feare the losse of her wits, at
least of her honesty. Other women thinke they may bee vnhappily
combred with one master husband, my poore daughter is oppressed with
two, both louing her, both equally liked of her, both striuing to
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matter) each haue brought their pertakers with them, and are at this
present, (without your presence redresse it) in some bloody
controuersie now sweete Lady helpe, your owne way guides you to the
place where they incomberd her: I dare stay here no longer, for our
men say in the countrey, the sight of you is infectious.

And with that she went away a good pace, leauing the
supplication
with her Maiestie, which very formerly contained this.

Supplication.

Most gracious Soueraigne,
To one whose state is raised over all,
Whose face doth oft, the bravest sort enchant,
Whose mind is such, as wisest minds appall,
Who in one selfe these diuerse gifts can plant;
How dare I wretch seeke there my woes to rest,
Where eares be burnt, eyes dazled, harts opprest?

Your State is great, your greatnesse is our shield,
Your face hurts oft, but still it doth delight,
Your mind is wise, your wisdom makes you mild,
Such planted gifts enrich even beggers sight:
So dare I wretch my bashfull feare subdue,
And feede mine eares, mine eyes, my hart in you.

Here we have a mock-up of the current version of the work. We have changed the background to white, moved the margins in, changed the link colors, and added graphics, including a portrait of Sidney for the Introduction and a return of the ornate initial at the head of the text. There are still shortcomings, however: although the notes are accessible from within the text, other notes appear at the same time as the one referenced. It would be nice to have the note onscreen at the same time as the text that called it. One solution would be to develop a **frames**-based edition:

[Continue...](#)

[Compare with 1598 edition.](#)

The Lady of May

Sir Philip Sidney

This edition was transcribed, with an introduction, notes, and bibliography, by R.S. Bear, [University of Oregon](#), January 1992. Converted to HTML, June 1996.

Contents:

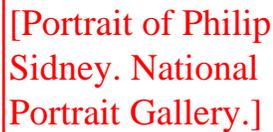
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Note on this e-text edition.

This etext edition of *The Lady of May* derives from the British Museum copy (Catalogue # C.39.h.8) of the 1605 edition of *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia*, pps. 570-576. Long "s" has been modernized, and catchwords and marginalia have been removed. Sixteenth century usage of "i" for "j" and of "u" and "v" has been retained, along with the original spelling. A few errors have been emended within brackets. Many italics, such as those

used for proper names, have been omitted. Endnotes are indicated within braces. The editor gratefully acknowledges helpful suggestions on the Introduction from Dr. Lyell Asher. Copyright & for this etext (1993,1996) is owned by the University of Oregon; it is distributed for nonprofit use only. Send corrections and comments to the Publisher, rbear [at]uoregon.edu.

Introduction



[Portrait of Philip Sidney. National Portrait Gallery.]

National Portrait Gallery

IN his Defense of Poesie Sir Philip Sidney avails himself of many arguments, but perhaps the most convincing is that the poet, unlike the scientist or social scientist, need not specify his referent:

The astronomer, with his cousin the geometrician, can hardly escape, when they take upon them to measure the height of the stars. How often, think you, do the physicians lie, when they aver things good for sicknesses, which afterwards send Charon a great number of souls drowned in a potion before they come to his ferry? And no less of the rest, which take upon them to affirm. Now, for the poet, he nothing affirms, and therefore never lieth. For as I take it, to lie is to affirm that to be true which is false. So as the other artists, and especially the historian, affirming many things, can, in the cloudy knowledge of mankind, hardly escape from many lies.

Though all human activity constructs with unknown materials toward an unknown end, the construction of texts in which no referent to a given particular need be specified releases the author from the charge of libel. This is a significant advantage in Sidney's cultural setting.

The Elizabethan courtiers, trained in "rhetorique" and provided with great store of tropes

from classical and biblical sources, found ready employment for their craft in seeking that most desired and most dangerous prize: preferment. Preferment was understood to be a reciprocal arrangement; the Queen might shower her favourite with gifts and lands, but she could and did expect competent, and in the case of favourites, superior service. Yet, to serve, one could not offer only flattery. Dangerous as it might be to advise an absolute autocrat, it was necessary to show that one could exercise competence and judgment in affairs of state. The courtiers learned to create, or if they could not create, to commission, texts in which they might approach the Queen to offer competence while at the same time implying that all competence and judgment was hers alone. In Parliament this was almost impossible to achieve. Hence the proliferation, in Elizabeth's time, of "entertainments": masques, pageants, and dramas offered by well-to-do subjects at the Inns of Court and at great country houses throughout the realm. On these occasions Elizabeth was in a sense already "on stage":

Her regal chair, in full view of the audience, surmounted by an embroidered canopy, was known simply as 'the state'. Even when it was unoccupied, as it was when Leicester celebrated St George's day in Utrecht in 1587, the Queen's presence was assumed and ceremony performed as though she were seated on it (Axton 48).

Thanks to her constant use of allegory in interpreting herself to her subjects, Elizabeth's presence as audience heightens the distinction between her "two bodies"; as herself, she is assailed by the same thoughts and emotions as any other, and with her access to power, the danger of these variables is very great; but as Prince of the realm, she embodies eternal verities and virtues through a host of known and popular symbols. The courtier-players can play to this heavily idealized representative of the Ideal even if the Queen is not physically present. When present, she is constrained within the bounds of decorum set by her own symbolic presence, thus affording a safe arena for the display by her courtiers of, not independent judgment, but allegorical depictions of independent judgment. In the Elizabethan entertainments, surrogate courtiers court a surrogate sovereign. "If you like this semblance of my service," they might be heard to say, "think how much more you stand to gain from true service from me, your humble servant."

Sir Philip Sidney's *The Lady of May* was originally, perhaps, an untitled bit of masque thrown together for an evening's entertainment at his uncle the Earl of Leicester's estate of Wanstead to honor Queen Elizabeth's visit. He may or may not have been working on behalf of Leicester's penchant for wild escapades, particularly a secret marriage which earned the Queen's displeasure. The masque would have been a relatively safe approach to the problem of reintroducing the new wife of the Earl to Court and seeking to turn aside royal wrath. At the same time, Sidney could point out, rather obliquely, his own fitness for service to the Queen, and perhaps even offer (from a relatively safe distance) some criticism of her tendency to accept the courtship of men who might appear to have much to offer (foreign money and connections), but who could not be expected to have her best

interests at heart (due to the same foreign money and connections). At this point the dangerous foreigner was the Duke of Anjou. Alan Haynes remarks that French envoys, whose work in hand was the pressing of the Duke's suit, were on hand for the presentation of Sidney's entertainment (*The White Bear* 134).

For each of these purposes Sidney's text faces the danger that a direct public statement may bring about the opposite effect to that which is intended. During the performance of *The Lady of May* at least two texts unfolded: that of Sidney's script, and that of the Queen's reaction to it. Elizabeth must have been carefully scrutinized throughout by members of Leicester's party, the opposition party, and that of the French ambassadors. Each text consisted in part in that which was said and that which was left unsaid. Each partook of *personae* in ways that recognize the expendability of these surrogate selves, images woven in the air of May in a magician's struggle for mastery of the moment. In such an atmosphere of risk, a masque -- an allegorical performance in which one thing may be understood to stand for another -- is a suitable vehicle, for the objects of potential royal wrath are "masked" as fictions, and their actions "masked" as fictional actions. The word "play" works equally well for this distancing, for what might be taken as an affront in earnest may be taken lightly in "play," the imitation of life by actions understood to be fictions. How can anyone, even a great Queen who "even with her eye can give the cruel punishment," be willing to break decorum to punish a clown? The courtier-players are accordingly transformed into rustic shepherds and foresters. The question at hand is that dangerous one of marriage, but it is not the supplicant whose marriage is in question, merely her daughter's. If the Lady of May is played by Penelope Devereaux, Leicester's new step-daughter, she would be a child of eleven or twelve, and might well expect her efforts to be kindly received.

