

“To seek new friends and stranger companies”:
The Expansion of Friendship in Early Modern England

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation argues that an acknowledgment of disparity was central to the conception of early modern friendship and that the period's emphasis on such disparity authorized the creation of larger social groups and networks. Classical theory's emphasis on likeness and parity in friendship offered a crucial model and rhetoric for conceiving ideal social relations. Renaissance writers, however, highlighted the inescapability of difference in an emerging set of social, political, and economic possibilities. Rather than read this difference as a loss of friendly idealism, they articulated the ways in which such difference might sustain existing likeness-based bonds as well as engender a larger number of social relations. A disparity between friends, Shakespeare and his contemporaries believed, would generate an expansive cultivation—rather than a mere reflection—of virtue; the promise of such virtuous expansion in turn encouraged friends to seek a greater number and range of social connections. The celebration of such pluralist configurations in Renaissance literature challenges the conception of social life as a search for exclusive union with a single individual and allows us to recognize the ways in which disparate qualities and experiences actually facilitated the creation of social connections over the course of the early modern period.

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Introduction

In Sir Thomas Elyot's telling of the "wonderfull history of Titus and Gisippus"—"whereby is fully declared the figure of perfect amitie"—the two "yonge gentilmen" turned friends first come together on account of their likeness. While studying together in Athens, the two are found to be so "equal" in "yeres, but also in stature, proporcion of body, fauour, and colour of visage" that "they semed to be one in fourme and personage." It is by virtue of this "same nature" that there "wrought in their hartes suche a mutuall affection, that their willes and appetites daily more and more so confederated them selves." In fact, the two prove so close that when Gisippus's family and friends urge him to marry, he resists on the grounds that "his hart [was] all redy wedded to his frende Titus," and that "marriage shulde be the occasion to seuer hym" from that relationship. It is only at Titus's behest that Gisippus agrees to pursue a bride and determines to marry Sophronia, a "gentilwoman" of "fourme and condicion according to his expectation and appetite."¹ But in a testament to the friends' likeness and mutuality, Titus also falls in love with Sophronia, and Gisippus in response gives his bride over to his friend, proclaiming himself to be "more estemyng [of] true frendship than the loue of a woman."² This sort of selfless interchangeability is reciprocated later on when Titus offers to take the place of a "maligned" Gisippus who is accused of a crime he didn't commit; Titus's demonstration of "incomparable frendshippe" is found to be so moving that the real culprit is inspired to turn himself in and Gisippus is exonerated. Reunited, Titus invites his friend to partake of "all his goodes and possessions." However, Gisippus declines on account of his desire to return to Athens. As a result, Titus assembles an army in order to perform "sharpe execution" upon those who were "causers of banisshinge and dispoilinge" his friend, "restor[es] to Gysippus his lands and substance," and establishes him in "perpetuall quietenes" all before returning himself home to Rome.³

Elyot's story, the "earliest fully elaborated friendship story to appear in the sixteenth century," has long been held as a model of the classical ideal of parity in friendship.⁴ Elyot himself declares the story a "goodly example of frendship" that is "engendred by the similitude of age and personage, augmented by the conformitie of maners and studies, and confirmed by the longe continuance of company."⁵ In a longer prefatory exposition to the story, he also declares that the friend is "proprely named of Philosophers the other I"—a seeming reference to Aristotle and Cicero's claim that the friend is "another self"—and recounts the classical friendly exempla of Damon and Pythias and Orestes and Pylades, the latter of which he notes specifically for being "wonderfull like in all features."⁶ Roughly fifty years later, Edmund Spenser would also

¹ Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named the Governour*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London: Everyman's Library, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1907), 166-167.

² Elyot, 177.

³ Elyot, 182-183.

⁴ Laurens J. Mills, *One Soul in Bodies Twain: Friendship in Tutor Literature and Stuart Drama* (Bloomington, Indiana: The Principia Press, Inc., 1937), 99.

⁵ Elyot, 166 and 183.

⁶ Elyot, 164. Aristotle states that the friend is "another self" in *Nicomachean Ethics* (1166a31-32). Cicero declares the friend an "alter idem" or "another self" in *De amicitia* (xxi.80). See *De senectute, De amicitia, De divinatione*, trans. W.A. Falconer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923).

cite the story of Titus and Gisippus in the fourth book of *The Faerie Queene*, his book devoted to the virtue of friendship, and he would place the two in the Temple of Venus amongst the model “bands of friendship”—including Hercules and Hylas, Thesues and Pirithous, Pylades and Orestes, and Damon and Pythias—“[w]hose liues although decay’d, yet loues decayed neuer” (IV.x.27).⁷ Early 20th century critics have gone so far as to deem Elyot’s story the definitive revival of English interest in and admiration for classical friendship theory. As Laurens J. Mills put it in *One Soul in Bodies Twain*, Elyot’s story is a combination of the “classical doctrines of friendship” and the “medieval court-of-love conventions,” but the “court-of-love ideas” are ultimately overshadowed by the unification of “Platonic and later Greek philosophy,” namely the “classical point of view” that is epitomized by the selfless unity evident in the Ciceronian analyses of Orestes and Pylades and Damon and Pythias.⁸ “There is no such classical handling of a friendship story (extant) in English literature before Elyot,” writes Mills, “[b]ut after 1531,” referring to the year Elyot’s telling of Titus and Gisippus was published in his *The Boke Named the Governour*, “the medieval attitude is subdued; the renaissance of classical friendship has come.”⁹

But while Elyot’s telling of Titus and Gisippus certainly reflects the classical tenets of friendly likeness and parity, its “fully elaborated” details also highlight the various complications that are an additional part of such an idealized imagination of social life. Gisippus gives Sophronia over to Titus in an apparently selfless move akin to classical exempla, but he does so not because he believes he and his friend do or should hold all things in common. He does so because he believes Titus’s love for Sophronia is fundamentally greater and thus different from his own. “I loue that mayden as moche as any wise man mought possible,” he confesses, “But nowe I perceyue that the affection of loue towarde her surmounteth in you aboue measure.”¹⁰ In fact, Gisippus’s initial moment of generosity creates a disparity between the two friends that is never, we might say, fully mended. Right after marrying Sophronia, Titus decides to return to Rome while also offering to bring Gisippus with him and “deuide with him all his substaunce and fortune.” However, Gisippus turns the offer down on account of “howe necessary his counsaile shulde be to the citie of Athenes.”¹¹ After that, Gisippus is exiled by his fellow Athenians and wrongfully accused of murder whilst roaming destitute in an attempt to reunite with his friend Titus in Rome. At Gisippus’s trial, Titus jumps at the opportunity to offer himself in his friend’s place, but this moment also forces Titus to recognize that such a circumstance is the result of his being a less than ideal friend. When Gisippus is ultimately freed, his friendship

⁷ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 2001). Also included are David and Jonathan, but as the Longman edition notes, the “catalogue is traditional except for the biblical pair” (486, n. Stanza 27).

⁸ Mills, 105-106. In *De amicitia*, Cicero recounts the scene in the story of Orestes and Pylades when Pylades, “wish[ing] to be put to death instead of his friend, declare[s] ‘I am Orestes,’” a moment that mirrors Titus’s willingness to take Gisippus’s place on the eve of Gisippus’s execution. See *De amicitia*, 135. Cicero’s account of Damon and Pythias actually appears in *De officiis* wherein Cicero lauds the two’s “ideally perfect friendship” because of their willingness to die together at the hands of a tyrant. See *De officiis*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1913), 313.

⁹ Mills, 105 and 108.

¹⁰ Elyot, 171.

¹¹ Elyot, 178.

with Titus is “through out the citie published, extolled, and magnified,” but Titus himself “recognised his negligence in forgettinge Gysippus.”¹² Titus then attempts to make a kind of recompense by offering “all his goodes and possessions” to Gisippus, yet Gisippus declines such an offer *for a second time*. And while Titus does help Gisippus reobtain his land and wealth in Athens, such reciprocating action doesn’t actually secure an absolute sense of parity between the two. Instead, the friends part ways and go on to live remarkably separate and different lives: Titus, married, in Rome and Gisippus, unmarried, in Athens.¹³

Read against the critical appreciation of the story as an exemplum of “classical doctrines of friendship” as well as the story’s own valorization of “similitude” in such relations, Titus and Gisippus’s physical and affective separation may very well come off as a disappointing social collapse. Indeed, a persistent strain of friendship criticism—epitomized by Montaigne’s evocation of the line, often attributed to Aristotle, “O my friends, there is no perfect friend”—has long held that all friendship is ultimately fleeting.¹⁴ However, the continuously fraught nature of Titus and Gisippus’s “perfect amitie” suggests that the Renaissance understood friendship to be an ongoing negotiation between budding forms of personal disparity and thus a relationship that exposes the limits of social likeness. After all, Titus and Gisippus do not maintain a state of perfect semblance for a good portion of the narrative, and they openly forego opportunities at enhancing the parity between themselves. Gisippus more than once prioritizes the collective interest of his country over the singular company of his friend, and Titus, although initially eager to bring Gisippus with him, recognizes the “negligence” he displayed toward his friend in his post-marital life. Furthermore, the final moment of mutuality between the two—i.e. the re-seizing of Gisippus’s lands—is made possible by an army raised at the “consent of the Senate,” literally an engagement with several, much larger political bodies; the answer to the individual friend’s woes does not come from the (other) friend himself but the significant connections he has. In light of these details, Titus and Gisippus’s disparate end feels like the progressive move away from a paired vision of social life rather than an unexpected surprise. Or better yet it stands as a kind of solution to the trials of pure parity and its inability to manifest fully. Thus, Elyot in

¹² Elyot, 182.

¹³ Elyot, 183.

¹⁴ See Michel Montaigne, “Of Friendship” in *The Essays of Montaigne: John Florio’s Translation*, ed. J.I.M. Stewart (New York: Modern Library, 1938), 150. Derrida’s *The Politics of Friendship* opens with this very line in order to argue for the “aporetic” nature of friendship. See *The Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London and New York: Verso, 1997). For an account of Derrida’s “aporetic” treatment of friendship, see David Webb, “On Friendship: Derrida, Foucault, and the Practice of Becoming,” *Research in Phenomenology* 33 (2003): 119-140. At the same time, the split between Titus and Gisippus in Elyot’s telling can be all the more surprising when compared to Boccaccio’s telling of the story in *The Decameron*. In Boccaccio’s version, the likeness between Titus and Gisippus is by all accounts enhanced in the end. Titus successfully “institute[s]” with Gisippus a “common ownership of all his wealth and possessions” and gives his younger sister Fulvia to Gisippus as his bride. In addition to establishing this economic likeness and marital-relational symmetry, the two also remove their cultural difference as Gisippus “agree[s] to become a Roman.” Finally, all four—i.e. Titus, Gisippus, Sophronia, and Fulvia—decide to live together, “growing closer each day, if that were possible, in friendship” (650). See Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. Guido Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

the end may declare the tale a “description of friendship engendered by the similitude of age and personage” and “confirmed by the longe continuance of company,” but the conclusion itself tells a far different story in which the “similitude” of “personage” between friends reaches an eventual limit, the “longe continuance of company” reaches a certain end, and the future of friendship is not in permanent pairs but in something far more open.

This dissertation argues that an acknowledgment of *disparity* was central to the conception of early modern friendship and that the period’s emphasis on such disparity authorized the creation of larger social groups. In response to the practical and ethical problems that parity often posed, Renaissance writers highlighted the inescapability of difference in social relations. Yet rather than read this difference as a loss of friendly idealism, they articulated the ways in which such difference might sustain existing likeness-based bonds as well as engender a larger number of social relations. Indeed, Gisippus’s exit serves as a means to preserve the dynamics of his close friendship with Titus as much as it provides him an opportunity to expand his social purview. The celebration of such pluralist configurations in Renaissance literature challenges the conception of social life as a search for exclusive union with a single individual and allows us to recognize the ways in which disparate qualities and experiences actually facilitated the creation of social connections over the course of the Renaissance. Friendship, that is, had the ability to embrace the very real differences between persons and use those differences as a means to produce a greater number of sustainable social connections.

Modern criticism has already troubled the idealization of parity in friendly relations through an emphasis on the rivalry and excessive, potentially disruptive intimacy that such likeness stood to produce. Building off René Girard’s theory of triangular desire—the idea that one person obtains his or her desires through imitation or another, thereby engaging in a rivalry over a third, shared “object” of desire—Eve Sedgwick argues in *Between Men* that the “bond between [primarily male] rivals in an erotic triangle [is] even stronger, more heavily determinant of action and choices, than anything in the bond between either of the lovers and the beloved.”¹⁵ In other words, the rivalry that is a natural byproduct of exact, imitative likeness is often so intense that it renders the relationship between alike men more influential than the erotic bond between men and women. Heterosexual desire and its relations were thus an integral part of the social lives of men in the early modern period, but they served as a kind of conduit to a more intimate connection between men themselves.¹⁶ As a result, all relations, even heterosexual love,

¹⁵ Eve Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 21.

¹⁶ This is the phenomenon that Sedgwick famously dubs male “homosocial desire” and describes as the “presence of male heterosexual desire” that seeks “to consolidate partnership with authoritative males in and through the bodies of females” (38). Lorna Hutson’s *The Usurer’s Daughter* similarly observes the ways in which early modern men sought to bolster their relations through the exchange of “persuasive fictions” about women, thereby rendering friendship a rhetorical exercise that took the place of more traditional material gift economies. Such rhetorical economies may not have involved the physical exchange of women, but they nevertheless required the metaphorical “bodies of females” in order to engender the partnerships they sought. See *The Usurer’s Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London: Routledge, 1994), 7-9.

were deemed subordinate to male same-sex “partnerships” and the imitative likeness such relations were thought to reflect and inspire.¹⁷

As subsequent critics have shown, these intense and often homoerotic bonds between same-sex pairs could achieve a “socially sanctioned” and even celebrated status;¹⁸ however, such “friendly” relations were also the source of intense social anxiety for the early modern period. In his essay “Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England,” Alan Bray notes that the prevalent sixteenth-century “images” of the “masculine friend” and the “sodomite” were imbued with many of the same intimate “conventions,” including embracing, kissing, protestations of love, and the sharing of beds. At the same time, though, these images elicited extremely different reactions depending on the class contexts under which they were employed. As he argues, close friendships were seen as familiar, practical, and oftentimes ideal, but when such intimate male-male relations were believed to challenge the “orderly ‘civil’ relations” of existing social hierarchy, an otherwise valorized male friend could be cast as an “unnatural” sodomitical partner.¹⁹ In *Close Readers*, Alan Stewart focuses on the collaborative nature of Humanist education—the very enterprise that first unites Titus and Gisippus—and its inextricable preoccupation with sodomy in order to show how the period further blurred the distinction between the friend and the “problematic” intimate. As he writes, English Humanism “is premised on notions of social relations and transactions” and thus “concerns more than the solitary scholar.” But it is also “this relationality or transactionality”—one that is found in an enterprise as formative and aspirational as young men’s education—“which leads us inexorably to sodomy.”²⁰ According to Stewart, paired collaboration, rather than individual endeavor, was thus understood to be an increasingly prevalent mode of civil and intellectual social organization. But it was a relation that could also be ‘too close’ and engender suspicion when it threatened to efface longstanding distinctions between class and gender.²¹

¹⁷ Along with heterosexual marriage, Sedgwick cites “name, family, and loyalty to progenitors and to posterity,” as the other kinds of “institutionalized relations carried out via women” that also might be utilized to enhance the primacy of male-male bonds (35).

¹⁸ Jeffrey Masten describes the “bonds among men” as “socially sanctioned” in *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2. Specifically, he cites the “double interment” of friends as well as the emphasis on collaborative authorship in early modern theater as evidence of such sanctioning.

¹⁹ Alan Bray, “Homosexuality and Male Friendship” in *Queering the Renaissance*, ed. Jonathan Goldberg (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 40-61.

²⁰ Alan Stewart, *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997), xxvii.

²¹ In focusing on the institution of the theater, Masten likewise argues in *Textual Intercourse* that “collaboration was a prevalent mode of textual production in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” but also observes the ways in which such close relations were more positively interpreted in the period (4). While such collaborative enterprises may have certainly enhanced suspicions about the prevalence of same-sex eroticism, such “sex/gender” contexts were, the “discourses through which collaboration and authorship were understood” (7). Early modern playwrights in particular were thus able to use these “sex/gender context[s]” in order to articulate the imitative nature of collaboration and the ultimately productive nature of friendly bonds (5).

Laurie Shannon, conversely, has sought to preserve the idealization of parity in friendship by arguing that the classical ideal of likeness offered a “radical” and utopic alternative to the dominant, hierarchical form of social organization in the early modern period. Focusing on the political rhetoric that surrounded depictions of early modern friendship, Shannon argues that the concept of friends as two persons who were able to be self-actualized and self-determinant, what she calls “two sovereigns,” offered a “sharp counterpoint to the terms understood to hold within the hierarchical relations of monarchical society.” In offering a “fully consensual image of participation” or vision of “political consent” that was otherwise unavailable to early modern understandings of polity, friendship was a concept of significant philosophical and political importance.²²

And yet, despite making a case for the utopian heights of friendly parity, Shannon also exposes the cracks in such an idealized social vision through her emphasis on the political realities of the period. As she points out, “sovereign” may have served as the rhetorical and conceptual means by which friendship conceived of an ultimate equality between two persons. But it also existed as a perpetual reminder that such equality was only imaginable within the context of a monarchical political order and was thus reliant on the existence of a something like a ruling Girardian third. Indeed, “[t]riangulation remains critical,” Shannon writes in a nod to Sedgwick, “[b]ut the third term triangulating Renaissance male friendship (female friendship, too, as we shall see), is not necessarily a heterosexual love interest. It is most likely to be a king.”²³ In this sense, Shannon’s friend(s) needed to imitate and desire (or desire and imitate) the “sovereign” status of the king—the “object”—in order to conceive of a “consensual” equality that could then be reflected onto themselves. Such a mediated parity, however, exposes the fundamental ironies of ideal friendship’s very conception. The “haunting royal presence” of a sovereign renders even the most elaborate sense of equality a fantasy; the reliance on a third object disturbs the very conception of the exclusive pair itself.

What both Sedgwick and Shannon’s studies reveal are the ways in which friendship’s pair-ity—a status of equality in pairs specifically—never involves a pair exclusively but always exists in the shadow of a more plural set of social dynamics. Combined with the anxiety that, according to Bray and Stewart, overly close pairs also posed, the pair by itself was never a totally stable or necessarily desirable social structure. If it wasn’t already butting against the presence of an available, and perhaps inevitable, social multiplicity, the pair needed an additional element to “cut” or diffuse its potentially improper intensity. Indeed, Elyot’s Titus and Gisippus is full of moments that point to the larger social apparatuses that exist outside of the titular pair themselves. In addition to the obvious triangulation that occurs around Sophronia, there is the fact that such heterosexual desire is actually inaugurated by a collection of Gisippus’s “frendes, kynne, and alies.”²⁴ And as previously mentioned, Gisippus seems to prioritize this collective over his singular friend twice: when Titus first invites Gisippus to live with him, Gisippus declines, claiming that “his counsayle shulde be to the cite of Athenes”; when Titus makes the same offer at the end, Gisippus once again voices a preference to “be agayne in his propre

See *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

²² Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 7-8.

²³ Shannon, 8-9.

²⁴ Elyot, 167.

country,” a request that also requires Titus to engage with his country and “by the consent of the Senate and people assemble[] a great armye” so that he may exact revenge on those who banished his friend.²⁵ Perhaps most interestingly though, the final reunification of the two friends is made possible by the murderer for whom Gisippus is mistaken. In “perceiving the meruaylous contention of [the] two” friends, the murderer confesses his crime so that Titus and Gisippus may both live.²⁶ Thus, Titus and Gisippus in their selfless willingness to die for each other offer the possibility not of the pair but of only one or the other; it is the sacrifice of this outside third that allows their friendship to reform and continue. In placing significant emphasis on the emergence of the pair, criticism has engaged (or perhaps been swept up) in the period’s own attempts at idealization and the social erasure—specifically of women and class difference—that it engenders. As a result, critics have not been able to recognize or explicate the full range of social variety that existed in the period, be it the inevitable presence of oft-overlooked social remnants or the possibility of other, more complex social configurations.

By taking the fictionality of equality in friendship more fully into account than most other critics have, Tom MacFaul’s *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* marks a fundamental break from the parity model by arguing that early modern friendship actually engendered—and was subsequently premised on—a sense of disparity between persons. To be sure, the Humanist ideal of parity was still a “persistent ideological force” that inspired individuals to pursue social connection in the hopes of finding absolute semblance with another.²⁷ However, the inevitable collapse of these relationships—either because a sense of sameness proved unattainable or the relationship naturally withered—forced friends to “recognize the precise nature of [their] differentiated and impermanent symbiotic connections to others” or, more simply, the “importance of difference in friendship.”²⁸ MacFaul proposes the “idea of symbiosis”—a state in which connections with others are “never fully articulated” but still provide a somewhat formative sense of self definition—as an “alternative” to perfect friendship and a means for fostering a multiplicity of social connections. Practically imagined, the friend jumps from friendship to friendship in an attempt to find a “stable and ennobled self in the friend” only to discover that he possesses a socially contingent “selfhood” and “integrity.”²⁹ More positively considered, though, MacFaul’s friends break away from the idea that friendship demands conformity to a single other and embrace the way in which friendship can be a tool for realizing a distinct sense of self that has the ability to connect with a whole variety of people.

Yet while MacFaul’s conception of disparity in friendship allows for a plurality of meaningful social connections, it does not fully escape the basic structural—i.e. paired—imagination of social life. To be sure, MacFaul reverses the logic of how friendship relates to the rather persistent structure of the pair. Whereas Shannon’s friend in his status as a “sovereign”

²⁵ Elyot, 178 and 183.

²⁶ Elyot, 182.

²⁷ Tom MacFaul, *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries* (London: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6.

²⁸ Indeed, MacFaul, unlike Shannon, regards friendship’s fictionality more as a matter of affective stamina—or lack thereof—rather than political fact. As he puts it in a reading of Amiens’s lyrics from *As You Like It* (II.vii.181), “most friendship is feigning,” or even as the “Humanist ideology of friendship tries to make friendship the most important thing in the world,” writers of the period knew that the relationship was a “will o’ the wisp” (1).

²⁹ MacFaul, 2.

may find a fully-realized sense of self *with* someone else—thereby, somewhat ironically, negating the idea of a unique individuality altogether—MacFaul’s friend inevitably discovers his individualism *through* an emphasis on, and eventual dissolution of, that union. Where the friendly pair for Shannon is a stable if imaginary pillar for Renaissance society, for MacFaul the pair is an unstable entity in and of itself that begs to be broken and re-realized with one after another. But while MacFaul articulates a process for how a larger number of friends than a single “other self” may emerge, he does not offer a sense of how these friends might configure or conceive of themselves beyond the self-actualizing service they provide for one another *as pairs*. There is, we might say, no sense of retention in MacFaul’s model. Each friendship is sequentially pursued and discarded; friends, as a result, are a rotating cast of characters that never actually organize themselves in a way other than a binary, one-to-one relation. Such an exclusive conception highlights the intense personal work friendship may do, but it ignores the more complex ways in which friendship may operate: namely, the ways in which friends may be party to a larger set of concurrent, multi-directional social forces.

Alan Bray’s later scholarly work *The Friend* seeks to reveal precisely the larger social effects that a particular friendship produces. In doing so, he does not directly challenge the prevalence or influence of the pair in friendship—in fact, the primary examples in his monograph are all notable pairs. Instead, he pursues a historical “archeology” of paired friendship’s ethics in order to interrogate the very particular, but subsequently expansive, dynamics of this structure. For example, in the chapter “Wedded Brother,” Bray analyzes the 14th century tombstone of two dead friends in order to highlight the ways in which such a monument evokes the arrangement of a “married couple” and the “binding forces of betrothal.”³⁰ Of course, these parallels between friendship and marriage very well affirm the homoerotic readings that have long been an integral part of friendship studies. Friendship, if not literally a monogamous marital relation, is at least incredibly like one. But for Bray, the “formal and objective character” of this monument also suggests the ways in which the friendship relationship was not peripheral but rather a central “interpretive crux” to a conception of social organization.³¹ These friends were not “just friends,” the formulation that Bray offers to describe the reductive, contemporary imagination of friendship as an essentially “private” relation that primarily serves the interests and pleasures of the friends themselves; these friends were part of a “larger frame of reference that lay *outside* the good of the individuals for whom the friendship was made.”³² To be sure, friendship could inhabit the centrality typically imagined for the “traditional” conjugal family, namely heterosexual marriage relations and its extended blood relatives. And accordingly, it had the ability to be an inward looking, potentially erotic, partnership. But it also had the ability to precipitate bonds between those who were merely associated with, rather than contained within, the friendly pair. Indeed, the ability to manifest such “public” connections would make the friendship more than a self-serving pair-ity. It would make it a means for accruing a much larger social network.

Bray’s work thus offers compelling new directions for the study of friendship by noting how the pair and its private intimacy can be seen not as the ultimate form of social expression

³⁰ Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), 20 and 24.

³¹ Bray, *The Friend*, 25.

³² Bray, *The Friend*, 2 and 6.

but rather as merely one of friendship's many facets.³³ The manifestation of the pair in friendship, that is to say, doesn't represent a culminating end but an opportunity to expand outward, to go beyond the pair itself and extend the sense of social affinity that the pair has achieved. In fact, Bray essentially argues that the critical reliance on the pair and the work it does is the product of an exaggerated equation of friendship with sexual eroticism.³⁴ As he puts it, the "inability to conceive of relationships in other than sexual terms says something of contemporary poverty"; or "the effect of a shaping concern with sexuality," he continues, "is precisely to obscure that wider frame."³⁵ Indeed, continuous attempts to spotlight the friendly pair within depictions of friendship have, I would contend, caused us to see critical elaboration where there has mostly been a kind of substitution. The emphasis on friendship as homoerotic, same-sex bonds has been radical in so much as it has forced us to consider the ways in which same-sex relations, erotic or otherwise, could be a more prevalent and compelling means of social organization than heterosexual marriage. But it is actually not as radical as it may seem given its tacit prioritization of the couple as the most significant construct within human society. Whether we are thinking of friendship or heterosexual relations—relations which are more or less assumed to lead to marriage—we have stubbornly insisted on, and thus over-conceived, the ways in which the social world revolves around or winds down to the specific pair. MacFaul exposes the errancy of this pursuit by noting how these pairs do not last and thus beget multiple, albeit still private, pairs. But Bray goes further by suggesting that far more interesting connections may exist outside of the pair and that the paired friendship itself might beget some of these pluralist—and thus truly social—inclinations.

Indeed, criticism of "dyadic sociality" has served as the inspiration for recent studies about friendship and friendship's status as a fundamental alternative to the dominant imagination of social life. As John S. Garrison succinctly points out in the recent *Friendship and Queer Theory in the Renaissance*, "the pair of friends is often counterposed to the heterosexual pair in literary criticism," and this move actually "reinforce[s] the centrality of the figure of the couple."³⁶ In an attempt then to challenge the "normativ[ity]" of dyadic heterosexuality but also the "model of dyadic sociality itself," Garrison argues that early modern writers "put pressure on the classical friendship ideal as a dyadic unit [] composed of equals" and, on account of the period's expanding opportunities for economic and material gain, began to valorize friendship in

³³ MacFaul certainly expresses a similar suspicion about friendship being a definitive culmination of relationship and self, but he responds to this dilemma by suggesting the creation of many more pairs. In this sense, friendship really only has one facet; that facet might remain useful via a kind of continuous motion. Bray's conception is less pessimistic and more generous in that it believes a pair can endure—indeed, friends may be buried together—but thus may branch out, even after death.

³⁴ Such an argument is somewhat surprising given that Bray himself pioneered much of the scholarly work that sought to evince the homoeroticism in male friendship. In addition to his aforementioned essay "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England," Bray's *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (1982) remains a seminal text for queer studies in the early modern period.

³⁵ Bray, *The Friend*, 6.

³⁶ John S. Garrison, *Friendship and Queer Theory in the Renaissance: Gender and Sexuality in Early Modern England* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014), xiii.

groups.³⁷ “Put simply,” he writes, “there was much money to be made and new ways to make that money,” and as “marketplace activity expanded,” persons were eager to welcome as many economically beneficial actors or “friends” as they could.³⁸ Thought this way, friendship offers a conception of social life defined not by a steady march towards the exclusive pair—be it heterosexual marriage or some same-sex bond—but by the production of a larger and larger, materially beneficial social network.

Yet while Garrison’s economic emphasis yields an expansive, non-dyadic form of sociality, it risks erasing the affective range that, I would argue, is integral to the conception of expansive friendship. To be sure, Garrison’s materially motivated idea of friendship rather positively welcomes a whole host of new economic agents or “friends” into a once restricted social landscape. With the premium on exact similitude and its premise of social and affective “scarcity” increasingly overshadowed, Garrison argues, by an emphasis on the material gain that is possible in larger hierarchical group configurations, one could and should associate with anyone and everyone so long as it helped you make money.³⁹ But such a privileging of material interest leads to a rather extreme and reductive redefinition of friendship that has little resemblance to any original core ideal. Indeed, Garrison’s claim that Renaissance writers imagined “self-interest as virtuous” and “profit-seeking enterprises” as “ideal” flies in the face of some of the most basic tenets of classical and neoclassical friendship. It also renders any economically advantageous relationship not just a friendship but an ideal one.⁴⁰

That is not to say that the issue of material wealth and its accumulation is anathema to early modern depictions of “perfect amitie.” The story of Titus and Gisippus makes clear that matters of shared monetary fortune are a serious consideration amongst friends. After all, Titus early on proposes to “deuide with [Gisippus] all his substaunce” and in the end suggests sharing “all his goodes and possessions” with his friend, offers that Gisippus declines before accepting Titus’s help in “restorynge” him “to his lands and substance” via “sharpe execution” of his detractors. Such a concluding moment perhaps proves Garrison’s point that the best of friendships are forged through a matter of material advantage and, it seems, brutal violence. But Gisippus’s subsequent exit suggests that such profit-seeking endeavors are only one aspect of

³⁷ Garrison, xv and xiv.

³⁸ Garrison, xxii. Garrison specifically cites the inclusion of women in the “marketplace [that] was largely a homosocial space dominated by men.” “As marketplace activity expanded,” he writes, “so did women’s involvement therein,” most notably through the “buying and selling related to the household” and the retention of property after marriage.

