

PIREDDA, PATRIZIA; ROICK, MATTHIAS (ED.). ***VERA AMICITIA – CLASSICAL NOTIONS OF FRIENDSHIP IN RENAISSANCE THOUGHT AND CULTURE***. OXFORD; NEW YORK: PETER LANG, 2021.

by *Gniewomir Hawrasz**

Friendship – arguably one of the most humane sentiments, has been penetrating different spheres of man’s activity for centuries. From Plato to the Stoics, Aquinas to Ficino, and Erasmus to Montaigne, friendship was always at the heart of intellectual debates. It is precisely due to its unfading profundity that friendship still draws the attention of academics: such was the case of the international conference “Virtue and Sociability. Early Modern Notions of Friendship in Context” that took place at the Lichtenberg Kolleg, the Göttingen Institute for Advanced Study, on 28-29 February 2020. The fruit of this undertaking is the volume *Vera Amicitia – Classical Notions of Friendship in Renaissance Thought and Culture*, edited by Patrizia Piredda and Matthias Roick, in which one finds eight elegantly conducted discussions pivoted on the notions of true friendship and virtue. The dominant themes are expounded by scholars representing as remote fields as ancient history, philosophy, intellectual history, art history, and literary studies. As a result, collectively seen, the book offers a plethora of methodological approaches to the early modern theory and practice of friendship and, as such, welcomes readers interested in deepening their understanding of the cultural and intellectual richness of the époque.

The volume begins with a highly informative introduction of one of the editors – Patrizia Piredda. In her initiatory chapter, Piredda deals with a threefold task of delivering a concise yet succinct outline of the socio-cultural phenomena informing early modern attitudes towards friendship; addressing commonplace notions recurring copiously in early-modern discussions on friendship – i.e. flattery, truth (of speech), self-knowledge; and offering a general overview of each of eight essays and pointing at the possible common denominators between them. This last point deserves special attention as Piredda, very convincingly, brings up Wittgenstein’s ‘language game’ and ‘family resemblance’ concepts as

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interpretative keys that prove vastly convenient in grasping the varying applicability of friendship as showcased in this eclectic collection. Among many meeting points of this volume identified by Piredda, one warrants particular praise - the conscious interplay of the private and public sociability constructing rich liaisons between intellectual culture, the normativity of social conventions, and the praxis of early modern politics.

The corpus begins with Sara Diaco's essay "Authentic and Counterfeit Friendship: A Reading of Montaigne through Ancient Reflections on Frankness and Flattery" exploring the Graeco-Roman philosophical heritage addressing the interconnectedness of friendship and the frankness of speech. Resulting from her hermeneutic investigation into Plato, Cicero, and the Epicureans, Diaco offers a fresh interpretation of Montaigne's perceptions of friendship evidenced in the *Essays*. The principal argument is that only genuine friendship resting in *parrhēsia* – treated here as frankness of speech – may guarantee conceiving an unfaltering bond between friends as it enables them to seek truth and leads to self-discovery of each party involved. Bearing in mind this interpretational keynote, one could reconcile the two seemingly contrasting views of friendship present in Montaigne – the one based on harmonizing union of like-spirited individuals and another resting in learned disagreement and fair critique aimed at friend's moral improvement. Consequently, the core values making up Montaigne's friendship are unity, harmony, truth, and frankness. Leaving aside some reservations stemming from the deliberate inclusion of the Epicurean philosophical thought on Diaco's side (the author acknowledges that Montaigne must not have known them), one should appreciate the validity of the main argument and its relevance for debates on classical inspirations in Montaigne.