The supplicant who begins the action is on the scene for one short speech only, and makes a hasty (and probably quite wise) exit. Yet she is present even in her absence, first, by leaving with the Queen a verse Supplication, and second, by her having asked the Queen to judge of matters addressed by the remainder of the play. The Supplication sets the tone for the entire piece with its praise that is, in Camille Paglia's words, "secular prayer:"

To one whose state is raised over all,
Whose face doth oft, the bravest sort enchant,
Whose mind is such, as wisest minds appall,
Who in one selfe these diuerse gifts can plant;
How dare I wretch seeke there my woes to rest,
Where eares be burnt, eyes dazled, harts opprest?

Your State is great, your greatnesse is our shield,
Your face hurts oft, but still it doth delight,
Your mind is wise, your wisdome makes you mild,
Such planted gifts enrich even beggers sight:

So dare I wretch my bashfull feare subdue,
And feede mine eares, mine eyes, my hart in you.

Although protected by the fiction in which the Queen is not recognized by the rustics, the Suppliant here boldly presses upon the boundary of fiction by identifying her as one whose "state is great," and offering fealty. This offer is choral in its effect, and carries the voices of the entire Leicester party in one presumed *persona*. The question in the first sestet is answered in the second: how dare I address myself to one so powerful? I dare, because that power is vested in you for the protection of your subjects, of whom I am one. Elizabeth is addressed here, not as the jealous woman who would have her courtiers never marry, but as the Queen of the second body, the embodied State, who must know that matrimony is for the good of that same State it is her sworn duty to uphold. "Your mind is wise" may be taken as pure flattery, but "your wisdom makes you mild" maneuvers the addressee into a position in which a display of pique must seem indecorous. As the Supplication is presented, but not necessarily read aloud, the maneuver is the more compelling in that it need not be obvious to all present. The Queen's *noblesse oblige* is heavily drawn upon without bankrupting her good will.

The rest of the company now make their appearance: the Lady of May, half a dozen shepherds and as many foresters, and a comic schoolmaster, Rombus. After a bit of symbolic slapstick in which neither the shepherds nor the foresters succeed in pulling the Lady among them, Rombus emerges as the would-be emcee of the proceedings. But from his first sentence, spiked with inkhorn terms, he establishes that he is, or is to be taken for, a great fool: "Now the thunderthumping Jove transfund his dotes into your excellent formosity, which have with your resplendent beams thus segregated the enmity of these rural animals." In case we have missed the point, he begins to enmire himself in alliterations: "*pulchra puella perfecto*... crafty coward Cupid...dire doleful digging dignifying dart." And the May Lady underscores all by plainly labeling him a "tedious fool" of "foolish tongue." Yet, like so many fools, including those of Shakespeare, Rombus is entrusted with many of the masque's more penetrating insights. His indiscretions are Sidney's discreet handling of inflammatory material. This absent presence of Sidney in Rombus is so strong as to lead easily to the speculation that here may be the role played by the author in his creation. Although none of the rustics is said to know the Queen, Rombus is on the mark in recognizing that her "resplendent beams" have parted the fray, and offers her the quite appropriate title of *Potentissima Domina*.

The May Lady, cutting Rombus short, presents to the Queen her suitors as combatants in a singing contest. Espilus, a shepherd, is richer than Therion, a forester, but Therion has served the Lady as best he can while Espilus has but recorded her name "in doleful verses." So the Queen is to judge "whether the many deserts and many faults of Therion, or the very small deserts and no faults of Espilus be to be preferred."

Sidney gives Therion the first real word, by having him challenge Espilus to sing; the

challenge itself is however the first verse. It contains a compliment to the Queen: "Great sure is she, on whom our hopes do live/Greater is she, who must the judgement give." Espilus might be expected to respond to the challenge in kind, and with a better compliment, but rather rudely launches into the contest itself, like one who begins a race before his opponent has had a chance to dig in. This confusion of beginnings masks Sidney's maneuver in giving also the last word to Therion. Espilus expresses himself in terms of property, transaction, commodity: "Sweet soul, to whom I vowed I am a slave" -- a slave is property; also Espilus explicitly says that he has said this, not that it is true, that is, he's reserving an escape clause in the fine print. "Two thousand sheep I have" -- this is mercenary; "All this I give, let me possess thy grace:" -- signed and sealed into the bargain. Therion, on the other hand, speaks of freedom, significantly not merely his but hers as well: "Them I can take, but you I cannot hold." Even the direct appeals to the arbitress show the distinction, for Espilus emphasizes that to Elizabeth beauty's force is but *lent*, while Therion calls on her to judge of love as the embodiment of ideal love itself, with the implication that she is beyond the reach of mercenary considerations and should be able to recognize and come to the aid of a fellow traveler.

A judgment is anticipated at this point but put off by further controversy among the contestants' supporters. A shepherd, Dorcas, rudely usurps the Queen's prerogative by proclaiming Espilus the winner. This presents one of the foresters, Rixus, an opportunity to once again praise the Queen while apparently praising Therion. The new impasse leads to a new opportunity to distinguish shepherds from foresters. Dorcas and Rixus are to meet in rhetorical combat; a formal debate on the familiar *topos* of the active versus the contemplative life is proposed, with Rombus as umpire. Dorcas, like Espilus, goes first, so that Rixus may have the chance to demolish him. But again, there is a confusion introduced to put the scent off Rixus, as before it was put off Therion. For Rombus steps in, as an over-officious umpire might do, and does the demolishing himself. Dorcas is accused, quite accurately, of employing the fallacious *enthymeme a loco contingentibus*: "that which is found in the same place is the same." Nature is good; shepherds are found in natural surroundings, *ergo* shepherds are good. Elizabeth has had a life of training in spotting weaknesses in arguments of this kind, and hardly needs Rombus to explain it to her. That he should try is part of the comic effect.

Rixus thus escapes the work of tearing down, and is allowed to build up. He makes his case, not from position, for the forest is not all good, but from equivalence, using a penetrating metaphor:

O sweet contentation to see the long life of the hurtlesse trees to see how in
straight growing up, though never so high, they hinder not their fellows;
they only enviously trouble, which are crookedly bent.

That is, in beholding the forest one may read it as a text, give it meaning, and see in it the

way to rightly read the meaning of men's lives. It is a direct and audacious instruction to the Queen, and the climactic sentence to which the entire effort of *The Lady of May* is bent. Your best servants, Sidney/Leicester/Therion/Rixus informs Elizabeth, are those of us who seek freedom of action so that we may exercise our natural abilities the more effectively on your behalf. One who is more mercenary may be more useful to you in the short term, but he has his own profit to consider, and will therefore be a slave to two masters. An adventurer, on the other hand, having the less to lose, can offer all the more. Yes, this is risky, but it will be worth the small risk for the great advantage you stand to gain through our freedom. This is a very large claim, and one which later events hardly supported. Sidney's own end illustrates that the risk was not small. Drake had better results on the Pacific coasts of the New World, but in singeing the King of Spain's beard at Cadiz might easily have set England ablaze; Raleigh fared poorly overall and Essex would have done much better to have stayed home. But none of this could have been predicted in 1579. The Queen has only her conservative instinct to guide her, honed by the terrifying political education afforded by her father's, brother's, and sister's reigns. Always an astute critical reader of the timing of literary events ("I am Richard the Second, know ye not that?"), she sees the game at once, and when the moment comes to judge between Espilus and Therion, she takes the May Lady quite at her word that "in judging me, you judge more than me in it." She chooses, against the best that Sidney can do, in favor of the *shepherd*. In this, she is very like the deer described by Rixus as craftily conserving her strength by remaining near her pursuers, not to keep them company, but to "take breath to fly further from them."