³⁹ Garrison, xxiv.

⁴⁰ In Cicero’s *De amicitia*, for example, Laelius declares that “Although many and great advantages did ensue from our friendship, still the beginnings of our love did not spring from the hope of gain. For as men of our class are generous and liberal, not for the purpose of demanding repayment. . . . so we believe that friendship is desirable, not because we are influenced by hope of gain, but because its entire profit is in the love itself” (143). To be sure, Laelius’s evocation of class suggests that classical friendship was already understood to be an aristocratic enterprise that would never be threatened by the prospect of economic need. But his point about need more generally being a poor basis for an enduring relationship still stands. Any relationship that is contingent on a kind of want stands to be abandoned the minute it is satisfied. Such relationships would, truly, be relationships of utility rather than something like friendship which has a pretension of virtue.

friendship, an aspect that gives way to a more prospective concern that is removed from such economic preoccupation. After all, the “perfect amitie” of Titus and Gisippus does not end with, and is thus not ultimately defined by, a continuous accumulation for wealth through cooperative action. Instead, the two engage in independent retreats to “perpetuall quietenes” in their own lands. There is then a definitive stop to the economic collaboration between the two, and the prevailing feature of their friendship is a separation that is, excitingly, marked by unknown possibilities that lie outside their relationship.

This dissertation seeks to engage the expansive range of factors that inform friendship. As the end of Elyot’s story suggests, friendship is never able to be wholly confined to a specific categorical concern. It is, in other words, a comprehensive relationship that not only retains the previous reasons and feelings that are responsible for its founding but also readily courts new, more generous possibilities. I thus try to reassert friendship itself as a primary organizing principle by which persons construct and understand their social life. The extensive criticism on friendship has shown how thoroughly enmeshed friendship was in the evolving discourses of sexuality, politics, and economics. But such an evolutionary emphasis risks reducing friendship to little more than a passive tool for any number of interchangeable social concerns. That is to say that friendship becomes a mere rhetorical overlay for other external forces—sexual, political, economic—rather than being a relationship with its own guiding impetus. Focusing on the relationship of friendship itself, we see not only how friendship challenges existing assumptions about the “ideal,” often exclusive organization of social relations but also how friendship stands as an ethical force for engendering a more sustainable and rewarding mass connection.

It is literature that provides both the forum and space in which it is possible to capture friendship’s existing conceptions while simultaneously stretching its multifaceted and ever-expanding bounds. As Ullrich Langer has argued in *Perfect Friendship*, the critical text that inaugurated the 1990s revival of modern friendship criticism, the disparity between the philosophical theory and actuality of friendship in the early modern period made literature the increasingly important “ground for experimentation, for experimentation with the multiple codes and values of an expanding civilization.”⁴¹ When “crucial choices are made, enacted, discussed, and defended within the confine of an imaginary world,” writes Langer, “these choices constitute interventions in the ongoing reflection by early modern culture on the status and nature of relationships of human beings with each other.”⁴² Literature thus performs a kind of dual function, providing an “ethical reflection of culture” while also being “an exploration, a trying-out, a testing, of options.”⁴³ Elyot’s tale of Titus and Gisippus certainly takes the form of an exploration or “test” in the way that it addresses the changing sexual, communal, and economic valences of the two friends’ relationship. But it also heightens these exploratory stakes by refusing to provide a definitive “choice” or enactment in the end. I don’t mean to suggest that friendship then is an infinitely mutable or even empty category in an early modern context. Rather, I want to suggest that a story like Elyot’s—through its rather comprehensive cataloguing of friendship’s various aspects—concludes by breaking us out of an ideological expectation for friendship. The progress of the story is, in a sense, deconstructive: it shows us how friendship is not definitively in pairs but is also not expansive for economic reasons alone. So as much as

⁴¹ Ullrich Langer, *Perfect Friendship: Studies in Literature and Moral Philosophy from Boccaccio to Corneille* (Geneva, Switzerland: Librairie Droz S.A., 1994), 28.

⁴² Langer, 11.

⁴³ Langer, 29.

Elyot's Titus and Gisippus suggest that the future of this ideal friendship exists in interactions that are outside the kind of proximate, two-man, one-to-one relation that frames much of previous critical thinking, it also suggests that such a prospective outlook is only possible to grasp in the context of literature's absolution from total resolution.

By insisting on the ethical dimensions of early modern accounts of friendship, I do not mean to imply that friendship was conceived as unproblematic or automatically harmonious. All of the texts in this dissertation involve some kind of friendly crisis, situations that easily lead to a suspicious conception of friendship: the belief, for example, that it is a relationship that cannot possibly last or is merely a stand-in for a more fundamental interest. I see the works in this dissertation as searching for a means to understand and incorporate, rather than to decipher and excuse, these predicaments. My work thus takes a cue from Sharon Marcus and her attempts to perform a kind of surface reading or "just reading" that circumvents the "symptomatic" responses that might obscure our ability to understand the full range of rationale and possibility that attend a relationship. As Marcus explains in a discussion of her own work, the emphasis on marriage in Victorian works "eliminates lesbian desire" and "exile[s] female friendship to the narrative margins." Consequently, critics have "insist[ed] on reading female friendship as something other than it is" and thus overlooked, we might say, the broader and simpler meanings friendship may have.⁴⁴ It is only by reading literary works without such an ideological predisposition that we can make "visible" the larger implications of a relationship like friendship and, in the process, better understand the actions and dynamics that create significant social bonds.

I trace this comprehensive notion of friendship through a wide range of genres in order to show how writers sought to negotiate seemingly larger and larger disparities into effective social connections. The roughly chronological organization of texts in this dissertation also highlights the various deconstructive and reconstructive potentials of these genres when it comes to friendship. I begin with the second part of Spenser's epic romance *The Faerie Queene*, published in 1596. With its stated intent to communicate "virtuous and gentle discipline," Spenser's romance offers an idealized vision of friendship and its classical tenets.⁴⁵ But such a seemingly perfect vision also serves as potent ground for unearthing complications inherent to the friendship relationship. Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* as drama with its plurality of friendly subjects on stage further illustrates the realist problems friendship experiences in a mass context. The biographical nature of Donne's letters subsequently stands as an opportunity to articulate how the very real praxis of friendship could lead to the realization of its ideals, and Wroth's early seventeenth century romance *The Countess of Montgomery's Urania* shows how romance once again exists as a place in which it is possible to concretize the evolved and evolving notion of friendship. Altogether, the texts in this dissertation comprise a rather systematic critique of friendship—in the genres of romance and drama—followed by a constitutive articulation in letters and romance of friendship's innovations.

At the same time, the somewhat limited span between the Elizabethan and Jacobean period that this project covers also exemplifies a kind of synchronic state of "experimentation" that friendship perhaps finds itself in so often. What we see in the romances, dramas, and letters

⁴⁴ Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: An Introduction," *Representations* 108, no. 1 (2009): 12.

⁴⁵ Edmund Spenser, "Letter to Raleigh" in *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 2001), 714.

discussed herein is an exploration of the idiosyncratic trials and tribulations of friendship that are not necessarily unique to this twenty-five-year period but *are* influenced by the particular interests of their historical moment. Broadly speaking then, all of these texts mediate on forms of likeness and parity only to reveal how such a social configuration is affectively, logically, and politically unsustainable. Accordingly, the writers seek to reformulate the bounds of friendship in order to allow these surprisingly fragile relationships to endure. Ironically, this calls for the realization of distance or disparity, rather than increased affinity, between persons. But the result is a new appreciation for the expansive possibilities of friendship, the ability for friendship to engender intimacy between individuals but also use that intimacy to go outside itself and attend to the concerns of a much larger collective.

My first chapter examines Spenser's epic romance *The Faerie Queene* and the fourth book "Containing the Legend of Cambel and Triamond, Or of Friendship." Focusing on its tale of exemplary friends who spend most of their time physically fighting one another, I redefine the critical understanding of ideal friendship in the period and argue that friendship as Spenser understands it is predicated on a discord that, unlike romantic love, never requires total union between persons. Using Girard's theory of mimetic desire, I show how the exemplary friendship between Cambell and Triamond is built on the conventions of likeness and imitation but also on the rivalry that such likeness naturally breeds. Both Cambel and Triamond seek to win the love of the same woman—ironically, an initial sign of likeness that predisposes them to friendship—and as a result engage in a lengthy battle. Although such rivalry seems to be antithetical to friendship, Spenser presents it as a natural product if not inevitable part of the likeness that friendship demands. Furthermore, such antagonism offers a kind of solution to the problem of shared desire and likeness. In the process of physically fighting, Cambell kills Triamond's brothers; Triamond's sister also appears and thus provides Cambell with an alternative romantic pursuit. The death of Triamond's brothers separates Cambel from the familial bonds that inhibit additional social affiliations, and the appearance of Triamond's sister provides the opportunity for an assertion of difference between once-alike characters. When no longer bound to the shared similitude that love demands, Spenser's exemplary friends realize a personal autonomy that enables a harmonious and expansive social relationship.

In my second chapter, "'Friends, Romans, countrymen': Expanding Friendship in *Julius Caesar*," I argue that Shakespeare's play explores the tension between and within two types of friendship: first, a friendship that involves an exclusive likeness between individual pairs—the form that Spenser interrogates in *The Faerie Queene*—and second, friendship as a public relationship that has a political resonance outside itself. Arguing that he and Brutus are a "reflection" or "glass" for one another, Cassius champions the classical notions of likeness in order to articulate his friendship with Brutus but also recruit his fellow senators into a conspiracy to assassinate Caesar. The conspiracy against Caesar comes about via a literal one-by-one recruitment that makes a unique appeal to each senator; the grounds of that appeal are rooted in an attempt to articulate a kind of shared frustration or desire. The resulting group of "friends," then, is actually a network of multiple though fundamentally exclusive dyads. Against this model, Antony, with his popular call to "Friends, Romans, countrymen," recruits a national collective through an appeal to an impersonal but like-minded political conviction. Indeed, the plebeians of Rome do not know Caesar or Antony personally, but Antony uses the larger affective resonances of his private relation with Caesar in order to garner a mass political following. Both forms of political "friendship," however, prove unsustainable if not undesirable as the play proceeds. Brutus and Cassius's highly personalized affiliation proves ill-equipped to

incorporate additional third parties. Frustrated with the lack of distinction between the members of his political collective, Antony proceeds to criticize his allies and ultimately makes a case for casting several of them out. Shakespeare thus highlights a concern about how friendship outside of the friendly dyad risks becoming a cynical means for cultivating an abundance of instrumental but ultimately tenuous social connections. Staging this tension in the context of classical Rome, Shakespeare also gestures toward the need for a more rigorous, contemporary theorization of friendship based on difference that might be able to retain a sense of genuine intimacy in an increasingly expanding popular realm.

My third chapter, “‘To make a friendship of nothing’: Donne and Friendly Disparity in Letters,” shows how Donne radically embraces the existence of interpersonal difference in his verse and prose correspondence with female patrons and theorizes that such gender and economic difference is a source of not only friendly connection but also virtuous elevation. Gender and economic difference has long been seen as irreconcilable with the exact likeness that friendship requires: the cross-gender friendships that Donne pursued have frequently been read as Petrarchan and thus ultimately erotic rather than friendly; the presence of economic difference in early modern friendships more generally has led critics to argue that such relations were primarily aspirational and instrumental. Yet rather than attempt to deny these differences and articulate a sense of equality in his correspondence with wealthy female patrons, Donne imagines the intermittent exchange of friendly letters as a means to share and capitalize on the virtuous diversity between persons. Only a disparity between friends, he believed, would encourage one friend to emulate the other, which would generate an expansive cultivation—rather than a mere reflection—of virtue. Indeed, a permanent difference like gender allowed friendship to be a potentially endless exchange of social and virtuous rewards that could best be realized through the courting of multiple female patron friends. Furthermore, the fact that Donne’s cross-gender friendships with patrons continue even after these patrons stop giving him money serves as proof that these friendships have ethical underpinnings.

I conclude with a return to the romance genre in the chapter “Forming ‘all other societie’: Lies, Evasions, and Friendly Networks in Mary Wroth’s *The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania*.” In a lengthy narrative that depicts both same-sex and cross-gender friendships, Wroth highlights the familiar jealousies and rivalries that attend dyadic relations. Also, in a reversal of familiar gender dynamics, the female characters Pamphilia and Antissia clash over their shared desire for the prince Amphilanthus. But rather than respond to this tension with all out physical fighting, the characters in Wroth’s romance lie and deceive in an attempt to circumvent such antagonism. These evasions and the ugly feelings they engender—jealousy, rage, even murderousness—have produced a critical suspicion about the nature of friendship in Wroth’s text, and the character’s themselves often lament their inability to be absolutely forthright. Yet such evasions prove to be a novel way to sublimate otherwise ugly sentiments in relations. By lying, Pamphilia and Antissia effectively test and expand the range of emotions that their relationship may contain. This ability to negotiate a variety of feelings within social relations spawns the possibility of multiple friendships as characters explore the myriad of ways beyond likeness that can establish and sustain relations. Furthermore, the pursuit of multiple friends effectively hedges the characters against the unreliability of any single relationship. In articulating both this affective and literal expansion of friendship, Wroth challenges the romantically-inflected social paradigm that valorizes the pursuit of a single exclusive partner and embraces a paradigm of friendship that seeks and encourages the establishment of larger and larger social networks.

1. Friendship and Violence in Book IV of *The Faerie Queene*

Book IV of *The Faerie Queene*, Spenser's "Legend of Cambel and Telamond, or of Friendship," has long been viewed as a continuation of Book III: the two books together, writes C.S. Lewis, constitute "a single book on the subject of love."¹ Indeed, Spenser makes explicit the connection between the two by referencing the previous book's account of "louers deare debate" (IV.proem.1.5) in the proem of the next; and in his most "overt"² description of the "three kinds of loue," Spenser posits the "zeale of friends" as one:

Hard is the doubt and difficult to deeme,
 When all three kinds of loue together meet,
 And doe dispart the hart with powre extreme,
 Whether shall weight the balance downe; to weet
 The deare affection vnto kindred sweet,
 Or raging fire of loue to woman kind,
 Or zeale of friends combynd with vertues meet. (IV.ix.1.1-7)³

Friendship, to be sure, is a 'kind' of love just as much as the book of friendship is part of the book of love. Yet it is not love itself, just as Book IV is only part of Book III and not Book III itself. By making the book of friendship a continuation of the book of love, Spenser acknowledges the connection and even likeness between love and friendship. But by giving friendship its own book, Spenser registers their very difference, a distinction that friendship announces and records with a moment of conflict.

That conflict is the presence of Book IV itself but also Spenser's own antagonism towards his critics. The connection between Book III and IV, love and friendship, is made via a rather disturbed sense of unity as Spenser's reference to Book III comes as a response to the criticism from the "rugged forehead" of Lord Burghley who "doth sharply wite" the poet "For praising love" (IV.proem.1.1-5). Spenser does not brush off this censure but launches an attack of his own, pronouncing his critics

Such ones ill iudge of love, that cannot loue,
 Ne in their frozen hearts feele kindly flame:
 For thy they ought not thing vnknowne reprove,
 Ne naturall affection faultlesse blame,
 For fault of few that haue abusd the same. (IV.proem.2.1-5)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1936), 338. Thomas P. Roche similarly argues that Books III and IV "can be read as a unified structure" (198) and details that the two "must be viewed as a continuous twenty-four-canto unity" (202). See *The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser's Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964).

² David R. Pichaske, "The Faerie Queene IV, II and III: Spenser on the Genesis of Friendship," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 17.1 (1977): 87.

³ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 2001). All references to *The Faerie Queene* are to this edition.

It is a startling accusation—there are those “that cannot loue, / Ne in their frosen hearts feele kindly flame”—seemingly out of place for a book on friendship that “perfects” the legend of love.⁴

Lamenting the existence of those that simply cannot love, Spenser declares that, “To such therefore I do not sing at all” (IV.proem.4.1). The book of friendship, it seems, is not for everybody. Spenser’s repudiation, yet another in a rather unfriendly proem, is a permanent reminder of the irreconcilability that lingers in friendship. Friendship is not accompanied with the promise of synthesis—it is a love that is only understood by and available to a limited number of people—but functions as a very mechanism of exclusion.

This note of discord, Burghley’s criticism and Spenser’s attack, keys us to the very discord that the book of friendship registers. The very presence of Book IV signals the incompleteness of Book III, a fact that disturbs any complete drive towards resolution that the second “part” of the book of love could provide. Indeed, Book IV is “not a progression toward a conclusion,” as Jonathan Goldberg has described it, but “a deferral, leaving an ending ‘to be perfected’ in ‘another place.’”⁵ The book of friendship opens not with a gesture towards resolution but a claim to a more radical separation.

Friendship then defies a kind of complete synthesis that love seeks to achieve. Spenser’s original 1590 version of Book III, also the end of the first part of *The Faerie Queene*, concludes with a literal moment of synthesis emblematic of resolution: Amoret is reunited with her lover Scudamour and the two embrace so totally that they seem to have “growne together quite” (III.xii.46.5 1590) and appear to form a “faire *Hermaphrodite*” (xii.46.2 1590). However, this resolution is undone in the 1596 edition: the “pensife *Scudamore*” leaves before Britomart and Amoret can emerge from the House of Busyrane and the two lovers remain separated by the book’s end (xii.44-45 1596).⁶

This separation is the necessary engine for the second part of *The Faerie Queene* and the seemingly enjoined book of friendship: the poem can only continue with friendship if there’s a break in love. Book IV or friendship, as Lewis suggests, becomes the means to Book III’s completion, yet the continuation of the book of love as the book of friendship—thanks to Spenser’s later edits—extends irresolution and leaves love’s bonds in a state of imperfect separation. Friendship seems to share the book of love’s momentum towards completion and synthesis and may even contribute to it. However, Spenser’s book of friendship begins with a separation and an assertion of difference, both in its distinct division from Book III and the divergence of the love characters.

Friendship, then, introduces the notion of an irreconcilable exclusion in love that wasn’t noted before. Lewis’s vision of Book III and IV as a “single book” touches on the intuitive possibility that all can or will be included in social harmony. But for Spenser, friendship raises

⁴ James Nohrnberg, *The Analogy of The Faerie Queene* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 626.

⁵ Jonathan Goldberg, *Endlesse Worke: Spenser and the Structures of Discourse* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 8.

⁶ This lack of synthesis in Book IV is observable as early as the title, “The Legend of *Cambel and Telamond*, or of Friendship” (emphasis added). A long noted and unique feature of Book IV is that it “has no synthesizing emblem-knight”; friendship can only be represented through two distinct and separated figures. See Charles G. Smith, “Sententious Theory in Spenser’s Legend of Friendship” *ELH*, 2, no. 2 (1935): 190.

the issue of a very real lack of social totality. Burghley, for one, is not in, and friendship is simply unavailable to some. Love may seem similarly exclusionary: Britomart is left on the sidelines at the end of the 1590 version of *The Faerie Queene*, “halfe enying” Amoret and Scudamour’s “blesse” (III.xii.46.6) and wishing for “like happinesse” (xii.46.8) when the two lovers unite; however, her romantic union with the knight Artegal is still assuredly fated.⁷ Love stands to be realized, albeit later. Lord Burghley is never afforded such a guarantee when it comes to friendship and friendship does not promise one. Friendship breaks something up or leaves someone out—and it continues to assert that rift. It has no pretension to total reconciliation for or between all parties. For Spenser, friendship is not defined by social fulfillment but a social break.⁸

Critics then are right to sense the imperfection or incompleteness of friendship in Spenser’s poem.⁹ My goal is to reread that incompleteness as an intentional part of Spenser’s poetry that captures friendship’s very virtue and being. The seeming imperfection or incompleteness of friendship—the fact that it is neither available to all nor requires total harmony between persons—affords friendship the unique ability to hinge between the inclusive and exclusive. This imperfection is both noticeable and jarring precisely because of friendship’s similarity to love. Love’s impulse towards unification is one that friendship shares. Yet friendship’s ability to break away, establish difference and not be subsumed into total concord is

⁷ “In vaine she wisht, that fate n’ould let her yet possesse” (III.xii.46.9). Britomart pines for a love she is not “yet” permitted to possess but certainly will in the future.

⁸ The notion of friendship’s fractured nature is certainly jarring given that friendship is, allegorically speaking, overseen by Concord, the “Mother of blessed *Peace*, and *Friendship* trew” (x.34.2) who sits on the porch of the Temple of Venus and ‘tempers’ *Love* and *Hate*, forcing them to “ioyne in hand” (x.33.2). Indeed, friendship is made possible thanks to Concord’s faculties: “strife, and warre, and anger [she] does subdew: Of little much, of foes she maketh frends” (x.34.7-8). But as Harry Berger, Jr. has notably argued in *Revisionary Play: Studies in the Spenserian Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), we should be wary of reading such coexistence in Spenser’s poem as an indication of equivalence and thus harmonious finality. The resolution of hostilities that Concord engenders is not an elimination of difference or a mere “moment of reconciliation in which peace and friendship are born,” but a “sustained process of control which can never stop” (21). Concord demands that people “acknowledge their differentness or separateness and accept their differences,” thus requiring that peaceful unions “be continually reaffirmed” (22). This ongoing process of constructed harmony is the theme of *discordia concors* which Berger prominently stresses. “[A] certain amount of discord is essential,” Berger explains, because “Where there is no opposition there can be no true concord. When the idea of otherness, of equal and independent and unique character, is not kept firmly in mind, the bonds of friendship or cooperation are scarcely possible. In the proper vision of concord, a diversity of man produces and overarching unity of one only so long as diversity and unity are sustained together in equilibrium” (19-20).

⁹ See Mark Heberle, “The Limitations of Friendship,” *Spenser Studies* 8 (1990) and Melissa E. Sanchez, “Fantasies of Friendship in *The Faerie Queene*, Book IV,” *English Literary Renaissance* 37.2 (2007). Heberle notes that Spenser makes us “aware of the unperfected nature of friendship in its fullest form” and that “perfected virtue...is an imaginative ideal” (114). For Sanchez, friendship’s “idealized relations of reciprocal devotion evinced by self-sacrifice are difficult to sustain in practice” (251).

its distinguishing virtue. The resistance towards complete harmony is not a deficiency of the virtue of friendship but its essential component. Imperfection, in fact, is part of the ideal of friendship.

Book IV, as I will show, is filled with these moments of asserted difference, difference that prevents the total concord we might come to expect from friendship. My reading focuses on the episode of Cambell and Triamond not only because it is the titular narrative of Spenser's book but also because of its unique status in the Renaissance as an origin story of friendship—a friendship which, furthermore, is born out of violence and conflict. Unlike so many Renaissance exemplars of friendship that predicate friendship on likeness, the story of Cambell and Triamond is predicated on difference.¹⁰ And rather than assuming a seemingly innate resemblance between its titular characters—thus authorizing an almost automatic concord which makes the proceeding narrative function as a kind of “test” of already established friends—Spenser's legend of Cambell and Triamond is exceptional because it locates the very genesis of friendship in disunity. Indeed, Cambell and Triamond start out as adversaries and the two seem to spend more time fighting than actually being friends.

This focus on the origins of friendship reveals how disunity, or violence, is an inherent part of friendship—both in terms of the interpersonal dynamics between friends as well as the external, public expression of friendly bonds. Cambell and Triamond's friendship with one another is not achieved through the establishment of a total likeness but defined by a persistent articulation of the inviolable individuality each friend has.¹¹ Thus friendship does not start out as a shared harmony between two people but with an attention to the self. Such uncompromising individuality in friendship necessarily produces rivalry rather than concord, and friendship has the responsibility, somewhat counter intuitively, to foster this difference.

Likewise, Cambell and Triamond's private friendship does not become a catalyst for public concord between more persons but effectively defies a larger fellowship. Simply put, their friendship literally breaks people up. While the genesis of Cambell and Triamond's friendship relies in part on a process of imitation that would seem to invite larger community, such a process asserts the individual boundaries between friends that naturally exclude others. Friendship's imperfect nature then is two pronged: rather than assume total likeness, friends must maintain a slight imperfection or difference between each other through an emphasis on the individual self; friends too must distinguish their relationship from mass sociality via disunity with the greater public.

¹⁰ As noted in my introduction, Elyot's retelling of Titus and Gisippus in *The Boke Named the Governour* is a prime example of Renaissance friendship predicated on likeness: the two are said to be friends because of an equality in manner, personality, and physical appearance, Gisippus being “equall to the said yonge Titus in yeres, but also in stature, proporcion of body, favour, and colour of visage, countenance and speche” to the point that they are “so like” that “it coulede nat be discerned of their propre parents, which was Titus from Gysippus, or Gysippus from Titus.” The two “semed to be one in fourme and personage” (166). See Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named the Governour*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London: Everyman's Library, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1907).

¹¹ See James Kuzner's *Open Subjects: English Renaissance Republicans, Modern Selfhoods, and the Virtue of Vulnerability* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011). Kuzner identifies a “dialectic” process in which friends “respect and reinforce each other's boundaries” but also “disregard and dissolve them” (39).

I will look at classical and neoclassical theories of friendship to show how friendship is predicated not on unity with others but a necessary attention to and differentiation of the self. Friendship, then, is caught in an intricate bind, simultaneously trying to articulate precise likeness with another and managing to preserve the difference between persons. Such individuation in sociality—the desire for two like people to distinguish themselves from each other—inevitably produces conflict: Cambel and Triamond’s continuous physical fighting is a plain example. Such conflict is a primary component of friendship that, for Spenser, must be sublimated. I will then use René Girard’s theory of mimetic desire to show how such likeness produces rivalry but also how violence helps to establish friendly likeness. However, while Girard imagines equality brought about by violent reciprocity, Spenser allegorizes a rejection of total likeness that is essential for friendship.

Friendship as Self-Love

The insistence on a fundamental difference that exists between friends is a central feature of both classical and early modern theories of friendship. Friendship does not start out as a shared harmony between two people but with an emphasis on the self, an emphasis that generates a constant and consistent differentiation of the self from others.¹² Thus, friendship from its inception relies on a persistent rift, an unwillingness to allow for total synthesis between persons. Furthermore, this rift must be maintained through the duration of the friendship as one must stay true to the action and understanding of the individual self. In this sense, friendship always contains an element of seemingly selfish imperfection because the individual can never fully take on the love of the friend. The love of self must always remain the primal force.

As Aristotle explains in *Nicomachean Ethics*, friendship is this love of the self that is then extended to another. Self-love is the basis of the “good person” who can be a friend

For it is said that we must love most the friends who is most a friend; and one person is a friend to another most of all if he wishes good to the other for the other’s sake, even if no one will know about it. *But these are features most of all of one’s relation to oneself*; and so too are all the other defining features of a friend, since we have said that all the features of friendship extend from oneself to others.¹³

Friendship, according to Aristotle, begins with the individual. This, of course, does not preclude the friend from seeking a connection with others, but it does uphold friendship’s insistence on the self. “The good person must be a self-lover,” Aristotle explains, because the self-lover “will both help himself and benefit others by doing fine action.”¹⁴ Aristotle’s emphasis rests on the fact that the friend will foremost “help himself.” Naturally, the friend will do things for others, but such actions find their basis in the consideration of and respect for the self. While it is “the vicious person” whose actions “conflict” with “the right actions,” the “decent person...does the right actions, since every understanding chooses what is best for itself and the decent person

¹² For another account of friendship’s emphasis on the self and the autonomous consent that it enables, particularly in the writings of Cicero and Elyot, see Laurie Shannon’s *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 30-38.

¹³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 1168b2ff. Emphasis added.

¹⁴ Aristotle, 1169a7ff.

obeys his understanding.”¹⁵ Aristotle is wary of the friend doing something for someone not out of their own reason but someone else’s. Friendship, in a sense, requires staying in oneself.

Like Aristotle, Cicero advocates for the primacy of the established, whole self in friendship that actually resists the inclination towards total, automatic accord with someone else. Friendship for Cicero is not predicated on a need to fill a “lack” but an assured self-sufficiency,

For to the extent that a man relies upon himself and so is fortified by virtue and wisdom that he is dependent on no one and considers all his possessions to be within himself, in that degree is he most conspicuous for seeking out and cherishing friendships.¹⁶

The origins of friendship rest not in shared traits but the existence of a complete self—he who finds all “possessions to be within himself”—that is effectively independent from all others. It is this self-sufficiency that not only authorizes friendship but becomes its indelible mark. In *De amicitia*, Cicero recounts Laelius’s claim that he can be sure that “the beginnings” of his friendship with Scipio “did not spring from the hope of gain” because neither Laelius nor Scipio, as self-sufficient individuals, had the need for it.¹⁷ To be sure, friendship is a kind of harmony between two people. But it is a limited one in that it is never dependent on the fulfillment the other can provide. The friend always remains his own self.

For Cicero, friendship continues to maintain this sense of independence and separation. Cicero acknowledges that the self-reliant man will naturally seek out friendship with another but that such friendship never compromises the individual boundaries that have already been established. Laelius recounts Tiberius Gracchus’s rebellion against Rome and the efforts of Gaius Clossius, a follower of Tiberius, to obtain a pardon for his involvement on the grounds that “his esteem for Tiberius Gracchus was so great he thought it was his duty to do anything that Tiberius requested him to do.”¹⁸ Laelius dismisses Gaius’s plea by exposing his dangerous fealty: Laelius asks Gaius if he would burn down the Capitol if Tiberius requested; Gaius responds that he would. Cicero makes clear that the point of the story is that friendship is no excuse for “sinful” betrayal (in this case against the state), one that stems from Gaius’s all-consuming obedience to Tiberius. Much of Gaius’s failure stems from his inability to remain a virtuous individual “for,” as Cicero explains, “since his belief in your virtue induced the friendship, it is hard for that friendship to remain if you have forsaken virtue.”¹⁹ Cicero emphasizes the independent existence of virtue in Gaius that served as the precondition for his friendship with Tiberius. The loss of virtue and the virtuous friendship emerges through a forsaking of the self. Gaius is led to a dishonorable disposition, a willingness to do dishonorable

¹⁵ Aristotle, 1169a8.

¹⁶ Cicero, *De senectute, De amicitia, De divinatione*, trans. W.A. Falconer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), 142-3. John D. Cox has also identified “stoic self-sufficiency as the basis for true (i.e., virtuous) friendship” in Cicero’s *De Amicitia*. See “Shakespeare and the Ethics of Friendship,” *Religion and Literature* 40, no. 3 (2008): 3. While Cox notes that a “confidence in one’s virtue and that of one’s friend” is the necessary means by which “excelling virtue seeks out its likeness in another,” I am arguing that the status of such virtue between friends is never an assured thing. Friendship is very much the dynamic process of maintaining this virtue.

