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McCue Gill, Amyrose and Sarah Rolfe Prodan, eds. Friendship and Sociability in Premodern Europe: Contexts, Concepts, and Expressions

Emily O'Brien

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of the uniqueness of Bolognese culture, and especially of Bolognese women, who, with every such additional scholarly publication, are emerging ever more clearly as a special group of educated and active contributors to the fields of art, music, literature, politics and religion.

ELIZABETH LOUISE BERNHARDT

University of California, Rome Study Center

McCue Gill, Amyrose and Sarah Rolfe Prodan, eds.

Friendship and Sociability in Premodern Europe: Contexts, Concepts, and Expressions.

Essays and Studies 33. Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2014. Pp. 318 + 4 ill. ISBN 978-907727-2170-4 (paperback) \$39.95.

Friendship is a relatively new and fast-growing field of study in scholarship on early modern Europe. It is also, as this edited volume makes abundantly clear, a very important one. *Friendship and Sociability in Premodern Europe: Contexts, Concepts, and Expressions* grew out of the similarly entitled conference “Friendship in Premodern Europe (1300–1700),” which took place in October 2011 at Victoria University’s Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies at the University of Toronto. The volume offers a useful cross-section of contemporary friendship studies: the ten essays collected here are the work of an international group of scholars, from young to established, and trained in a variety of disciplines. The volume explores the multiform ways that friendship functioned as a tool, concept, and ideal—shaping group relations in the premodern period. In so doing, it positions itself at the leading edge of scholarship on amity and makes an impressive and important contribution to this exciting new field.

Friendship and Sociability begins with a well-crafted overview of the volume, including a rationale for its structure, a summary of the ten individual contributions, and an assessment of their collective position in contemporary scholarship. The ten essays are divided into three sections. In the first, on the theme of individual friendship, Adriana Benzaquén analyzes John Locke’s complex and evolving relationship with politician Edward Clarke; Malina Stefanovska explores the staging of friendship in the memoir of a French nobleman warrior, Louis de Pontis; and Francesco Ciabattini studies Dante’s contrasting friendships with poet Guido Cavalcanti and his own beloved Beatrice.

(The introduction includes what might be considered a fourth essay in this section: a short study on the spiritual friendship of Michelangelo Buonarroti and Vittoria Colonna, by editor Sarah Rolfe Prodan.) The second section is comprised of four essays on the topic of friendship networks. Steven Baker studies Petrarch's humanistic strategies for repairing a political friendship, while Sally Hickson considers how, at the court of Mantua, friendships grew out of the common suffering of syphilis. Brian Sandberg surveys the friendships binding warrior nobles in France during the Wars of Religion; and Jean Bernier illuminates how Pierre Bayle promoted ideals of scholarly friendship in the Republic of Letters. The final three essays address friendship in the context of political and international relations. Paolo Broggio illuminates hierarchical patterns of friendship that emerged in Counter-Reformation culture, while Hyun-Ah Kim documents how interfaith friendship served as a crucial tool for Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci. In the final essay, David Harris Sacks explores how commerce was viewed in the early modern world as a means of forging friendship. Among these, the contributions by Baker, Benzaquén, Bernier, Kim, and Stefanovska stand out as particularly strong.

Several important points emerge from what the editors quite rightly call the volume's "panoramic view" of premodern friendship. The first is the fluidity and elasticity of amity itself. Together, these essays uncover how ideas of friendship evolved throughout the period in conscious and creative conversation with ancient and early Christian concepts, and how they were adapted to a wide range of contexts. That sense of adaptability helps to explain the second major point to emerge from these essays: that as a conceptual category, friendship is essential for understanding the society and culture of premodern Europe. Readers of this volume should come away convinced of how experiences and ideas of amity informed and shaped political, military, and economic relations; fostered intellectual culture and forged interfaith connections; reinforced and, at the same time, reconfigured traditional social hierarchies; and encouraged unity, community, and peace on both local and global levels.

These essays do more, however, than simply illuminate the defining influence of friendship in this four-hundred-year period: they also bring into sharper focus the very dynamics of amity. Premodern friendships, we learn, were routinely steered by political interests and shaped by broader social networks. They often straddled public and private realms, and they merged the utilitarian with the sentimental. And while they played out on an earthly plane, they were

sometimes directed simultaneously toward higher, spiritual goals. In discerning and illustrating these patterns of amity, the volume does just what the editors claim: it successfully plots the coordinates of friendship's "complex geometry" in premodern Europe (17). At times, readers may feel the collection comes up short in achieving all of its goals: a few individual contributions seem overly ambitious for the allotted space, while in others the themes of friendship and sociability fade in and out of view. Even so, the quality of scholarship remains consistently high in all the essays and the volume's cohesiveness strong. The latter is a particularly remarkable achievement given how widely this collection of essays ranges chronologically and geographically, and given how many dimensions of friendship it explores.

The editors are right to identify a broad audience for their volume. They have helpfully equipped it for an audience of novices by including a brief introductory bibliography of the field. As they suggest, both graduate and senior-level undergraduates could make excellent use of the collection as a reader on premodern European history. Professional scholars new to friendship studies will, in turn, find that it provides a useful orientation. Admittedly, not all of the essays in the volume are pitched toward such a broad audience. A few require considerable fluency in particular texts, ideas, or historical moments. But most are remarkably accessible to non-experts and experts alike and, taken together, they serve as a valuable introduction to this important and growing area of study. They do so by showcasing a range of methodologies employed in the field, from rigorous philological work to more theoretical approaches of sociology and anthropology; and by illustrating the wide variety of sources used by scholars of amity, including memoirs, poetry, treatises, letters, and paintings. By mining the details of these sources carefully and creatively, these essays consistently bring to life the people who imagined, idealized, and experienced friendship in the premodern world—demonstrating to great effect why this field is as compelling to study as it is important.

EMILY O'BRIEN
Simon Fraser University