Sidney is prepared for the possibility, for Espilus now sings "tending to the greatness of his own joy," but the god whose joy he compares to his own is Silvanus, a forest deity, while his opponent's defeat is compared to that of Pan, a pastoral deity. The song is so written that it can convey the appropriate sentiments regardless of the choice made by the Queen, and so helps to smoothe the abrupt transition, required by her choice of the shepherd, from obedient willfulness to willing obedience. Immediately following the music, the May Lady concludes the festivities in glowing praise of the sovereign:

Lady your selfe, for other titles do rather diminish then add vnto you. I and my little company must now leaue you. I should doo you wrong to beseech you to take our follies well since your bountie is such, as to pardon greater faults. Therefore I will wish you good night, praying to God according to the title I possesse, that as hitherto it hath excellently done, so hence forward the flourishing of May, may long remaine in you and with you.

A chorus of voices are packed into this farewell speech. The sense in which the Lady is a young woman of the Court in a mask appears in the conventional hyperbole of the player's plea for pardon. Since the Queen's bounty is such as to pardon those greater faults that occur, not in the controlled world of the masque, but in that larger world of dangerously free men, the May Lady is also, perhaps, Lettice Knollys; certainly she is Sidney and

Leicester. There is, as there has been throughout, nothing whatever of the rustic bumbling in the May Lady that we see in her companions. She has about her a certainty that authenticates her claim to be the Lady of May. This is a clue to at least one of the Lady's identities, for as she is the Lady, not only of one May, but May forever (as the title is, like any title, the sign of the second and eternal body), so is she the sovereign -- Queen Elizabeth herself. The Lady relinquishes to her the title, and in fading away into the woods at this moment, leaves the new May Lady in possession of the stage.

This benediction is the proper ending, surely, and it is so found in printed versions (including this e-text) of the masque. But from the Helmingham Hall manuscript we learn that Master Rombus, in what must have been a risky move, carries the ball for the losing team long after the goal posts have been torn down. In his determination to be heard, he is somewhat reminiscent of George Gascoigne's improvisations on Leicester's behalf even as the Queen was riding away from Kenilworth in 1575.

Sidney employs a thin fiction in which the absent rustics, still present in Rombus, retain possession of the grove, and the schoolmaster refers to Master Robert of Wanstead as a neighbor. Leicester is thus present in his naming yet absent as the fictional owner of a nearby estate. He is depicted as a beneficial force in the community but hampered by adherence to the hated Catholic religion (a patent falsehood but suitable for explaining the gift which Rombus now offers to the Queen). The gift, an agate necklace, apparently resembles a rosary:

I have found *unum par*, a pair, *papistorum beadorum*, of Papistian beads, *cum quos*, with the which, *omnium dierum*, every day, next after his *pater noster* he *semper* saith 'and Elizabeth', as many lines as there be beads on this string (Duncan-Jones 13).

The phrase-by-phrase translating retains some of Rombus' ineffectual pomposity, for Elizabeth is quite fluent in Latin herself. At the same time, some of those present might miss the point without it; although no other audience is addressed than the Queen, this is a convention; the same technique which is used to establish the character of Rombus serves also to make him accessible on multiple levels.

Master Robert's "religion" is an idolatry (which is the Protestant idea of Catholicism). When he prays over his beads he always adds "and Elizabeth" after the "our Father." This likely means that he has expanded the *in nomine* to "in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and Elizabeth." A less likely but not impossible interpretation, made possible by the difficulties presented by the scribal text, is that he adds "an Elizabeth," (Duncan-Jones 337), that is, an *ave Elizabeth* in place of an *ave Maria*. Either choice comes near to blasphemy; either is rich in possibility. By adding Elizabeth to the Trinity, Master Robert shows that he regards her as a proper object of praise, worship, and

obedience, and as the intermediary between his soul and salvation. By saying an *ave Elizabeth* he steals the archangel Gabriel's lines -- with a difference: "Hail, Elizabeth! The Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the *fruit of thy womb*...." This arrogation of the cult of the Virgin Mary was one that Elizabeth herself was not above using. Leicester had by this time given up his hope of marrying Elizabeth and siring a line of kings; so the implication here need be no more than that Elizabeth is the "mother" (by means of her body of State) of her people.

Rombus refers to the Queen, not as the eternal May Lady of the benediction, but in the terms Leicester has preferred for many years: Juno, Venus, Pallas, the three among whom Paris judged by awarding the golden apple. They were common *personae* for the Queen during the early decades of her reign (Axton 38-40). Pallas, goddess of wisdom, is the second body of the Queen, concerned with matters of State. Venus, goddess of erotic love, is the first body, the woman who is desired for herself. Juno combines both bodies in one presence, as Goddess of empire and of, significantly, marriage. Although Diana has by this time made herself thoroughly at home in Elizabeth, the huntress' name is not yet current among the courtiers; this betrays a fundamental misunderstanding of Elizabeth that underlies the consistent "failure" of the propaganda in their entertainments. Leicester and Sidney, well versed in the classics of antiquity and the allegorical uses of their own faith, have great mastery of the available *personae*, and *The Lady of May* retains even today much of its persuasive power, though many of its allusions are lost to us. But their comprehension of the problem of gender and the throne of England falls short. Critics refer to *The Lady of May* as a failure, but no other result was possible. Elizabeth was exposed to a steady stream of entertainments in which she was invited to play a game with the dice loaded, as it were, against her policies, yet held her own. She "showed a marked predilection for freeing pageant virgins whose deflowering would produce heirs" (Axton 66). The Spanish Ambassador, De Silva, described attending a Gray's Inn entertainment with the Queen in 1565:

...we went to the Queen's rooms and descended to where all was prepared for the representation of a comedy in English, of which I understood just as much as the Queen told me. The plot was founded on the question of marriage, discussed between Juno and Diana, Juno advocating marriage and Diana chastity. Jupiter gave the verdict in favor of matrimony after many things had passed on both sides in defense of the respective arguments. The Queen turned to me and said, 'This is all against me' (Axton 49).

We might add yet another name to the long list of the Queen's identities: Penelope. The Virgin Queen, like Penelope, unweaves each day's seeming promises, so that the suitors -- whether Leicester or Anjou -- who might eat up her substance may attend an endless round of entertainments but must return empty-handed. In a world in which power naturally gravitated to men, subterfuge is often a woman's only means to faithfulness. And Elizabeth, as everyone was always forgetting, was already married:

...I am already bound unto an Husband, which is the Kingdome of England, and that may suffice you: and this (quoth shee) makes me wonder, that you forget yourselves, the pledge of this alliance which I have made with my Kingdome (And therewithall, stretching out her hand, shee showed them the Ring with which shee was given in marriage...) (William Camden, *Annales*, qtd. in Axton 35).

Elizabeth has no more *personae* to work with than her courtiers; but, in some ways a greater artist than any of them, she knows which images to use when. What historians call her sense of timing or political balance is often no more than her matchless capacity for returning the "answerless answer." She makes of her presence as Queen an absence by simply returning "no" to every expectation of "yes," leaving the ambitions of great men of power to twist slowly in the wind. That is the power of protective coloration in a fiction: if you give to others no more of yourself than a *text*, whether acted, spoken, or written, then they have no more of you than their own interpretation. This was her means to her own freedom of action and the key to her greatness.

