



John Lyly and early modern authorship (Revels Plays Companion Library MUP)

Andy Kesson

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During Shakespeare's lifetime, John Lyly was repeatedly described as the central figure in contemporary English literature. This book takes that claim seriously, asking how and why Lyly was considered the most important writer of his time. It demonstrates his decisive role in creating a market for cheap, short forms of literature, reinventing the prose sentence and thereby becoming a litmus test for literary excellence.

The book traces Lyly's work in prose fiction and the theatre, demonstrating previously unrecognised connections between these two forms of entertainment. Having established Lyly's enormous impact on his contemporaries, the final chapter then examines how his importance to early modern authorship came to be forgotten in the late seventeenth century and thereafter.

This book will serve as an introduction to Lyly and early modern literature for students, but its argument for the central importance of Lyly himself, 1580s literary culture and the relationship between the book market and the theatre makes it a significant contribution to current scholarly debate. Its investigation of the relationship between performance and print means that it will be of interest to those who care about, watch or work in early modern performance.

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