In the following paper titled "How to Tell a Flatterer from a Friend - The Solitude of the Tyrant in Early Modern Treatises" Cecilia Asso discusses 'the relationship between friendship and political freedom' focusing on early modern thinkers (Erasmus, Juan de Marina, Feliciano Silvestri) addressing problems of flattery, the frankness of speech, and education of the prince. Asso identifies an essential link between true friendship and a form of constitution governing society: the argument here is that in autocratic regimes, the figure of a flatterer takes primacy over a real friend, as the role of the latter diminishes, almost retreating to the sphere of private relations. At the same time, Asso points to the Erasmian ideal of friendship as a bond attainable between individuals participating in the egalitarian society that was to realize the ideal of *Respublica Christiana*. In the final part of the paper, Asso analyses the figure of the flatterer to the monarch paying particular attention to the destructive effects of the ill-judged advisors on the common welfare.

In the third paper of the volume, Patrizia Piredda's essay "Friendship and Virtues in the Good Society Thomas More's Utopia" sheds new light on More's *opus magnum*, delivering a nuanced philological and philosophical interpretation of the networks between virtue, sociability, and friendship existing in

the ideal state. Piredda's paper begins by unearthing and analysing the amic-root words present in the Latin text of *Utopia*. Following this, Piredda utilizes her findings by framing a convincing narration of divergent concepts of private and public friendships in Moore's work. The punctilious philological exposition, followed by a concise description of the classical considerations of friendship and virtue, allows a further investigation into the intended philosophical meanings behind More's usage of amic-root words. As evidenced in Piredda's concluding notes, this reading of *Utopia* allows formulating fresh insights on the modes of appropriation of the notion of virtuous friendship viewed as a cornerstone of the utopian society.

In the essay titled "The Thousand Faces of Friendship - An Iconological Survey of the Emblem Books of the Herzog August Library" Valeria Butera delivers a rich survey of emblem books on friendship held in the Herzog August Library in Wolfenbüttel. The only art-historical piece of the volume, abundant in signposting and illustrations, the chapter on Valeria Butera allows enough breathing spaces between the more textually-oriented papers. But, by all means, there is more to that piece that deserves appreciation as its contents do not limit the discussion on the pictorial qualities of the sources: quite contrary, Butera demonstrates a sound recognition of philosophical themes encoded in adages assisting the pictures. Resulting from the merger of iconographical, textual, and philosophical inquiries, Butera ascertains generic types of friendship representations: simultaneously providing a pervasive discussion on the provenance of pictorial tropes filling studied emblem books. The particular strength of Butera's research lies in her well-thought choice of exempla. One must consider, for instance, the portrayal of interpretative tensions between positive and negative usages of self-same tropes (the case of handshake symbolism) as truly well-executed. This study not only is a good read, filled with eye-catching and highly emotive imageries, but it also serves as a reminder of the complexity of cultural forms of expression concerning the trope of true friendship existing in early modernity.

In the paper titled "Private or Political Friendships? Machiavelli's Sociability after 1512 and His Strategies of Retreat and Rehabilitation" Stefano Saracino deals with the role of private and public friendships in Machiavelli. This piece precisely focuses on the period after 1512: that is, the years when Machiavelli was temporarily banished from the city, losing the trust and patronage of the Medici. The notion of friendship is investigated here in the context of sociability as Saracino identifies in Machiavelli's correspondences instances of both private and public friendships. The latter aims at forging a political alliance and often shifts between patronage and clientelism; the former showcases the importance of friendship of leisure and pleasure, often combined with genuine sentiment providing reassurance in times of hardships. Noteworthy, Saracino gives some attention to the figure of La Riccia – the Florentine courtesan, who is argued to be a true friend of Machiavelli. A motif of the female-male friendship sees the light, enriching our understanding of the fiercely disputed position of women in early

modern society. One last contribution that stands out is an all-prevalent element of sexuality present in the letters between Machiavelli and his younger patrician friends from the circle of the Orti Oricellari. These relations, Saraciano rightly observes, can be assessed from varying angles informing sociability, political life, and true friendship, at least.