Queen Elizabeth may have fashioned herself to suit national and international exigencies, and her subjects may have fashioned themselves to the exigencies of her Court, but their environment predates them and their behaviors have origins lost in that social antiquity in which our progenitors fashioned themselves to their surroundings as naturally, as necessarily, as unthinkingly as any butterfly. There are critics who find the posturing in courtier poetry distasteful, either because it appears to them to consist in cynical dissembling, or appears to them as unconscious masking of a self-serving teleology of temporal power. Either the cynicism perceived in the text calls forth in these critics a value judgment, or the value judgment perceived in the text calls forth in the critics a cynicism. More is required of the text than it can deliver, because the ideal that poesy should embody undying truths is a chimera. Every poetic text is rhetorical, that is, its nonspecificity of reference is a consciously employed strategem for misdirecting that first and final reader whose name is Death.

-- R.S. Bear

{text}

Her most Excellent Maiestie
WALKING IN WANSTEED
GARDEN, AS SHE PASSED DOWN INTO THE

*GROVE, THERE CAME SVDDENLY AMONG THE TRAINE,
one apparelled like an honest mans wife of the countrey, where crying out
for iustice, and desiring all the Lords and Gentlemen to speake a
good word for her, she was brought to the presence of her
Maiestie to whom vpon her knees she offered
a supplication, and vsed this speech.*

The Suitor

Most faire Lady, for as for other your titles of state statelier persons shall giue you, and thus much mine owne eies are witnesses of, take here the complaint of me poore wretch, as deeply plunged in miserie, as I wish you to the highest point of happinesse.

One onely daughter I have, in whom I had placed all the hop[e]s of my good hap, so well had she with her good parts recompenced my paine of bearing her, and care of bringing her vp: but now alas that shee is come to the time I should reape my full comfort of her, so is shee troubled with that notable matter, which wee in the countrey call matrimonie, as I cannot chuse but feare the losse of her wits, at least of her honesty. Other women thinke they may bee vnhappily combred with one master husband, my poore daughter is oppressed with two, both louing her, both equally liked of her, both striuing to deserue her. But now lastly (as this iealousie forsooth is a vile matter) each haue brought their pertakers with them, and are at this present, (without your presence redresse it) in some bloody controuersie now sweete Lady helpe, your owne way guides you to the place where they incomberd her: I dare stay here no longer, for our men say in the countrey, the sight of you is infectious.

And with that she went away a good pace, leauing the supplication with her Maiestie, which very formerly contained this.

Supplication.

Most gracious Soueraigne,
To one whose state is raised over all,
Whose face doth oft, the bravest sort enchant,
Whose mind is such, as wisest minds appall,
Who in one selfe these diuerse gifts can plant;
How dare I wretch seeke there my woes to rest,
Where eares be burnt, eyes dazled, harts opprest?

Your State is great, your greatnesse is our shield,

Your face hurts oft, but still it doth delight,
Your mind is wise, your wisdom makes you mild,
Such planted gifts enrich even beggars sight:
So dare I wretch my bashful feare subdue,
And feede mine eares, mine eyes, my hart in you.

Herewith the woman-suiter being gone, there was heard in the woods a confused noise & forth-with there came out six shepherds with as many fosters {1} hailing and pulling, to whether side they should draw the Ladie of May, who seemed to encline neither to the one or the other side. Among them was maister Rombus {2} a schoolemaster of a village thereby, who being fully perswaded of his owne learned wisdom, came thither, with his authoritie to part their fray; where for answer he receiued many vnlearned blowes. But the Queene comming to the place where she was seene of them, though they knew not her estate, yet something there was which made them startle aside and gaze vpon her till old father Lalus stepped forth (one of the substantiallest shepherds) and making a legge or two, said these few words.

May it please your benignity to giue a little superfluous intelligence to that which with the opening of my mouth, my tongue and teeth shall deliuer unto you. So it is right worshipfull audience, that a certaine she creature, which we shepherds call a woman, of a minsicall countenance, but by my white Lambe not three quarters so beautious as your selfe, hath disannulled the braine pan of two of our featioust yong men. And wil you wot how? by my mother Kits soule, with a certain fransical maladie they call Loue, when I was a yong man they called it flat folly. But here is a substantiall schoole-master can better disnounce the whole foundation of the matter, although in sooth for all his loquence our young men were nothing dutious to his clarkship; Come on, Come on maister schoole-maister, be not so bashlesse we say, that the fairest are ever the gentlest: tell the whole case, for you can much better vent the points of it then I.

*Then came forward Maister Rombus, and with many speciall graces
made this learned oration.*

Now the thunder-thumping Ioue transfund his dotes into your excellent formosity which haue with your resplendent beames thus segregated the enmitie of these rurall animals I am *Potentissima Domina*, {3} a schoole maister, that is to say, a Pedagogue, one not a little versed in the disciplinating of the iuentall frie {4} wherein (to my laud I say it) I vse such geometricall proportion, as neither wanted mansuetude {5} nor correction, for so it is described.

Parcare Subiectos & debellare superbos. {6}

Yet hath not the pulchritude of my vertues protected me from the contaminating hands of

these plebians; for comming, *solumm[o]do* {7} to haue parted their sanguinolent fray, they yeelded me no more reuerence, then if I had bin some *Pecorius Asinus* {8} I, euen I, that am, who am I? *Dixi verbus sapiento satum est.*{9} But what sayd that Troian Aeneas, when he soiorned in the surging sulkes of the sandiferous seas, *Haec olim memonasse iuuebit.* {10} Well well *ad popositos reuertebo*{11} the puritie of the veritie is, that a certaine *Pulchra puella porfecto*{12} elected and constituted by the integrated determination of all this topographicall region, as the soueraine Lady of this Dame Maias month, hath bene *quodammodo*{13} hunted, as you would say, pursued by two, a brace, a couple, a cast of yong men, to whom the crafty coward Cupid had *inquam* deliuered his dire-dolorous dart.

But here the May Lady interrupted his speech saying to him:

Away away you tedious foole, your eyes are not worthy to looke to yonder Princely sight, much lesse your foolish tongue to trouble her wise eares.

At which Maister Rombus in a great chafe cried out:

O Tempori, O Moribus!{14} in profession a childe, in dignitie a woman, in years a Lady, *in caet[e]ris* a maid, should thus turpifie the reputation of my doctrine, with the superscription of a foole, *O Tempori, O Moribus!*

But here againe the May Ladie saying to him,

Leaue off good Latine foole, and let me satisfie the long desire I haue had to feede mine eyes with the only sight this age hath graunted to the world.

*The poore scholem after went his way backe, and the Ladie kneeling
downe said in this manner*

Do not thinke (sweete and gallant Lady) that I do abase my selfe thus much vnto you because of your gay apparell, for what is so braue as the naturall beautie of the flowers, nor because a certaine Gentleman{15} hereby seekes to do you all the honour he can in his house; that is not the matter, he is but our neighbour, and these be our owne groues, nor yet because of your great estate, since no estate can be compared to be the Lady of the whole moneth of May as I am. So that since both this place and this time are my seruants, you may be sure I wold look for reuerence at your hands, if I did not see something in your face which makes me yeeld to you; the troth is, you excell me in that wherein I desire most to excell and that makes me giue this homage vnto you, as the beautifullest Lady these woods haue euer receiued. But now as old father Lalus directed me, I wil tel you my fortune, that you may be iudge of my mishaps and others worthines. Indeed so it is, that I

am a faire wench or else I am decieued, and therefore by the consent of all our neighbours haue bene chosen for the absolute Lady of this mery moneth, with mee haue bene (alas I a ashamed to tell it) two yong men, the one a forrester named Therion, the other Espilus a shepheard very long euen in loue forsooth, I like them both, and loue neither, Espilus is the richer, but Therion the liuelier: Therion doth me many pleasures, as stealing me venison out of these forrests, and manie other such like prettie and pretier seruices, but with all he growes to such rages, that sometimes he strikes me, sometimes he rails at me. This shepheard Espilus of a mild disposition, as his fortune hath not beene to do me great seruice, so hath he neuer done me any wrong, but feeding his sheepe, sitting under some sweet bush, sometimes they say he recordes my name in dolefull verses. Now the question I am to aske you faire Lady, is, whether the many deserts and many faults of Therion, or the very small deserts and no faults of Espilus be to be preferred. But before you giue your iudgment (most excellent Lady) you shall heare what each of them can say for them selues in their rurall songs.