¹⁷ Cicero, 143.

¹⁸ Cicero, 149.

¹⁹ Cicero, 149.

things, because of an allegiance to his friend that overrides his own individually held sense of virtue. The example of Tiberius and Gaius is one in which total accord leads to a dangerous conformity and dissolution of proper, virtuous friendship.

Cicero reiterates this insistence on autonomy in friendship through several stories about friends who errantly rebelled against Rome.²⁰ Such betrayals are never justified in Cicero's mind as "no one may think it permissible to follow even a friend when waging a war against his country."²¹ Cicero's opinion rests heavily on a belief in the preservation of the state, but his assessment leads to an acknowledgment of the seductive sway friends can possess and an endorsement of a certain distance in friendship. "Because without associates," Cicero writes, "no one attempts any such mischiefs," and therefore friends "must not think themselves so bound that they cannot withdraw from friends who are sinning in some important matter of public concern."²² Cicero does not admonish friendship here but instead addresses the dangers of a social connection that threatens to compromise the virtuous individual self. In another sense, he identifies friendship's very need to toggle between the private allegiance of individual friendship and "public concern" of the state and larger sociality. Total concord with the group is disturbed by an allegiance to a particular friend; total concord with the individual friend may have to be broken in the interest of the larger public.

Cicero identifies the seeming imperfection of friendship in that it can never be assured of its total union to a particular person or group. The ability to re-assert difference always lies in reserve. In fact, it is a crucial element for friendship to remain sound. Cicero, then, defines a limit in friendship: friendship *per se* is not an absolute good but hinges on a persistent, unwavering autonomy—an autonomy that may manifest as a siding with the individual or larger society. (For Cicero, this includes an unwavering loyalty to country.) Such wavering is not authorized by inconstancy in the feelings for two parties but a strict constancy to the self.

However, this rigid investment in the assured, definitive, and autonomous self also defines distinct limits on the very scope of friendly relations.²³ Citing both Cicero and Aristotle's shared belief that "friendship is a vertue" and that it be "in good men onely," Sir Thomas Elyot reasons that friendship is "rare and seldome" (162) because friendship requires not just common virtue but the matching of the exact same virtues in "good" individuals.²⁴ The need to know oneself so specifically authorizes the need for exact likeness in friendship. The need for such likeness means that only certain people can be friends and that, "Betwene all men that be good can nat all way be amitie," because friendship

requireth that they be of semblable or moche like maners. For grauitie and affability be euery of them laudable qualities, so be seueritie and placabilitie, also magnificence and liberalitie be noble virtues, and yet frugalitie, whiche is a sobrenesse or moderation in liuinge is, and that for good cause, of al wise men extolled. Yet were these virtues and qualities be separately in sundry parsons assembled, may well be perfect concorde, but frendshippe is there seldome or neuer; for that, whiche the one for a vertue embraceth, the other contemneth, or at

²⁰ Cicero, 147-9.

²¹ Cicero, 155.

²² Cicero, 153-5.

²³ I.e. One's concord with the individual friend that is broken in interest of the larger public does not necessarily make one a "friend" with the larger public.

²⁴ Elyot, 161-2.

the leste neglecteth. Wherefore it semeth that wherein the one deliteth, it is to the other repugnaunt unto his nature; and where is any repugnaunce, may be none amitie, sens frendshippe is an entier consent of willes and desires.²⁵

Elyot's claim that "all men that be good can nat all way be amitie" echoes Spenser's own exclusionary proclamation "To such therefore I do not sing at all": friendship is expressly not for everybody. But Elyot shows how friendship's emphasis on the precise, definitive self justifies such a position. Given that persons are "separately" or so uniquely "assembled" of virtue, friendship demands more than just "parfect concorde," the casual fellowship between all good men, but "entier consent." Such exacting equality between two people will inevitably not include many others. The intense likeness between friends, based on individual specificity, asserts the friends' necessary difference from even other "good men." Difference remains an integral part of friendship in that friends must necessarily be distinct from almost everyone else. The very identification of likeness is an inherent assertion of difference, and that distinction from others is the very mark of friendship.

In confirming the reality of Spenser's world where not everyone can be friends, Elyot also begins to articulate how the assured specificity of friendly bonds actually creates conflict. Whereas Cicero's friends, through an attention to the self, can never be assured of their bond to a particular person or group, Elyot's friends in the very act of bonding with another specific individual assert their difference from everyone else. As one will "embraceth" a virtue, another will naturally "contemneth" said virtue to the point that he will have "repugnaunce" for the other's proclivity. Thus, likeness between friends defines the very features that prohibit concord with others. Cicero's imperfection in friendship is internal, which is to say that it is the emphasis on individual autonomy that articulates the necessary difference from everyone else. Elyot's imperfection in friendship is external: the identification of the individual's unique virtuous disposition when linked with another, rather ironically, asserts the pair's very means of differentiation. The very act of becoming friends produces imperfection. That is, it puts into relief the friends' difference from the rest of the world. With all its inclination towards specific likeness, friendship actually authorizes and empowers social diversity that can't possibly be reasoned into totality.

Thus, Elyot reveals the consequence of an intense attention to the self. Friendship, in the particular interest of shared likeness, can't help but exclude the majority of people: specificity of self makes demands on likeness that inevitably bars most people—arguably everyone other than the friendly pair—from ever being friends, a fact that keeps friendship undeniably "rare."²⁶ Elyot himself makes plain this disunity that friendship causes with others when he notes that, "Wherefore it semeth that wherein the one deliteth, it is to the other repugnaunt unto his nature; and where is any repugnaunce, may be none amitie." Friendship, in discerning what people are 'like,' breeds conflict simply because people actively dislike what they are not.

²⁵ Elyot, 163.

²⁶ Thought another way, Elyot's conception of friendship is less generous than Cicero's. Cicero's autonomous self allows for a more liberal variety of private and public association. In that sense, Cicero demonstrates how attention to the self must sometimes forsake the individual friend for the public concern. Elyot swings the pendulum in the other direction: attention to the self authorizes an identity so assured that no one other than the particular friend can possibly be included.

Indeed, the very constitution of Cambell and Triamond's friendship in *The Faerie Queene* draws distinct boundaries of sociality and thus prevents a larger amity between many. Spenser's book of friendship features multiple tournaments that pit the likes of Cambell and Triamond against other friendly pairs and groups.²⁷ But central to Spenser's book of friendship is also the incessant fighting between the friends Cambell and Triamond. Not only is there a rivalry between friends and those who are unlike them, there is also an inherent rivalry between friends themselves. Cicero certainly hints at this latent possibility: the necessary ability to re-assert difference always leaves the presence of discord between friends that may need to be exercised, such as how Gaius should have fought against Tiberius when he knew he had forsaken his virtue. In that sense, friends are always rivals because they are constantly maintaining their own individual virtue rather than conforming to each other's will.

However, likeness itself also produces conflict, and it is René Girard's theory of mimetic desire that most explicitly articulates the mechanics of such disunity. Of course, the possibility of conflict between equals, such as friends, seems counterintuitive. As Girard posits, "words like *sameness* and *similarity* evoke an image of harmony. If we have the same tastes and like the same things, surely we are bound to get along."²⁸ But such similarity also means we share the same desires, and "Two desires converging on the same object are bound to clash. Thus mimesis coupled with desire leads automatically to conflict."²⁹ For Girard, this desire is not mere coincidence but has its origins in the very mimetic "impulse" or "being": "The rival desires the same object as the subject" not out of "the fortuitous convergence of two desires on a single object; rather, *the subject desires the objects because the rival desires it.*"³⁰ Shared desire has its very roots in the shared identity of two persons. Those who *are* alike will naturally want the same things and the resulting interaction could only be rivalry.

For Girard, it would be neither ironic nor unexpected that it is through fighting that Spenser's book begins to evoke many of the elements most familiar to friendship: imitation, likeness, and equivalence. The only viable imitative response to the violence of rivalry (physical or verbal) is "mimetic counterviolence," a response so derivative that the rivals ultimately erase their "initial disparities" and "end by resembling one another."³¹ What begins as an initial similarity expressed as shared desire and rivalry evolves into a more intense likeness or "doubling" through violence. And it is as "antagonists" that they are "truly doubles."³² Violence

²⁷ In Canto 4, Satyrane organizes a tournament for Florimell's girdle, a fight which causes Satyrane and Ferramont to ally against the likes of Blandamour and Paridell, among others. When Triamond is wounded, Cambell, of course, comes to his aid. In Canto 5, Satyrane is "ajudged" to win Florimell but Blandamour and Paridell—united in their loss—challenge the result.

²⁸ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 146. Emphasis is Girard's.

²⁹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 146. This feature of shared desire is a reality of friendship that is certainly familiar to early modern literature. Elyot's story of the exemplary friends Titus and Gisippus hinges on Titus falling in love with Gisippus's betrothed, causing Gisippus to "renounce...all [his] title and interest" that has in that "faire mayden" (172). In fact, having this attraction to the same woman seemingly confirms their friendship.

³⁰ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 145.

³¹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 151.

³² Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 160.

indicates the very strength of the subjects' similarity, for "Violent opposition is the signifier of ultimate desire, of divine self-sufficiency, of that 'beautiful totality' whose beauty depends on its being inaccessible and impenetrable."³³ Once subjects are fighting, we can be assured that they want the same thing and thus are alike. The violent self is, in a sense, a complete or realized self. He possesses, as Girard uncannily seems to echo, a kind of Ciceronian "self-sufficiency" and Elyot-like total likeness necessary for friendship.

But while Girard's theory astutely identifies a primeval mimetic aspect of friendship, it does not articulate friendship's ultimate form. Cambell and Triamond certainly fight for a long time, but they do not fight endlessly. Their fighting indicates and even establishes likeness—perhaps even prophesizes their friendship—but it does not signal friendship realized. The two reach a kind of 'doubling' but their status as friends is defined by necessary moments or breaks: the dissolution of social union from other individuals, namely kindred, and entire groups. For Spenser, friendship is not total harmony between persons. It is not the concord between the masses nor is it the indistinguishable 'growing together' of lovers. The doubleness of antagonism is not the friendly finality; friendship's epitome exists in the ability to re-conceive or re-establish difference.

With its incessant conflict and literal, seemingly inappropriate fighting, Book IV actually captures the dual dynamic of friendship's autonomy: the necessary disruption of a larger amity between many, as articulated by Elyot, as well as the inherent, Girardian rivalry between friends themselves. Disunity or violence is then instrumental for friendship. Friendship does not just take on the qualities of the other person, it also discards them in order to define the self against the sameness that could only perpetuate conflict. Friendship is about removing bonds—between individuals, between groups—as much as it is about creating them.

Friends as Imitative Rivals

Spenser's book of friendship is, in many ways, also a book about fighting. Cambell and Triamond, the exemplary friends whose narrative occupies the latter part of Canto 2 and whole of Canto 3 of Book IV, start out as adversaries. In fact, the book features multiple tournaments that pit friendly duos against other friendly pairs and groups, all of whom strive to win the same prize (i.e. Florimell's girdle). Girard's theory of mimetic desire explains much of this: all of the fighting takes root in the characters' similarity or, specifically, their shared desire for the same thing. Such likeness necessarily produces rivalry, but such rivalry is also indicative of the quintessential sameness that can lead to friendship. Spenser's friends have to be rivals: they have to desire the same things and fight over them, for this is the very action that establishes the equivalence—the actual doubling—that is a hallmark of friendship.

Indeed, Spenser's story of exemplary friendship begins with a profusion of desire: "Full many Lords, and many Knights" (IV.ii.36.1), which includes Triamond along with his brothers Priamond and Diamond, pursue Cambell's sister Canacee. Canacee refuses to love any of them, a response that only enhances the suitors' desire. As Girard's theory anticipates, the lovers' shared desire prompts "bloudie" fights among the besotted suitors.

So much the more as she refusd to love,
So much the more she loued was and sought,
That oftentimes vnquiet strife did moue
Amongst her louers, and great quarrels wrought,

³³ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 148.

That oft for her in bloudie armes they fought. (IV.ii.37.1-5)
Cambell initially intervenes in the interest of establishing order.

Which whenas *Cambell*, that was stout and wise,
Perceiu'd would breede great mischiefe, he bethought
How to preuent the peril that mote rise,

And turne both him and her to honour in this wise. (ii.37.6-9)

Cambell decides to organize a tournament for Canacee's "warlike wooers" (ii.38.1), a move that would presumably control the budding "mischiefe" on the ground. But rather than sit back and simply arrange the potential suitors into orderly match ups, Cambell injects himself into the matrix of desire. He makes himself one of the fighting parties, declaring

That of them all, which loue to her did make,
They by consent should chose the stoutest three,
That with himselfe should combat for her sake,

And of them all the victour should his sister take. (ii.38.6-9)

Cambell's participation posits himself as a quintessential Girardian "rival" who imitates the suitors in two ways. First, he imitates the suitors' desire for his sister. Cambell's decision to fight the suitors, which is to say be one of the suitors that stands to "take" the object of desire (his sister), suggests the imitative desire for his sister, the incestuous implications of which are certainly not absent from this episode.³⁴ Cambell wants his sister simply because others do, and his adoption of this desire begins to establish a similarity with the many suitors.

The second, and arguably more significant, imitation is not Cambell's desire for the same object (i.e. Canacee) but his desire to imitate the suitors themselves. Girard gestures towards this fundamental inclination when he emphasizes that "rivalry" between two subjects (here Cambell and the three brothers who will compete for Canacee) is not the "fortuitous convergence of desires on a single object" but the very imitation of the subject(s): "*The subject desires the object because the rival desires it.*"³⁵ Girard makes clear that it is ultimately the relationship between subjects (Cambell and Triamond, eventually) that is the true motivating force behind Cambell's participation (and resulting desire for the object), not any sense of independently determined guardianship or desire for the same object. Cambell mimics the brothers –mond as well as the mass of suitors' desire for Canacee, which is to say that Cambell's desire manifests in an orderly but nonetheless identical action to the many lords and knights that pursue his sister: fighting "in bloudie armes" (ii.37.5). Arguably, Cambell has little interest in protecting his sister nor does he

³⁴ The incestuous suggestion comes from the end of Chaucer's "Squire's Tale," the source material for much of Canto 2 and 3, in which "Cambalo" is said to fight "For Canacee, er that he mighte hir winne" (669). Vaughn Stewart argues that Spenser's revision of Chaucer's original source material "avoids incest by having Cambell fight only to protect his sister from potential suitors" (82). See "Friends, Rivals, and Revisions: Chaucer's *Squire's Tale* and *Amis and Amiloun* in *The Faerie Queene*, Book IV," *Spenser Studies* 26 (2011). A Girardian reading of the same scene suggests that the incestuous suggestion is still present in Spenser's version, and there is no explicit indication that Cambell's concern is solely for the protection of his sister.

³⁵ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 145. Emphasis is Girard's.

have any true romantic feelings for her; he fights simply because others—namely the brothers Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond—do.³⁶

Thus, Spenser's friends-to-be, so to speak, constitute a familiar Girardian triangle.³⁷ Cambell (subject) desires his sister Canacee (object) because he imitates the brothers –mond (model); or, the brothers –mond (subject) desire Canacee (object) because they imitate Cambell who, as brother, is the “dearest frend” (ii.35.5) to his sister. They too want that status.³⁸ (This would explain the ever-increasing desire of the suitors even when Canacee refuses them. They desperately want the love that Cambell already has.) If these are to be the friendly paragons in Spenser's poem, we can already see the principle of imitation at work. Even before their actual fighting, both mirror an antagonism towards each other that seems to prophesize their future social union. In a sense, Cambell and Triamond, by virtue of the fact that they are alike in their shared romantic desire and means of action, are on the path to be friends before they even know it.

To be clear, though, Cambell and Triamond's mimetic rivalry, and the resulting qualities of sameness, is expressly not friendship realized. Friendship is not just likeness; likeness elicits a violence or assertion of difference that characterizes the friendly relationship but also generates friendship. Put another way, violence causes difference or separation that can re-establish the independent self, a necessary part of friendly harmony. The overwhelming likeness of Girard's mimetic desire is a kind of affective extreme in *The Faerie Queene* that through violence must be sublimated into an articulation of difference. Spenser's friends must recapture a personal autonomy.

Friends as “parts diuyde”

Spenser's friends begin with a Girardian mimetic inclination, but they also possess a set of personal boundaries that resist an immediate and total similitude between themselves and others. Triamond, who will become a “true” friend to Cambell, does not start out as a friend or one with an amicable social disposition. Rather, his initial defining social bond is familial. He is the youngest of triplet brothers that are determined to be the “stoutest three” challengers for Cambell, “three brethren” that are

Borne of one mother in one happie mold,
Borne at one burden, in one happie morne,
Thrise happie mother, and thrise happie morne,
That bore three such, three such not to be fond;
Her name was *Agape* whose children werne
All three as one, the first hight *Priamond*,
The second *Dyamond*, the youngest *Triamond*. (IV.ii.41.3-9)

³⁶ After Cambell establishes the tournament for Canacee and announces his own participation, all the parties save for the brothers drop out: “none of them durst vndertake the fight; / More wise they weend to make of loue delight, / Then life to hazard for fair Ladies looke” (ii.40.4-6).

³⁷ For Girard's “triangular” desire, see *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1966), 1-26.

³⁸ Another possible triangle: Cambell (subject) desires to fight (object) because the suitors (model) do. In any event, Cambell and the brothers –mond imitate each other and exhibit a budding likeness on multiple fronts.

As a familial band, the brothers Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond stand in for one of Spenser's kinds of love—"deare affection vnto kindred sweet"—that, like friendship, lends itself towards unity: the brothers are "one happie mold" that are "three as one." But they also share an affinity for distinction and difference. The description of the three brothers is caught between a budding oneness but also a seemingly irreconcilable division: they are "allyde, As if but one soul in them all did dwell" yet "into three parts diuude" (ii.43.2-4); "three faire branches" that from "one roote deriu'd" (ii.43.5-6).

Indeed, their mother Agape is painfully aware of their innate, tripartite nature and thus inherent division. Fearing that her sons will meet an early death due to their warlike proclivity, Agape seeks out the "three fatall sisters" (ii.47.4) to "draw them [i.e. Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond] longer out, and better twine" (ii.51.2): she requests that if any of her sons should die, that son's "life may passe into the next; And when the next shall likewise ended bee, / [...] / Vnto the third, that his may so be trebly wext" (ii.52.6-9). Agape's proposal reveals how distinctly separate Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond actually are. Although they seem to be one, they are in fact not: Agape needs to explicitly request that their "life" be combined upon death.

The brothers' promise of metaphysical unification, then, is evidence of a lack of unification itself. Even with all their collective concord, each brother still bears their own individual "life." In this sense, the brothers embody the jarring clash of love's unity and friendship's resistance to concord that Spenser establishes in the proem: they are undoubtedly bonded by the "deare affection vnto kindred sweet" but each still retain a differentiated self. To be sure, this autonomy is not necessarily a social deficiency. It arguably bespeaks a proper friendly predisposition. Like Cicero's friend, the three brothers are predisposed to a healthy independence rather than an automatic and total resemblance to each other.³⁹

This sustained differentiation is reflected not only within the brothers' fraternity but outside it as well. The brothers' unity does not actually lend itself to a larger harmony with the rest of the world. In fact, it authorizes further social division. On the surface, this takes the form of their ability to love but also be violent: their "loue [for] each other deare" (ii.53.9) is offset by their "rash prouoking perils all about" (ii.46.8). In fact, the poem depicts familial love as an instrument for violence. The brothers get along, but this concord amongst themselves actually encourages "battell." They "surely" love each other

And neuer discord did amongst them fall;

³⁹ This mere similarity rather than total likeness is evident in the combinations of attributes that define each brother:

Stout *Priamond*, but not so strong to strike,
 Strong *Diamond*, but not so stout a knight,
 But *Triamond* was stout and strong alike:
 On horsebacke vsed *Triamond* to fight,
 And *Priamond* on foote had more delight,
 But horse and foote knew *Diamond* to wield:
 With curtaxe vsed *Diamond* to smite,
 And *Triamond* to handle speare and shield,

But speare and curtaxe both vsd *Priamond* in field. (ii.42)

Although they possess the same traits, these traits vary in degree or configuration. No brother is exactly the same.

Which much augmented all their other praise.
 And now t'increase affection naturall,
 In loue of *Canacee* they ioyned all:
 Vpon which ground this same great battell grew,
 Great matter growing of beginning small; (IV.ii.54.2-7)

Here, the brothers' love resembles something like Elyot's disruption of harmony through shared likeness: their shared love indicates the extent of their similarity to each other and thus asserts their difference from everyone else. Unification between the kindred authorizes conflict. The love of *Canacee* 'joins' the three brothers and 'increases' their "affection," but that same "ioyned"-ness actually establishes the "ground" of their antagonism. The brothers fortify the boundaries of their own affection, a fraternal definition that effectively resists connection with anyone else. Such distinction enhances the desire to exhibit difference (i.e. fight), causing the "great battell" (with *Cambell*) to grow. In the most extreme sense, the brothers, fortified by the exclusivity of their own familial bonds, don't want to be friends with anyone else.

Yet the brothers themselves are not as close as they may seem. Given that they do not fight each other, they reveal a real lack of similitude or noticeable difference. By Girard's account, *Priamond*, *Diamond* and *Triamond* should fight each other. All three openly love *Canacee* and thus share the desire for the same woman. However, they do not engage in any kind of sibling rivalry due to mimetic conflict: "neuer discord did amongst them fall" (ii.54.2). Instead, their shared love of the same woman counter intuitively 'increases' their "affection naturall" (ii.54.4). This ability to be "ioyned" in love is a rather remarkable response from brothers that all desire the same thing. But given that they do not fight each other, we can be certain that the brothers are, in a sense, not actually doubles. (They are, after all, triplets.) That is to say that they lack a necessary similarity close enough to produce conflict. The fact that the brothers don't fight is evidence of a healthy division or difference; their natural concord suggests that they fail to possess the intense likeness that would manifest as violent conflict.

This dissimilarity seems to be the virtue of the trio: it avoids the inter-relational doubling that causes the most intense of conflicts. Yet for all its halcyon status, the trio *per se* noticeably lacks the close, intense kinship between friends—the kind of similarity that would inevitably lead to if not require rivalry. The brothers are able to take advantage of the casual fellowship of Elyot's "perfecte concorde" but at the cost of the near absolute likeness and the resulting risk of conflict that accompanies "the zeale of friends."

The brothers, simply put, lack the likeness that is characteristic of friendship. They possess the kinship of familial bonds that inspires them to antagonize those outside of their fraternity but exhibit a distance that keeps them from fighting each other. Imagined more positively, *Priamond*, *Diamond*, and *Triamond* as brothers exhibit half of the social requirements for friendship proper: Cicero's sufficient division or autonomy that resists total union to another, a social condition that is sustained by the fellowship of a triple fraternity that can't possibly be doubled. This quality, by itself, is not actually indicative of friendship *in toto*. The brothers, as a social unit, "consent" enough that they want to fight other people. But they don't want to fight each other, a fact that bespeaks a lack of true equivalence.

Spenser's triplet brothers are representative of a comfortable, seemingly perfect harmony that is an imperfect friendly bond—which is to say that it is, strictly speaking, not really a friendly bond at all. Friendship requires that friends not only desire to fight others (i.e. non-friends) but also, at a certain point, fight each other. This inter-relational conflict is only possible through the close likeness produced by a kind of doubling. The trio as a social configuration is in

a way antithetical to the exemplary friendship Spenser seeks to articulate because it keeps, in this case, Triamond from establishing the kind of dual relationship that leads to friendship. Friendship hinges on the likeness that can only come from an intense parity. For friendship to actually manifest, the trio has to be destroyed.

In this sense, Triamond and his brothers, from the outset, seem closed off to friendship in that they resist a mimetic doubling; Cambell too exercises a similar but simpler allegorical boundedness that emphasizes his status as a contained, individual self. Whereas Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond are fated to take on each other's life and soul, Cambell is impervious if not invincible thanks to a magical ring, a gift from his sister Canacee which has the "power to staunch al wounds, that mortally did bleed" (ii.39.9). Indeed, Cambell's fight experience is defined by a maintaining a resilient, literally unopened self. When Cambell first fights Priamond, he is hit with an "vnluckie glaunce" against his shoulder, "Yet from the wound no drop of bloud there fell" (IV.iii.8.6). Allegorically speaking, Cambell stands poised to be the virtuous friend that exercises a Ciceronian self-containment. He is never at risk of errantly taking on the other because he never, literally, opens up.

But Cambell's ability to stay "within himself" is yet another unsustainable status for friendship. Like the brothers -mond, Cambell harbors the important autonomy that friends, even when linked, must exercise and maintain. However, the man by himself can't be representative of a friendship, and so it is necessary that his individual status first be dissolved. (Arguably, Cambell betrays his strict boundedness through his many mimetic impulses.) In order to be a friend, Cambell's self-containment is something that also needs to be broken down.

Friendship Through Fighting

With its competing forces of imitative likeness and separate autonomy from the outset, the constitution of Cambell and Triamond's friendship is an intricate negotiation. To be sure, the relentless, imitative fighting that dominates the third canto of Book IV feels like an indiscriminate mess. Blows are a seemingly unremarkable back-and-forth where, like many other parts of *The Faerie Queene*, the characters in the midst of battle often mirror each other to the point of being indecipherable. But despite the seemingly relentless similarity in and of the fighting in Canto 3 of Book IV the "friends" Cambell and Triamond, as well as "kindred" Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond are never permitted to be fully alike. While the overarching momentum seems to be on a fight that is seeking resolution, the constitution of friendship is filled with and defined by moments of differentiation. Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond are never permitted to unite into one soul. Cambell may seem to resemble others in fighting but that resemblance never settles into finality. Relationships are forged in moments of slight but significant variance.

Granted, Book IV's fights begin by reflecting the mimetic disposition inherent to friendship. Cambell's premiere battle with Priamond seems like an emblem of friendly likeness given its premise of equality: each fighter is deemed to be of "equall worth" and of "equall armes" (iii.6.3-4), and both are so "thoroughly skild" in the use of their weapons that it is "hard...to weene which harder were" (iii.7.2-5). It is only after a lengthy exchange in which both cannily "auoyd[]" (iii.7.9) the "mightie strokes on either side" (iii.7.6) that, in an aberrant moment of vulnerability, Cambell stabs Priamond in the thigh and side, thrusts a spear into his "brow," and finishes him off by shoving the "other halfe" into his head. In short, Cambell gets an edge on Priamond and finally a combative distinction is made. Cambell's ensuing fight with Diamond follows a similar script: The two face off like "two Tygers" and do not so much land

their blows as “warded, or auoyded and let goe” (iii.17.4) until Diamond loses his balance and Cambell, with a single stroke, decapitates him (iii.20.6).

In both cases, the brothers’ deaths initiate a move towards a seemingly greater unification: the combining of souls, a familiar trope of friendly union that Agape had previously contracted.⁴⁰ Priamond’s “ghost” leaves his “fleshy band” and is “through traduction” placed into Diamond’s body (iii.13); Diamond’s “soule” leaves his body and “Streight entring into *Triamond*” fills the third brother “With double life” (iii.22.1-3). This moment of “traduction” where each brother literally takes on the other’s soul seems like the perfect friendly union we’ve been waiting for, a synthesis of “kindred” love that represents an utterly complete harmony.

Yet this soul sharing is neither the exemplary friendly move nor is it constitutive of the titular friendship of the poem.⁴¹ Certainly, the brothers’ ability to share souls is indicative of a metaphysical, if not literal, kinship. But this metaphysical harmony is in service of familial bonds, not friendly ones. In fact, the combining of souls *per se* does not actually bring us any closer to friendship in the poem. If anything, the twined souls only enhance the antagonism that exists between Cambell and the brothers. After Diamond receives Priamond’s soul, it is with “secret feeling” that he “Rush fiercely forth, the battell to renew” (iii.14.5-6), and when Triamond takes on Diamond’s soul (which also contains Priamond’s), he is “With double life, and grieffe” in his “inner parts” (iii.22.3-4) inspired to fight.⁴²

Rather, what serves friendship is the way the death of Priamond and Diamond actually marks a reduction. The death of the brothers Priamond and Diamond effectively brings us to Cambell and Triamond only, a social configuration that is actually conducive to friendship. In terms of social configuration, Spenser eliminates the fellowship of the trio and reduces it to the duo. The book of friendship, with its pervasive fighting, is explicit about the need to cleave people from each other in the interest of establishing the perfect, exclusive friendship. Thus, the removal of the brothers Priamond and Diamond is an integral part of Spenser’s friendly allegory, a blatant reminder that friendship does not include everyone, even those as friend-like as familial bonds.⁴³

It is this very separation of kindred that is a fundamental movement for friendship, and in this sense Spenser’s violence is productive. What moves Cambell and the brothers –mond towards friendship are the killings themselves, which is to say that friendship needs not so much the combining of souls but the very excising of the multiple brothers. While the brothers’ deaths

⁴⁰ Montaigne cites Aristotle’s definition of friend as “being no other than one soule in two bodies” (150-151). See Michel Montaigne, “Of Friendship” in *The Essayes of Montaigne: John Florio’s Translation*, ed. J.I.M. Stewart. (New York: Modern Library, 1938).

⁴¹ Strictly speaking, the soul sharing in Spenser’s poem is not one soul in two bodies but two (or more) souls in one body.

⁴² Diamond and Triamond’s compounded antagonism certainly echoes Elyot’s belief that likeness defines the bounds that prohibit concord with others. The union of Priamond-Diamond and Diamond-Triamond, itself a kind of likening, fortifies the kindred bond and thus augments their difference or “repugnance” for their opponent, Cambell.

⁴³ To be sure, Priamond and Diamond are not throw-away characters nor is the decision to make the triplets a trivial one. Twins would already possess the paired rivalry of friendship. A single brother would deprive Spenser of the chance to literally kill off the familial people that are expressly not friends in his allegorical poem. The trio is a crucial configuration in that it allows for the manifestation of so many features of friendship but also captures what friendship is not.

get us to a preferred numerical configuration for friendship, the brothers' union of souls still betrays the possibility of virtuous friendship by establishing an undifferentiated self that can't possibly practice a Ciceronian autonomy.⁴⁴ And so, Spenser is sure to countervail the period of intense unification with a period of necessary renunciation. Triamond must go through a second phase in which the souls are actually released from his body.

