

“Nature, Reason, Use”: Cultivation and Class in *Euphues* and *The Winter’s Tale*

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My paper will explore early modern debates about class, environment, and virtue, looking chiefly at two texts: John Lyly’s *Euphues* (1578) and Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale* (c. 1610). The paper will begin with a discussion of Lyly, whose *Euphues* is not only a highly stylized rhetorical performance, but also, I suggest, an investigation of the relationship between nature and nurture, virtuous potential and its cultivation. Arguing that rhetorical mastery was closely linked to anxieties about social advancement, I suggest that Lyly’s treatise expresses a productive uncertainty about the true basis of virtue and the limitations of high birth; Lyly himself was, after all, a socially ambitious courtier from a non-aristocratic background. The tension between the rhetorical sophistication of euphuism, a style that quickly became associated with elite circles, and *Euphues*’ own assertion that virtue is the product of “nature, reason, [and] use,” offers a highly suggestive picture of early modern ambivalence about the power of class to determine character. The second part of the paper will focus on *The Winter’s Tale*, a play that is deeply engaged in exploring the three principles of virtue outlined by *Euphues*. As a play that depicts the effects of pastoral “education” upon Perdita, a woman of high birth, *The Winter’s Tale* not only explores the power of rhetoric in reinforcing distinctions of gender and class, but also investigates the ways in which nature, “art,” and education can shape character and regulate behavior.