*Therevpon Therion chalenged Espilus to sing{16} with him,
speaking these six verses:*

Come Espilus, come now declare thy skill,
Shew how thou canst deserue so braue desire,
Warne well thy wits, if thou wilt win her will,
For water cold did neuer promise fire:
Great sure is she, on whom our hopes doe liue,
Greater is she who must the iudgement giue.

But Espilus as if hee had beene inspired with the Muses, began forthwith to sing, whereto his fellow shepheardes set in with their recorders, which they bare in their bags like pipes, and so of Therions side did the foresters, with the cornets they wore about their neckes like hunting hornes in baudrikes.{17}

Espilus.

Tune up my voice, a higher note I yeeld,
To high conceits the song must needs be high,
More high then stars, more firme then flintie field
Are all my thoughts, in which I live or dye:
Sweet soule, to whom I vowed I am a slaue,
Let not wild woods so great a treasure haue.

Therion.

The highest note comes oft from basest mind,

As shallow brooks do yeeld the greatest sound,
Seeke other thoughts thy life or death to find;
Thy stars be fal'n plowed in thy flinty ground:
Sweet soule let not a wretch that serueth sheep
Among his flocke so sweet a treasure keepe.

Espilus.

Two thousand sheep I have as white as milke,
Though not so white as is thy louely face,
The pasture rich, the wooll as soft as silke,
All this I giue, let me possesse thy grace,
But still take heed least thou thy selfe submit
To one that hath no wealth, and wants his wit.

Therion.

Two thousand Deere in wildest woods I have,
Them can I take, but you I cannot hold:
He is not poore who can his freedome saue,
Bound but to you no wealth but you I would:
But take this Beast, if beasts you feare to misse,
For of his beasts the greatest beast he is.

Espilus kneeling to the Queene.

Iudge you to whom al beauties force is lent.

Therion.

Iudge you of Loue, to whom al loue is bent.

But as they waited for the iugdment her Maiestie should giue of their deserts, the shepeheards and foresters grew to a great contention whether of their fellowes had sung better, and so whether the estate of shepheards or foresters were the more worshipfull. The speakers were Dorcas an olde shepeheard, and Rixus a young foster, betweene whom the schoole-maister Rombus came in as moderator.

Dorcas the shepheard.

Now all the blessings of mine old grandam (silly Espilus) light vpon thy shoulders for this honicombe singing of thine; now of mine honestie all the bells in the town could not have

sung better, if the proud heart of the harlotrie ly not downe to thee now, the sheepes rot catch her, to teach her that a faire woman hath not her fairenesse to let it grow rustish.

Rixus the foster.

O Midas{18} why art thou not aliue now to lend thine eares to this drivle, by the precious bones of a hunts-man, he knowes not the bleaying of a calfe from the song of a nightingale, but if yonder great Gentlewoman be as wise as she is faire, Therion thou shalt haue the prize, and thou old Dorcas with young maister Espilus shall remaine tame fooles, as you be.

Dorcas. And with cap and knee be it spoken, is it your pleasure neighbour Rixus to be a wild foole?

Rixus. Rather than a sheepish dolt.

Dorcas. It is much refreshing to my bowels, you haue made your choice, for my share I will bestow your leauings vpon one of your fellowes.

Rixus. And art thou not ashamed old foole, to liken Espilus a shepheard to Therion of the noble vocation of hunts-men, in the presence of such a one as euen with her eye onely can giue the cruell punishment?

Dorcas. Hold thy peace, I will neither meddle with her, nor her eyes, they sayne in our towne they are dangerous both, neither will I liken Therion to my boy Espilus, since one is a theeuish proller,{19} and the other is a quiet as a lambe that new came from sucking.

Rombus the schoole-maister.

Heu Ehem, hei, Inspidum, Inscitium vulgorum & populorum.{20} Why you brute Nebulons{21} have you had my *Corpusculum* so long among you, and cannot yet tell how to edefie an argument? Attend and throw your eares to mee, for I am grauitated with child, till I haue endoctrinated your plumbeous cerebrocities. First you must divisionate your point, *quasi* you should cut a cheese into two particles, for thus must I vniforme my speech to your obtuse conceptions; for *Prius dividendum oratio antequam definiendum exemplum gratia*,{22} either Therion must conquere this Dame Maias Nimphe, or Espilus must ouerthrow her, and that *secundum* their dignitie, which must also be subdiuisionated into three equal species, either according to the penetrancie of their singing, or the melioritie of their functions, or lastly the superancy of their merits *De* singing *satis*. *Nunc* are you to argumentate of the qualifying of their estate first, and then whether hath more infernally, I mean more deeply deserued.

Dorcas. O poore Dorcas, poore Dorcas, that I was not set in my young dayes to schoole, that I might haue purchased the vnderstanding of master Rombus misterious speeches. But yet thus much I conceiue of them, that I must euen giue vp what my conscience doth find in the behalfe of shepeheardes. O sweet hony miken Lommes, and is there any so flintie a heart, that can find about him to speak against them that haue the charge of such good soules as you be, among whom there is no enuy, and all obedience, where it is lawfull for a man to be good if he list, and hath no outward cause to withdraw him from it, where the eye may be busied in considering the works of nature, and the heart quietly reioyced in the honest vsing them. If [con]templation as Clarks say, be the most excellent, which is so fit a life for Templars as this is, neither subiect to violent oppression, nor servile flatterie, how many Courtiers thinke you I haue heard vnder our field in bushes make their wofull complaints, some of the greatnesse of their Mistresse estate, which dazled their eies and yet burned their harts some of the extremitie of her beauty mixed with extreame crueltie, some of her too much wit, which made all their loving labours folly. O how often haue I heard one name sounded in many mouthes, making our vales witnesses of their doleful agonies! So that with long lost labour finding their thoughts bare no other wooll but dispaire of young Courtiers they grew old shepheards. Well sweet Lams I will ende with you as I began, hee that can open his mouth against such innocent soules, let him be hated as much as a filthy fox, let the tast of him be worse then musty cheese, the sound of him more dredfull then the howling of a wolfe, his sight more odible then a toade in ones parreage.

Rixus. Your life indeede hath some goodnesse.

Rombus the schoole-master.

O *tace, tace*, or the fat will be ignified, first let me dilucidate the very intrinsicall maribone of the matter. He doth vse a certaine rhetoricall inuasion into the point, as if indeed he had conference with his Lams, but the troth is, he doth equitate you in the meane time master Rixus, for thus he saith, that sheepe are good, *ergo* the shepheard is good, an *Enthymeme a loco contingentibus*, {23} as my finger and my thumbs are *contingentis*. againe he saith, who liueth well is likewise good, but shepheards live well *Ergo* they are good; a *Sillogisme* in Darius king of Persia a *Coniugatis*, as you would say, a man coupled to his wife, two bodies but one soule: but do you but acquiescate to my exhortation, and you shall extinguish him. Tell him his major is a knaue, his minor is a foole, and his conclusion both. *Et ecce homo blancatus quasi lilium*. {24}

Rixus. I was saying the shepheards life had some goodnesse in it, because it borrowed that quiet part, doth both strengthen the bodie, and raise vp the mind with this gallant sort of actiuitie. O sweet contentation to see the long life of the hurtlesse trees to see how in straight growing vp, though neuer so high they hinder not their fellowes, they only enuiously trouble, which are crookedly bent. What life is to be compared to ours where

the very growing things are ensamples of goodnesse? wee haue no hopes, but we may quickly go about them, & going about them, we soone obtaine them; not like those that haue long followed one (in troth) most excellent chace, do now at length perceiue she could neuer be taken: but that if she stayed at any time neare the pursuers, it was never meant to tary with them, but onely to take breath to flie further from them. He therefore that doubts that our life doth not far excell all others, let him also doubt that the well deseruing and painfull Therion is not to be preferred before the idle Espilus, which euen as much to say, as that the Roes are not swifter then sheepe, nor the Stags more goodly than Gotes.