While there always existed a latent resistance towards total unity amongst the kindred brothers—their status as “three parts diuyde”, their differing combinations of chief attributes—Spenser's ultimate renunciation is profound. When Cambell and Triamond fight, Cambell momentarily gains the upper hand and slits Triamond's throat, a wound that causes “one soule out of his [Triamond's] bodie to flie” (iii.30.8). (Triamond is also ‘killed’ a second time when he is stabbed in “th'arm-pit” but no soul is explicitly said to escape from his body then.) The metaphysics of the episode provide some explanation for the killings and Triamond's continued survival: effectively in possession of three lives, Triamond has two lives to lose. And in one sense, these deaths and the accompanying flight of souls are a virtuous, friendly move. Allegorically, the rejection of souls realizes the appropriate Ciceronian autonomy that friendship needs. No longer is Triamond bound to his siblings; he can effectively withdraw (or is withdrawn) from them in the interest of a more virtuous, independent friendly concern. Triamond's expulsion of soul(s) reflects friendship's resistance to total synthesis—not unlike Scudamour and Amoret's hermaphroditic mixing—that an unabated imitation might provide.

But in a very brutal and ruthless way, Spenser insists on the absolute removal that friendship requires. The brothers (as souls), in the end, do not actually stay with(in) Triamond at all and thus have no actual part in the friendship with Cambell. This is not to say that Priamond and Diamond don't have their place. For Spenser these non-relationships between Cambell and Priamond and Diamond are still part of friendship's larger totality. But what they are is a reminder of friendship's inability to foster universal social bonds. The fact that (the book of) friendship in no way accommodates the brothers' inclusion, even in the form of combined souls, illustrates the incredible limits of friendship's application.

Indeed, the brothers' excision allows Cambell and Triamond's fighting to take on a fundamentally different tenor. Unlike Priamond and Diamond—whose battles with Cambell are marked by fleeting contact, key evasions, and surgical counterstrikes—Triamond rushes at Cambell and lets fly “heapes of strokes” from which “fierie sparkles flasht, / As fast as water-sprinkles gainst a rock are dasht” (iii.25.4-9). His strikes make contact with flashing brilliance, a frenzy which catches Cambell, “daunted with [Triamond's] blowes” (iii.26.1), off guard. The result is a battle that looks much more like the one we might expect between equals—a regular exchange of blows—but also one in which we can anticipate the effacement of the familiar demarcations of rivalry. In other words, Cambell and Triamond's fighting begins to more definitively manifest as a form of pure likeness. It begins to establish the similarity that friendship, in part, needs.

It would be no surprise to Girard that the fighting continues so unabated in the canto. Violence can only perpetuate more violence, and so Priamond, Diamond, and Triamond automatically engage Cambell. But Cambell and Triamond's particular, almost mechanical back-and-forth exchange is violence par excellence. Girard's theorization fits Spenser's poem perfectly.

⁴⁴ The sameness that the merging of souls creates is not enough or, thought another way, too much for friendship.

The rhythm of the action is faster and more abrupt; it is reflected in the tragic dialogue or *stichomythia*, that is, in the exchange of insults and accusations that corresponds to the exchange of blows between warriors locked in single combat. [...]

Whether the violence is physical or verbal, an interval of time passes between each blow. And each blow is delivered in the hope that it will bring the duel or dialogue to an end, constitute the *coup de grace* or final word. The recipient of the blow is thrown momentarily off balance and needs time to pull himself together, to prepare a suitable reply. During this interval his adversary may well believe that the decisive blow has indeed been struck.⁴⁵

Note however that this is how Cambell and Triamond fight, not Priamond and Diamond. Priamond and Diamond bob and weave. Strikes miss. The fighters “slyde.” Priamond and Diamond *don't* mirror Cambell (and vice versa). Cambell and Triamond, on the other hand, go toe-to-toe. They fight like potential friends.

Put another way, Cambell and Triamond are “doubled” more fundamentally than either Priamond or Diamond. The extent of this imitation is expressed in the depth of Triamond’s engagement and the intensity of his fighting. Far from the purposed desire to win Canacee, Triamond’s fighting manifests as a fierce expression of being: “He stroke, he soust, he foynnd, he hewd, he lasht” (iii.25.6) and

Thus did the battell varie to and fro,
With diuerse fortune doubtfull to be deemed:
Now this the better had, now had his fo;
Then he halfe vanquisht, then the other seemed,
Yet victors both them selues always esteemed. (iii.28.1-5)

Spenser’s description registers the systematic evenness of Cambell and Triamond’s battle but also the strange way the two become increasingly the same. For the first time, we see a fight that does not end with a single, strategic strike but one that goes back and forth. The effect is a concordance of feeling in which both fighters see themselves as victors.

More specifically, Cambell and Triamond’s brand of fighting produces what Girard calls “alternation” or “oscillation.” Girard seems to mean this both in terms of action and identity. “Victory,” he writes, “or rather, the act of violence that permits no response—thus oscillates between the combatants without either managing to lay final claim to it.”⁴⁶ Indeed, both Cambell and Triamond deem themselves as “victors” in an exchange that could potentially go on forever. But it is this “alternation” that “constitutes a *relationship*” that the mere state of winning or not-winning, having or not-having cannot.⁴⁷ By Girard’s reasoning, Cambell and Priamond or Cambell and Diamond are not friends because their antagonisms end in (Cambell’s) definitive victory. Priamond and Diamond’s fights with Cambell are not “relationships” expressly because they don’t involve the necessary exchange. Relationships proper happen when the “roles of dominating and dominated are constantly reversed”;⁴⁸ or in the case of Cambell and Triamond, “Now this the better had, now had his fo” (iii.28.3). According to Girard, “Alternation is a

⁴⁵ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 150-151.

⁴⁶ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 151.

⁴⁷ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 150.

⁴⁸ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 153.

fundamental fact of the tragic relationship,” which is to say that relationships are not construed by states of certain status but far more active and even rapid reciprocity.⁴⁹

But for Spenser, the alternation between Cambell and Triamond is not a “tragic” relationship. (After all, Cambell and Triamond ultimately come out friends by the end of their fight.) The tragedy of such relationships, for Girard, is that “distinctive traits vanish, for [tragic heroes] all successively assume the same roles.”⁵⁰ Certainly, Cambell and Triamond establish an equality through violent reciprocity. But it is here that friendship distinguishes itself through a concern for a proper autonomy. Cambell and Triamond don’t end up in a permanent state of incontrovertible or “monstrous” doubling, what Girard describes as a “‘Dionysiac’ state of mind” that “erase[s] all manner of differences: familial, culture, biological, and natural...a hallucinatory state that is not a synthesis of elements, but a formless and grotesque mixture of things that are normally separate.”⁵¹ What this description does not fully account for is the distinction of friends who, despite their seeming identicalness, must also assert their separation. In other words, a similar kind of doubling happens in Book IV to Cambell and Triamond, but only to an extent. The establishment of similarity (via mimesis) is not the end for Spenser, which is to say that it doesn’t constitute a complete, realized friendship. Friendship is able to reclaim or re-realize difference.⁵²

Still, Spenser pushes such a dangerous doubling to its limits. Cambell and Triamond continue to fight until they are so exhausted that “both at once fell dead vpon the field, / And each to other seemd the victorie to yield” (IV.iii.34.8-9). Their antagonism reaches a point of combative stalemate.

Ne either car’d to ward, or perill shonne,
Desirous both to haue the battell donne;
Ne either cared life to saue or spill,
Ne which of them did winne, ne which were wonne. (IV.iii.36.4-7)

Here, Cambell and Triamond’s antagonism does not feel like antagonism at all mainly because the demarcations of conflict—safety and peril, life and death, winning and losing, the very exchanges that constitute a Girardian relationship—are so thoroughly erased. The effect is a turn away from an inter-personal melding and towards a collective one. The stalemate has a strange, expansive influence on the observing masses. Those watching the battle sympathize with its combatants so much so that they become less interested in the success of a particular party but begin to express a concern for the maintenance of the “doubtfull ballance” that has been reached:

Whilst thus the case in doubtfull ballance hong,
Vnsure to whether side it would incline,

⁴⁹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 150.

⁵⁰ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 150.

⁵¹ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 160. Girard’s description of ‘doubling’ certainly echoes the description of the lovers Scudamore and Amoret who, in an erasure of certainly biological and natural norms, embrace at the end of the 1590 version of Book III, the book of love, and “as growne together quite” (III.xii.46.5 1590) appear to form a “faire *Hermaphrodite*” (xii.46.2. 1590).

⁵² In this way, friendship has the ability to actually avoid the “process of sacrificial substitution—to the polarization of violence onto a single victim who substitutes for all the others” (161). Friendship, in its ability to reclaim the difference between persons, is a safeguard against the persecution of victims or scapegoats.

And all mens eyes and hearts, which there among
 Stood gazing, filled were with ruffull tine,
 And secret feare, to see their fatall fine, (IV.iii.37.1-5)

This is, arguably, the most halcyon moment in the tournament if not all of Book IV. But it's also an eerie one—not unlike Elyot's "parfecte concorde" that is not friendship—between everyone present. Cambell and Triamond's stalemate and the crowd's uncertainty about which side to "incline" towards is a tenuous truce, what could be described as an "equivocal middle ground between difference and unity."⁵³ Thought another way, it's a kind of social blank, one that has none of the necessary definitions (i.e. an inclination towards specific virtue that "deliteth" one but is "repugnant" to another, to use Elyot's terms) that are constitutive of friendship's world.

Such a seemingly perfect, mass concord is not permitted to exist in the book of friendship, for it is in this rare lull in an otherwise unremitting battle that Triamond's sister Cambina inexplicably arrives in a chariot, 'smites' Cambell and Triamond with her wand, and beckons them to drink from a cup of magical nepenthe in a bid to 'affrend' the two foes. However, even with all its friendly intention and promise, Cambina's entrance is marked by a cacophonous, mid-stanza interruption to the hanging "ballance" that has been reached: "All suddenly they heard a troublous noyes, / That seemd some perilous tumult to desine, / Confusd with womens cries, and shouts of boyes" (IV.iii.37.6-8). Even this auditory disturbance is a mere precursor to the violence that is Cambina's charge through the crowd with a chariot drawn by "two grim lyons" (iii.39.2). Rushing towards Cambel and Triamond, Cambina

...passed through th'vnruy preace
 Of people, thronging thicke her to behold,
 Her angrie teame breaking their bonds of peace,
 Great heapes of them, like sheepe in narrow fold,
 For hast did over-runne, in dust enrould,
 That thorough rude confusion of the rout,
 Some fearing shriekt, some being harmed hould,
 Some laught for sport, some did for wonder shout,
 And some that would seeme wise, their wonder turnd to dout. (IV.iii.41)

To be sure, Cambina's appearance is a celebratory moment for it is the crucial intervention and first step bringing the two once foes, Cambel and Triamond, together as friends. But her entrance is accompanied by an extreme, almost callous disregard for those around here, manifested in an outright "breaking" of the masses. In the interest of pacifying "th'evill plight" of her "dearest brother" (IV.iii.40.7), people are trampled, dispersed, and sent into disarray.

The stanza is explicit about not only the physical damage wrought by Cambina's chariot but the variance of response that her entrance brings. "Like sheepe," the people are physically parted by the lions that draw her chariot, and they too descend into an array of reactions: some shriek, some fear harm, some laugh, and some "wonder" in awe. The crowd's reaction is not universal, but that is the very point: Cambina's arrival, armed with all its allegorical potential for establishing the friendly harmony between Cambel and Triamond, comes with a notable amount of social fallout, the shattering of a, granted, tenuous concord between many.

Cambina's entrance raises the question of whether such friendly action (meant to be conducive to concord) can be in the service of two modes of social connection. There are two types of "bonds" being composed over the course of this episode, both of which reach a crux

⁵³ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 161.

near this moment in the tournament. The first and most prevalent is the ongoing formation of the friendship between Cambel and Triamond, an exclusive friendship that is specific to the two heroes of the book. Cambina's entrance is an integral part of the realization of this amity, a penultimate climax to the earlier bouts of fighting. The second is the larger shared, communal response, one that manifests in a collective entente amongst the audience. Exceptional friendship (i.e. between Cambel and Triamond) and mass harmony literally and figuratively collide in this moment, and the result is *not* harmony. Cambina's intervention (i.e. in the interest of establishing the friendship between Cambel and Triamond), ironically, breaks the concord of the masses.

“Few men...Are by the Gods to drinck thereof assynd”

Given that friendship asserts difference and thus thwarts total synthesis, it is only natural that when it comes to the magical nepenthe, the drink that officially makes Cambell and Triamond friends, “Few men, but such as sober are and sage, / Are by the Gods to drinck thereof assynd” (iii.43.7-8). As Spenser announces from the beginning, friendship is simply unavailable to some. It makes no promises to mass harmony. Indeed, friendship actively disturbs the very mass harmony it purports to produce. Cambina's entrance, the penultimate action in a ceremonial ‘affrending’ between Cambel and Triamond, is notable for not only the concord it fosters but the discord that it causes.

And it is perhaps dissatisfying that Cambell and Triamond need only drink a special liquor that makes them forget their former antagonism in order to officially become friends.⁵⁴ It is a strikingly instantaneous fix to a chain of violence that seems to have no end. Indeed, in the moment right before Cambell and Triamond drink, they are once again poised “both againe to fight” (iii.47.3) and have to be assaulted by Cambina before taking up the divine beverage. But the nepenthe serves as a final reminder of the irreconcilability in friendship. Friendship between Cambell and Triamond does not come about thanks to a total harmonization, a thorough account of everything that has gone into it and reasoned resolution to their hostilities, but in a moment where both just sort of drop it. To be sure, we have seen Cambell and Triamond share much in common in the course of the poem, but this developing similarity is met with an instant, uncompromising realization that they are separate and different people.

Only then do the two become friends exchanging deadly “strokes” for kisses “glad” before finally joining “hands for euer friends to be” (iii.49.2-5). But what seems like a purely magical intervention is the moment where friendship actually resists total harmony, in this case effectively ignoring the very history that leads to friendship. Nepenthe is, in essence, a drink that makes people forget: “To drincke hereof, whereby all cares forepast / Are washt away quite from their memorie” (iii.44.6-7). Friendship in Book IV is made possible by leaving something out—family, grief, rage, and the memories of that strife. Like the total removal of souls from Triamond, friendship announces itself with yet another aversion to reconciliation, the inability to account for all things and reasonably bring them together.

It is this very real lack of harmony that concludes the titular friendly episode. Book IV barely gives us fully harmonized subjects or masses, but it is this perpetual state of division that

⁵⁴ The nepenthe that Cambia offers, a “drinck of souerayne grace” has a specific effect: “Deuized by the Gods, for to asswage / Harts grief, and bitter gall away to chace,” replacing “anguish and contentious rage” with “sweet peace and quiet age” in “the troubled mynd” (iii.43.2-6). When “famous men” worthy enough drink it, “all cares forepast / Are washt away quite from their memorie” (iii.44.1-7).

captures friendship's essence. Friendship may seem imperfect given its assertion of difference between subjects as well as between exclusive pairs and the masses, but this keeps it from a near slavish allegiance to mass sociality and harmony. This separation affords friendship an astounding freedom, one that it can relish precisely because it is never bound to all things. It is a privileged relationship that is reserved for specific people. It is never required to unite all things, even all the elements of the narrative.

Indeed, as has been oft-noted, one of the most peculiar features of Spenser's "Legend of Cambel and Telamond, or of Friendship," is that the titular friends Cambell and Triamond drop out after Canto 5, never to be seen again in all of *The Faerie Queene*. Cambell and Triamond's absence makes Book IV feel unfinished, and it casts doubt on friendship's potential, whether it can be "fully realized" in Spenser's world.⁵⁵ Certainly, friendship defies inclusion into the larger world. But there is a strange power in this separation. Cambel and Triamond's very absence from the rest of the book might render their relationship to love and the rest of the poem as seemingly unrealized and incomplete, but it renders their friendship oddly complete by comparison. Friendship is expressly not left in the limbo that love is, the promise of its completion, but manages to reach a point of status relatively quickly. Cambel and Triamond do not exist anywhere else in Spenser's fairy world, but they need not. Friendship does not promise harmony with all things but with the few that it serves.

⁵⁵ Heberle, 115.

2. “Friends, Romans, Countrymen”: Expanding Friendship in *Julius Caesar*

Julius Caesar features one of the most sweeping social declarations in all of Shakespeare’s plays. When Antony addresses the crowd as “Friends, Romans, countrymen,” (3.2.70) he opens his rhetorical (and I can’t help but imagine actual) arms, identifying the masses as not just political citizens but particularly close partners.¹ It’s an *argumentum ad populum* that implies a generous conception of sociality, bolstered by the seemingly broadening call to friends, then Romans, and then countrymen. Antony does not distinguish the people as exclusive and thus separate individuals but ushers them in under a shared sense of identity. Friendship, conceived here, is expansive, available to nearly all of Rome’s citizens.

And yet the actuality of this circumstance seems unsustainable if not hard to imagine. Is Antony really “friends” with all these people? Does he even know them? If friendship, as Sir Thomas Elyot writes, requires an “entire consent of willes and desires” that effectively makes the friend the “other I,”² how can Antony be friends with so many? What does Antony mean when he says that all the people before him are “friends”? Can he really care about these people in a friendly way?

Indeed, the possibility of Antony extending his amity so infinitely is rather dubious. In his essay “Of the Pluralitie of Friends,” Plutarch posits that the necessary “good will, and a lovely grace joined with vertue” of friendship is “so rare” that it is “unpossible either to love many or to be loved of many, perfectly and in the height of affection.” Affection, like “great rivers, if they be divided into many chanel, and cut into sundry riverets,” is necessarily weakened because it only carries “an ebbe water,” and does not run with a “strong streame.”³ Thus, friendship is really only available “betweene twaine” because it requires the experience to establish “similitude and conformitie” of a particularly exacting kind. The “friendship of many,” conversely,

separateth, distracteth and diverteth us, calling and transporting us sundry waies, not permitting the commixture and sodering (as it were) of good will, and kinde affection to grow into one, and make a perfect joint by familiar conversation, enclosing & fasning every part together.⁴

There is, in other words, only so much friendship that any one person can give, and to try and have multiple friends, as Antony does, leads to a dispersal of intimacy that would fail to connect with anyone at all. In order to be a friend, according to Plutarch, one must contract rather than expand one’s social purview and identify the single person who is a friend so that he may focus all of his energy on cultivating a relationship with that particular person.

Thus, Antony’s more generous call to “friends, Romans, countrymen” stands as a challenge to the idea that friendship is primarily a “rare” or exclusive phenomenon and raises a lurking question about friendship’s very nature: is friendship a relationship that can or should only be between a select number of people—two, really—or is it one that might also be

¹ William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008). All references to *Julius Caesar* are to this edition.

² Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named the Governour*, ed. Ernest Rhys (London: Everyman’s Library, J.M. Dent & Sons, 1907), 162-4.

³ Plutarch, *The Philosophie, commonlie called, The Morals*, trans. Philemon Holland (London, 1603), sig. T5r.

⁴ Plutarch, T5v.

expanded to unify far more? Indeed, the success of Antony's speech, namely its ability to focus the affections and behaviors of the crowd so quickly, gestures towards the mass unity that friendship may be able to provide. Moments before Antony speaks, Brutus, the master orator, successfully argues for his own sparing ("Live, Brutus, live, live!" [3.2.44]), convinces the plebeians that Caesar was indeed a "tyrant," and moves them to admit that "[they] are blessed that Rome is rid of him" (3.2.66-67); when Antony is done addressing these same "friends," they are mournful for Caesar and quick to express their feelings en masse, "pluck[ing]" down and setting fire to anything they can find (3.2.246-248), swearing to "burn the house of Brutus" (3.2.222), and collectively killing Cinna the poet in a bout of overzealous and erroneous mob justice (3.3.34). At the same time though, such a communal affinity is complicated, perhaps even questionable, when one considers the foundational and galvanizing content of Antony's speech: his close, personal love for Caesar. In fact, little more than ten lines after identifying the entire crowd as "friends," Antony identifies Caesar as "my friend, faithful and just to me" (3.2.82), a claim that suggests Caesar was always fair to Antony but also "only" to Antony: a friend to him and him alone. (Accordingly, Antony would be the exclusive partner to Caesar and friend to no one else.) In this way, Antony himself is rather equivocal on the topic. Right after stating that practically everyone in Rome is or at least could be his friend, he turns around and states that he really only had one friend all along, thereby performing a radical social contraction that ultimately champions an exclusive, "twaine" imagination of friendship.

Critics have certainly noted how the plural and exclusive conceptions of friendship, as well as the forms of social and political organization that they inspire, constitute a central ideological tension in *Julius Caesar*. As Martha Nussbaum describes it, Brutus embodies a "rather abstract love of country and hatred of oppression" while Antony "can understand no kind of love other than the personal" and is a "lover of individuals."⁵ Andrew Hadfield has similarly argued that Brutus "attempts to treat everyone with equal concern" and "maintains his friendship with Cassius on general, egalitarian, republican principles" while Antony displays "passionate loyalty" to his dead friend Caesar that is "more obviously appealing than Brutus's detached indifference to people and loyalty to an ideal."⁶ As a result, Brutus has been read as a stand-in for a Ciceronian ideal of mass friendly equality that is tragically overshadowed by Antony and his conception of friendship as a "private and furtive affair," one in which the "rule of reason and the control of the emotions" is "superseded by fierce tribal loyalties as dictatorship and tyranny replace the republic."⁷

But while I too want to emphasize the twofold nature of friendship in *Julius Caesar*, I also want to show how thoroughly enmeshed these two contradictory conceptions of friendship are in Shakespeare's play. Antony—as a comparison of even a few lines in his seminal speech reveals—is not a model of ideological consistency when it comes to friendship. Several other characters, as I will show, also toggle between appreciations of singular persons and collective people, and they deploy these contradictory appreciations across and even within scenes at an

⁵ Martha C. Nussbaum, "Romans, Countrymen, and Lovers': Political Love and the Rule of Law in *Julius Caesar*" in *Shakespeare and the Law: A Conversation among Disciplines and Professions*, ed. Bradin Cormack, Martha C. Nussbaum, and Richard Strier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 256 and 263.

⁶ Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 177.

⁷ Hadfield, 175 and 179.

almost frenetic pace. Accordingly, there is not so much a direct competition between dueling conceptions of friendship and the politics they seem to represent but a perpetually unsettled social rhythm as characters use almost any and every social logic in order to justify their construction of social harmony.

After all, notions of republican equality and tyrannical exemplarity fit imperfectly in *Julius Caesar*'s particular political moment. Brutus, Cassius, and the conspirators, all professed "friends" and defenders of the republic, are a decidedly elite minority that, from the very first lines of the play, distinguish themselves from the "knav[ish]" and "senseless" commoners (1.1.15 and 34).⁸ Antony, an implicit defender if not actual enabler of monarchy, uses the appeal of friendship's equality in order to revive an inherently unequal political vision that places his friend Caesar at the top. Friendship thus doesn't function as a precise reflection of republicanism or tyranny and its corresponding values but stands in for a political model that doesn't quite exist, a kind of elite level democracy that relies on the approval of many but is also incapable of truly incorporating those masses.

What *Julius Caesar* then offers is an ambivalent—maybe even muddled—culture of friendship that is wrestling between a practical need for social expansion and a persistent desire for the intimacy that is increasingly lost in an inevitably expanding modern world. Indeed, the very plot of *Julius Caesar* hinges on the efforts of its main characters to bring as many Romans as possible to their side: Brutus (and Cassius) by systematically recruiting additional conspirators from the senatorial ranks, Antony by marshaling the mass of plebeians in one fell swoop. Such efforts are necessary for political if not actual survival, and both the egalitarian seeming conspirators and individual loving Antony rely heavily on the rhetoric of friendship, namely the classical emphasis on likeness, in order to argue for an intimate connection with people that will woo them over. But such efforts come across an inevitable logical hurdle: to emphasize parity more than once—a necessity for mass recruitment—already breaks the logic of exclusive individualism that undergirds the conception of exclusivity in friendship. Furthermore, the attempt to conceive of the masses—in this sense more than one other person—as the same as oneself already engenders a Plutarch-like diversion that renders one's relationship(s) something other than friendship. Consequently, one requires more creative articulations of shared feeling that don't rely on exact likeness and parity.

In noting the classical and early modern period's interest in models of friendship that went beyond the dyadic emphasis on likeness and parity, recent scholarship has emphasized the ways in which practical and less affective social concerns were increasingly understood to be an integral part of friendship. As John S. Garrison has shown, classical writers from Cicero to Plutarch all entertained the idea that the traditional "dyadic model" of friendship "might be expanded," and Renaissance writers, spurred by the "expanding economic opportunities" of the early modern period, further "tested the conditions under which the classical model of perfect friendship could be expanded to include more than two participants."⁹ "Put simply," writes Garrison, "there was much money to be made and new ways to make that money," and the

⁸ Flavius and Murellus's opening argument with the Commoners during the celebration of Caesar's return from defeating Pompey's sons illustrates the senators' preexisting enmity for Caesar. It also puts front and center a class dynamic that betrays the larger republican ideals that one is potentially wont to imagine in Shakespeare's play.

⁹ John S. Garrison, *Friendship and Queer Theory in the Renaissance* (New York: Routledge, 2014), xiv.

pursuit of such novel opportunities inevitably welcomed a whole range of new participants into friendship's once exclusive landscape.¹⁰ In his recent study of *Julius Caesar* specifically, Philip Goldfarb Styrts similarly argues that Shakespeare's play highlights the political trend away from "individualized politics of the early Republic" and to a more group-centric model of "institutionalized factionalism" in which politics "is not merely a matter of individual interactions but the interplay between the factions with which individuals are associated." Consequently, "friend" becomes "largely divorced from its affective meaning" and functions as an instrumental means to identify and recruit an increasingly important mass of political allies.¹¹

Put another way, traditional notions of equality and exclusivity—something like Plutarch's "similitude and conformitie"—were becoming quaint ideals unfit for a much more populous and complex world. Or rather, friendship with an individual was no longer valuable for the relationship with the individual *per se* but for the broader connections that it might engender. Single friendships were no longer enough to make political gains or attain the increasingly important and possible accumulation of wealth. And so, the answer to friendship's desire for more, one might say, was an open adoption of utilitarian and sometimes even cynical interests that encouraged the cultivation of influential and literally productive networks.

But Styrts's emphasis on the structures of faction in *Julius Caesar* also signals the intense vacillation between personal and mass, intimate and instrumental proclivities that lie within friendly relations. That is to say that practical economic and political concerns should, arguably, be enough to engender cooperative connection with any and almost everybody. So long as someone helps you make money or serves to advance your political goals, they satisfy the new modern criteria of friendship. However, the persistence of factions under the utilitarian impetus of economic and political gain suggests that social groups do not expand ad infinitum but reach a kind of natural limit. At a certain point, persons resist mass inclusion and opt for some sort of social preference, thus denoting an unwillingness to reduce oneself to a practical and possibly advantageous sameness as well as a desire to distinguish oneself through the expression of specific, often personal, affiliation with an individual or small(er) group.

Thus, *Julius Caesar* is a play that acknowledges the trend toward larger social groups and the utilitarian forms friendship may take as a result, but it is also a play that registers resistance against such an impulse by depicting how dissatisfying and unsustainable such affectless arrangements actually are. Practically speaking, this resistance manifests in the fact that the opening socio-political expansions of the play are later met with fierce social contractions,

¹⁰ Garrison, xxii.

¹¹ Philip Goldfarb Styrts, "'Continuall Factions': Politics, Friendship, and History in *Julius Caesar*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 66, no. 3 (2015): 286. Styrts does identify "lovers," the term that Brutus notably uses to address the crowd of Romans after assassinating Caesar as the opposing term that suggests "affection, personal attachment, or what we would traditionally call friendship" (293). Such an argument, however, stresses a strict division between conceptions of friendship that I do not believe rigorously stand. Furthermore, Hadfield's and Styrts's arguments taken together render the issue of ideological representation in *Julius Caesar* rather moot. For Hadfield, it is Antony that is the champion of personal friendship; for Styrts, it is Brutus. And in a refutation of Nussbaum's identification of Brutus with a "rather abstract love of country and hatred of oppression," Styrts himself seems to acknowledge that Brutus possesses both communal and individual ideals, noting that Brutus actually "speaks freely of, and claims to participate in, both love of Caesar and love of country" (297).

moments where both “republican” and “tyrannical” characters once eager to court as many persons as possible begin to shed the once crucial affiliations that had previously been established. But such contractions also demonstrate the way in which friendship, rather than just being the instrument of an increasingly self-interested economic or affectless political expansion, also functions as a means to assert and maintain a sense of specialness in an inevitably expanding social world. So while friendship in *Julius Caesar* no longer means being wholly rare and equal individual, it also doesn’t mean being an anonymous practical agent.

Constantly negotiating between these positions is what puts the characters in a social bind. Friends are unable to rely on the promise of a single individual but neither are they content with the practical safety of numbers. On the one hand, this liminal quality breeds a kind of uncertainty about friendship: what exactly is it? Does it even have an established form? On the other hand, it engenders the possibility of intimacy that does not require exact likeness but allows people to rally around a shared set of feelings. Indeed, so many of the “friends” in *Julius Caesar* do not know one another wholly or, like the “Romans” and “countrymen” Antony identifies in his speech, don’t know each other at all. But this no longer matters. So long as persons can align themselves with an abstract concern—one that is often tied to the emblematic reputation of an individual—they possess the necessary affinity to be friends. Put another way, friendship is no longer about another person specifically but the ideals that a relationship, even one that a person may have no specific stake in, may embody.

In fact, it is the theater that is best able to reflect this negotiation between close personal relationships and abstract intimacy with the masses that the friends of *Julius Caesar* constantly seek. As discussed in my first chapter, the epic romance of *The Faerie Queene* provides Spenser with a means to describe a hyper-idealized dyadic model of friendship but also chip away at its perfect veneer through an exploration of parity’s ironic depths, namely that to be alike in the way that so many traditional theories describe also spawns a competitive violence that needs to be reconciled through some sort of expression of difference. Thought another way, Spenser’s book on friendship is not about what happens when friends try to go beyond the dyad but when friends exist in the dyad itself. Drama as a public medium permanently installs the presence of an audience—be they spectators or fellow actors on stage—and it is in this way that a play like *Julius Caesar* is constantly testing out how the relationships depicted might be able to attract a larger group. Imagined more concretely, the close relationship between Brutus and Cassius or Caesar and Antony functions as an example by which others are molded; similarly, the audience itself is swayed by an elect group on stage that it doesn’t actually know. In the theater then, *Julius Caesar* is constantly articulating a friendship that isn’t just for the pair but one that might be for all people.

