

## Lodge, Thomas (1558–1625)

### Son of the Former Lord of the Manor of Rolleston

Thomas Lodge, best known for his euphuistic prose romance *Rosalind*, was born in 1558 in London into a family of London mayors. His father, Sir Thomas Lodge, would serve as lord mayor of London for the 1562–63 term, and his mother, Lady Anne Lodge, was the stepdaughter of William Laxton, who had been lord mayor of London from 1544 to 1545. This eminent social status was admittedly weakened by Sir Thomas Lodge's bankruptcy following his mayoralty in 1564, and this may have contributed to young Thomas Lodge's later belief that "virtue is not measured by birth but by action," as he states at the conclusion of *Rosalind* (139). This may be his central theme. Despite his father's financial straits, Lodge's early education was rich in classics and brought him into contact with major literary figures of the time. As a boy, Lodge was a page in the home of Henry Stanley, earl of Derby, where he undoubtedly received an introduction to the classics and to the Roman Catholicism he later embraced. In 1571 he began his formal education at the Merchant Taylor's school, where Thomas Kyd\* was also enrolled and where Edmund Spenser\* had attended only a few years prior. After two years at Merchant Taylor's, Lodge left for Trinity College, Oxford, where he studied under Edward Hoby (son of Thomas Hoby\*) and must have known John Lyly,\* whose prose style known as euphuism he later emulated.

After earning a bachelor of arts degree in 1577, Lodge returned to London and was admitted to Lincoln's Inn as a law student. He apparently gave up the study of law before earning a degree. However, he did make important literary connections there. Lodge first gained literary notice in 1580 for his "Defence of Plays" (sometimes called "Honest Excuses"), which was refused for publication but circulated privately by Lodge himself. He wrote this defense of the theater in answer to the Puritan sentiments of Stephen Gosson, who had published an attack on drama and music entitled 'The School of Abuse,' also, apparently, answered by Philip Sidney.\* Gosson responded to Lodge with a further treatise entitled 'Plays Confuted in Five Actions,' in which he personally slanders Lodge. Lodge closed the public rivalry with his first published work, entitled 'An Alarum for Usurers,' in which he departs from the personal attacks in which he

and Gosson had both indulged. During these early years in London, Lodge developed a friendship with Robert Greene,\* with whom he later collaborated in writing the play *A Looking Glass for London*, in 1587. Additionally, he was at least acquainted with Barnabe Rich,\* whose romance entitled *The Stronge and Wonderful Adventures of Don Simonides* he revised while imprisoned for heresy (for his Catholic leanings) in 1581. To Rich's romance Lodge prefixed dolorous verse bemoaning his muse's desertion of him: 'long distresse hath laied [my] Muse to rest.' In addition to suffering accusations of heresy, by 1584, Lodge was in financial difficulties. Perhaps to alleviate these stresses, he entered the army for a brief stint in 1586 and went on a sea voyage with Captain Clarke to the Canaries and the Azores in 1586, which continued into 1587. In apparent repossession of his errant muse, he published two plays, a major collection of poetry, the euphuistic pastoral romance *Rosalynd*, and over ten other literary works in the succeeding decade (1587–97). At the end of this prodigious period, Lodge renounced his literary career and entered the University of Avignon to study medicine.

In his later life, Lodge practiced medicine and translated works by Luis of Granada (a Catholic writer), Josephus, and Seneca. Although he was given license to practice medicine by Oxford in 1602, he was denied license in London in 1604, probably on the basis of his Catholicism. It is likely that the authorities could not condone the combination of the Catholic sentiments in Lodge's 1596 pamphlet *Prosopopeia*, his translation of Granada, and the known Catholic connections of his recent bride, Joan Aldred. He therefore returned to Belgium, where he worked as a physician until he was finally granted license to practice in London in 1610, where he lived and worked until he died of plague in 1625. In addition to his translations, Lodge published two medical works, *A Treatise on the Plague* in 1603 and a collection of medical cures entitled *The Poore Mans Talentt* in 1621.

### **Critical reception**

In the words of one of Lodge's biographers, N. B. Paradise, 'Lodge seems to have been always on the doorstep of Parnassus, but never to have quite succeeded in entering the company of the elect' (180). His contemporary Francis Meres mentions Lodge among those who were 'best for comedy.' Some critics argue that Greene's praise of the 'young Juvenal, that biting

satirist' in his *A Groatsworth of Wit* refers to Lodge. Thomas Nashe\* may have described Lodge in his portrait of the 'Prodigall Young Master' in *Pierce Penilesse*. Lodge may also have provided the basis for Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* in his *Glaucus and Scilla*. Although the only complete works of Lodge were not published until 1893, Lodge has received significant critical attention in the twentieth century. In addition to the several biographical works produced in the 1930s, bibliographies are complete through 1990. Among recent scholars to comment on Lodge are Arthur Kinney, who analyzes Lodge's contribution to a literature of humanism in the 1590s, and the new historicist Richard Helgerson, who examines Lodge's struggle to define a stable literary identity amid ethical and artistic conflicts. Most important to Lodge, I argue, was that he fulfill his own definition of success as expressed at the conclusion of *Rosalynd* that 'virtue is not measured by birth but by action... [and] concord is the sweetest conclusion' (139). In this light I would say that Lodge succeeded in reaching his own Arden and did not find it apt to pursue Parnassus.