Rombus. *Bene bene, nunc de questione prepositus*, that is as much as to say, as well well, now of the proposed question, that was whether the many great seruices and many great faults of Therion, or the few smal seruices and no faults of Espilus, be to be preferred, incepted or accepted the former.

The May Lady.

No no, your ordinarie braines shall not deale in that matter, I haue already submitted it to one, whose sweet spirit hath passed through greater difficulties, neither will I that your blockheads lie in her way.

Therefore O Ladie whorthie to see the accomplishment of your desires, since al your desires be most worthy of you, vouchsafe [our] eares such happinesse, & me that particular fauor as that you will iudge whether of [these] two be more worthy of me, or whether I be worthy of them: This I will say[, that in] iudging me, you iudge more than me in it.

This being said, it pleased her Maiesty to iudge that Espilus did the better deserue her: but what words, what reasons she vsed for it, this paper, which carieth so base names; is not worthy to containe. Sufficeth it, that vpon the iudgement giuen, the shepherds and forresters made a full consort of their cornets and recorders, and then did Espilus sing this song, tending to the greatnesse of his owne ioy, and yet to the comfort of the other side, since they were ouerthrowne by a most worthie aduersarie. The song contained two short tales, and thus it was.

Siluanus long in love, and long in vaine,
At length obtained the point of his desire,
When being askt, now that he did obtaine
His wished weale, what more he could require:
Nothing sayd he, for most I ioy in this,
That Goddess mine, my blessed being sees.

When wanton Pan decieu'd with Lions skin,
Came to the bed where wound for kisse he got,
To wo and shame the wretch did enter in,
Till this he tooke for comfort of his lot,
 Poore Pan (he sayd) although thou beaten be,
 It is no shame, since Hercules was he.

Thus ioifully in chosen tunes reioice,
That such a one is wnesse of my hart,
Whose cleerest eyes I blisse, and sweetest voice,
That see my good, and iudgeth my desert:
 Thus wofully I in wo this salue do find,
 My foule mishap came yet from fairest mind.

The musicke fully ended, the May Lady tooke her leave in this sort.

Lady your selfe, for other titles do rather diminish then add vnto you. I and my little company must now leaue you. I should doo you wrong to beseech you to take our follies well since your bountie is such, as to pardon greater faults. Therefore I will wish you good night, praying to God according to the title I possesse, that as hitherto it hath excellently done, so hence forward the flourishing of May, may long remaine in you and with you.

FINIS.

Notes and Glosses:

{1} fosters: foresters.

{2} Rombus: *rhombus*, an equilateral parallelogram. Suggestion of pedantry.

{3} *Potentissima Domina*: most powerful Lady.

{4} iuuentall frie: iuental (juvenile) fry, young children.

{5} mansuetude: gentility.

{6} *Aeneid* 6:853: "to raise the lowly and throw down the high ones."

{7} *solummodo*: solo.

{8} *Pecorius Asinus*: silly beast. Rombus' mistake for *pecus asininus* [Duncan-Jones 335].

{9} "I have said. A word to the wise suffices." *Verbus* should be *verbum*.

{10} *Aeneid* 1:203: "In time the memory of these will be pleasant."

{11} *ad propositos reuertebo*: to return the proposition.

{12} *Pulchra puella perfecto*: girl of perfect beauty.

{13} *quodammodo*: in some mode or fashion. *Quodam modo*.

{14} Cicero, *Contra Catalinam* 1.1: "*O tempora, o mores*": O times, o morality!

{15} The Earle of Leicester, owner of Wanstead.

{16} A traditional gambling game in the form of a poetry contest, in which verses composed extempore are to be judged by a competent referee. Cf. Edmund Spenser's [The Shepheardes Calender](#).

{17} *baudrikes*: baldricks.

{18} At one point in his career, Midas was punished by having his ears turned into ass's ears.

{19} *proller*: prowler.

{20} Something along the lines of: "Woe unto you, insipid inciters of the vulgar populace."

{21} *Nebulons*: *nebulo*, a vague and unhelpful person.

{22} "Divide an oration before defining it; for example..."

{23} An argument from proximity; this is a common fallacy.

{24} "And see the man white as a lily!" An unknown reference [Duncan-Jones 336].

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Renascence Editions

The Lady of May

Sir Philip Sidney

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Her most Excellent Maiestie *WALKING IN WANSTEED*

GARDEN, AS SHE PASSED DOWN INTO THE
GROVE, THERE CAME SVDDENLY AMONG THE TRAINE,
one apparrelled like an honest mans wife of the countrey, where crying out
for iustice, and desiring all the Lords and Gentlemen to speake a
good word for her, she was brought to the presence of her
Maiestie to whom vpon her knees she offered
a supplication, and vsed this speech.

The Suitor

Notes

This etext edition of **The Lady of May** derives from the 1605 edition of *The Countesse of Pembrokes Arcadia*, pps. 570-576. Long "s" has been modernized, and catchwords and marginalia have been removed. Sixteenth century usage of "i" for "j" and of "u" and "v" has been retained, along with the original spelling. A few errors have been emended within brackets. Many italics, such as those used for proper names, have been omitted. The editor gratefully acknowledges help from Dr. Lyell Asher. Design copyright & (1996) is owned by the University of Oregon; nonprofit use only. R.S. Bear



Ost faire Lady, for as for other your titles of state statelier persons shall giue you, and thus much mine owne eies are witnesses of, take here the complaint of me poore wretch, as deeply plunged in miserie, as I wish you to the highest point of happinesse.

One onely daughter I have, in whom I had placed all the hop[e]s of my good hap, so well had she with her good parts recompenced my paine of bearing her, and care of bringing her vp: but now alas that shee is come to the time I should reape my full comfort of her, so is shee troubled with that notable matter, which wee in the countrey call matrimonie, as I cannot chuse but feare the losse of her wits, at least of her honesty. Other women thinke they may bee vnhappily combred with one master husband, my poore daughter is oppressed with two, both louing her, both equally liked of her, both striuing to deserue her. But now lastly (as this iealousie forsooth is a vile matter) each haue brought their pertakers with them, and are at this present, (without your presence redresse it) in some bloody controuersie now sweete Lady helpe, your owne way guides you to the place where they incomberd her: I dare stay here no longer, for our men say in the countrey, the sight of you is infectious.

And with that she went away a good pace, leauing the supplication with her Maiestie, which very formerly contained this.

Supplication.

Most gracious Soueraigne,
To one whose state is raised over all,
Whose face doth oft, the bravest sort enchant,
Whose mind is such, as wisest minds appall,
Who in one selfe these diuerse gifts can plant;
How dare I wretch seeke there my woes to rest,
Where eares be burnt, eyes dazled, harts opprest?

Your State is great, your greatnesse is our shield,
Your face hurts oft, but still it doth delight,
Your mind is wise, your wisdom makes you mild,
Such planted gifts enrich even beggers sight:
So dare I wretch my bashfull feare subdue,
And feede mine eares, mine eyes, my hart in you.

