

Pastoral Homoeroticism and Richard Barnfield, the Affectionate Shepherd

By Rictor Norton

Note: The following essay was published in *The Affectionate Shepherd: Celebrating Richard Barnfield*, edited by Kenneth Borris and George Klawitter (Susquehanna University Press/Associated University Presses, 2001, pp. 117–29), which is a collection of articles on the Elizabethan poet Richard Barnfield (1574–c.1626). It used to be argued that Barnfield, as a writer of overtly homoerotic poetry, was merely using a Classical pastoral convention à la Virgil, an interpretation supported by the understanding that he later got married and had a child and retired as a gentleman farmer to the family country house. But in 1992 it was discovered that the will upon which this understanding was based is in fact his father's will rather than the poet's, and it was further discovered that his father disinherited Barnfield in favour of his younger brother and that Barnfield probably died unmarried and somehow disgraced. The argument of many of the essays, with this new knowledge, is that his poetry is rightly judged to be homosexual and not simply a homoerotic convention.

The Foreword by the scholar Claude J. Summers has this to say: “The example of Barnfield may well have the salutary effect of demonstrating concretely that gay theory – or at least the extremely social-constructionist branch that Joseph Cady has designated the school of ‘new inventionism’ – may be far too straitened to accommodate the wide range of homoerotic representation in the Renaissance. In promulgating the idea that there were no homosexuals (by whatever name) in Renaissance England, only individuals who committed sodomitical acts without ever recognizing themselves as sodomites, these gay theorists have trapped Renaissance ‘sodomites’ within a hegemonic ideology that denies them either self-awareness or

agency. One main purpose of this volume is to reassess Barnfield's audacious representation of homoeroticism and thus open up current conceptions of early modern sexuality to reappraisal and redefinition. While the essays included encompass a range of positions, Kenneth Borris presents a Barnfield who is not only self-consciously aware of his homoeroticism but who also deliberately defends same-sex impulses and behaviour."

My own essay is based largely upon my book *The Homosexual Literary Tradition*, which was published in 1974 and which derived from my doctoral dissertation at Florida State University. The Editors appended a note to my essay, as follows: "Published in 1974, Rictor Norton's *The Homosexual Literary Tradition: An Interpretation* is one of the founding texts of gay literary studies as we now know it. The chapter on Barnfield was the first sympathetic study of his homoeroticism aside from the introduction to Montague Summers' 1936 edition of Barnfield's poems, and thus constitutes a turning point in the poet's twentieth-century reception. In consultation with the author, we have edited his argument in accord with more recent developments in Barnfield studies; those interested in this essay as a document in reception should thus also consult the original version."

IF ANY PARTICULAR GENRE can be called a homosexual genre, the evidence would point most convincingly to pastoral – from Theocritus's *Idylls* to the chapter titled "Bee and Orchid" in Marcel Proust's *Cities of the Plain*, from Walt Whitman's *Calamus Leaves* to A. E. Housman's *Shropshire Lad*, from Mark Twain's novel *Huckleberry Finn* to Richard Amory's underground pulp novel *Song of the Loon*, from Gerard Manley Hopkins's ballads on boys bathing to Sanford Friedman's novel

Totempole, from all the Greek poets' praise of boys in the gymnasias to all the flashbacks to adolescent experience in Boy Scout camps in American gay fiction in the 1960s. In its origins in Theocritus, Bion, Moschus, and Virgil, sexual love between males was an integral part of the pastoral tradition. And when that tradition was revived during the English Renaissance, it had not altogether lost its homoerotic ambience.

Although Hobbinol's love for Colin in Edmund Spenser's *The Shepherdes Calender* (1579) is not as overtly sexual as is Corydon's love for Alexis in Virgil's Second Eclogue or the more robust and occasionally obscene relationships in Theocritus's *Idylls*, it is clearly an infatuation, a "frenzy" typical of the lovers of youths criticized by Socrates in Plato's *Symposium* rather than the ideal friendship praised by Diotima. The *Calender* was written while Spenser was still an unmarried young man, long before he became "sage and serious" and had fully absorbed the ethical friendship theory of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Cicero's *De Amicitia*. The masculine love in the *Calender* comes more from the feeling human heart than from the aspiring Neoplatonic spirit. No textual evidence explicitly states that Colin wishes to copulate with Rosalind, but surely we are justified in describing this as heteroerotic love; similarly, although explicitly erotic textual evidence is lacking, we are justified in classifying Hobbinol's love for Colin as homoerotic, insofar as it parallels Colin's love for Rosalind.