This chapter focuses on the methods of social recruitment employed by Cassius, Brutus, and Antony, the very methods that seek to take friendship from being a rare and limited relationship to something that might enact larger social change. In doing so, it highlights the ways in which these efforts of expansion are informed by the exclusive notions of friendship. As an ideological vector for republican parity, Brutus and Cassius approach friendly expansion systematically. They craft unique appeals to each individual conspirator, a strategy that simultaneously suggests but also belies exclusivity: each conspirator may require a unique reasoning, but it is one that ultimately serves a common end. Antony, on the other hand, offers a single argument of superiority: the exemplarity of Caesar or, more specifically, the exemplarity of his exclusive relationship with Caesar. This is a relationship that the masses cannot actually be a part of, but it is one that they can identify with, and that by itself is enough.

But just as important as these principled expansions are the subsequent breakdowns that occur. Both parties in *Julius Caesar* experience social growing pains, namely the desire to shrink or exclude affiliates, that demonstrate the limits of unique exclusivity and more general exemplarity. To put it somewhat reductively, everyone in the play has to make a social compromise. But that compromise is in the interest of rareness that tries to find reasons to exclude people. Indeed, Brutus and Antony revert to their ideals, not expediency, when ultimately deciding who they want around them. And it is in this way that friendship fights expansion as much as it invites it.

The “glass” and the “general”: Brutus, Cassius, and “several citizens”

Julius Caesar begins with a negotiation about friendship couched within a political proposal. When Cassius first speaks to Brutus, he complains that Brutus fails to express any affection for him in his outward visage, saying

I have not from your eyes that gentleness
And show of love as I was wont to have.
You bear too stubborn and too strange a hand
Over your friend that loves you. (1.2.35-8)

In his request for his “show of love” to be reciprocated, Cassius attempts to position himself as a singular “friend” to Brutus. In response, Brutus tries to assure Cassius that any “veiled” look he puts on is a manifestation of his own inner turmoil and proceeds to place Cassius amongst the many “good friends” that he has probably alienated with his despondency. “But let not therefore my good friends be grieved,” Brutus begins,

Among which number, Cassius, be you one—
Nor construe any further my neglect
Than that poor Brutus, with himself at war,
Forgets the shows of love to other men. (1.2.45-9)

Brutus’s response couldn’t be any more disappointing. Cassius’s request for a “show of love as I wont to have” stresses a desire for Brutus to conceive of him as a personal friend, one that has exclusive insight or access to his friend. Brutus, however, gives Cassius little to no special consideration, identifying him merely as “one” of a “number” of “good friends” in the Roman republic. The exchange makes apparent a distinct disconnect between Brutus’s and Cassius’s considerations of each other. Whereas Cassius wants a kind of special, individual consideration from Brutus—what Cassius will call his “single self” (1.2.96)—Brutus can only place Cassius in an undifferentiated “number” of “friends” which he has.

Dismayed, Cassius doubles down on the case for his status as an exceptional individual by positing that he is a kind of mirror for Brutus: “And since you know you cannot see yourself,” Cassius urges, “So well as by reflection, I, your glass, / Will modestly discover to yourself / That of yourself which you yet know not of” (1.2.69-72). Casting himself as a “glass,” Cassius proposes that he and Brutus are essentially the same, possessing a “reflection” or likeness that is reserved for the most complementary of men. In an attempt to articulate a special connection with his fellow senator, Cassius seeks to establish himself as a unique friend to Brutus, one with the exclusive ability to share and even reveal Brutus’s self.

The revelation that Cassius hopes to coax out of Brutus is a political, not necessarily social, one. By insisting that he and Brutus are friends that might imitate each other, Cassius hopes that Brutus will take his cue from Cassius’s political conviction and thus discover his own pre-existing political apprehension about Caesar’s monarchical behavior. Nevertheless, the

reasoning and strategy that Cassius employs—his emphasis on mirroring that will lead to a greater self-discovery—abides by the tenets of classical friendship theory. As Cicero writes in *De amicitia*, a friend looks upon another friend as “a sort of image of himself.”¹² Furthermore, such a reflection does not merely reflect the friend but also seeks to elevate his disposition and understanding. “For often in some men either the spirit is too dejected, or the hope of better in their fortune is too faint,” Cicero notes,

Therefore, it is not the province of a friend, in such a case, to have the same estimate of another that the other has of himself, but rather it is his duty to strive with all his might to arouse his friend’s prostrate soul and leave it to a livelier hope and into a better train of thought.¹³

Cassius even goes so far as to assure Brutus that his claims to friendship are warranted by noting that he does not posit this comparison errantly. He does not over-profess his friendship but reserves it for specific individuals. He is, simply put, not a flatterer:

And be not jealous on me, gentle Brutus.
Were I a common laughter, or did us
To stale with ordinary oaths my love
To every new protester; if you know
That I do fawn on men and hug them hard,
And after scandal them; or if you know
That I profess myself in banqueting
To all the rout: then hold me dangerous. (1.2.73-80)¹⁴

The proof of friendship for Cassius hinges on a policing of identification, the assurance that he is not doing it too much—which is to say he is not doing it too intensely and with other people. Cassius’s evocation of flattery makes a careful distinction about the limits of his identity with Brutus. Friendship, which is to say proper reflection and articulation of likeness, includes an implicit requirement for exclusivity. It is also a matter of affective scale or verve. Cassius’s very “oaths” and professions if made too “hard” could very easily become an illegitimate flattery. The friend and flatterer, in essence, do the same thing, but the friend must reflect his likeness in particularly precise and careful way.

Indeed, Cassius is the first in the play to emphasize a rare and personal love, using it as the primary means to recruit the conspirators who will save Rome from Caesar’s ambition. However, such an affinity for individual comparison also forms the basis of Cassius’s virulent antagonism. Unlike Brutus who girds his concerns about—as well as “love” for—Caesar amongst a consideration of the “general good” of Rome, Cassius, we learn, roots his feelings in a

¹² Cicero, *De senectute, De amicitia, De divinatione*, trans. W.A. Falconer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), 133.

¹³ Cicero, 169.

¹⁴ As Laurie Shannon discusses in *Sovereign Amity*, the dangers of flattery to friendship were well known and paramount to early modern writers. “Flattery presents an epistemological dilemma for friendship practice” writes Shannon, because it can so easily mimic the similitude that serves of the foundation of friendly relations (47). “[N]othing is to be considered a greater bane of friendship than fawning, cajolery, or flattery,” writes Cicero in *De amicitia*, and “hypocrisy is not only wicked under all circumstances, because it pollutes trust and takes away the power to discern it, but also because it is especially inimical to friendship” (199). In a sense, it is not the enemy but the flatterer that stands in most direct opposition to the friend.

response to the first set of letters or anonymous “instigations” from Cassius (2.1.49), Brutus privately deliberates the merits of the conspiracy against Caesar. Somewhat surprisingly, Brutus begins by acknowledging his personal history with Caesar as well as Caesar’s distinct, individualistic capacity. “I know no personal cause to spurn at him,” Brutus claims,

But for the general. He would be crowned.
 How that might change his nature, there’s the question.
 It is the bright day that brings forth the adder,
 And that craves wary walking. Crown him: that!
 And then I grant we put a sting in him
 That at his will he may do danger with.
 Th’abuse of greatness is when it disjoins
 Remorse from power. And to speak truth of Caesar,
 I have not known when his affections swayed
 More than his reason.... (2.1.11-21)

As Brutus concedes, there is little reason to believe that a crowned Caesar would pose an increased or imminent political threat. Caesar is an exceptional man that, in Brutus’s own experience, has proven consistently reasonable in circumstances of passion and power. Yet Brutus immediately rejects this specific and empirical conclusion in favor of a more universalizing assessment. Caesar himself has never been “swayed / More than his reason” in the past,

...But ‘tis a common proof
 That lowliness is young ambition’s ladder,
 Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;
 But when he once attains the upmost round,
 He then unto the ladder turns his back,
 Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
 By which he did ascend. So Caesar may. (2.1.21-27)

Caesar “may” become a tyrant if crowned: this is as certain as Brutus can get and enough to convince him that Caesar needs to be killed. However, it is a conclusion from a “general” rather than specific consideration. In citing “common proof,” Brutus reduces Caesar to little more than a common man, one who is like any other person and thus assessable by the same unexceptional behavioral precedents. (Indeed, Brutus’s initial claim that he knows no cause to “spurn” at Caesar “but for the general” suggests that while a specific consideration of Caesar would elicit no cause for concern, Caesar’s circumstances in the hands of the average man would be quite worrisome.) Much like he did with Cassius when he disappointingly relegated him to a “number” of “good friends,” Brutus thinks about the Roman leader that he personally knows and loves as little more than an ordinary figure. Furthermore, he proves himself all the more willing to prioritize such a consideration in the name of the mass unity that it will elicit. In other words, had Brutus actually considered Caesar as he knows him, he would be forced to debate with both Cassius and the many letters’ opinion of the man. In thinking about Caesar as a common man of ambition, he is able to join a chorus of figures, real and invented, that already wishes to assassinate him.

Even Cassius, as if seduced by the spirit and efficiency of Brutus’s generalizing, begins to defer to a less and less precise consideration of his fellow senators in order to assure the constitution of the conspiracy against Caesar. With Brutus, Cassius models a process of recruitment based on individual appeal. Each person requires a distinct set of motivating criteria,

so Cassius would need to compose a unique mirror for and with each individual conspirator. Practically speaking, Cassius recruits people one by one. Indeed, Cassius's founding influence cannot be denied. As René Girard puts it, Cassius is the "real father" of the conspiracy and author of an essentially repeatable recruitment process: Cassius entices Casca to join by means of "mimetic suggestion" and then Ligarius through "mimetic pressure."¹⁵ But this individualized attention masks the increasing lack of specificity Cassius's argument against Caesar holds. "We watch three individuals in a row," writes Girard, "join the conspiracy; with each one, we go down one more notch in regard to their ability to think for themselves, to use their reason and behave in a responsible way. It is less a matter of individual psychology than the rapid march of mimetic desire itself."¹⁶ As much as Cassius's process of recruitment utilizes a model of friendly parity in order to authorize itself, it also seems to mark the dissolution of rigorous friendly bonds. We can perhaps look at the ease by which Casca and Ligarius join the conspiracy as evidence that the necessary requirements for friendship have slackened immensely. Exact imitation has become so vague, so imprecise that the exclusivity of friendly likeness has been erased.

Indeed, the expansion of Cassius's emphasis on likeness seems to reflect the erosion of a more rigorous, Ciceronian friendship, a circumstance that is then symbolically confirmed by Cicero's omission from the conspiracy. However, the actual reason for Cicero's omission has less to do with the wane of his ideological influence and more with the supposed inability of his thinking to coexist with any other idea. Cassius and Casca actually endorse the recruitment of Cicero, and it is Metellus who likewise argues that Cicero is a necessary figure that will bring respect to the conspiracy's cause. "His silver hairs," Metellus explains,

Will purchase us a good opinion,
And buy men's voices to commend our deeds.
It shall be said his judgment ruled our hands.
Our youths and wildness shall not whit appear,
But all be buried in his gravity. (2.1.143-148)

But it is Brutus who immediately rejects the idea of Cicero's inclusion on the grounds that his ideas will, in essence, not play nice with others.

O, name him not! Let us not break with him,
For he will never follow anything
That other men begin. (2.1.149-151)

The majority of the conspirators want Cicero precisely because of his trusted antiquity. But Brutus worries Cicero's independent thinking will never go along with collective plan like theirs. On the one hand, Brutus's recommendation seems like a surprising rebuke of the ideals with which he is frequently associated. It is as if he has no interest in the traditional "republican principles" and wants a whiff of "youths and wildness" to appear in the conspirators' quest for republican preservation. On the other hand, it is a decision that remains true to Brutus's unwavering concern for communal consensus. Anyone who seems unlikely to fall in line with the decisions of other men—and subsequently adopt the mindset that is necessary for such compliance—is more of a liability than an asset.

So totalizing is Brutus's demand for ideological conformity that when Cassius proposes that everyone "swear [their] resolution" to the conspiracy with an oath (2.1.112), Brutus goes so

¹⁵ René Girard, *A Theater of Envy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 187, 190, and 191.

¹⁶ Girard, 191.

far as to suggest that such an idea is not only unnecessary but also offensive. “[D]o not stain / The even virtue of our enterprise, / Nor th’insuppressive mettle of our spirits,” he replies

To think that or our cause or our performance
Did need an oath, when every drop of blood
That every Roman bears, and nobly bears,
Is guilty of several bastardy
If he do break the smallest particle
Of any promise that hath passed from him. (2.1.131-139)

Of course, Brutus’s response can be read as a sign of his confidence in the unwavering loyalty of the greater Roman character and thus the conspiracy itself. Romans don’t need oaths because once they have committed to a particular conviction, they dare not “break” it. But Brutus’s final declaration is somewhat troubling for it serves as a sheer dismissal of any sort of individuated sense. In proposing an oath, Cassius suggests that there may be slight deviations between the various conspirators. An oath, that is to say, would be an opportunity to sublimate any variable feelings and affirm a devotion to the conspiracy’s greater purpose. For Brutus though, such communal devotion is not a matter of considered agreement but a necessary and automatic giving over of the self. The personal must be subsumed into a larger concern for, and agreement with, abstract principles. Anything else would be an outright disgrace.

At this point, Brutus is a republican machine: he is caught up in what he deems the inevitable and righteous conversion of the individual into the general. Nussbaum explicitly states that Brutus has no love for individuals, but it is perhaps more accurate to say that Brutus has no conception of individualism. That is, Brutus has no ability to take causes or people personally: Brutus can only justify joining the conspiracy “for the general” of Rome; Brutus cannot see Cassius as a friend but as representative of “friends”; oaths are unnecessary because even the slightest feeling of dissent is a matter of impossibility. This is not political manipulation on Brutus’s part but a near debilitating need to default to the bloodless assumption of “general” character. It works well enough to bring the elite conspiracy together, but, as we will see, it ignores the particularities that exist in a much larger multiplicity of people.

“But here I am to speak what I do know”: Antony’s personal and mass friendship

Brutus’s republican vision is so strong that even after assassinating Caesar, he assumes that Caesar’s dear friend Antony will automatically side with the conspiracy’s cause, declaring, “I know that we shall him well to friend” (3.1.144). Only Cassius, in what perhaps marks a subtle return to his more discerning sensibility, doubts such an easy incorporation. “I wish we may [have Antony],” Cassius concedes,

...But yet have I a mind
That fears him much; and my misgiving still
Falls shrewdly to the purpose. (3.1.145-147)

Cassius proves the more prescient thinker here. In what is perhaps the first break in the impersonal chain of consensus that Brutus leads, Antony immediately mourns for Caesar. “O mighty Caesar,” he laments

Dost thou lie so low?
Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils,
Shrunk to this little measure? Fare thee well. (3.1.149-151)

Antony’s grief at the sight of Caesar’s body reflects the “genuine passions” and “erotic” speeches that make Antony, according to Nussbaum, a “lover of individuals.” But the

progressive scope of Antony's speech also reveals a fundamentally personal imagination that is markedly different from Brutus's. Whereas Brutus, in the deliberations about the Caesar that he personally knows, inflates Caesar to the status of the "common proof," Antony has the ability to "shrink" his friend down to his individual, unadorned self. This isn't a reductive assessment so much as an appreciation of the man in his most humble of particularities. What is relatable isn't the aura of "conquests, glories, triumphs, and spoils" but the man himself.

Indeed, in a show of extreme personal fealty to Caesar, Antony begs the conspirators to kill him as well. "[T]here is no hour so fit," he declares

As Caesar's death's hour,
[...]
I do beseech ye, if you bear me hard,
Now, whilst your purpled hands do reek and smoke,
Fulfill your pleasure. Live a thousand years,
I shall not find myself so apt to die.
No place will please me so, no mean of death,
As here by Caesar, and by you cut off, (3.1.154-163)

Antony's desire to join Caesar in death is a macabre kind of mirroring, a desire to be so like his friend that he wishes the conspirators to impose the same fate on him. But it is a return to a more limited kind of friendship that Cassius had first advocated. Antony would much rather stay true to his dear friend than, as Cassius proposed, "be pricked in a number of our friends" (3.1.218).

Brutus, however, deflects Antony's request with a characteristically impersonal argument, assuring Antony that he does feel "pity," but it is "pity to the general wrong of Rome" (3.1.171). As Brutus says, "[he] did love Caesar when [he] struck him" (3.1.183), but one's heart should now be with Rome and the health of the abstract republic. And Brutus continues to advocate such an abstract interest when he promises the crowd "public reasons" for Caesar's death (3.2.7). Brutus's phrase is perhaps a simple declaration that he will publicly give an explanation for what the conspirators have done. But given his momentum towards republican generalization, Brutus seems to suggest that his speech will be a presentation of what is already the public's reasoning. He has, in effect, intuited their wishes and rendered those wishes into action, an endeavor that assumes that the people, much like Brutus himself, did indeed love Caesar but in the end "loved Rome more" (3.2.22).

By contrast, Antony's seminal "Friends, Romans, countrymen" speech opens with an absolute claim to friendship with Caesar as well as a disavowal of any kind general sentiment or national interest. In fact, right after identifying the entirety of the crowd as friends, Antony, in what seems like a contradictory and potentially alienating moment, pronounces Caesar to be friend to him and him alone: "He was my friend, faithful, and just to me" (3.2.82). In keeping with this extreme exclusivity, Antony positions himself as separate from any kind of shared feeling with the crowd, declaring, "I speak not to disprove what Brutus spoke, / But here I am to speak what I do know" (3.2.97-98). He is not there to "stir" his "good friends, sweet friends" of the crowd into a "flood of mutiny" but is simply there out of his love for Caesar:

I come not, friends, to steal away your hearts.
I am no orator as Brutus is,
But, as you know me all, a plain blunt man
That love my friend; and that they know full well
That gave me public leave to speak of him. (3.2.207-211)

Antony employs the kind of affective deference that marked Cassius's earliest interactions with Brutus. His assurance that he is not too persuasive and not trying to convince the people of anything in particular harkens back to Cassius's claim that he does not "hug [men] hard" or Brutus's refusal to be "further moved." It is a direct departure from the conformist pressure that Brutus puts on his friends and an embracement of friendship as an exclusive bond between individuals.

But this incredibly personal appeal also proves to be a savvy way for Antony to create the social affinity necessary for mobilizing the mass of plebeians. In emphasizing his sole connection to Caesar, he cultivates a private feeling that can then be unleashed onto the masses. We see this most plainly towards the end of Antony's speech when, after declaring to speak only "what I do know," Antony slips into a Brutus-like claim to equal understanding, declaring that, "I tell you that which you yourselves do know" (3.2.215). But from the beginning, Antony is so adamant about his affective connection with Caesar that he practically dares the crowd to admit that they themselves could feel otherwise. "You all did love him once, not without cause," Antony posits; "What cause withhold you then to mourn for him?" (3.2.100). To be sure, Antony establishes himself as an effective friend or mirror for the people. Yet in mediating between a rare friendship with Caesar and a larger mass friendship with the crowd, he does not propose a fundamentally shared feeling for Caesar, much like Cassius did with Brutus. (After all, Antony's knowledge of his friend is "just to [him].") Rather, he views his particular feelings as an emotional example that may be applicable to all. He is, in a sense, a one-way mirror that projects reflections out.

Both Brutus and Antony are elite senatorial figures that lack a categorical likeness with the common people they address. But while Brutus channels the people's supposed will into himself and then expresses it through his singular action, Antony channels his own individual will and then deflects it onto the people. It is not so hard then to understand Antony's magnetism in the face of Brutus's openly arrogant seizure of conviction. As much as Brutus insists on a shared political conviction with the general populace, his conspiratorial actions, the brainchild of a privileged minority, maintain the hierarchical structure of the republic. They are, quite plainly, in contention with his desired vision of social equality. Antony's friendship is, in a sense, more honest and ultimately generous. It frames his feelings as specific to him and thus the product of a privileged position to Caesar, but it ultimately offers those feelings as a model to the general public. Given access to those feelings, the people possess the power to engender their own response and act on it themselves.

Antony's speech thus marks a kind of social height in the play, a cross-class affinity for a single man that is powerful enough to unite a public mass into collective action. Whereas Brutus's initial appeal to "Roman, countrymen, lovers" conceives of idealistic allegiance to the republic as grounds for persons to form a more affective bond, Antony's call to "Friends, Romans, countrymen" imagines personal intimacy as a means to inspire greater national fidelity. Practically speaking, Antony's friendship is a mediated, two-pronged approach: he assimilates the people by suggesting that he is in possession of a rare friendship that they too can share, and by emphasizing an affective bond—his intimate relationship to Caesar—he creates the social filter by which all Romans can conceive of their political attachment to the state.

A "slight, unmeritable man," Lucius Pella, and the Reclaiming of Rare Friendship

If the first half of *Julius Caesar* can be described as an expansion of social possibility, the second half of the play shows how such large groups prove unsustainable if not outright

undesirable. In fact, Antony's promising claim to mass friendship, one that is galvanized by the call to "Friends, Romans, countrymen" and seemingly confirmed by the mobilization of the masses against Caesar's murders, is actually betrayed in the very next scene. Having announced to the crowd that Caesar bequeaths "To every several man—seventy-five drachmas" (3.2.233) as well as "all his walks, / His private arbours, and new-planted orchards" (3.2.237), Antony then commands Lepidus to fetch Caesar's will so that he may "determine / How to cut off some charge in legacies" (4.1.8-9) and bilk his fellow Romans out of their inheritance. And in addition to renegeing on the promise of Caesar's will, Antony readily discusses which men and family members he will excise from Rome: "These many, then, shall die; their names are pricked" (4.1.1).

Such a disturbing social rhythm—mass inclusion followed by systematic excision—is only amplified by Antony's professed annoyance at the size of his own triumvir. Right after dispatching Lepidus to engage in a bout of financial chicanery, Antony voices his doubts about his fellow general, noting to Octavius that

This is a slight, unmeritable man
Meet to be sent on errands, is it fit,
The threefold world divided, he should stand
One of the three to share it? (4.1.11-14)

Antony's problem with the third man in his group is rather simple: he sees Lepidus as an unworthy soldier who is undeserving of an equal amount of spoils. He is, simply put, not a fit mirror. But Antony's reservations reflect a larger trend in which the characters wish to see their social circles shrink not only because they wish to better honor the merits of specific persons but also because they naturally dislike a fair number of people.

On the one hand, such social contraction suggests the desire for a more exclusive form of friendship, one that is reserved for only the most comparable of individuals. On the other hand, it renders the many prior social expansions—and the rhetoric of friendship that authorized them—little more than cynical ploys to shore up the necessary political needs of the moment. Antony admits as much when he, in response to Octavius's suggestion that Lepidus be added to the list of those "pricked to die" (4.1.16), assures Octavius that they would better use Lepidus before ultimately leaving him high and dry. "I have seen more days than you, / And though we lay these honors on this man, / To ease ourselves of diverse slanderous loads" he tells Octavius,

He shall but bear them as the ass bears gold,
[...]
And having brought treasure where he will,
Then take we down his load, and turn him off,
Like to the empty ass, to shake his ears
And graze in commons. (4.1.18-27)

In evoking the "commons" as the place in which Lepidus will ultimately end up, Antony engages in a social conception more often associated with Brutus than himself. It was Brutus who had last and seemingly unfairly lumped someone—Caesar of all people—in with "common proof," and Antony reveals himself to be equally capable of such callous dismissal. Gone, it seems, is the Antony who was able to value people for their particularities. But whereas commonness was a means for Brutus to make sense of the socio-political world with ruthless efficiency—and thus a feature either reasoned or even sought out—it is a social *bête noire* for Antony. Simply put, commonness is not a reason to welcome but a reason to exclude.

And yet, Antony is fully aware of the need to court such commonness in the interest of his own military and political success. Immediately after criticizing the third man in his party, Antony revives his call for friendly recruitment. “Brutus and Cassius / Are levying powers,” he concludes

... We must straight make head.

Therefore let our alliance be combined,

Our best friends made, our meinies stretched, (4.1.42-44)

But in light of Antony’s criticisms about Lepidus, such a call to making “best friends” comes off as an irksome necessity rather than a cherished act. Friendship, it turns out, is something one must begrudgingly entertain and even “stretch” when your enemies are near. No one would willingly want to be associated with so many people.

This admitted desire for social reduction is a trend that Antony starts, but it is one that nearly everyone in the play is soon to demand. On the eve of battle, Brutus and Cassius themselves engage in a disagreement about the continued inclusion of one of their ranks as Brutus refuses to pardon Cassius’s friend Lucius Pella for taking bribes from the Sardians. “That you have wronged me doth appear in this,” Cassius explains,

You have condemned and noted Lucius Pella

For taking bribes here of the Sardians,

Wherein my letters praying on his side,

Because I knew the man, was slighted off. (4.2.53-57)

Unlike Antony, Brutus’s reasoning against a fellow commander isn’t necessarily personal. It’s not that he doesn’t like Lucius Pella the way Antony dislikes Lepidus. Brutus’s decision is a matter of moral principle. To pardon Lucius Pella for such an act would sully the ideals of their original act. “Remember March, the ides of March, remember,” Brutus chides,

Did not great Julius bleed for justice’ sake?

What villain touched his body, that did stab,

And not for justice? What, shall one of us,

That struck the foremost man of all this world

But for supporting robbers, shall we now

Contaminate our fingers with base bribes,

And sell the mighty space of our large honors

For so much trash as may be grasped thus? (4.2.70-78)

But although Brutus’s critique has less to do with Lucius Pella’s merit than his morals, Brutus’s concluding claim that Cassius’s friend is unfit for the “mighty space of our large honors” mirrors Antony’s logic of Lepidus as an unfit reflection of the given enterprise. Brutus and Antony’s disagreement manifests as a debate about matters of perceived financial malfeasance: Brutus reminds Cassius that Cassius once denied him money that he requested (4.2.132); Cassius denies ever refusing Brutus and blames it on a misreported message (4.2.138-139). But these arguments mask a more serious attempt at reclaiming the exclusiveness of their friendship against the political community of conspirators and generals they have assembled. Despite such social growth, Brutus cannot so automatically extend his love to someone once removed. His affection for Cassius is not reproducible beyond the pair or, perhaps more concretely, Brutus, like Cassius before, is able to see past the general and give the specific consideration that can distinguish the real friends from the faulty individuals. The friend of a friend, it turns out, is not necessarily a friend.

The moments of Act 4 thus mark a conservative return to specific friendship as characters try to disassociate from mediocre individuals in order to reclaim a sense of social exclusivity for themselves. Yet in looking at these moments altogether, one can't help but notice a kind of grand reversal at work. Antony proves himself Cassius-like in his desire to be friends with only a specific set of individuals. Brutus likewise turns out to be less than willing to welcome any and everybody into a general faction. And in his eagerness to pardon Lucius Pella, Cassius reveals himself to be far less exclusive than originally thought: he is in fact that one that is willing to overlook the most in the interest of social accord. These turns not only render all three friendly exempla as fairly hypocritical, they also render the social world of *Julius Caesar* as practically incoherent. The primary social instigators of the play do not operate on any fixed principles but a disparate set of convenient and often provisional strategies.

Thus, when Antony wins the Battle of Philippi, Shakespeare seems to acknowledge the ultimate success of Antony's more fluid mediation of friendship; however, the battle is filled with so many errors and confusions that one is left to wonder if any character really holds symbolic prominence. The action itself seems to reflect a messy, almost random, contest of social ideologies rather than a celebratory changing of the guard. That messiness begins with Cassius who, in addition to rejecting his Epicureanism and announcing his newfound belief in omens (5.1.76-78), fatally misreads his friend's success in battle. Convinced that he has seen his "best friend [Titinius] ta'en before [his] face" (5.3.35), Cassius kills himself only for Titinius to emerge victorious. Following that, Lucillius proclaims himself to be Brutus (5.4.7)—a sort of perverse pinnacle of the logic of the friend as another self—is captured, and thus leads Antony's troops to a premature sense of victory. It is Antony himself who must disabuse the nameless soldiers of their belief that Brutus has been defeated (5.4.26). So unclear are Brutus and his ideals that the soldiers cannot even identify him properly. As Titinius comments "Alas, thou has misconstrued everything" (5.3.83).

In fact, the entire battle is prefaced by an almost childish argument about which side is the real "flatterer" and thus deficient friend to Caesar. Antony criticizes the conspirators' "good words" to Caesar that hid "bad strokes":

<i>Antony</i>	Villains, you did not so when your vile daggers Hacked one another in the sides of Caesar. You showed your teeth like apes, and fawned like hounds, And bowed like bondmen, kissing Caesar's feet, Whilst damned Casca, like a cur, behind, Struck Caesar on the neck. O you flatterers!
<i>Cassius</i>	Flatterers? Now, Brutus, thank yourself. This tongue had not offended so today If Cassius might have ruled.
<i>Octavius</i>	Come, come, the cause. If arguing make us sweat, The proof of it will turn to redder drops. (5.1.40-50)

The fact that Octavius is the one to police this squabble suggests that the likes of Antony and Cassius have descended into a social mire that is detached from any sense of consequence. (Given that Antony has already divulged his utilitarian sympathies and Cassius his ultimate liberality in friendship, the claim to any kind of philosophical purity seems irrelevant.) But Octavius's desire to move past such a debate also signals his emerging social prowess. Octavius is, arguably, the real winner of the whole play, a secondary character who, as if taking cue from Antony's recommendation that "unmeritable" men like Lepidus should be ultimately discarded,

astutely uses his friendship with Antony to engender a lasting political transformation, namely his own ascendancy. When Antony touts his experience (“I have seen more days than you” [4.1.18]) and explicitly states, “let our alliance be combined, / Our best friends made” (4.1.43-44), there is a bitter irony, for it is the young man across the table that seems to better understand the true instrumentality of friendship. In this sense, Octavius sees Cassius and Antony’s back and forth for what it is: a kind of moot ideological argument that won’t really matter when Octavius himself is emperor. Whatever kind of true friendship any of these men embodied—or were perceived to embody—is already on its way out.