Herewith the woman-suiter being gone, there was heard in the woods a confused noise & forth-with there came out six sheapheards with as many

fosters hailing and pulling, to whether side they should draw the Ladie of May, who seemed to encline neither to the one or the other side. Among them was maister Rombus a schoolemaster of a village thereby, who being fully perswaded of his owne learned wisdom, came thither, with his authoritie to part their fray; where for aunswer he receiued many vnlearned blowes. But the Queene comming to the place where she was seene of them, though they knew not her estate, yet something there was which made them startle aside and gaze vpon her till old father Lalus stepped forth (one of the substantiallest shepherds) and making a legge or two, said these few words.

May it please your benignity to giue a little superfluous intelligence to that which with the opening of my mouth, my tongue and teeth shall deliuer unto you. So it is right worshipfull audience, that a certaine she creature, which we shepherds call a woman, of a minsicall countenance, but by my white Lambe not three quarters so beautious as your selfe, hath disanulled the braine pan of two of our featioust yong men. And wil you wot how? by my mother Kits soule, with a certain fransical maladie they call Loue, when I was a yong man they called it flat folly. But here is a substantiall schoole-master can better disnounce the whole foundation of the matter, although in sooth for all his loquence our young men were nothing dutious to his clarkship; Come on, Come on maister schoole-maister, be not so bashlesse we say, that the fairest are ever the gentlest: tell the whole case, for you can much better vent the points of it then I.

Then came forward Maister Rombus, and with many speciall graces made this learned oration.

Now the thunder-thumping Ioue transfund his dotes into your excellent formosity which haue with your resplendent beames thus segregated the enmitie of these rurall animals I am, Potentissima Domina, a schoole maister, that is to say, a Pedagogue, one not a little versed in the disciplinating of the iuuentall frie wherein (to my laud I say it) I vse such geometricall proportion, as neither wanted mansuetude nor correction, for so it is described.

Parcare Subiectos & debellare superbos.

Yet hath not the pulchritude of my vertues protected me from the contaminating hands of these plebians; for comming, solumm[o]do to haue parted their sanguinolent fray, they yeilded me no more reuerence, then if I had bin some Pecorius Asinus I, euen I, that am, who am I? Dixi verbus sapiento satum est. But what sayd that Troian Aeneas, when he soiorned in

the surging sulkes of the sandiferous seas, *Haec olim memonasse iuuebit.*
Well well *ad popositos reuertebo* the puritie of the veritie is, that a certaine
Pulchra puella perfecto elected and constituted by the integrated
determination of all this topographicall region, as the soueraine Lady of this
Dame Maias month, hath bene *quodammodo* hunted, as you would say,
pursued by two, a brace, a couple, a cast of yong men, to whom the crafty
coward Cupid had *inquam* deliuered his dire-dolorous dart.

But here the May Lady interrupted his speech saying to him:

Away away you tedious foole, your eyes are not worthy to looke to yonder
Princely sight, much lesse your foolish tongue to trouble her wise eares.

At which Maister Rombus in a great chafe cried out:

O Tempori, O Moribus! in profession a childe, in dignitie a woman, in years
a Lady, *in caet[e]ris* a maid, should thus turpifie the reputation of my
doctrine, with the superscription of a foole, *O Tempori, O Moribus!*

But here againe the May Ladie saying to him,

Leaue off good Latine foole, and let me satisfie the long desire I haue had to
feede mine eyes with the only sight this age hath graunted to the world.

*The poore scholem after went his way backe, and the Ladie kneeling
downe said in this manner*

Do not thinke (sweete and gallant Lady) that I do abase my selfe thus much
vnto you because of your gay apparell, for what is so braue as the naturall
beautie of the flowers, nor because a certaine Gentleman hereby seekes to do
you all the honour he can in his house; that is not the matter, he is but our
neighbour, and these be our owne groues, nor yet because of your great
estate, since no estate can be compared to be the Lady of the whole moneth
of May as I am. So that since both this place and this time are my seruants,
you may be sure I wold look for reuerence at your hands, if I did not see
something in your face which makes me yeeld to you; the troth is, you excell
me in that wherein I desire most to excell and that makes me giue this
homage vnto you, as the beautifullest Lady these woods haue euer receiued.
But now as old father Lalus directed me, I wil tel you my fortune, that you
may be iudge of my mishaps and others worthines. Indeed so it is, that I am
a faire wench or else I am decieued, and therefore by the consent of all our
neighbours haue bene chosen for the absolute Lady of this mery moneth,

with mee haue bene (alas I a ashamed to tell it) two yong men, the one a forrester named Therion, the other Espilus a shepheard very long euen in loue forsooth, I like them both, and loue neither, Espilus is the richer, but Therion the liuelier: Therion doth me many pleasures, as stealing me venison out of these forrests, and manie other such like prettie and pretier seruices, but with all he growes to such rages, that sometimes he strikes me, sometimes he rails at me. This shepheard Espilus of a mild disposition, as his fortune hath not beene to do me great seruice, so hath he neuer done me any wrong, but feeding his sheepe, sitting under some sweet bush, sometimes they say he recordes my name in dolefull verses. Now the question I am to aske you faire Lady, is, whether the many deserts and many faults of Therion, or the very small deserts and no faults of Espilus be to be preferred. But before you giue your iudgment (most excellent Lady) you shall heare what each of them can say for them selues in their rurall songs.

*Therevpon Therion chalenged Espilus to sing with him,
speaking these six verses:*

Come Espilus, come now declare thy skill,
Shew how thou canst deserue so braue desire,
Warne well thy wits, if thou wilt win her will,
For water cold did neuer promise fire:
Great sure is she, on whom our hopes doe liue,
Greater is she who must the iudgement giue.

But Espilus as if hee had beene inspired with the Muses, began forthwith to sing, whereto his fellow shepheardes set in with their recorders, which they bare in their bags like pipes, and so of Therions side did the foresters, with the cornets they wore about their neckes like hunting hornes in baudrikes.

Espilus.

Tune up my voice, a higher note I yeeld,
To high conceits the song must needs be high,
More high then stars, more firme then flintie field
Are all my thoughts, in which I live or dye:
Sweet soule, to whom I vowed I am a slaue,
Let not wild woods so great a treasure haue.

Therion.

The highest note comes oft from basest mind,

As shallow brooks do yeeld the greatest sound,
Seeke other thoughts thy life or death to find;
Thy stars be fal'n plowed in thy flinty ground:
Sweet soule let not a wretch that serueth sheep
Among his flocke so sweet a treasure keepe.

Espilus.

Two thousand sheep I have as white as milke,
Though not so white as is thy louely face,
The pasture rich, the wooll as soft as silke,
All this I giue, let me possesse thy grace,
But still take heed least thou thy selfe submit
To one that hath no wealth, and wants his wit.

Therion.

Two thousand Deere in wildest woods I have,
Them can I take, but you I cannot hold:
He is not poore who can his freedome saue,
Bound but to you no wealth but you I would:
But take this Beast, if beasts you feare to misse,
For of his beasts the greatest beast he is.

Espilus kneeling to the Queene.

Iudge you to whom al beauties force is lent.

Therion.

Iudge you of Loue, to whom al loue is bent.

But as they waited for the iudgment her Maiestie should giue of their deserts, the shepeheardes and foresters grew to a great contention whether of their fellowes had sung better, and so whether the estate of shepheards or foresters were the more worshipfull. The speakers were Dorcas an olde shepeheard, and Rixus a young foster, betweene whom the schoole-maister Rombus came in as moderator.

Dorcas the shepheard.

Now all the blessings of mine old grandam (silly Espilus) light vpon thy

shoulders for this honicombe singing of thine; now of mine honestie all the
bels in the town could not have sung better, if the proud heart of the harlotrie
ly not downe to thee now, the sheepes rot catch her, to teach her that a faire
woman hath not her fairenesse to let it grow rustish.

Rixus the foster.