This is not an "anachronistic" modern interpretation. The first critic to notice the ambiguity of the relationship between Hobbinol and Colin was a contemporary of Spenser, the scholar, critic and learned pedant whom we know only by his initials

“E.K.” His commentary, published together with the *Calender*, calls attention to the homosexual connotations in the “January” eclogue even while taking pains to discount them:

In thys place seemeth to be some sauour of disorderly loue, which the learned call paederastice: but it is gathered beside his meaning. For who that hath red Plato his dialogue called Alcybiades [i.e., the *Symposium*], Xenophon and Maximum Tyrius of Socrates opinions, may easily perceiue, that such loue is much to be alowed and liked of, specially so meant, as Socrates vsed it: who sayth, that in deed he loued Alcybiades extremely, yet not Alcybiades owne selfe. And so is paederastice much to be praeferrred before gynerastice, that is the loue which enflameth men with lust toward woman kind. But yet let no man thinke, that herein I stand with Lucian or hys deuelish disciple Vnico Aretino, in defence of execrable and horrible sinnes of forbidden and vnlawful fleshlinesse. Whose abominable error is fully confuted of Perionius, and others. (7:18)

I shall not here review E.K.’s learned references, but contemporary Renaissance opinion did not unanimously concur with his opinion that Plato praised purely idealistic love between man and boy. Sir Philip Sidney, for example, in his *Defence of Poetry* (probably written at almost the same time as the *Calender*) says that Plato in his *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, and Plutarch in his *Discourse on Love*, both “authorize abominable filthiness” (107); and Socrates was often called “Alcibiadis Paedagogus” with an intended pun between “pedent,” “Pedagogue,” and “pederast.” E.K. raised an issue which he by no means resolved.

William Webbe attempted to grapple with this “problem” in *A Discourse of English Poetrie* (1586). Webbe paraphrases

E.K.'s argument, and agrees that the pederastic reading "ouer shooteth the Poets meaning" (54), but he strangely vacillates in his own opinion. He backtracks a little, mentions that his circle of literary acquaintances had debated this interpretation of the *Calender* (which apparently had aroused some controversy), and concludes that critics have no right to prescribe a poet's morality. Then he notices that the ambiguity exists also in the "June" eclogue, whereas E.K. had mentioned it only in regard to "January." Finally he speculates upon Spenser's personal behavior, with an insinuation that perhaps he learned sodomy (or its defense) from the Italians (54). The Italians were notorious for condoning sodomy – a suggestion that completely undermines E.K.'s reading.

E.K.'s confutation of "paederastice" did not succeed in nipping the English homoerotic pastoral tradition in the bud. On the contrary, it may well have been more responsible for promoting this classically derived motif than Spenser's *Calender* itself. William Webbe read E.K.'s gloss, practically quoted in verbatim, and himself translated Virgil's First and Second Eclogues. In 1588, two years after Webbe's *Discourse*, Abraham Fraunce offered his own translation of Virgil's Second Eclogue in *The Lawiers Logike*, which was accompanied by a complete rhetorical schema of its contents and structure. This translation was later republished in *The Countess of Pembrokes Ivychurch* (1591), along with ten elegiac eclogues, thus re-establishing the connection between elegiac perspectives and the lover's complaint tradition.

E.K.'s gloss, Webbe's commentary and translation, and Fraunce's works were followed by Richard Barnfield's explicitly

homosexual *The Affectionate Shepherd* (1594). Abraham Fraunce was virtually the mentor of Richard Barnfield, and his pervasive influence upon the life and literary career of Barnfield has been admirably documented by Harry Morris in *Richard Barnfield, Colin's Child* (1963). Perhaps the two “kids and cracknels” given as love-offerings by Barnfield’s Daphnis to Ganymede derive from Spenser’s *Calender*, and the poppies and wheatplumbs may derive from Fraunce’s translation of Virgil’s Second Eclogue. However, recent scholarship has shown that Barnfield worked directly, knowledgeably, and creatively with original Latin and Neo-Latin sources, just as his university-educated background would lead us to expect. His acknowledged publications all have pointed epigraphs from Latin literature, for which George Klawitter identifies the sources in his edition, including Virgil’s Second Eclogue. As Kenneth Borris has informed me, “The Shepherds Content” in *The Affectionate Shepherd* introduces to England the classically derived “*beatus ille*” tradition, which had already been current on the continent but did not become so in England until after 1610, except for Barnfield, and Spenser somewhat later. Longus’s *Daphnis and Chloe* may have partly inspired the amorous rivalries in *The Affectionate Shepherd* between Guendolen, Daphnis, and Ganymede. While newly fashionable English homoerotic pastoral provides a topical basis for Barnfield’s literary inspiration, his poetry also recurs to and freshly redevelops the classical origins of this tradition.

