

Séminaire Passions

Jeudi 14 juin 2012, 15h-18h

Université Paul Valéry – Montpellier III, site Saint-Charles,
salle 004

Cinta Zunino Garrido (Jaen University)

" Rhetoric, Emotion and the Self in the Plays of John Lyly"

On the basis of John Lyly's particular style, which came to be known as *euphuism*, and its dramatic practicalities, my objective in this presentation is to explore the complexity of representing the self and subjective experience through language. My reason for choosing the plays of Lyly is related to the strict observance of the rules of rhetoric and *decorum* that characterizes the playwright's works, but that is progressively abandoned in favour of more flexible techniques of dramatic characterization. In this sense, Lyly exemplifies the changes in playwriting and aesthetics that take place during the last years of the sixteenth century. Indeed, together with being a dramatist influenced by tradition, he also proves to be one of the innovators who advances the improvements of late Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.

Lyly's writing style adheres to the fixed rhetorical patterns that were customarily used in humanist education. However, although for the most part he shaped his plays in accordance with these rhetorical models, there was a moment in his career in which he began to examine the real dramatic possibilities of such an artificial style. The rigidity of rhetoric produced a series of characters who complied perfectly with the idea of *decorum*, but who seemed to lack signs of human essence. Thus, despite his interest in rhetoric, Lyly began to search for other mechanisms that could allow the representation of human nature on stage. Just as he had explored the formal prospect of language through his euphuistic style, he similarly began to examine dramatic characterization through language. It is this change of writing style in Lyly and his growing interest in reproducing characters endowed with human traits that are brought into focus in this paper.

This increasing concern for representing human nature is particularly relevant because by the time the comedies of Lyly proved successful at court and in private playhouses such as the Blackfriars —during the 1580s and beginnings of 1590s—, a number of treatises on the human mind such as those of Thomas Hill's *Contemplation of Mankind* (1571), Thomas Rogers's *The Anatomy of the Minde* (1576), or Timothy Bright's *A Treatise of Melancholie* (1586) were already in circulation in learned circles of England. In their works these physicians endeavoured to describe the characteristics of the self from a medical point of view. Human passions thus became a matter of exhaustive study.

This interest in defining the self reached other areas and, just as physicians endeavoured to investigate the features of the self and the human passions, playwrights, taking into account that dramatic characters were indeed the fictional equals of humans in the theatre, began to consider whether human subjective experiences were susceptible to being reproduced within the mimetic restraints imposed by the theatre. In this context, the comedies of Lyly illustrate the gradual advances in characterization. The portraits of characters shaped in line with literary *decorum* are progressively substituted for the depiction of characters who being somehow less constrained by the formalities of rhetoric, are presumed to function as the fictional counterparts of the self in the theatre.

Paula Pando (Seville University)

–Kings may rule Subjects, but Love reigns o're Kings”: Pathos and the Emergence of the Female Hero in the Late Seventeenth Century.

The increasing relevance of female roles after the appearance of the first English actresses during the Restoration has frequently been seen as a corruption from the model of the Shakespearean tragedies and history plays into a domestic drama suited to the tastes of a rising bourgeoisie. Critics like Jean Marsden, Sue Owen or Laura Brown have analyzed female-centred tragedy as inherently apolitical and seeking a sympathetic audience response provoked by the titillating representation of women, who appear as objectified victims of the voyeuristic male gaze. This paper attempts to demonstrate that the rhetoric of pathos in Restoration historical she-tragedy entails a redefinition of heroism based not on military prowess but on the ability to understand and ultimately check one's passions. A case in point is John Banks's *The Unhappy Favourite* (1681), dealing with Essex's rebellion from the point of view of Queen Elizabeth I. The first English play about the Tudor queen is a reflection on the dangers of faction against the backdrop of the Popish Plot and the Exclusion Crisis; in a time of political disorientation under Charles II, strong leadership is measured against the ability to suppress feeling, interpret and disguise passion, and sacrifice private desires for the public good. Departing from the tendency to portray female protagonists as sexually stained, Banks's characterization of the queen concentrates instead on the clash between her political role and her human dimension, presenting a woman as capable of heroic *gravitas* and placing emotion at the core of the dramatic action.