“Love and be friends, as two such men should be”: Shakespeare and the Future of Friendship

It is quite possible that Shakespeare saw Octavius’s ascendance in *Julius Caesar* as a good thing. “Shakespeare’s audience, gifted with the hindsight and persuaded (whether Protestant or Catholic) that God moves history toward a final goal,” writes John Mahon, “could perhaps see the working of providence in *Julius Caesar*.”¹⁷ Many of those same people “would [also] argue that the most desirable government was monarchy, a stable and strong central authority that could support and enhance conditions of peace and prosperity” that Octavius would first authorize as Caesar Augustus.¹⁸ Thus, even the most seemingly pernicious social events of the play—Cassius’s recruitment of Brutus, the assassination of Caesar, Antony’s manipulation of the mob—would be seen as necessary, even fortunate, developments that would “[lead] not only to the birth of the Roman Empire but to the creation of conditions ideal for Jesus’ birth and for the growth of the movement that developed after his death and resurrection.”¹⁹ In this sense, one need not be overly concerned with the particulars of any one conception of friendship and might even embrace the most instrumental forms it may take. Friendships, that is to suggest, are not something worthy of note but something to move past. So long as relationships—be they provisional, inconsistent, insincere, and cynical—elicit some sort of social action, they’re headed down the right track.

But what makes *Julius Caesar* so compelling is the ways in which the characters repeatedly insist that they or others are good friends (in and of themselves, not necessarily with each other) in spite of these apparent realities. The main characters lie, cheat, and deceive in pursuit of their political goals, but the accompanying insistence on their friendly credentials bespeaks an almost innate desire to order the world in positive social terms. Antony’s accusation of flattery towards Brutus and Cassius, along with Cassius’s impassioned defense, is thus not a mere squabble but a discussion for a fundamental social spirit, one that only a person as unsympathetic as Octavius could dismiss with the advice that everyone get to fighting and prove through “redder drops.”

Indeed, this issue of perceiving and even declaring friendship is not a private matter left to friends themselves. When Brutus and Cassius quarrel before the Battle of Philippi, they engage in a similar self-righteous name-calling. Complaining that Brutus goes too hard on him for his financial decisions, Cassius declares, “A friendly eye could never see such faults.” Brutus replies unfeelingly: “A flatterer’s would not, though they do appear / As huge as high Olympus”

¹⁷ John W. Mahon, “Providence in *Julius Caesar*” in *Shakespeare’s Christianity*, ed. Beatrice Batson (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006), 91.

¹⁸ Mahon, 91-92.

¹⁹ Mahon, 101.

(4.2.144-146). But this scene proves to be more than a matter of private debate. It attracts an audience, specifically a nameless poet who can't stand to see the two generals in such a state of discord. He chastises them:

For shame, you generals, what do you mean?
 Love and be friends, as two such men should be,
 For I have seen more years, I'm sure, than ye. (4.2.182-184)

It's a touching moment but one that also elicits a somewhat surprising dismissal from the two friends.

Cassius Ha, ha! How vilely doth this cynic rhyme!
Brutus Get you hence, sirrah; saucy fellow, hence! (4.2.185-186)

As Maurice Hunt has noted, this scene revises Thomas North's translation of Plutarch's telling of Nestor's attempt at reconciling the quarrel between Agamemnon and Achilles in book 1 of Homer's *Iliad*. And, as Hunt further argues, it stands as a rebuke of "third party[] artistry" that would seek to enact a Christian "cobbling of souls" between the plays most ardent friends.²⁰ Put another way, the dismissal of the poet is not a dismissal of his sentiment but the idea of someone other than Brutus and Cassius themselves are instrumental for the "soulful brotherhood" that Shakespeare introduces in the beginning with the cobbler's joke—"I am] a mender of bad soles" [1.1.14]—and Brutus and Cassius forge in the wake of Julius Caesar's "revolutionary," Christ-like presence.²¹ Thus, Hunt's argument emphasizes the intimacy of specific pairs and concludes with an endorsement of the idea that friendship is "between twaine"—i.e. a relationship that not only has two members but is also a relationship that only two people can determine through intense, private deliberation.

But while I agree that the poet's entrance and subsequent dismissal is a somewhat jarring claim to exclusivity, I believe that its larger dynamics and presence reflects the uncomfortable way in which friendship often goes beyond its paired existence—or in this case, someone tries to reach in to a paired friendship in order to get a greater grasp on the world. Brutus and Cassius's friendship may very well be a private affair, but its resonance is palpable to a greater public, whether the two friends like it or not. In this way, Brutus and Cassius's friendship is a kind of unintentional version of Antony's and Caesar's. Antony deliberately uses his close personal friendship with Caesar in order to inspire the masses to his cause; the exemplarity of their relationship serves as a means for common citizens to imagine their attachment to the state. Brutus and Cassius do not utilize their intimate friendship in such a public way, but the effect is nevertheless the same. People see and note it, and while they themselves may not be "friends" to it, they nevertheless are invested in its status.

That is to say also that the continued existence of a friendship like Brutus and Cassius's serves as a touchstone for stability in a period of social turmoil. Banished from Rome, Brutus and Cassius no longer hold the political clout they once did. But the fact that they continue to know and love each does give the external observer, in this case the poet, continued confidence. Affectless political institutions and once instrumental relations may be in disarray, but the affective core of something like Brutus and Cassius's friendship endures. Social expansion has failed or at least hit a wall; what remains solid is the intimacy of the initial pair. The poet's goal in asking Brutus Cassius to "[I]ove and be friends" is not to become friends with Brutus and

²⁰ Maurice Hunt, "Cobbling Souls in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*" in *Shakespeare's Christianity*, ed. Beatrice Batson (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2006), 123-124.

²¹ Hunt, 112.

Cassius themselves. That exclusionary element is still very much alive. But it asks that they hold on to the core paradigm that serves as both a foundation for personal and larger socio-political commitment for others.

The poet's propensity and desire to see friendship between the friendly examples of Brutus and Cassius reflects the position that we, the audience, and maybe even Shakespeare himself wanted to have when watching a play like *Julius Caesar*. We very much feel like we know how these men "should be" given the historical background and insight we have. They are, after all, emblems of a classical tradition that we depend on. And in anticipating the kind of overzealous desire to transcribe order onto a play full of classical friendship, Shakespeare registers the very conceptual power and promise of friendship. The plebeians themselves are willing if not eager to buy into Antony's invocation of "Friends, Romans, countrymen" even when they have little actual connection to the man before them; the poet who chastises Brutus and Cassius likewise has no real part in their friendship but nonetheless regards it as a matter of great importance. Indeed, both friendships may be seductive visions removed from the work of political action, but they are visions to which we are perhaps all susceptible. The friendships that are often evoked are ones that we ourselves may never actually have a part in, but the way in which they seem to touch us represents the kind of expansive potential that friendship has.

"I grant I am a woman, but withal / A woman well reputed"

It is a similar drive for inclusion that prompts the literally and critically neglected Portia, Brutus's wife, to engage her husband and ask to be "acquainted with [his] cause of grief" (2.1.255) once the conspiracy officially established. Observing the same turmoil within Brutus that Cassius did, Portia pleads for access into her husband's mind by making a case for the same kind of identification with Brutus that Cassius desired. Cassius complained to Brutus, "I have not from your eyes that gentleness / And show of love as I was wont to have" (1.2.35-6); Portia observes that

You've ungently, Brutus,
Stole from my bed, and yesternight at supper
You suddenly arose, and walked about
Musing and sighing, with your arms across;
And when I asked you what the matter was,
You stared upon me with ungentle looks. (2.1.237-41)

Like Cassius, Portia takes Brutus's "ungentle looks" as a sign of a disparity between them and, in response, makes a case for a more reflective concordance with her husband on the grounds of her "virtue of [] place" or status as his wife. But her argument also takes on the rhetoric of self-same identification that is hallmark of classical friendship and Cassius's own characterization of himself as reflective "glass" for Brutus. "Upon my knees," she declares,

I charm you by my once-commended beauty,
By all your vows of love, and that great vow
Which did incorporate and make us one,
That you unfold to me, your self, your half, (2.1.269-73)

More pointedly, she asks, "Am I your self, / But as it were in sort or limitation" (2.1.282), a question that reiterates her feeling of sameness with Brutus while also gesturing towards the gender difference between them. Indeed, Portia explicitly acknowledges her status as a woman as well as her awareness that such a fundamental difference disbars her from the friendship that is afforded the same-sex male conspirators. "I grant I am a woman," she confesses,

but withal

A woman well reputed, Cato's daughter.

Think you I am no stronger than my sex,

Being so fathered and so husbanded?

Tell me your counsels; I will not disclose 'em.

I had made strong proof of my constancy. (2.1.293-98)

Brutus's eventual agreement to "construe to [Portia], / All the character of my sad brows" (2.1.306-7), then, is a moment of significant cross-gender inclusion that defies custom as even Portia understands it. But it is also one in which we see the logical limits of social expansion in Shakespeare's play. As much as Portia's inclusion indicates the possibility of a more a diverse set of friendly connections, it also affirms the premium of likeness in social relationships. After all, Portia doesn't convince Brutus by emphasizing her status as a wife but noting the ways in which she transcends her very gender: Portia declares herself "stronger than [her] sex" and in possession of a "constancy" that is not typical for women. Simply put, Portia wins inclusion into the conspiracy by declaring herself to be a man, thereby creating greater social connection via the erasure, rather than cultivation, of any difference between her and Brutus.

Of course, the initial success of Portia's argument gestures towards the potency and versatility of likeness's basic logic. If an articulation of likeness can surmount the fundamental difference of gender, the range of other social chasms that such reasoning might span seems considerable. But the actual stability of such cross-gender likeness, here achieved through the adoption of male gendered traits on Portia's part, turns out to be a less than inspiring. Despite her previously fervent claims to masculine "constancy," Portia wrestles with the prospect of maintaining such a poise on the eve of Caesar's assassination, begging, "O constancy, be strong upon my side; [...] I have a man's mind, but a woman's might. / How hard it is for women to keep counsel" (2.4.6-9). And as if fearing that she cannot escape her gendered disposition and "disclose" the secret of Brutus's plan, she hopes that Brutus will act soon. "Ay me," she laments, "How weak a thing / The heart of woman is! O Brutus, / The heavens speed thee in thine enterprise!" (2.4.41-43). Despite its simplicity, likeness is not necessarily an easily held or even sustainable tenet. The constant secrecy that is the foundation of Portia and Brutus's political friendship is here hanging by a thread.

Indeed, Portia's ultimate death along with Brutus's literal and affective distance from the event seems to reflect the way in which they never were as close, or at least alike, as they thought. When Brutus reflects on Portia's death, he blames it on her "impatience" and inability to deal with the news of Antony and Octavius's ascendance (4.2.204-8).²² In other words, she could not maintain the masculine "constancy" that she professed. On one hand, Brutus's reasoning reifies Portia's misogynist take on the apparent weakness of her gender. On the other hand, it highlights, perhaps benignly, the chasm between genders that can't be bridged a claim to likeness. Brutus and Portia two persons who had hoped to use a sense of semblance as a means to go beyond the intimacy of their marriage and engage in a more vaunted relationship of friendship. Men and women, it seems, are just too different to do so.

With its public exhibition and lofty declarations, *Julius Caesar* shows how friendship may be inspiring to the masses, be they plebeian or woman. But Shakespeare's play also gestures

²² Even the anomalous second announcement of Portia's death at Act 4, scene 2, lines 242-244 prompts Brutus to reflect on his assured "patience" and ability to "endure" her death, a comment that also feels like a backhanded critique of Portia's self-inflicted demise as faithless way out.

towards the impossibility of such a pluralist vision when likeness is the only piece of rationale available in one's social arsenal. Indeed, such a logical limit becomes a distinct liability when it turns out that likeness itself might not be enough to sustain a relationship, much less a guise that two persons can actually take on. The creation but ultimate dissolution of so many friendly relationships in the play—the conspiracy, Antony's "Friends, Romans, countrymen," Brutus and Portia—hints at the budding diversity that friendship is wont to entertain but also the fundamental inadequacy of likeness as a means to that diversity. In order to span difference, even one as fundamental as gender, friendship requires a rationale beyond likeness, along with room to develop outside the public space of theater.

3. “To make a friendship of nothing”: Donne and Friendly Disparity in Letters

“...amitie, whereunto we read not, hir sexe could yet attaine”

In his essay “Of Friendship,” Montaigne declares that women are incapable of friendship. Unlike men, who might “wholy be engaged” in the “share of the alliance” of friendship, “this sex” (i.e. women), Montaigne writes, “could never yet by any example attaine unto it, and is by ancient schooles rejected thence.”¹ Montaigne’s view may seem extreme, but it is by no means radical for the period. Several accounts of friendship, classical and early modern, omit women entirely²; those that do address women stress the inconstancy of women as reason for women’s inability to form ideal (i.e. virtuous) friendships of their own. In *De amicitia*, Cicero claims that it is “helpless women” who are “least endowed with firmness of character” and thus desperate for “defence and aid”: they seek friendships of utility rather than virtue.³ In his essay “Of Friendship & Factions,” Sir William Cornwallis declares that “woman is loathsome and flexible,” and thus her friendship does not require the necessary “labour” or “difficulty” that the “certaintest” of friendships have.⁴ Montaigne himself also cites “the ordinary sufficiency of women” as unable to incite the steadfast commitment that friendship requires. It “cannot answer this conference and communications, the nurse of this sacred bond: nor seeme [women’s] mindes strong enough to endure the pulling of a knot so hard, so fast, so durable.”⁵

Montaigne, however, would alter his position on women a few years after his essay on friendship. In “Of Presumption,” Montaigne provides a catalogue of the “worthiest men” he has known, only to reserve his “fille d’alliance” Marie de Gournay for the very end of the list. “[H]ir minde shall one day be capable of many notable things,” he writes, “and amongst other of the perfection of this thrice-sacred amitie, whereunto we read not, hir sexe could yet attaine.”⁶ Despite his previous confident declarations, then, Montaigne admitted that at least one woman was capable of friendship and, furthermore, that he himself could be a friend with her. Friendship, it turns out, was not necessarily confined to men and their shared constancy. It could also exist between persons of differing genders.

Montaigne’s change of heart reflects a larger trend in the period: early modern writers became increasingly amenable to the idea that women could be friends. Critics have already

¹ Michel Montaigne, “Of Friendship” in *The Essayes of Montaigne: John Florio’s Translation*, ed. J.I.M. Stewart (New York: Modern Library, 1938), 147.

² Aristotle voices vague support for cross-gender friendship by claiming that the “friendship of man and woman also seems to be natural” (133), but such relationships are examples of friendship in families, which is separate from “that of companions” (132). See *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin (Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1999). See Amanda E. Herbert’s *Female Alliances: Gender, Identity, and Friendship in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 23-25 for a catalogue of criticism that addresses classical male philosopher’s denial of female friendship.

³ Cicero, *De senectute, De amicitia, De divinatione*, trans. W.A. Falconer (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1923), 157.

⁴ Sir William Cornwallis, “Of Friendship & Factions” in *Essayes by Sir William Cornwallis, the Younger*, ed. Don Cameron Allen (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1946), 23.

⁵ Montaigne, “Of Friendship,” 147.

⁶ Montaigne, “Of Presumption” in *The Essayes of Montaigne: John Florio’s Translation*, 599-600.

begun to recognize this expanded conception of Renaissance friendship by exploring the rich tradition of all-female friendship in the period.⁷ But while critics have focused on the respective traditions of all-male and all-female friendship, they have left the possibility and existence of cross-gender friendship like Montaigne's and Marie De Gournays' relatively unexplored.⁸ To be sure, critics have addressed the existence of mixed gender sociality in the Renaissance, but they have consistently read such relations as something other than friendship due to the relations' persistent lack of equality. Given the privileged status of male friendship in the period, women's relations to men have been regarded as inevitably subordinate to the homosocial bonds of men.⁹ Conversely, mixed gender relations that exalt women's status are frequently read as Petrarchan and thus as erotic rather than friendly.¹⁰ And more recent critical emphasis on friendship as a "vision of parity" has further pushed mixed gender relations outside the realm of friendly

⁷ For a comprehensive summary of female friendship in early modern neoclassical, religious, physiological, and epistolary texts, see Herbert's *Female Alliances*, 21-51.

⁸ Recent studies by Craig A. Williams and Maritere López have directly addressed cross-gender friendship in the classical and early modern period, respectively. Williams's *Reading Roman Friendship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012) investigates the question of "whether men and women could be friends in ancient Rome" through a study of the use of the feminine *amicae* and masculine *amicus* to describe various sexual partnerships (91-107). He most conclusively answers the question of whether or not men and women can be friends when he notes that the "[n]ear-synonym[] of *amica*," *familiaris*, "did not run the risk of denoting or even connoting a sexual relationship" and "provided one way of describing friendships between men and women" (92). López focuses on the relation between the courtesan Tullia d'Aragona and her patron Benedetto Varchi. Given patronage's inherent imbalance, López, in the interest of adhering to the readings of Aristotle and Cicero that privilege the notion of "perfect friends [as] each other's 'other self,' equal in stature, wealth, and virtue," argues that Pisana "recharacteriz[ed] perfect friendship as based on both virtue *and* utility" (102) by offering a notion of "reciprocal utility" (115). See "The Courtesan's Gift: Reciprocity and Friendship in the Letters of Camilla Pisana and Tullia D'Aragona" in *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500—1700*, ed. Daniel T. Lochman, Maritere López, Lorna Hutson (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011).

⁹ For an account of women and homosociality in the Renaissance, see the second chapter of Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), "Swan in Love: The Example of Shakespeare's Sonnets." Any kind of "male heterosexual desire" (i.e. the desire for women), she argues, is in essence the "desire to consolidate partnership with authoritative males in and through the bodies of females" (38). Lorna Hutson has similarly observed the way women are "signs of credit between men in...the literary culture of humanism" (7). Rather than have direct relations with women themselves, men facilitate their relationships through "persuasive fictions" that are necessarily about women (9). See *The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-Century England* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).

¹⁰ For a thorough discussion of Donne's relationship to Petrarchism, see Chapter 5 of Heather Dubrow's *Echoes of Desire* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1995), "Resident Alien: John Donne." Dubrow argues that Donne is very consciously "inside and outside Petrarchism," a participant in the tradition who takes pains to remind us that he is "no native" (205).

consideration: mixed gender relations naturally clash with the “radical likeness of sex and station” that parity requires.¹¹

Insofar as critics have attempted to argue for the possibility of cross-gender friendship, they have generally premised this amity on a minimization of difference between men and women. Building on the early modern period’s valorization of the cross-gender relation of marriage, Laurie Shannon argues that writers like Elizabeth Cary and John Donne show how friendship is dually applicable to both men and women only through an abstracted parity: “principles of [female] chastity” are found to be comparable to “the (male) Stoic doctrines of integrity so favored by Renaissance writers.”¹² Yet the attempt to show that women possess a virtuous constancy akin to the “firmness” and “sufficiency” of all-male friendship actually precludes the possibility of cross-gender friendship. Contact between men and women threatens to violate the chaste constancy that is the very basis for cross-gender parity. Thus Cary and Donne, in Shannon’s own reading, “suggest ways that cross-gendered *analogies* become possible, even though cross-gendered *contacts* are otherwise invariably eroticized, and thus (in period terms) debased.”¹³ In other words, male friendship with women is possible in theory but not actuality. Female friendship and its applications are an “example,” “model,” or “analogy”; actual cross-gender “contacts” are still necessarily tinged with eroticism. The result is a form of friendship that, in order to retain its defining parity, never actually allows for real social interaction between the genders. Simply put, men and women can be friends so long as they stay away from each other.

The attempt to reason how women might be like men confirms, rather ironically, that women are definitively not men (and vice versa). The necessary distance that the two must keep in order to maintain a sense of friendly parity serves as a reminder of how difference is still a persistent constant in cross-gender relations. In order to establish an actual social connection, friendship needs to court the difference between persons rather than cast it behind forms of virtuous semblance. To wit, if we are to take Montaigne’s claim of a “thrice-sacred amitie” for Marie de Gournay as something other than just a shared chaste eroticism and permit Montaigne and Marie to associate (i.e. be in contact) as friends, we need a critical account of how difference could serve friendship in the early modern period.¹⁴

This chapter focuses on the often disregarded and under-theorized configuration of cross-gender friendship through an examination of an early modern writer who had many female

¹¹ Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 2.

¹² Shannon, 12.

¹³ Shannon, 12.

¹⁴ Tom MacFaul’s *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) has already noted the prevalence of difference in early modern friendship but he has explicitly limited this discussion to the male gender domain on the grounds that “female friendship [is] an entirely separate issue, affected by different codes of values” (3). My study shows how theorizations of difference in friendship have much broader application and provide a logic for cross-gender friendship in the period. Furthermore, MacFaul laments friendship’s “illusion of permanence” on account of the fact that when friendship is in a dramatic “plot,” “an end to the friendship has to be assumed” (20). As I show with Donne, letters allow for a paradigm of friendship that has no end and thus enables a more expansive logic of disparity as conducive to a particularly advantageous and infinite virtuous growth.

friends: John Donne. Donne cultivated friendly relations with these women and explicitly identified them as friends in his letters. However, Donne did not attempt to argue for virtuous parity with his friends but openly recognized and emphasized the social and gender differences between them. This valorization of difference, I argue, is not a “pragmatic” solution to the fact that “absolute equality” is an unattainable ideal for friendship; rather, this valorization recognizes the fact that difference is an essential element for realizing friendly virtuosity.¹⁵ Put another way, difference is the means to the virtuous heights that friendship aspires: when different, friends can emulate virtuous examples other than themselves and thus enable an expansive cultivation—rather than mere reflection—of virtue. This dynamic interchange *is* friendship. The most virtuous of friendships do not seek to reach a state of equality but seek to capitalize on an ever-enduring disparity in status and virtue.

It is the genre of letters that both occasions and facilitates this paradigm of friendly disparity. Letters, after all, signify distance: friends write them in moments of physical absence in an attempt to provide a sense of social proximity. The receipt of letters, then, constitutes a moment of metaphysical contact that notionally closes a gap between friends. But even the moment of epistolary contact inevitably manifests an ever-present disparity: first, it confirms that friends are still necessarily *not* together; second, it naturally inspires the need for more letters in order to re-affirm the existence of the relationship and its feelings. (Any single letter by itself is not a definitive embodiment of the friendship *in toto* but merely part of an ongoing correspondence.) In other words, friends in letters are always in touch and yet apart—and thereby committed to a creative process—literally the writing of more letters—that never allows for the possibility of a settled equality but constantly mediates between moments of attachment and detachment. Donne seizes on this dynamic irresolution: he unceasingly emphasizes the difference between him and his correspondents with the dual understanding that friends will define themselves and each other collaboratively through letters but also never be bound to those designated capacities. The prospect of more letters leaves them socially unattached or ‘distant’ from a singular, settled identification and thus subject to further personal expansion.

While Donne’s letters’ emphasis on physical and social distance seems to encourage the un-intimate engagement—and thus enable the chaste parity—that Shannon believes cross-gender friendship requires, recent scholarship has shown how letters’ meditation on distance actually facilitated the development of personal style and the communication of intimacy in the period. Beginning with the Aristotelian notion of writing as a solution to the “problem of distance—spatial distance,” Kathy Eden chronicles how classical writers identified the familiar letter as the form that could best close the “physical distance” between interlocutors through “an expression of the letter writer’s deepest feelings.”¹⁶ The letter writer produces attachment through the

¹⁵ Critical studies of early modern friendship have often read the acknowledgment of difference as a “pragmatic” or “practical” consideration of the “reality” of social relations that is necessarily divorced from the contra the ideal of “absolute equality.” See *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500—1700*, 15. My study attempts to show how considerations of difference were not necessarily a departure from the notion of ideal friendship but integral part of its vision.

¹⁶ Kathy Eden, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 12 and 30-31. John Carey has actually made a similar claim about Donne’s letters attempt to realize a spatial proximate intimacy: “[Donne] imagines that his letters have transported him physically into Goodyer’s presence.” See John Carey, “John Donne’s Newsless Letters,” *Essays*

individuated expression of an “innermost self” or “character” with the height of epistolary style resting in the ability to “reveal the soul” or that which is most unique about one’s own self.¹⁷ This tradition of “intimate style,” Eden argues, would “change fundamentally the way Europeans between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries expected to read and write”: writers sought to differentiate themselves in order to communicate “exclusive belonging” and style became a “forum for promoting the increasingly embraced values of individuality and difference.”¹⁸

Eden’s argument allows us to read Donne’s letters as part of a larger project in the Renaissance that seeks to establish connection between persons through an expression of distinct “character” rather than the articulation of commonality. In this sense, the assertion of difference between one’s self and another was a supreme sign of intimacy, a way of establishing “belonging” with another by fully representing and disclosing the self. But what Donne’s *constant* articulation of difference makes particularly clear is how this friendly “belonging” via personal revelation constitutes a profound rejection of parity as a friendly goal and thus ideal. That is, Donne does not artificially expand the sense of difference between him and his friends in letters only to bridge it later—thereby realizing a more stunning sense of equality and tacitly adhering to a model of friendly parity; rather, he repeatedly increases the sense of difference between himself and his friends so that they will be able to continually provide a unique contribution for each other.¹⁹ This model of friendly disparity unlocks a more powerful vision of friendship as an infinitely generative and genuinely social relation: friends tap increasing personal depths for the very purpose—or process—of elevating one another in perpetuity. Friends, in other words, truly “belong” with each other not when they possess a sense of parity but when they each have a distinctive and rich enough understanding of self that they can engage in an endless exercise of virtuous exchange.

Men and women, by this standard, are remarkably suited for friendly relations. Cross-gender friends, after all, possess a fundamental disparity that could be mined for the most unfamiliar, and therefore valuable, of virtuous qualities (respective to either sex). And with no ability to ever be fully alike, that friendly exchange, and its resulting expansion of self, could potentially go on forever. The radical gender difference otherwise believed to preclude friendly association actually contains the virtuous multiplicity necessary for both upholding friendship’s dynamic essence and transcending the limits that a shared equality would impose.

Beyond gender, my reading of friendship’s constant drive towards difference allows us to understand how other unequal transactions are in fact true to the promise of friendship and thus instances of genuine friendly engagement. Most notably, critics have questioned whether

and Studies 34 (1981): 62. See also Margaret Maurer’s “The Prose Letter” in *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne* ed., Jeanne Shami, Dennis Flynn, and M. Thomas Hester (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) for commentary about Donne’s “preoccupation with a Letter’s capacity to make the absent present” (353).

¹⁷ Eden, 36-38.

¹⁸ Eden, 4-9.

¹⁹ Parity, logically speaking, is a kind of social dead end: it asks that friends simply find others with the same qualities they already possess; or, in a fundamentally unsocial way, it asks that a (i.e. one) friend attain the existing (usually elevated) status of another and effectively ‘stay there.’ In fact, friendship by this standard has no inclination to parity: the minute friendship surrenders its unsettled dynamic and becomes assured of its status, it effectively forfeits its very purpose and appeal.

friendly texts are really about friendship at all on the grounds that the Humanist rhetoric of friendship is “really a rhetoric of social aspiration” that chiefly seeks to “gain patronage.”²⁰ In the specific case of Donne’s verse letters to the Countess of Bedford, Patricia Thomson similarly insists that Donne should “be read with this strong need for patronage and this knowledge of competition in mind.”²¹ This suspicious reading—one rooted in the ideal of (eventual) parity and an imagination of friendship as a social ceiling that its participants are desperately trying to reach—suggests that much of what Donne says is better considered a sophist attempt at “advancement” rather than a genuine friendly expression. To be sure, elaborate claims to neediness are a regular feature of Donne’s letters: as I will highlight, Donne makes constant mention of “debt” as well as his own literal and figurative “nothing”-ness. But Donne employs this logic of disparity on all his friends—male, female, peer, and patron—and thereby consistently reads a sense of limitless possible advancement in all of friendship. Put another way, Donne does not strategically employ claims of disparity on some of his friends and not others, thereby creating a class of ‘real’ friends that he uses for nothing and ‘fake’ friends that he uses for something. All friendship is about aspiration—a constant aspiration—with claims to disparity functioning more or less as an established “style” for Donne, a kind of extreme honesty that that he uses to communicate the depths of his self in the interest of realizing the boundless benefits that friendship has to offer.

Granted, those benefits, as Donne’s use of “debt” indicates, are frequently articulated in financial terms, and I have adopted much of that language in my own discussion of Donne and his letters. The pertinence of these terms for me, however, hinges not on the idea that Donne is chiefly interested in monetary support—although that is certainly on his mind—but that this economic language is a particularly illustrative metaphor for Donne’s larger vision of friendship as value creation. Friends, as letters indicate, do not engage in a search for a static identification with one another but engage in a dynamic exchange of difference. In this sense, friendship is always about a kind of profit: friends work as a mutual earnings power in order to produce things they did not have, feelings they did not know, and relationships they did not see. One could easily brand this a gross opportunism, but such opportunism is a friendly non-entity when the relationship has no definitive conclusion. That is, friendship does not have the opportunity to stop and take stock of what it has or has not conclusively done, whether or not it has been properly or improperly used. It is constantly looking forward to the distinct advantages that it will continue to yield with difference serving as its self-perpetuating guide.

This chapter begins by exploring Donne’s articulation of debt and disparity in letters to the likes of male friends such as Henry Goodyer, George Garrard, Henry Wotton, and Robert Karre. I argue that Donne’s constant expressions of indebtedness and “nothing”-ness fosters the necessary disparity between friends that authorizes a dynamic process of constant social and literary production. I then show how the same logic of disparity applies to Donne’s female and patron friendships, particularly Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford. As Donne demonstrates, class and gender disparity is not a disruption of friendship but a feature that yields an even

²⁰ MacFaul, 11. MacFaul cites Alan Bray’s *The Friend* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), Lisa Jardine’s *Erasmus: Man of Letters* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), and Alan Stewart’s *Close Readers: Humanism and Sodomy in Early Modern England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) as notable examples of this argument.