Hence, even while appearing to deny serious and interested representation of homoerotic desire in *The Affectionate Shepherd*, Barnfield’s introductory epistle to *Cynthia* (1595)

nonetheless positions his earlier pastoral poetry within the ancient tradition of male–male love: “Some there were, that did interpret *The affectionate Shepheard*, otherwise then (in truth) I meant, touching the subject thereof, to wit, the love of a Shepheard to a boy; a fault, the which I will not excuse, because I never made. Onely this, I will unshadow my conceit: being nothing else, but an imitation of *Virgill*, in the second Eglogue of *Alexis*” (115–16). Barnfield’s protestations of innocence and mere literary imitation are belied by the continuation of this homoerotic theme in his following sonnet sequence and by the overt and covert eroticism of his former pastoral poetry. The bulk of Barnfield’s work contains the most overt homosexual themes and motifs in English Renaissance literature. Although there is little biographical information about Barnfield’s private life, the intensity, apparent sincerity, and frequency with which he expresses this sexual theme leave little doubt but that he was erotically committed to males, at least at the relatively young age at which he wrote his poetry. Several critics have speculated that he was the lover of both Marlowe and Shakespeare, and even the “rival poet” vying for the affections of the young man in Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*. His apparent connection with Abraham Fraunce, a writer in the Sidney circle, is in this sense curious, for Sidney attacks male–male love as “abominable filthiness” in the *Defence* (107), and although Fraunce himself translated Virgil’s Second Eclogue, and published it, he calls such love “inordinate and unnmatural lust” in *The Countess of Pembrokes Yvychurch* (50).

The Affectionate Shepheard, Containing the Complaint of Daphnis for the love of Ganymede (1594) occurs within the

lacks sensitivity and perception by failing to appreciate the values of Daphnis's love – just as Colin lacks charity by failing to reciprocate Hobbinol's love. The phrasing “If it be sinne / Oh then sinne I” might well play off Sidney, who had already used much the same formula to insist, very differently from sodomitic Barnfield, on the chaste excellence of heteroerotic love in the fourteenth sonnet of *Astrophil and Stella*: (“If that be sinne which in fixt hearts doth breed / A loathing of all loose unchastitie, / Then Love is sinne, and let me sinfull be” (lines 12–14). Barnfield's reference to the sadness of his “soul” might further allude to the medieval tradition of the debate between the Body and soul, the implication here being that, although Daphnis's soul may be sad, his body is quite delighted. However, in Barnfield's day the term “sad” often meant “settled, constant, firm”, and in that case the love of Daphnis for Ganymede is fixed in Daphnis's very soul, so that the issue of putative sinfulness is beyond Daphnis's control anyway, and he proceeds to explain his settled, constant love. Later, in *Cynthia*, Barnfield describes Ganymede's body as “sinne-procuring” (Sonnet 17): this is a standard quality attributed to beautiful maidens in the lover's complaint tradition, and modern readers would err greatly in seeing such phrases as evidence that Daphnis fits the stereotype of the guilt-ridden 1950s homosexual. Ganymede scorns Daphnis's love, not because of any abhorrence of homosexuality, but because unrequited love is the *raison d'être* of the lover's complaint tradition. Few poems would be written if lovers' complaints were required.

The seasonal ritual of love takes place within the pastoral sacred precinct, a pagan-but-holy garden which Barnfield depicts with even more sensuous and precise detail than does Spenser.

Later, in the Second Day, Daphnis tells Ganymede: “clusters of crimson Grapes Ile pull thee downe: / And with Vine-leaves make thee a lovely Crowne” (lines 65–66). We might recall Dionysus with his Ampelos, Gracchus with his bugler, a king with his queen (or a “quean” with his boy) sitting beside the pool of Hylas: “by a silver well (with golden sands) / Ile sit me downe, and wash thine yvory hands” (First Day, lines 119–20). This is the narcotic pool of Narcissus, wherein Ganymede, if he would consent, could be baptized and discover his true identity as the hermaphroditic boy-surrogate of ancient ritual (Norton 1974, 26).