O Midas why art thou not aliue now to lend thine eares to this drivle, by the
precious bones of a hunts-man, he knowes not the bleaying of a calfe from
the song of a nightingale, but if yonder great Gentlewoman be as wise as she
is faire, Therion thou shalt haue the prize, and thou old Dorcas with young
maister Espilus shall remaine tame fooles, as you be.

Dorcas. And with cap and knee be it spoken, is it your pleasure neighbour
Rixus to be a wild foole?

Rixus. Rather than a sheepish dolt.

Dorcas. It is much refreshing to my bowels, you haue made your choice, for
my share I will bestow your leauings vpon one of your fellowes.

Rixus. And art thou not ashamed old foole, to liken Espilus a shepheard to
Therion of the noble vocation of hunts-men, in the presence of such a one as
euen with her eye onely can giue the cruell punishment?

Dorcas. Hold thy peace, I will neither meddle with her, nor her eyes, they
sayne in our towne they are dangerous both, neither will I liken Therion to
my boy Espilus, since one is a theeuish proller, and the other is as quiet as a
lambe that new came from sucking.

Rombus the schoole-maister.

Heu Ehem, hei, Insidium, Inscitium vulgorum & populorum. Why you
brute Nebulons have you had my *Corpusculum* so long among you, and
cannot yet tell how to edefie an argument? Attend and throw your eares to
mee, for I am grauitated with child, till I haue endoctrinated your plumbeous
cerebrosities. First you must divisionate your point, *quasi* you should cut a
cheese into two particles, for thus must I vniforme my speech to your obtuse
conceptions; for *Prius dividendum oratio antequam definiendum exemplum
gratia*, either Therion must conquere this Dame Maias Nimphe, or Espilus
must ouerthrow her, and that *secundum* their dignitie, which must also be
subdiuisionated into three equal species, either according to the penetrancie

of their singing, or the melioritie of their functions, or lastly the superancy of their merits *De singing satis. Nunc* are you to argumentate of the qualifying of their estate first, and then whether hath more infernally, I mean more deeply deserued.

Dorcas. O poore Dorcas, poore Dorcas, that I was not set in my young dayes to schoole, that I might haue purchased the vnderstanding of master Rombus misterious speeches. But yet thus much I conceiue of them, that I must euen giue vp what my conscience doth find in the behalfe of shepeheardes. O sweet hony miken Lommes, and is there any so flintie a heart, that can find about him to speak against them that haue the charge of such good soules as you be, among whom there is no enuy, and all obedience, where it is lawfull for a man to be good if he list, and hath no outward cause to withdraw him from it, where the eye may be busied in considering the works of nature, and the heart quietly reioyced in the honest vsing them. If [con]templation as Clarks say, be the most excellent, which is so fit a life for Templars as this is, neither subiect to violent oppression, nor servile flatterie, how many Courtiers thinke you I haue heard vnder our field in bushes make their wofull complaints, some of the greatnesse of their Mistresse estate, which dazled their eies and yet burned their harts some of the extremitie of her beauty mixed with extreame crueltie, some of her too much wit, which made all their loving labours folly. O how often haue I heard one name sounded in many mouthes, making our vales witnesses of their doleful agonies! So that with long lost labour finding their thoughts bare no other wooll but dispaire of young Courtiers they grew old shepheardes. Well sweet Lams I will ende with you as I began, hee that can open his mouth against such innocent soules, let him be hated as much as a filthy fox, let the tast of him be worse then musty cheese, the sound of him more dredfull then the howling of a wolfe, his sight more odible then a toade in ones parreage.

Rixus. Your life indeede hath some goodnesse.

Rombus the schoole-master.

O *tace, tace*, or the fat will be ignified, first let me dilucidate the very intrinsicall maribone of the matter. He doth vse a certaine rhetoricall inuasion into the point, as if indeed he had conference with his Lams, but the troth is, he doth equitate you in the meane time master Rixus, for thus he saith, that sheepe are good, *ergo* the shepheard is good, an *Enthymeme a loco contingentibus*, as my finger and my thumbs are *contingentis*. againe he saith, who liueth well is likewise good, but shepheardes live well *Ergo* they are good; a *Sillogisme* in Darius king of Persia a *Coniugatis*, as you would say, a man coupled to his wife, two bodies but one soule: but do you but

acquiescate to my exhortation, and you shall extinguish him. Tell him his major is a knaue, his minor is a foole, and his conclusion both. *Et ecce homo blancatus quasi lilium.*

Rixus. I was saying the shepherds life had some goodnesse in it, because it borrowed that quiet part, doth both strengthen the bodie, and raise vp the mind with this gallant sort of actiuitie. O sweet contentation to see the long life of the hurtlesse trees to see how in straight growing vp, though neuer so high they hinder not their fellowes, they only enuiously trouble, which are crookedly bent. What life is to be compared to ours where the very growing things are ensamples of goodnesse? wee haue no hopes, but we may quickly go about them, & going about them, we soone obtaine them; not like those that haue long followed one (in troth) most excellent chace, do now at length perceiue she could neuer be taken: but that if she stayed at any time neare the pursuers, it was never meant to tary with them, but onely to take breath to flie further from them. He therefore that doubts that our life doth not far excell all others, let him also doubt that the well deseruing and painfull Therion is not to be preferred before the idle Espilus, which euen as much to say, as that the Roes are not swifter then sheepe, nor the Stags more goodly than Gotes.

Rombus. *Bene bene, nunc de questione prepositus*, that is as much as to say, as well well, now of the proposed question, that was whether the many great seruices and many great faults of Therion, or the few smal seruices and no faults of Espilus, be to be preferred, incepted or accepted the former.

The May Lady.

No no, your ordinarie braines shall not deale in that matter, I haue alreadie submitted it to one, whose sweet spirit hath passed through greater difficulties, neither will I that your blockheads lie in her way.

Therefore O Ladie whorthie to see the accomplishment of your desires, since al your desires be most worthy of you, vouchsafe [our] eares such happinesse, & me that particular fauor as that you will iudge whether of [these] two be more worthy of me, or whether I be worthy of them: This I will say[, that in] iudging me, you iudge more than me in it.

This being said, it pleased her Maiesty to iudge that Espilus did the better deserue her: but what words, what reasons she vsed for it, this paper, which carieth so base names; is not worthy to containe. Sufficeth it, that vpon the iudgement giuen, the shepherds and forresters made a full consort of their

cornets and recorders, and then did Espilus sing this song, tending to the greatnesse of his owne ioy, and yet to the comfort of the other side, since they were ouerthrowne by a most worthie aduersarie. The song contained two short tales, and thus it was.

Siluanus long in love, and long in vaine,
At length obtained the point of his desire,
When being askt, now that he did obtaine
His wished weale, what more he could require:
Nothing sayd he, for most I ioy in this,
That Goddesse mine, my blessed being sees.

When wanton Pan decieu'd with Lions skin,
Came to the bed where wound for kisse he got,
To wo and shame the wretch did enter in,
Till this he tooke for comfort of his lot,
Poore Pan (he sayd) although thou beaten be,
It is no shame, since Hercules was he.

Thus ioifully in chosen tunes reioice,
That such a one is witnessse of my hart,
Whose cleerest eyes I blisse, and sweetest voice,
That see my good, and iudgeth my desert:
Thus wofully I in wo this salue do find,
My foule mishap came yet from fairest mind.

The musicke fully ended, the May Lady tooke her leave in this sort.

Lady your selfe, for other titles do rather diminish then add vnto you. I and
my
little company must now leaue you. I should doo you wrong to beseech
you to take our follies well since your bountie is such, as to pardon
greater faults. Therefore I will wish you good night, praying
to God according to the title I possesse, that as hitherto it
hath excellently done, so hence forward the
flourishing of May, may long remaine in
you and with you.

FINIS.

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