In the sixth piece of the volume, “Virtue and Discord - Notions of Friendship in Commentaries on Cicero’s *De amicitia* in Sixteenth-Century Germany”, Matthias Roick dwells on the German sixteenth-century commentaries on Cicero *De Amicitia*. The punctilious analysis of chosen studies leads Roick towards concluding that Cicero’s text found applicability in two main areas: as a source of theoretical definitions and as a provider of practical precepts. However, the principal interest of Roick’s study lies in unveiling a plethora of trajectories linking friendship with virtue showcased in the selected corpus. Resulting from his philological and philosophical inquiry, Roick argues, the German humanist commentaries employ *De Amicitia*’s text as a tool of rhetorical training and inspiration for learned discussions on friendship. The interpretational routes taken in the paper are, indeed, convincing and prove even more pervasive as the author discusses two lesser-known accolades of Ramism delivering student compendia on friendship - Marcus Bäumlér and Johann Thomas Freig. The readers of the history of confessional strife may be interested in parts of Roick’s argument showcasing the relation between humanist postulates of friendship transgressing religious division.

In the penultimate essay “Ich werde aber in meiner gefreundter dienst verreisen - Sociability and Friendship in the Letters of the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft (1617–1650) and Beyond” Gabrielle Ball focuses on the notion of friendship in the letters of the members of the Fruchtbringende Gesellschaft – a German scholarly circle associating aristocratic intelligentsia and prominent courtier-literati of the seventeenth century Germany. The authorial attention focuses on unveiling an intended social impact that the members could have had in mind while establishing their learned grouping. What stems from the lines of Ball’s argument is that members of the society hoped to promote a particular type of friendship resting on candour, honesty, mutual help, and respect of its members. The author quite rightly points to the context of the historical turmoil of the Thirty Years War during which the epistles were produced. However, the argument falls short as Ball shifts from the inquiry of lexical wordings of friendship in German to the discussion concerning the translation of Seneca’s treatise on friendship produced under the auspices of the learned grouping. When discussing practical aspects of sociability evidenced in the letters of the members of society, Ball argues for the ‘inherently anti-hierarchical’ character of the society. Although her detailed analysis of the source material may be sufficient for supporting this view, one could find it confusing that the author decides to use ‘a more formal letter’ in another case. Nevertheless, this study undeniably enriches our knowledge of early modern practices of

friendship among the literati - and, as such, makes a significant contribution to studying the phenomenon of promoting the attainment of true friendship rooted in virtue.

The volume ends with the chapter of Clemens Cornelius Brinkmann “The Notion of Friendship in Johannes Caselius’s Occasional Poetry”. The title of this piece hints at the main subject of Brinkmann’s research, namely the phenomenon of occasional poetry in sixteenth and seventeenth-century Germany. After a brief introduction discussing the social context of the studied genre, Brinkmann focuses on expounding the exempla of occasional poetry coming from under the hand of a famous humanist - Johannes Caselius. The detailed analysis of usages of the theme of friendship accounts for the richness of semantic associations of the studied phenomenon. Furthermore, the praxis of friendship in Caselius’s life is evidenced, Brinkmann shows us, by the close relationship between the poet and his friend Johannes Schosser. Friendship was not reduced in their case to a mere source of inspiration in occasional poetry but also inspired a genuine urge for articulating sentiments between like-minded creators. The overall picture emerging from Brinkmann’s analysis enables concluding that occasional poetry is not only dictated by social convention but also takes its origin from sincere sentiment towards the addressee.

In conclusion, *Vera Amicitia – Classical Notions of Friendship in Renaissance Thought and Culture* is an eclectic yet stimulating volume addressing justified questions on the interconnectedness between virtue and friendship. One could argue that some arguments present in this collection deserve further investigation. Such is the case, for instance, of the relation between confessional strife and virtuous friendship: one could argue that reoccurring in several essays, this subject does not receive enough attention. At the same time, however, the volume may serve as a source of inspiration for scholars interested in entangling the problem of friendship in the context of religious disunity. In its totality, the book successfully delivers a multi-faced and novel take on the theory and practice of private and public friendships in early modern Europe. In effect, the volume makes a valid contribution to ongoing debates and has the potency to kindle new ones.

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