Ganymede is the archetypal boy-surrogate anyway. He is favorably compared to Endymion, Alcinous, Absalom, Adonis, and Narcissus, as well as to his mythical namesake, Cupbearer to Zeus. He possesses all the beauties of the *formosus puer*, lovingly described: long amber locks, white and red complexion, ivory forehead, naked arms, delicate wrists, smooth eye-lids, ivory hands, cute dimples, ruddy cheeks, coral lips, sparkling eyes, and sweet breath. The First Day of *The Affectionate Shepheard* neatly presents the Virgilian–Mantuan–Spenserian love-triangle: Daphnis is spurned by Ganymede, who loves Guendolen. Daphnis professes to love Ganymede for his spiritual qualities, unlike his rival Queen Guendolen: “I love thee for thy gifts, She for hir pleasure; / I for thy Vertue, she for Beauties treasure” (lines 209–10). (Shakespeare seems to have imitated these lines in his Sonnet 20: “But since [Nature] pricked thee out for women’s pleasure, / Mine be thy love and thy love’s use their treasure.”) But the original Ganymede was also Zeus’s bed-warmer, and Daphnis has an Olympian ambition. His passion for the lad

reaches an intense eroticism characteristic of Strato or Anacreon, and patently reaches beyond the conventons of literary rhetoric:

Oh would to God he would but pittie mee,
 That love him more than any mortall wight;
 Then he and I with love would soone agree,
 That now cannot abide his Sutors sight.
 O would to God (so I might have my fee)
 My lips were honey, and thy mouth a Bee.

Then shouldst thou sucke my sweete and my faire flower
 That now is ripe, and full of honey-berries.
 Then would I leade thee to my pleasant Bower
 Fild full of Grapes, of Mulberries, and Cherries;
 Then shouldst thou be my Waspe or else my Bee,
 I would thy hive, and thou my honey bee.

(First Day, lines 91–102)

Barnfield's clever use of "fee" and "debt" (common Elizabethan puns for sexual intercourse) together with "sucke" suggests fellatio. The imagistic complex of bee–flower–honey is the ancient homoerotic metaphor par excellence, found throughout Strato's *Muse of Boyhood*, and given a homoerotic metaphysic in the "Bee and Orchid" chapter of Proust's *Cities of the Plain*. Ganymede's cup of ambrosia contains the honey of boys' loins. It may be relevant that in classical agrarian folklore, bees supposedly procreated with their mouths. In the *Georgics* Virgil notes that "bees . . . indulge not in conjugal embraces, nor idly unnerve their bodies in love, . . . but of themselves [i.e., without the male] gather their children in their mouths from leaves and sweet herbs" (4.197–204). Though bees are thus asexual, apparently procreating without sex, the mouth constitutes their locus of reproductive activity.

The transfer of “honey” from the mouth to the loins, from saliva to semen, is effectively achieved in the second stanza of Barnfield’s poem: Ganymede’s flower is his penis, ripe or erect, and full of spermatic honey-berries. He is to be Daphnis’s wasp as well as bee, and has a potentially penetrative role, as his implied entry into Daphnis as “hive” indicates. Homoerotic imagery may underlie references throughout the poem to “suck my Coyne” (“coin” is a common mercantile metaphor for sperm), “stones” (testicles), “purses” (scrotum), the “Robbin-redbrest” (penis), the “beaver who bites off his testicles,” “Pan’s owne pipe,” and coy descriptions of Cupid’s arrow (“and under Death the amorous shaft did shiver”) and Death’s dart (“Aye mee! Thy Dart is blunt, it will not enter!”).

The Second Day of *The Affectionate Shepheard* is not so well constructed or unified as the first; the poetry is rather marred by notes of maudlin self-pity (“But if I can no grace nor mercie finde, / Ile goe to *Caucasus* to ease my smart, / And let a Vulture gnaw upon my hart” (lines 28–301) and sexual egotism (“Why doo thy Corall lips disdaine to kisse, / And sucke that Sweete, which manie have desired?” (lines 103–4). Resolving thwarted desire into typical Socratic education for his beloved, Daphnis advises Ganymede to cut his fair love-locks or suffer the fate of Absalom, to respect age, to be humble, to trust more to virtue than to beauty, to worship God, to be kind, to keep his word, to remember death, to marry and beget children (as Shakespeare admonishes the young man in his *Sonnets*), to obtain a faithful friend, to avoid mean company, and in general to become a Renaissance gentleman. Such moral counsel from an elder male lover to his male beloved is basic to the Greek pederastic–

pedagogic tradition. Readers who call Daphnis a “pederast” because he loves the young Ganymede would also, by the same criterion, have to characterize Guendolen, who also loves Ganymede, as a pedophile. We have to be careful about reading Renaissance literature through the distorting lens of mid-twentieth-century anti-homosexual prejudice, which has itself become superseded by significant reductions in the age of consent for homosexual sex in various Western countries.