²¹ P. Thomson, “John Donne and the Countess of Bedford,” *The Modern Language Review*, 44 no. 3 (1949): 332.

greater amount of virtuous interchange and thus growth. This awareness of disparity's benefits naturally expands the scope of possible friendly configurations in the period, but it also reconfigures the conception of exemplary friendship: friends were not defined by an exclusive equality they possessed but the abundant social possibilities they could occasion. My chapter ends by noting the prevalent place cross-gender friendship had in the public presentation of Donne's life with an analysis of Donne's letters to Mrs. Bridget White, the "first" friend to appear in the posthumous collection *Letters to Severall Persons of Honor*. Mrs. White was a rather distant friend to Donne but also one that represents the full potentiality that disparate friendship could offer.

The study of early modern friendship and its vision of virtuous idealism does not require us to argue for forms of parity between unlike persons but allows us to observe the ways in which real differences are conducive to friendly virtuous expression. Indeed, early moderns themselves recognized that equality was not actually all that useful or even desirable of a friendly condition. As Sir Francis Bacon concludes in his essay "Of Followers and Friends," "to use Men with much Difference and Election, is Good" because "*Lookers on, many times, see more then Gamesters; and the Vale best discovereth the Hill.*" Friendship, it follows, "betweene Equals... was wont to be Magnified," but "That that is, is between Superiour and Inferiour, whose Fortunes may Comprehend, the One the Other."²² Disparity, as Bacon's comment suggest, could provide the divine perspective that allowed persons to truly understand each other and thus actually be friends. But that initial understanding does not call for a "Magnified" sense of sameness, a myopic solidification of identity and perspective, but an active resistance of such constrictive definition. Friends, that is, should stay on the vale and hill rather than attempt to meet on the same plain. Once that gap has been eliminated, the possibility of further social discovery—the very premise of friendship—is severely impeded. Letters, in their constant communication of distinct selves, were keys for articulating the unsettled disparity that produced this culture of friendship based on continuous virtuous proliferation rather than achieved assimilation. The rejection of parity as an ideal, real or imagined, embraces friendship's dynamic imperative and provides a logic for the existence of the cross-gender friendship that Renaissance writers acknowledged and Donne in particular would extol.

Counting Letters, Counting Debt

Donne often worried about whether or not people were receiving his letters. Responding to a letter from his friend Henry Goodyer, Donne complains incredulously that "I neither discern by it that you have received any of mine lately; which have been many, and large, and too confident to be lost."²³ Goodyer's failure to reference any of the significant news items in Donne's "many" previous missives was cause for concern, though, at other times, the fact that Goodyer asked about something that Donne had already addressed also aroused suspicion. "I am not come to an understanding how these Carriers keep daies," Donne mused, "for I would fain think, that the Letters which I sent upon *Thursday* last might have given you such an account of the state of my family, that you needed not have asked by this" (*Letters*, 145). Donne was keenly

²² Sir Francis Bacon, *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 149.

²³ John Donne, *Letters to Severall Persons of Honour*, ed. Charles Edmund Merrill, Jr. (New York: Sturgis & Walton Company, 1910), 128. Hereafter cited parenthetically by page number and abbreviated *Letters*.

aware of, and less than pleased with, the discordant lapse in communication that his own missing letters could cause. But he was equally concerned about whether or not he was successfully receiving all of his friends' letters to him. While trying to reconstruct the order of several letters, Donne concludes that one must have been lost "because," as he tells his friend, "in your last Letter, I find mention of things formerly written, which I have not found" (*Letters*, 64). Other times, however, he doubted that his friends were writing him at all. "[Y]ou know in your conscience that you have sent no Letter," Donne chastised fellow Strand lodger George Garrard, only to assure his man that they were still friends but also make clear that Garrard's lack of writing was an indecorous response given Donne's devotion: "it shall not be in the power of your forbidding, (to which your stiffe silence amounts) to make me leave being *Your very affectionate servant*" (*Letters*, 224-225). It would take more than a lost or unwritten letter to destroy a friendship, but either event was still an unfortunate disruption in the unbroken line of correspondence that Donne was so eager to capture.

Indeed, Donne was fiercely attentive about keeping a "concurrent chain" of communication with his friends for it was letters, he felt, that "make up" and "nourish bodies of friendship" (*Letters*, 64). Just as "the strongest bodies are made of the smallest particles," he told Robert Karre, "so the strongest friendships may be made of often iterating small officiousnesses" (*Letters*, 250). Friendships were knit together thanks to a consistent and repeated correspondence from both parties, and this regular reciprocation was a feature that matched and even defined friendship's virtuousness. "[E]vennesse," Donne told Goodyer, "conduces as much to strength and firmnesse as greatnesse doth," a belief that led Donne to promise his friend, "I would not discontinue my course of writing" (*Letters*, 100). Great friends were, in essence, "even" friends, ones who made sure to write each other reliably and often.

Yet it is in this context of reciprocation and represented equal exchange that Donne was willing to admit to a potential imbalance in his friendships. In a moment of near obsessive epistolary tracking, Donne takes "account" of how many letters he has received from Garrard, only to document his debts to every other friend that has written him.

SIR,

IT is one ill affection of a desperate debtor, that he dares not come to an account, nor take knowledge how much he owes; this makes me that I dare not tell you how manie letters I have received from you since I came to this Towne; I had three the first by the Cooke, who brought none but yours, nor ever came to me, to let me know what became of the rest: the two other of the 7. and 8. Of *March*, came in a letter which Sir *H. Wotton* writ to me from *Amyens*; [...] When any thing passes between Sir *Thomas Roe* and you, tell him I am not the lesse his Servant, for not saying so by often letters: for by my troth, I am that so much as he could desire I should be, when he began to love me. Sir *Thomas Lucies* business, and perchance sadnesse forbid me writing now. I have written to him (whilst I lived in darknesse, whether my Letters came to you or no) by another way; and if my poore Letters were any degree of service, I should doe it often, and rather be mine own Post then leave any thing undone, to which he would give such an interpretation, as that it were an Argument of my Devotion to him. (*Letters*, 218-219)

Donne's act of counting letters evokes his anxiety about whether or not he and his friends are receiving each other's messages—he explicitly mentions that he doesn't know "what became of the rest" of the letters presumably meant for him and that he is in "darknesse, whether [his] Letters came to" Garrard—but it also registers Donne's concern about whether or not he is doing enough in the relationship. Donne's reference to himself as a "desperate debtor" who effectively

“owes” his friends casts letter writing as a matter of substantive payment in which each letter has a calculable value that goes towards fulfilling an existing debt. Donne, in this way, is always seeking to repay his friends just as he wants them to pay, which is to say write, him. However, when it comes to such epistolary recompense, Donne is most certainly deficient. His “poore Letters” are not worth much, so even if he promises to be diligent and never “discontinue” his writing, he will always be behind in supplying enough letters of value to satisfy his friends. In other words, Donne feels he can never measure up, and he acknowledges that his lack of sufficient payment—not just exchange—creates an unevenness in his relationships that is in constant need of redress.

Donne’s concern over his debts in friendship seems considerate, but this claim to irreconcilable indebtedness is rather at odds with classical notions of assured equality in friendship and arguably signals a lack of genuine friendship in his relations. In *De amicitia*, Cicero explicitly cautions against those who “limit[] friendship to an equal interchange of services and feelings” because such “petty accounting” requires friendship

to keep an exact balance of credits and debits. I think true friendship is richer and more abundant than that and does not narrowly scan the reckoning lest it pay out more than it has received; and there need be no fear that some bit of kindness will be lost, that it will overflow the measure and spill upon the ground, or that more than is due will be poured into friendship’s bin.²⁴

Donne, by Cicero’s account, is seemingly “petty” both to admit indebtedness in friendship and also to seek a kind of “exact” reciprocation or even repayment. Such “accounting” is unnecessary because “true” friendship never has to worry about an imbalance occurring: no “bit of kindness will be lost”; or it could never be the case that one will errantly over-fill “friendship’s bin.” If Donne really was a friend to these people, a certain “exact[ness]” in friendship would obviate the need to “scan the reckoning” or even talk about debt at all: a friend would never “pay out more”; Donne would never give back less.

But Donne’s admission of indebtedness draws attention to the fact that unsettled disparity—rather than assured equality—is the perpetual feature of friendship in letters. As Donne’s anxiety over the receipt of letters makes clear, epistolary exchange is by definition intermittent, engendering moments of shared connection (i.e. when one has received a letter) followed by necessary periods of uncertain absence (i.e. waiting for the next letter). Consequently, there is always a state of indebtedness for at least one party, a moment where one friend—usually not Donne, if Donne himself is to be believed—has provided more than the other. The tracking of debt then does not, as Cicero would believe, seek “equal interchange” because friends never reach a state of resolve: their commitment to an ongoing process of requital invariably produces a dynamic back-and-forth between the disparate roles of debtor and creditor. With no single letter marking the achievement of “exact balance” but implicitly signaling the prospect of another letter in return, Donne’s account of debt effectively locates friendship in an ever-present gap between correspondents—in a letter that has yet to be written, a letter that has yet to arrive, or a letter that has unfortunately been lost.

That gap or state of difference is as much a part of friendship as the moments of receipt and perceived “balance,” and it is the interplay between parity and disparity that comprises the whole of friendship. But Donne also privileges the element of disparity in friendship because it is the primary agent of reciprocation and thus the very circumstance that enables the relationship’s

²⁴ Cicero, 168-169.

continued existence and growth. When Goodyer makes known his “desire of letters” from Donne—by Cicero’s standards, an uncouth request for “equal interchange” on Goodyer’s part—Donne embraces the reminder of that deficit, “for in these commandements,” he tells Goodyer, “you feed my desires, and you give me means to pay some of my debts to you” (*Letters*, 167). Goodyer’s message, on the surface, makes reciprocation possible: Goodyer “feed[s]” Donne so that Donne can “pay” Goodyer back. Yet Donne’s reciprocal payment has no propensity for a kind of solvency: Donne will only be able to pay “some” of his debts and thus will still be in a state of indebtedness by the end. To be sure, Donne’s implied inability to fully repay his friend could be a matter of disingenuous self-effacement or even intentional refusal; but with friendly debt never reconciled, Goodyer may come to “feed” Donne again and Donne will be obliged to write no matter what, thus adding to the relationship in a nearly endless creative effort.²⁵ That is to say that Donne’s debt is not something that needs or even should be reconciled: if equality has been achieved, why bother doing anything else? The claim to persistent disparity provides friendship with the impetus to produce additional moments of unifying correspondence, an attempt at parity via the writing of more letters.

Indeed, Donne exaggerates disparity in friendship—effectively precluding the possibility of equality between friends at all and thus guaranteeing a continuously productive dynamic—with a claim to his total lack of value: both he and his letters are “nothing.” Donne routinely admits to this kind of insufficiency. If “often iterating small officiousnesses” is the rule of friendship, as he wrote Karre, Donne confesses, “I feel I can be good for nothing” (*Letters*, 250). To Henry Wotton, Donne describes news-less letters and thus himself as “spun out of nothing...but apparitions and ghosts, with such hollow sounds, as he that hears them, know not what they said” (*Letters*, 104). To Goodyer, Donne claims “this Letter is nothing” and leaves the note unsigned, reasoning that nothingness is such a trademark of his epistles that they can be identified by that very feature (*Letters*, 126). And even if Donne didn’t explicitly call every letter “nothing,” he theorized his letters as a kind of operative blank, claiming,

I Send not my letters as tribute, nor interest, nor recompense, nor for commerce, nor as testimonials of my love, nor provokers of yours, nor to justifie my custom of writing, nor for a vent and utterance of my meditations; for my Letters are either above or under all such offices; (*Letters*, 94)

With such a systematic denial of his own letters’ purpose—what John Carey has aptly described as “functional emptiness”²⁶—Donne seems to say that his letters have no point at all. Yet such abnegation, Donne’s unwillingness to declare his own letters’ value, imbues the friend with the ability to articulate the purpose of the letter and thus define Donne’s very self. In this way, Donne’s almost absurd claims to absolute disparity are not needless self-effacement but a profound articulation of the friend’s value and importance. Donne never dares assume what he is to Goodyer; Donne is only that which his friend, in letters, declares him to be.

After declaring his letters to be void of intention, Donne in a seemingly modest moment tells Goodyer that he would never impose on him but rather simply accept whatever Goodyer

²⁵ Presumably, this disparity need not be exclusive to Donne. A friend like Garrard could engender the same kind of disparity for himself in his failure to write Donne. Donne is not the only friend capable of self-appointed indebtedness, though he certainly seems to be the most vocal about it.

²⁶ John Carey, “John Donne’s Newsless Letters,” *Essays and Studies* 34 (1981): 52.

chooses to “reveal.” Letters are merely “conveyances and deliverers of me to you,” he tells his friend. “[W]hether you accept me as a friend or as a patient, or as a penitent, or as a beadsman,”

I would not open any door upon you, but look in when you open it. Angels have not, nor affect not other knowledge of one another, then they list to reveal to one another. It is then in this onely, that friends are Angels, that they are capable and fit for such revelations when they are offered. (*Letters*, 94-95)

As Carey details in his reading of this very letter, it is not the case that the observer (here, Donne) “can choose what meaning or motive to ascribe to [letters].” Rather, as is the case with angels, “the freedom of choice belongs to the observed, who reveals to observers only such knowledge about himself as he cares to reveal.” Donne “will see only what Goodyer wishes to be seen,” and Donne’s letters “notic[e] only such facets of Goodyer as he chooses to expose.”²⁷ In this sense, Donne’s letters about nothing pose as empty “conveyances” or receptacles waiting to be filled with Goodyer’s choice revelations. Donne will not necessarily be nothing forever; he could be a “friend,” “patient,” “penitent,” or “beadsman.” But he remains an unnamable something until the friend names him. It is the friend who, quite literally, informs Donne who he is.

This does not mean that Donne has no part to play in the project of letters: as “nothing,” Donne must not only continuously write but constantly be written to because he must constantly be recognized if he is to be anything. But it does mean that the friend is a crucial arbiter of that very being, and he must possess something that Donne does not in order to fulfill that role. If Donne is, as he himself professes, “nothing,” the friend must be an opposite sort of “everything” by comparison. Donne practically confesses as much to Wotton, asking, “How shall I then who know nothing write Letters? Sir, I learn knowledge enough out of yours to me” (*Letters*, 104). The friend is expressly not a reflection for Donne—how could nothing be reflected? He is instead a kind of discretionary respondent who is able to effectively construct and improve the friend, in this case Donne, as he sees fit. Such endowments necessitate difference, and letters, as signifiers of absence, communicate the disparity between parties that would make the friends’ contributions all the more significant. Donne’s constant request for letters fits a vision of friendly reciprocity, but such mirroring produces a pseudo-equality that, ironically, serves to realize the lack of equality in Donne’s friendships. That lack of equality, however, does not defeat friendship but serves as the productive key to friendship’s very purpose and value.

Friendships of Disparity: Donne and Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford

Donne knew of Lucy Russell, Countess of Bedford and her family as early as 1601 or 1602. But it wasn’t until 1607—when Goodyer helped Bedford to acquire the lease to Twickenham Park, himself took residence there, and subsequently referred Donne to her—that Donne and Lady Bedford began to exchange letters regularly. While it took years before they actually met, the two would become close friends in a short matter of time as both shared an admiration for the other that they were keen to express in writing. As R.C. Bald describes it, “Lady Bedford was just as eager as Donne to explore all the possibilities of her new friendship, and as anxious to find out all she could about him as he was to celebrate her beauty and virtue.”²⁸ Mutually inclined to commend the other, their frequent correspondence engendered the kind of “concurrent chain” of communication that characterized the strongest of Donne’s friendships.

²⁷ Carey, 61-62.

²⁸ R.C. Bald, *John Donne: A Life* (Oxford University Press, 1970), 173.

There was, however, another reason for Donne's relationship with Bedford: as already noted, Donne was, in the words of Patricia Thomson, a "social climber" and "opportunist,"²⁹ and Bedford's wealth and good name were attractive assets to the employment-strapped Donne of 1607.³⁰ Bedford often provided Donne with money and lodging, and Donne used his affiliation with her in an attempt to obtain a secretarial post in Ireland.³¹ Indeed, it is this expectation of material profit that has led to a persistent critical suspicion of Donne's relationship with Bedford as well as other wealthy female patrons. Given the financial and gender disparity between Donne and Bedford, any understanding of genuine mutuality and friendship seems troubled.

But whereas such inequality might traditionally suggest something amiss in friendship, Donne cites the economic inequality between himself and Bedford as the very working context for his friendship with her. Debt, after all, was Donne's constant friendly theme, and just as Donne embraced the epistolary debt between himself and other male friends as the integral dynamic of their relationship, Donne approached Bedford's superior fortune—along with the "mercenary" relation that it engendered—as a fitting condition for the paradigm of friendly disparity that he so readily courted. In a verse letter to Bedford, Donne explicitly addresses the prevalent issue of his "debt" by mulling over the fact that he needs to write Bedford back but also needs to write back at the right time, for

T'HAVE written then, when you writ, seem'd to mee
Worst of spirituall vices, Simony,
And not t'have written then, seems little lesse
Then worst of civill vices, thanklessnesse.
In this, my debt I seem'd loath to confesse,
In that, I seem'd to shunne beholdingnesse.³²

Donne knows that he owes Bedford, but he also knows that he can't win either way: to write back too early would feel like a forced gesture in order to effectively pay Bedford for the benefaction she has provided, a response that would amount to a Ciceronian expression of "petty accounting"; to not write at all would be "the worst of civill vices, thanklessness," a seeming denial that he owes anything at all. Yet it is in this deliberation about how to best answer Bedford that Donne rehearses the indebted dynamics so characteristic of his friendships. Bedford's letter galvanizes a process of reciprocation that Donne cannot possibly match, and with no way to rectify his debt, Donne comes to an inevitable yet familiar conclusion: even if he tries to repay Bedford with grateful writings,

... 'tis not soe; *nothings*, as I am, may
Pay all they have, and yet have all to pay. (*VL*, 7-8)

Donne's customary appraisal of his letters and himself as "nothing" registers the persistent sense of insufficiency that valorizes the friend's generosity and authorizes an endless cycle of creative output. But in the case of Bedford, Donne's lack also takes on an explicitly

²⁹ Thomson, 330.

³⁰ Bald, 160. Goodyer would try to secure an appointment for Donne through William Fowler, the Queen's secretary, in 1607. Donne would also seek office in 1608.

³¹ Thomson, 330.

³² *The Satires, Epigrams and Verse Letters of John Donne*, ed. W. Milgate (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967): 95. Hereafter cited parenthetically by line number and abbreviated *VL*. Additional verse letters will be cited parenthetically by page number and line number and abbreviated *VL* on their first mention; by line number only upon subsequent mention.

financial meaning. Given that Bedford had in all likelihood already provided Donne with some kind of financial support, the letter is not just an abstract unit of compensatory content in the “chain” of friendship but also a somewhat unsavory matter of monetary repayment. With everything “yet...to pay” and no way to pay it, Donne admits that he is not just a self-deprecating correspondent who fails to write satisfying letters but a bona fide “nothing” in that he has no money.

Donne, as a matter of course though, does not gloss over his inability to pay but cites it as the very difference that occasions the possibility of a friendly bond. Bedford possesses the means to substantiate Donne’s nothingness much like friends Goodyer, Garrard, Wotton, and Karre. Yet unlike the case with Goodyer, Donne is not just offered an “open door” to identity-informing “revelations,” he is made valuable thanks to Bedford’s actual monetary gifts. Donne makes reference to this received patronage when, in the same letter, he declares that “rich mines in barren grounds are shown,” a point that permits him to rhetorically ask (or conclude) of himself, “May not I yeeld (not gold) but coale or stone?” (*VL*, 12). Bedford’s generous financial recognition puts Donne in a disposition of productivity or, proverbially speaking, turns a “barren” nothing into something “rich.” Lady Bedford’s initial friendly move, then, is a financial expression of confidence akin to Donne’s request that his friends accredit him in letters and, in the process, give him more than he had on his own.

While this may seem like patronage par excellence—Donne is actually given money as opposed to the more divine friendly assurance of letters—Donne is keen to distinguish Bedford’s action from such simple material benefaction. By Donne’s account, Bedford’s gifts do not actually close the financial gap between him and Bedford, effectively bringing them into a greater state of semblance; rather, Bedford’s monetary support acts as a confirmation and extension of friendly distance that authorizes a reciprocal economy of increasingly diverse rewards. When Donne compares himself to a “rich” mine that has been “showne” thanks to Bedford’s initial assessment, he specifies that he is one that will yield “not gold” but “coale or stone.” This is a rather literal qualification: Donne, despite Bedford’s monetary contributions, (still) does not actually make money. His now realized output is an entirely different product, one that is expressly not financial. Yet it is this lack of recourse to money that effectively defeats the possibility of a straight *quid pro quo* arrangement and requires a much more radical market exchange. Whereas Donne could at least respond in kind to his male friends with (as he claimed) lesser letters, a female interlocutor like Bedford renders Donne such a radical product—non-monetary “stone”—that Donne can only offer a response wholly unlike that which Bedford gave him. Such a return will naturally fail to produce equality, but it is precisely that failure that becomes a greater means of value creation in the relationship: each friend provides something for—and receives something from—the other that he or she truly did not have before.

The resistance to likeness, economic or otherwise, is then the very means to the friends’ “rich”-er disposition. In Donne’s case with Bedford, that richness for both Donne and Bedford is not the multiplication of monetary wealth but the realization of a greater virtuous state via material exchange. This, to be clear, is a rather especial occurrence, one that marks the friendly nature of Bedford’s and Donne’s interaction. Later in the same letter, Donne once again acknowledges the supposed mercenariness of his relation with Bedford by noting how Bedford’s monetary gifts could very well render him an un-virtuous opportunist. “I have beene told,” Donne cautiously observes, “that vertue’in Courtiers hearts / Suffers an Ostracisme, and departs” (*VL*, 21-22). The line acknowledges a prevalent fear: Bedford’s patronage could actually throw Donne back into—or perhaps confirm his status in—a socially competitive courtier market in

which he once lacked success, a development that is not necessarily a virtuously promising prospect for “Profit, ease, fitness, plenty, bid it [virtue] goe” (*VL*, 23). Donne, in short, could simply take the money and run—and as a courtier would be somewhat expected to do so. However, Donne suggests that Bedford imparts too much virtue by way of her economic generosity to experience such betrayal. Whereas other mercenary transactions may “bid [virtue] goe,” when it comes to Bedford,

...whither, only knowing you, I know;
Your (or you) vertue two vast uses serves,

It ransomes one sex, and one Court preserves. (*VL*, 24-26)

As a “court[ier]” made by Bedford, Donne’s virtue does not “goe” but is “preserve[d].” And it is in the failure to transmit such a courtier mentality that Bedford’s gifts prove greater than the material baseness that they might be taken as. The virtue that Bedford demonstrates and imparts through her economic generosity comes not only to elevate Donne to a courtier status that once so eluded him but also to transcend the base character of mercenary success. Donne does not become what he might be anticipated to be—a gold mine, a courtier—but something else entirely. It is this transformation, rather than financial mirroring, that is all the more valuable because of its multiple end products.

Granted, it is reasonable to wonder if Donne’s account of his friendship with Bedford—or his whole account of friendship in general—doesn’t just reach its sophist heights here. Donne’s claim to virtuous improvement on account of Bedford’s monetary gifts is, arguably, nothing more than a specious reinterpretation of an undeniably welcome payday for himself. Any promise against “exact balance” then becomes a creative way for Donne to excuse the fact that he will never actually pay Bedford back for the generosity that she has shown. Broadly speaking, Donne’s constant self-deprecatory rhetoric risks coming off as an elaborate manipulation that compels the friend to repeatedly contribute to a man who is only interested in material gain.

Friendship, though, is always about some kind of gain. Whether it is in the interest of receiving epistolary declarations from his male friends or financial support from female patrons, Donne remains committed to a friendly logic of disparity precisely because it creates the circumstances under which there is a continued possibility of diverse and thus meaningful contribution to one another. That is to say that the mercenary aspect of Donne’s and Bedford’s relationship (i.e. the constant receipt of material gifts) does not disrupt friendship by signaling a particularly pernicious breach in necessary parity—after all, that parity was never really there in the first place—but points to the existence of an infinite mercy that recognizes the unsettled disparity in which friendship exists. Material gifts actually serve to prove and maintain the existence of the disparate dynamic that allows for continued worthwhile engagement.

Thought another way, Bedford’s patronage is friendly precisely because it does not actually enable much social progress. For all its remarkable change, her patronage keeps much the same—which is to say that it maintains the difference between Donne and Bedford in the interest of cultivating an increasing number of profitable opportunities.³³ In this sense, Bedford’s

³³ Put more concretely: for Bedford to give Donne money only for Donne to pay her money back, as equal or mirrored as that would be, would produce nothing but a profitless exactitude. Friends (on both sides) would fail to receive anything truly additional and thus beneficial for themselves. Similarly, if Bedford were to simply give Donne money outright, she may succeed in bringing her friend to her economic level, but such an action would be little more than pure charity on (only) Bedford’s behalf.

friendly giving is not a pitying move—a mere filling up the pockets of a desperate beggar—but a sort of economic stimulus to someone that she recognizes to be a good investment. Donne, that is, will never cease to be productive so long as he is involved in a stimulating friendly interchange. Thus, Bedford does not, to use Cicero's terms, seek "exact balance" from Donne but assumes a much richer abundance within her friend.³⁴

That is not to say that Donne did not get a certain base sense of fulfillment from the material offerings that friends included with their letters. "I nurse that friendship by Letters, which you begot so," Donne tells Goodyer, "though you have since strengthened it by more solid aliment and real offices" (*Letters*, 59). The bestowal of "real offices" was, in a sense, a natural extension of the regular exchange of letters that provided some welcome, tangible security. But an appreciation of such "real offices" also meant conceiving friendship beyond its material manifestation. As Donne explains to George Garrard, any "reall office" is merely a superficial indicator of a much deeper commitment, for

...as we do not onely then thank our land, when we gather the fruit, but acknowledge that all the year she doth many motherly offices in preparing it: so is not friendship then onely to be esteemed, when she is delivered of a Letter, or any other reall office, but in her continuall propensenesse and inclination to do it. (*Letters*, 59)

Here, Donne downplays the idea that the delivery "of a Letter, or any other reall office" is a singular moment of friendly realization. Friendship's greater "esteem" comes from the "continuall propenseness and inclination to do" or deliver such rewards. In other words, friendship is not just realized in the fruits of its labor but the ongoing labor itself. The moment one receives an "office" from a friend is not a sign of found equilibrium but the proof of both a backlog of work as well as a continued appreciation and favor. Friends, in this way, never reach an "exact balance" but possess a kind of disproportion in perpetuity, for it is in the active negotiation of ongoing mutual stake—rather than a conclusive moment of equality—that friendship finds its value.

But if friendship finds most of its value in a state of perpetual disproportion, then it can do no better than a cross-gender configuration. The fundamental difference between men and women would require a negotiation of mutual stake that would, ironically and beneficially, never be able to render a sense of total fulfillment. And this extensive gap would make for a particularly profound friendly appreciation. As Donne would tell Elizabeth Stanley, the Countess of Huntington, their gender disparity was the means with which he could realize a superior friendly intimacy because he could more fully understand her. "Else, being alike pure, wee should neither see" (*VL*, 87, 33) Donne would posit before explaining,

So you, as woman, one doth comprehend,
And in the vaile of kindred others see;
To some you are reveal'd, as in a friend,
And as vertuous Prince farre off, to mee (*VL*, 41-44)

Much like Bacon's claim that the "*Vale best discovereth the Hill*," Donne, in a sense, has the advantage of farsighted perspective. Those who are most "alike" to Huntington, ironically, don't

³⁴ Cicero: "It surely is calling friendship to a very close and petty accounting to require it to keep an exact balance of credits and debits. I think true friendship is richer and more abundant than that and does not narrowly scan the reckoning lest it pay out more than it has received; and there need be no fear that some bit of kindness will be lost, that it will overflow the measure and spill upon the ground, or that more than is due will be poured into friendship's bin" (169).

“see” her at all. Donne, however, is a “kindred other[.]” who sees her from the “vaile,” a “farre off,” a vantage that not only allows him to see her fully but actually “comprehend” her as a woman, virtuous royalty, and even “a friend.” Such distance actually allows the friend to be a constant source of perspective: Donne could effectively see his own shortcomings by comparison or, more positively speaking, truly appreciate the friend’s infinite imitable goodness. There certainly was more distance between them, but this meant that there was a greater amount of material with which to draw upon in the pursuit of a more exceptional disposition.

Claims to indebted nothingness were one way of constructing such a fruitful dynamic, but gender difference was a far more certain means to the same thing. Cross-gender friends like Donne and Bedford, Donne and Huntington, even Montaigne and de Gournay, had, in essence, a permanent disparity that was not something to avoid, overcome, or reason away, but rather to exploit for all its virtuous possibility. Disparate unlikes could in fact pose and provide some of the greatest and varied heights that friends could reach, and with no propensity to permanently close that gap, the rewards of disparate friendship were potentially limitless.

Disparity’s Friendly Abundance

Donne was always looking for more friends, and with friendship not confined to the bounds of likeness, the possible number of friendly configurations, and thus the possible number of friends, was greatly expanded. Donne certainly took advantage.³⁵ At the same time that he was corresponding with Lady Bedford, he would strike up a friendship with the Countess of Huntington. Not much later, this time at the behest of George Garrard, he also sent a letter to Catharine Howard, the Countess of Salisbury.³⁶ And a long-standing friendship with Magdalen Herbert and her son Edward led to an acquaintance with Mrs. Bridget White. This eagerness to befriend so many women has typically been read as an indication that Donne really was not friends with these women at all: such a flagrant lack of exclusive consideration verifies that they were little more than interchangeable sources of income that Donne was strategically setting up. The model of friendly disparity, however, reads these friendships as valuable not because they garner a finite exclusivity but because they enable an abundant expansion of friendly possibility. The point of friendship is to increase the amount of difference in the interest of expanding the values that friends can share. The fact that one friendship could occasion another friendship was a testament to the productivity of a particular friend and a mark of the friend’s exceptional value.