Barnfield’s personal attitudes are perhaps better revealed by his sonnets in *Cynthia, With Certain Sonnets*, and the *Legend of Cassandra* (1595). For Barnfield, moralistic polemic is easily overcome by emotional sensibilities; his standards would seem to arise from the feeling heart, as illustrated in Sonnet 3:

The Stoicks thinke, (and they come neere the truth,)
 That virtue is the chieftest good of all,
 The Academics on *Idea* call.
 The Epicures in pleasure spend their youth.
 The Perrepatetickes iudge felicitie,
 To be the chieftest good above all other,
 One man, thinks this: and that conceaves another:
 So that in one thing very few agree.
 Let Stoicks have their Vertue if they will,
 And all the rest their chiefe-supposed good,
 Let cruel Martialists delight in blood,
 And Mysers ioy their bags with gold to fill:
 My chieftest good, my chief felicity,
 Is to be gazing on my loves faire eie.

Barnfield also delves more deeply into the relationship of Eros with Thanatos, into the commingling of the honey of love

with the blood of death. He relates how Ganymede's mythical namesake was created out of a mixture of pure white snow and a stream of blood from chaste Diana's foot, pricked by a thorn while on the hunt. He discusses deep wounds inflicted by Achilles, that could be healed only by the reapplication of the same sword, and in accordance with the ancient principle that like heals like, he implores Ganymede to "Kill me with kisses, if thou wilt destroy me" (Sonnet 5). He also has a curiously morbid religious dream resembling the eroticism of mystic ecstasy, in which he envisions himself in a way corresponding to the Christ of medieval iconography:

One night I dream'd (alas twas but a Dreame)
 That I did feele the sweetnes of the same [i.e.,
 Ganymede's lips],
 Where-with inspir'd, I young again became,
 And from my heart a spring of blood did streame,
 But when I wak'd, I found it nothing so,
 Save that my limbs (me thought) did waxes more strong
 And I more Iusty far, and far more yong.

(Sonnet 6)

Let psychoanalytical critics interpret this as they will, it is an image of a homoerotically inspired wet dream.

In Barnfield's later volume, *The Ecomion of Lady Pecunia* (1598), his "Complaint of Poetrie, for the Death of Liberalitie" might possibly portray the poet's male beloved as a woman so that he can praise him without causing too many raised eyebrows. A common difficulty in recognizing homosexual literature is the necessity an author often feels to disguise his male lover as his mistress. "Poetrie" may thus represent Barnfield, and the female allegorical figure "Bountie" (also portrayed as the

woman “Liberalitie”) would represent the poem’s dedicatee Edward Leigh, in whose mind Bounty must live if nowhere else, according to the poet’s dedication. The gender identifications of the poem are significantly somewhat fluid, as when Barnfield calls Bountie a “Patron” as well as a “Nurse.” Not only comparing herself to Venus weeping for Adonis, the supposedly female Poetry likens her situation to that of a husband deprived of a wife, and a man who has lost his faithful friend (lines 67–70). Of particular interest is Poetry’s catalogue of male couples, some of whom were famous lovers:

If *Pythias* death, of *Damon* were bewailed;
 Or *Pillades* did rue, *Orestes* ende:
 If *Hercules*, for *Hylas* losse were quailed;
 Or *Theseus*, for *Pyrrithous* Teares did spend:
 Then doe I mourne for *Bounty*, being dead:
 Who living, was my hand, my hart, my head.
(lines 187–92)

Though partly an exercise in patronage, the poem turned out to provide an elegy on the actual death of a male friend – Leigh died before the appearance of the second edition (1605).

Although explicitly proclaiming much admiration for Spenser, Barnfield’s poetry is obviously very different, partly on account of his extensive sensuality and eroticism, and that may reflect some debt to Marlowe, though no doubt many other writers, such as Theocritus (at least in translation), Horace, and Ovid, would also have been influential. The sensuous imagery in Barnfield’s sonnets is probably drawn from Marlowe’s portrait of Leander, e.g. “His love-enticing delicate soft limbs”:

Sometimes I wish that I his pillow were,
 So might I steale a kisse, and yet not seene,
 So might I gaze upon his sleeping eine,
 Although I did it with a panting feare.

(Sonnet 6)

Certain lines addressed by Barnfield's Daphnis to Ganymede (such as "If thou wilt come and dwell with me at home"; "All these, and more, Ile give thee for thy love"; "If thou wilt love me, thou shalt be my Boy"; and "If thou wilt be my Boy, or else my Bride" (First Day, lines 163, 193; Second Day, lines 25, 78) seem to echo Marlowe's lyric poem "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and its famous opening invitation to love:

Come live with mee, and be my love,
 And we will all the pleasures prove,
 That Vallies, groves, hills, and fields,
 Woods, or steepie mountain yeeldes.

And wee will sit upon the Rocks,
 Seeing the Sheepheards feede theyr flocks,
 By shallow Rivers, to whose falls,
 Melodious byrds sing Madrigalls.

And I will make thee beds of Roses,
 And a thousand fragrant posies,
 A cap of flowers, and a kirtle,
 Imbroydred all with leaves of Mirtle.

(lines 1–12; 2: 537)

Most critics read "to his love" in the sense "to his mistress," but there is no conclusive evidence that the poet's beloved is female. The "kirtle" of course is not a modern "girdle" but a wrap-around sort of scarf worn by men as well as women, usually associated with rustic culture: indeed Barnfield's Daphnis offers Ganymede "a silken Girdle" (First Day, line 92). Although the persona of Sir

Walter Raleigh's answering poem "Nymph's Reply" is female, that need not define what Marlowe had in mind, and in any case Raleigh thus transgenders himself in creating this feminine persona. Raleigh and Marlowe were members of the all-male secret society the School of Night, and their two poems may be an insider joke.

Again, this is not an anachronistic reading, for Marlowe's contemporaries were themselves aware of a homoerotic context for this Marlovian lyric. In the anonymous play *Choice, Chance and Change: Or, Conceits in their Colours* (1606), the male Arnofilo says to the male Tidero, "thou knowest I haue no store of Heires [heirs], and therefore I pray thee, bee [*sic*] let vs be merry, and let vs liue together," and Tidero recognizes the source or the sentiment: "Why how now? Doe you take me for a woman, that you come vpon mee with a ballad, of Come liue with me and be my Loue?" (3). In *The Tragedy of Dido, Queen of Carthage* (1594), Marlowe himself has Zeus echo the famous line when he offers Ganymede jewels "if thou wilt be my love" (1.1.49, 1:8).

Francis Meres in *Palladis Tamia: Wit's Treasury* (1598) considered Barnfield among "the best for pastorall" in England, and compared him, not unfavorably, to Virgil, Spenser, and Sidney (fol. 284^a). such a reputation in Barnfield's own lifetime was in many ways justified, for his lyrics have an innocence and exuberance not unlike Theocritus: they are certainly adroit, with a pleasant singing voice and a fine eye for sensuous detail, and above all a charming sincerity and directness. Barnfield's short-lived fame was strictly pastoral, a genre for which we no longer have much taste. He may not be a "major" poet, but neither does he deserve the opprobrious tone with which some may call him

“minor.” One of Barnfield’s songs was fine enough to be attributed to Shakespeare for almost three hundred years:

As it fell upon a Day
 In the merrie Month of May,
 Sitting in a pleasant shade,
 Which a grove of Myrtles made,
 Beastes did leape, and Birds did sing,
 Trees did grow, and Plants did spring:
 Everything did banish mone,
 Save the Nightingale alone.

(“Ode,” lines 1–8)

This sad tale of Philomela and the nightingale, which appeared under Shakespeare’s name in the collection *The Passionate Pilgrime* (1599), concludes with a series of “certaine signes, to knowe / Faithfull friend, from flatt’ring foe” (lines 55–56), such as “Everie one that flatters thee, / Is no friend in miseries: / Words are easie, like the winde; / Faithfull friends are hard to finde” (lines 29–32). The poem is one of the better contributions to the Renaissance friendship tradition, and its author probably had sexual love between males in mind. This illustrates one of the ironies of critical attempts to classify literature according to the artificial criterion of the presence or absence of overt physiological sexuality. When new evidence emerged in the nineteenth century demonstrating that the poem was by Barnfield rather than Shakespeare, scholars unfairly lowered their critical estimation of it; but this confusion of authorship testifies rather to Barnfield’s real poetic talent which we find diversely reflected throughout his works.

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