Still, as if aware that having so many friends would render his friendships unremarkable, Donne made efforts to make his friends feel special. Donne would assure Goodyer, for one, that he was no indiscriminate socializer: “I can allow my self to be *Animal sociale*, applicable to my

³⁵ Bald describes Donne’s search for friends as a near obsessive practice, noting that Donne’s “letters also show that both Donne and Goodyer were shrewdly watching the fortunes of young George Villiers, the handsome youth recently introduced into the Court by the Earl of Pembroke and the Countess of Bedford in the hope that he would catch the King’s eye and gradually undermine the influence of Somerset” (294). This was all going on while Goodyer still had relations with Lady Bedford and was beginning to court Lady Huntington. Donne became particularly interested in Huntington around 1613 and 1614, which coincided with Bedford’s declining fortune. See Bald, 179 and 276-77. Julie Crawford suggests that Donne’s friendship with Bedford continued far after 1614. See *Mediatrix* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 126.

³⁶ Bald, 276-277.

company,” he wrote, “but not *gregale*, to herd my self in every troupe” (*Letters*, 37). True to his word, Donne registered a palpable anxiety at the prospect of adding more people, especially women, into his social circle. When Goodyer first recommended that Donne send some writings to the Countess of Huntingdon, Donne resisted on the grounds that

My integrity to the other Countesse of whose worthinesse though I swallowed your opinion at first upon your words, yet I have had since an explicit faith, and now a knowledge: and for her delight (since she descends to them) I had reserved not only all the verse, which I should make, but all the thoughts of womens worthinesse. (*Letters*, 90)

Donne’s existing loyalty to Bedford was enough to make him cautious about extending his praise to another, though in the same breath he does not rule out the possibility of doing so. While Donne has devoted all his energies to thinking and writing about Bedford, his consideration of her is not actually all that specific: she is merely a particular model for thinking about all of “womens worthinesse.” In fact, Donne’s commendation is not even all his own. As Donne describes it, Goodyer offered the initial “opinion” of Bedford that Donne has now confirmed as his own “knowledge.” Writing to and of Bedford did not yield a unique sense of connection or closeness to Bedford—it never was unique in the first place and Bedford, after all, must still “descend[]” to Donne’s praise—but has been a kind of exercise in disparity articulation: Donne’s attention had, in a sense, been directed to a “farre off” example that allowed him to generate the general praise that could have relevance and application to “all” women. Any sense of exclusive friendly connection with Bedford so far was a matter of distributive action—the fact that he has “reserved” all his “verse” for her—rather than content.

Donne, then, was actually quite prepared to share what he had come up with. Right after seeming to decline to write the Countess of Huntingdon, Donne tells Goodyer in the very next sentence that he will in fact “write well of her Picture” so long as Goodyer makes an effort to ensure that Donne not be “traded” by Bedford or “esteemed light in that [Bedford’s] Tribe” (*Letters*, 90). Donne was aware that his decision might be taken as a breach of exclusivity, but the fact that Donne *could* praise another with the very same material that Bedford had inspired was a testament to the multiplicity of Bedford’s friendly example. Just as Goodyer linked Donne with Bedford by giving him an initial “opinion” of his future friend and patron, Bedford had (albeit incidentally) linked Donne to Huntingdon by giving him the “thoughts of womens worthinesse” that could be used to praise other women.³⁷

Indeed, Donne would openly admit to at least one female friend that he was dispensing much of the same praise on all of them. In a verse letter to the Countess of Salisbury, Donne relates a series of compliments before confessing that “things like these, have been said by mee / Of others” (*VL*, 108). Within those same lines, though, Donne would begin to mount a defense of

³⁷ This reading exposes our illogical suspicion of cross-gender friendship and over-eagerness to read it as necessarily opportunistic. The fact that Goodyer or Garrard effectively gave Donne the means—in this case a referral—to expand his social circle does not compel us to read their relationship as overwhelmingly opportunistic or believe that Donne was less of a friend to either of those men. In fact, this is a celebrated feature of their devotion and a sign of their friendship. We should, for consistency’s sake, treat Bedford’s ability to engender social expansion with the same admiration. Similarly, the re-use of poetic material has not been treated as a universal breach: Goodyer himself very likely used portions of Donne’s poetry for his own acts of courtship. See Maurer’s “The Verse Letter” in *The Oxford Handbook of John Donne*, 214.

his seemingly errant praise. Regarding his apparently stock expressions, “call not that Idolatrie,” Donne pleads,

For had God made man first, and man had seene
The third daies fruits, and flowers, and various greene,
He might have said the best that he could say
Of those faire creatures, which were made that day;
And when next day he had admir'd the birth
Of Sun, moone, Stars, fairer then late-prais'd earth,
Hee might have said the best that he could say,
And not be chid for praising yesterday;
So though some things are not together true,
As, that another'is worthiest, and, that you:
Yet, to say so, doth not condemne a man,
If when he spoke them, they were both true than.

How faire a prooffe of this, in our soule growes! (*VL*, 37-51)

Donne flatters Salisbury by arguing that his deployment of the same praise is not an indication of semblance to those that came before her but an indication that she is now the foremost example of all the good that he has seen.³⁸ It's a seemingly sophist coup. Donne, literally at his wits' end, offers old material with a slick caveat: this doesn't mean what it used to. But Donne's compliment to Salisbury actually posits this evaluative instability as the constant of friendly praise. Like the Biblical examples, Salisbury is the “best that [Donne can] say,” for “that day,” but who knows what the “next day” will bring: she has given new meaning to the same complimentary words, but the fact that she did this means that someone else can and will too. Despite the letters seemingly especial feelings, Donne has not actually singled Salisbury out as the definitive paragon but identified her as one in a line of certain virtuous progression.

This almost hyper social movement means that Donne's assessments are endlessly changing, and Donne fully embraces this idea. By describing his praise as “not...Idolatrie,” Donne casts his compliments as never overly committed. When Donne praises his friends with the same compliments, he is not nonsensically—nor conclusively—saying that *all* are the *most* virtuous at the same time. Rather, Donne is able to recognize one friend in a particular moment as the virtuous exemplar; this recognition, in turn, gives him the baseline by which he can understand future friends as even greater virtuous expressions. By Donne's description, his supposed inconstancy of affection is more of a change or “growth” in perception of virtue that is made possible by each subsequent female friend. The fact that Donne has gone on to praise another does not necessarily signal a loss for the original—that they no longer have a place in Donne's mind—but an expansion of the total capacity of his appreciation. In fact, this evolution is the “prooffe” that the “soule growes” or that friendship is indeed working.

Donne would actually use this rationale of evolving growth and perceptive improvement to assure principal, which is to say earlier, female friends like Lady Bedford that his original

³⁸ Donne himself anticipates the charge of duplication and makes this very argument in a letter to Garrard: “I should be loath that in any thing of mine, composed of her, she should not appear much better then some of those of whom I have written. And yet I cannot hope for better expressings then I have given them. So you see how much I should wrong her, by making her but equall to others. I would I could be beleaved, when I say that all that is written of them, is but prophecy of her.” See Bald, 277.

praise was still valuable and true. In one of his later verse letters to Lady Bedford, probably around 1612, Donne would fully admit that he had praised other women, but he rooted the ability to have done so in Bedford's pre-eminent—which is to say first—status. "First I confesse," Donne declares,

... I have to others lent
 Your stock, and over prodigally spent
 Your treasure, for since I had never knowne
 Vertue or beautie, but as they are growne
 In you, I should not thinke or say they shine,
 (So as I have) in any other Mine. (*VL*, 104)

Donne's reckless praise of other women was, in part, a consequence of his being a novice to virtue: the initial excitement of encountering Lady Bedford's virtue was so great that he couldn't help but share the wealth.³⁹ But it was Lady Bedford's initial virtuous "stock" that actually enabled him to "spen[d]" or praise the virtue of others. Lady Bedford, in effect, equipped him with the necessary material that would allow him to praise later female friends. It is she who essentially taught Donne how to be a friend, and her rare influence could only beget more friendship, not cut it off.

Donne's conciliation posits Lady Bedford as both the alpha and omega of female friends: she was the first to show him virtue that has only gotten better with time; she is now the last to reclaim her position as the paragon of virtue and beauty. Lady Bedford may have been able to take solace in her reclaimed crown, but, as Donne suggests, her status is (still) by no means fixed. This is both a threatening and promising prospect. On the one hand, Lady Bedford risks being supplanted by another virtuous example; on the other hand, she too stands to surpass (or re-surpass) the other friends that Donne will esteem. Ultimately, however, these shifting disparities are themselves productive. They suggest that all of Donne's friends' potential for continued growth is alive and active, a sign that no one has reached a point of stasis or come to their virtuous limit.

What Donne does not so readily acknowledge is how this constant shifting could be a less than satisfying experience for the individual. Such a rapidly changing rank produces a kind of averaging effect that erases the absolute exceptionality of any one friend. If no placement is assured for a period of time, there is arguably no real sense of position at all. But such a destabilization of assured ranking, I would argue, suggests the presence of a larger virtuous world, one in which the friend's rareness is not defined by an exclusive appreciation they can amass but by the amount of virtuous opportunities they can produce. Perhaps most simply, friends that could get Donne more friends were the most valuable for the very basic reason that they provided him with more sources of virtue. Those same friends, by virtue of their activity, would always seem to be cast aside, but they could and should be confident in their position given their ability to provide.

In what operates to my mind as Donne's most comprehensive articulation of this friendly theory, Donne likens each man to a handwritten letter of script. As such, "Custome, hath made every minde like some other; we are patterns, or copies, we informe, we imitate" (83). Yet we do not judge such writing through the penmanship of a single letter, for

³⁹ Donne suggests this quite literally and metaphorically. The "treasure" he refers to takes on the double meaning of both the material funds that Lady Bedford provided—and Donne promptly spent—as well as the virtuous teachings she imparted.

he hath not presently attained to write a good hand, which hath equaled one excellent Master in his A, another in his B, much lesse he which hath sought all the excellent Masters, and imployed all his time to exceed on one Letter, because not so much an excellency of any, or every one, as an evennesse and proportion, and respect to one another gives the perfection: so is no man virtuous by particular example. (83-84)

Just as no man strives to write one (alphabetic) letter perfectly, Donne does not try to praise or “perfect” a single friend. It is the general quality of man’s entire penmanship, not the specific perfection of a single letter, that gives writing its “excellency.” Likewise, no friend, we could say, is an island. Friendship is not the bestowal of attention on a single person or the identification of a single virtue within that person. Friendship, like good penmanship, operates by way of a comparative assessment—a “farre off” vantage that sees the whole alphabet—that seeks to find the best of each in the hope that they might all “informe” one another.

Put another way, it is only in thinking about someone in “respect” to others that a true sense of perfection can be determined. To think about each person irrespective of others would make them seem perfect, but such an assessment would not in fact be perfection because it would have no grounds with which to make that determination. In this sense, Donne needs his multiple female friends in order to recognize the perfection in all of them. Donne cannot simply look on one friend and know he has seen perfection, nor can he identify one virtue within her and know that she is capable of being a friend. It is in concert that these friends contribute to a virtuous understanding that allows Donne to appreciate truly what each one is. To use Donne’s own metaphor, he did not spend his life writing letters (i.e. epistles) with the intent to “exceed on one Letter” (i.e. alphabetical character) or dote on one friend. It was through the pursuit of many friendships that he cultivated the proper “evennesse and proportion” that allowed him to discern each friend’s actual value. Specific friendships could in fact make a much larger virtuous world visible, but a virtuous world could also help to define a friend’s genuine rareness.

Bridget White: Donne’s “first” Friend

Letters to Severall Persons of Honour, the first posthumous collection of Donne’s letters printed in 1651 by John Donne’s son, opens with four letters to the lady Mrs. Bridget White. It was, then, a friendship with a woman that would announce the public release of Donne’s correspondence and a cross-gender friendship that would be offered as a principal emblem of Donne’s social life. Be that as it may, critics have questioned whether Mrs. White’s inclusion is really about friendship at all. Donne does not seem to have known Mrs. White particularly well and the four letters to her do not seem to exemplify Donne’s friendship in any immediate way.⁴⁰ It seems most certain that Donne exchanged more letters with Lady Bedford and corresponded with others for much longer: Henry Wotton the most “fully documented” of Donne’s friendships; George Garrard, his “life-long” friend who provided at least one proof of friendship in the reference of Lady Salisbury; and of course Henry Goodyer, Donne’s “closest friend” who exchanged letters with Donne once a week for their entire lives. In the face of so many better friendly candidates, Mrs. White’s “place of honour” within the collection is puzzling if not undeserved.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Donne most likely met Mrs. White through longtime friend Magdalen Herbert and her son Sir Edward Herbert, though his correspondence with Mrs. White is not terribly extensive. See Bald, 186.

⁴¹ See Bald, 119 for Wotton; Bald, 277 for Garrard; Bald, 163 for Goodyer; Bald, 186 for White.

Critics have suggested that the younger Donne's reasoning for putting Mrs. White first is less about faithfully documenting his father's friendships and more about his own economic interest. As Alan Bray has detailed, surviving letters often served as "'countenance': the *appearance* of friendship in the public eye that was itself a kind of currency that could be turned to advantage."⁴² John Carey—intimating his belief that it should have been Goodyer to open the volume—likewise proposes that Donne's son wanted to suppress Goodyer's presence on the grounds that Goodyer was "a forgotten name by 1651, with no market value."⁴³ According to both Bray's and Carey's reading, the decision to open with a friendship "of station" like Mrs. White was a traditional but ultimately cynical one, a familiar exercise in opportunism that reflects an early modern consideration of friendship, even in its afterlife, as little more than a means to maximize commercial prospects.⁴⁴

Yet in opening with a female friend "of station" like Mrs. White, the younger Donne does in fact faithfully document the central aspect of his father's friendships: their disparity. The letters to Mrs. White present one of the most unreciprocated of Donne's friendships, making the correspondence emblematic of the social difference that Donne so desperately wanted engaged. Donne's whole friendly formula, so to speak, is here. In the second letter of the volume, Donne characteristically puts this concern for epistolary exchange up front only to excuse Mrs. White's silence by assuming his letters have been lost in the mail:

I Thinke the letters which I send to you single lose themselves by the way for want of a guide, or faint for want of company. Now, that on your part there be no excuse, after three single letters, I send three together, that every one of them may have two witnesses of their delivery. (*Letters*, 3)

Donne would not let up. After sending three more letters all at once to make up for the three that went unanswered, Donne writes yet another letter that very same day, admitting that hope that I have a room in your favour keeps me alive, which you shall abundantly confirme to me, if by one letter you tell me that you have received my six; for now my letters are grown to that bulk... (*Letters*, 2)⁴⁵

⁴² Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003), 54.

⁴³ Carey, 46.

⁴⁴ Arthur F. Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 222.

⁴⁵ See also P.M. Oliver, ed., *John Donne: Selected Letters* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 50-51. P.M. Oliver reproduces this order in his chronologically organized edition of *Selected Letters*. The assumption that these letters appear in proper order in *Letters* (1651) seems mistaken. While both are dated the same day ("*Strand*, S. Peters day") and time stamped (the first to appear in the volume "at nine"; the second "at 4"), the tally of letters that Donne provides in each suggests that the order should be switched. In the letter written "at 4," Donne mentions that "after three single letters" he sends an additional "three together, that every one of them may have two witnesses of their delivery" (3), totaling six. It is then in the letter written "at nine," that Donne makes explicit reference to these six: "your favour keeps me alive...if by one letter you tell me that you have received my six" (2). Donne seems to have written the first at four in the afternoon and the second at nine at night.

Donne's yearning reaches an almost sublime extreme here: having sent six letters, he would like just one in return.⁴⁶ And it is in light of such pronounced imbalance that Donne, in the fourth letter of the volume, pleads with Mrs. White to substantiate him, pronouncing his letter

a bashful servant, who though he have an extreme desire to put himself in your presence, yet hath not much to say when he is come: yet hath it as much to say as you can think; because what degrees so ever of honour, respect, and devotion, you can imagine or beleeve to be in any, this letter tells you, that all those are in me towards you. So that for this letter you are my Secretary, for your worthinesses, and your opinion that I have a just estimation of them, write it: so that it is as long, and as good, as you think it; and nothing is left to me, but as a witness, to subscribe the name of

Your must humble servant
J.D.

(Letters, 5-6)

If Donne's whole rhetoric was just a lead up to a more mercenary request, this letter to Mrs. White is surprisingly scrubbed of material concern. Donne makes no reference to money, lodging, and offices, and he does not ask her to provide for him in that way. Instead, he asks that Mrs. White give him the act of mental consideration, to make him whatever she can "think," "imagine," or "beleeve." The actual letter would give Donne the pleasure of confirmation, but even that material manifestation would be a momentary container for a much larger potentiality: the friendship is whatever Mrs. White "can think."

Donne's letters to Mrs. White are, most simply, about a gap: "a bashful [male] servant" and a noble woman; six letters that go unanswered; an "opinion" that has yet to be declared. This has the effect of making one suspicious—"were they really friends?"—when in fact it depicts friendship as it really is: a dynamic, undetermined bond of incredible speculative value. That is to say that Donne's friendship with Mrs. White comes off as one of his most disparate but also one of the most potentially fulfilling. In such unproven form, disparity reaches its height and thus Mrs. White's estimation in waiting stands as a friendly peak. The fact that Donne could come to include an association as grand as Mrs. White in a collection of his friendly correspondence—one that could prove fruitful even after his death—was the best evidence not only of friendly success but also of the continued benefits that friendship could offer. There were certainly those closer to Donne, but the letters to Mrs. White—the first of Donne's friends—exemplify how friendship in the co-founded abundance of disparity rather than in the static reproduction of equality finds its greatest expressions and most valuable forms.

⁴⁶ Donne does not specify whether or not the six letters he has previously sent includes the one he is writing. The very letter in which Donne mentions "[his] six," then, may actually be his seventh that he has written to Mrs. White that has gone unreciprocated.

4. Forming “all other societie”: Lies, Evasions, and Friendly Networks in Mary Wroth’s *The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania*

When Antissia, the “uncontrolled, passionate, self-destructive” Sapphic figure of Mary Wroth’s *The Countess of Montgomery’s Urania*, first identifies herself as a “friend” to Pamphilia, the reader, much like Pamphilia herself, has good reason to be suspicious.¹ Despite some congenial moments in which the two are “plac’d together; Antissia dearely loving [Pamphilia] for her cousins sake” and Pamphilia “embrac[ing] [Antissia’s] companie” (63.27-30), the two, on account of their shared love for Pamphilia’s cousin Amphilanthus, spend more time passive-aggressively competing with one another than actually getting along. In fact, when Pamphilia first hears her cousin’s “commendations” of Antissia, she responds by telling him “me thinkes there is not that beautie in her as you speak of” but an “extreame whiteness I like not so well” (61.35-40). Later, and shortly before Antissia’s aforementioned proclamation of friendship, Pamphilia actually hopes for ill to befall Antissia, “wishing her sudden end, cursing her days, fortune, and affection” as well as “wish[ing] her dead, or her beauty marr’d” (91.38-40). Antissia similarly contemplates how “perfect” Pamphilia seems to be only to realize that “the more did those perfections make her perfectly jealous” (93.33-35). Thus, when Antissia sidles up to a grieving Pamphilia to ask,

[w]hy are all these grievous complaints?...If it be for love; tell me who that blessed creature is, that doth possesse such a world of treasure as your heart? and deny not this to your friend (94.11-17)

she seems more like a scheming rival than a sympathetic companion, her claim to friendship a rhetorical ploy for gaining an emotional upper hand—with the intent to win Amphilanthus for herself—rather than an earnest attempt at consoling a lovelorn acquaintance.

Indeed, Pamphilia and Antissia’s contentious relationship over Amphilanthus makes them a textbook example of René Girard’s theory of mimetic rivalry and the fundamental irony of similitude in friendship. As Girard succinctly puts it,

words like *sameness* and *similarity* evoke an image of harmony. If we have the same tastes and like the same things, surely we are bound to get along.

However,

Two desires converging on the same object are bound to clash. Thus mimesis coupled with desire leads automatically to conflict.²

But it is this threat of conflict that also sets Pamphilia and Antissia up to proceed as so many early modern friends, even the most exemplary ones, have before. As I argued in my first chapter, Spenser takes Girard’s mimetic rivalry to its literal and logical extreme in the fourth book of *The Faerie Queene* by making Cambel and Triamond, the eventual paragons of friendship in his poem, bitter rivals who are in love with the same woman, Canacee, Cambel’s sister. In fact, the two engage in a literal and lengthy fight, one in which they practically beat each other to death, until Triamond’s sister, Cambina, magically shows up and offers the two an opportunity to differentiate their desires. In the end, Cambel couples with Cambina, Triamond

¹ Lady Mary Wroth, *The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery’s Urania*, ed. Josephine A. Roberts (Binghamton, New York: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1995), xxxiv. All references to the *Urania* are to this edition.

² René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 146.

couples with Canacee, allowing the two to “plight[] hands for euer friends to be” (IV.iii.49.5).³ Spenser’s epic romance thus theorizes the way in which antagonism lies at the heart of friendship but also provides a kind of formula for how friendly candidates like Pamphilia and Antissia could and perhaps should proceed if they are to become true and exemplary friends: duke it out until you are able to differentiate yourselves and assume a harmonious coexistence. After all, Antissia has been “perfectly jealous” of Pamphilia and Pamphilia as already wished Antissia “dead” on account of their converging desire for Amphilanthus. The two might as well just be honest with themselves and each other and publicly admit their love for Amphilanthus so that they can go ahead and fight about it.

But rather than engage in the honest antagonism that seems to be the necessary and even virtuous next step for friendship, Pamphilia and Antissia take pains to avoid such conflict through a canny deployment of lies and verbal evasions. In response to Antissia’s question about who “possesse[s]...[her] heart,” Pamphilia responds by criticizing the jealousy of Antissia’s inquiry in an attempt to avoid admitting her love for Amphilanthus and thus her similitude with Antissia. When Antissia presses the issue and suggests that, given her own love for Amphilanthus, she may have to “be a rival with the rarest Princesse Pamphilia” (96.35), Pamphilia chooses to outright lie and denies having any romantic feeling for Amphilanthus at all, claiming that her affection for him is based on his “never enough praised merits, but not for love otherwise” (96.36-37). Furthermore, Pamphilia actually encourages Antissia to pursue Amphilanthus on the grounds that “she did resemble him” and was thus “like to true vertue” (97.9-10), praise that is as dubious as Antissia’s initial identification of Pamphilia as a friend but successful in staving off a melee between the two.

Critics have tended to read these lies and deceptions in *Urania* as a critique of friendship that questions the very integrity of the relationship itself. As Sheila T. Cavanagh has argued, the “similitude that friends in the *Urania* demonstrate corresponds generally with the early modern theories of friendship that Laurie Shannon describes: ‘The radical likeness of sex and station that...singly enables a vision of parity...not modeled elsewhere in contemporary social structures’”⁴; however, the *Urania* also “often exposes the limitations of reliance on similitude” as characters often “choose lies or betrayal when their lives become uncomfortably complicated, so that the tenets of friendship are often compromised, with long-term and widespread consequences.”⁵ When characters do claim similitude, they do so not for virtuous but pernicious reasons: “feigned familiarity or other models of similitude [] cultivate unwarranted, and ultimately dangerous, confidence in the supposedly astute main characters.”⁶ In fact, Cavanagh deems friendship so deceptive and “unreliable” that she goes so far as to wonder if friendship has any real criteria left. It is unclear in *Urania* “whether ‘friendship’ simply includes anyone who is not an obvious enemy,” she writes, “or whether it should carry stricter qualifications. Lovers, former suitors, and relatives can all be friends, but they also regularly betray each other.”⁷

³ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, 2nd ed. (London: Longman, 2001)

⁴ Sheila T. Cavanagh, “‘My foule, faulce brest’: Friendship and Betrayal in Lady Mary Wroth’s *Urania*” in *Discourses and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700*, ed. Daniel T. Lochman, Maritere López, and Lorna Hutson (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 150.

⁵ Cavanagh, 150-151.

⁶ Cavanagh, 157.

⁷ Cavanagh, 149.

Generally speaking then, the lies in *Urania* at best pose as a friendly but ultimately disingenuous expression of friendship itself; at worst, they are proof that friendship is an empty category, a rhetoric used to promote a superficial civility that masks the real antagonism underneath all supposedly congenial relationships.

But these assessments overlook the more positive, long-term social developments that unfold over the course of Wroth's romance, developments that are made possible by the very lies that the characters tell. In fact, right after Pamphilia lies and falsely claims that she is not in love with Amphilanthus, she and Antissia not only avoid a fight but Antissia declares herself "contented" and the two leave together in a state of remarkable social harmony: "holding each other by the arm, with as much love, as love in them could joyne" (97.13-14). Even more, they continue to remain cordial after this event. A short time later, when Antissia is forced to depart for Romania and her betrothed Leandrus, she asks Pamphilia to "let youre poore unfortunate friend and servant, bee in absence but sometimes remembred" (147.38-39) and the two spend the night "lying together, and with sad, but loving discourse passing those dark hourse" before parting with "manie tears" and "kisses" (148.9-17). When Antissia returns, Pamphilia "with her left arme embrac[es] her"—albeit while awkwardly "holding Amphilanthus with the right hand"—making Antissia "never more pleased" and "Pamphilia seldome so well contented" (319.38-320.2). And finally, in the late pages of Wroth's romance which I will detail later, both women actually advocate for one another, Antissia even going so far as to champion Pamphilia as the proper companion for Amphilanthus. In this way, seemingly perfidious moments do lead to "long-term and widespread consequences," but they are not necessarily the problematic or "compromised" friendly circumstances that critics have emphasized. Rather, the frequent lies of *Urania* often provide the foundation that goes on to facilitate some of the most tender and altruistic moments in all of Wroth's romance.

In light of these developments, *Urania* begins to look less like the story of friendship's inevitable breakdown and more like one about friendship's ability to subsume and transform otherwise ugly sentiments and actions—like lying—into positive relations. Indeed, I want to argue that Wroth offers a vision of friendship as an adaptive relationship that is able to accommodate a complex variety of feelings, rather than an absolute fixity that seeks to maintain itself at all costs and subsequently experiences certain disappointment in the process. But I also want to argue that Wroth, in reconfiguring the dynamics of friendship, shows how the messy "realities" of friendship—often understood to be impediments to the relationship—can actually be in service of friendly ideals. The *Urania* is certainly filled with social disappointments and inconstant behavior. However, the characters are able to maintain relationships in spite of these disappointments through a sophisticated practice of self-modification that is able to court a larger variety of emotional landscapes. When Pamphilia lies, that is to say, she is not assuming a sense of difference that departs from a problematic similitude—such as when Cambel in *The Faerie Queene* switches from loving Canacee to loving Cambina, eliminates the rivalrous similitude between him and Triamond, and thus creates the circumstances that enable a friendship to be established. Rather, in lying, Pamphilia performs a suppression of passion that allows or, in a sense, makes room for a congeniality and tolerance that might coexist alongside her hostility towards Antissia and disappointment with Amphilanthus.⁸ To be sure, such a lie may look like a

⁸ Thought another way, the lie creates an alternative scenario in which Pamphilia can possess the difference (i.e. lack of love for Amphilanthus) that would be necessary for two former rivals to

“realist” compromise, a willingness to forego what one truly wants in the interest of promoting a larger civility in a crowded and complex social world. But the key to these oft-made friendly adjustments is the way in which they establish an ever-present social harmony through the management of a varied set of feelings, rather than the insistence on a singular emotional response.

Indeed, in its repeated dramatization of the need to modify the self in order to stay true to the underlying principle of social harmony, Wroth’s romance offers a rather Neo-Stoic vision of friendship that challenges the critical perception of friendship as an inevitably disrupted ideal. By not becoming overly perturbed by the multiple changes within people—changes in affection that usually make love interests unfavorable or create rivalry between persons—characters exercise a calm and patience that are only appreciable in a long work like *Urania*. Such behavior reflects Justus Lipsius’s claim in the Neo-Stoic tract *On Constancy* that the “true mother of Constancy is Patience, and lowliness of mind, which is a voluntary sufferance without grudging of all things whatsoever can happen to or in a man.”⁹ Explained metaphorically, Lipsius likens the “alterations of all human affairs” to the “swaging...of the sea” with which one must not become overly preoccupied:

Arise you, fall you, rule you, obey you, hide your head; lift yours up, and let this wheel of changeable things run round, so long as this round world remains.¹⁰

Indeed, a true constancy requires looking past, rather than getting bogged down in, the inevitable changes that may occur. As Lipsius suggests,

Imprint Constancy on your mind amid this casual and inconstant variableness of all things. I call it inconstant in respect of our understanding and judgement; for that if you look to God and his providence, all things succeed in a steady immovable order.¹¹

Lies and other forms of dishonest behavior can thus be seen as the practical manifestation of a Neo-Stoic strategy against “inconstant variableness” and its antagonistic effects. Or, to put it another way, the most “constant” way to respond to inconstancy and its disappointment would not be with an openly fervent expression of devotion—one that would demand an immediate reaction to every digression with, say, a renunciation of the inconstant lover or a clash with a perceived rival—but a reasoned mutability that is able to see the original goals of life through, or at least allow them to come to pass in “steady” order.¹²

Wroth, however, takes such Neo-Stoic theorization a step further by suggesting that the solution to such inconstancy does not exist in mere waiting but a more proactive engagement with people and the emotions they elicit. Pamphilia and Antissia certainly do respond to Amphilanthus’s “variableness” with a kind of detached patience in so much as they hold out and hope he might ultimately choose or come back to them. But that state of patience also indulges

get along all the while retaining (in actuality) the affection for Amphilanthus and likeness with Antissia that engendered the relationship with both persons in the first place.

⁹ Justus Lipsius, *On Constancy: De Constantia translated by Sir John Stradling (1595)*, ed. John Sellars (Exeter, UK: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2006), 37.

¹⁰ Lipsius, 61.

¹¹ Lipsius, 62.

¹² Of course, this logic could also be a convenient excuse for the less than constant lovers that are ubiquitous in *Urania*: moments of passion for other characters can be reasoned away as mere aberrations from true, destined partners, and thus insignificant offenses in the long run.

the ugly feelings that their social commitments might engender in order to create the emotional range that can continue to accommodate the many more disappointments that the world might offer. A purely Lipsian response to a predicament like Pamphilia and Antissia's, that is to say, would be to ignore or deny the presence of anger and disappointment at Amphilanthus and each other—so much so that Pamphilia and Antissia wouldn't even bother to associate with each other at all. The Wrothian alternative is to very much dwell in every “swaging” of the emotional “sea”—in both oneself and others—so that social connections may continue to be cultivated through a more novel set of social strategies and practices. The lie that Pamphilia tells, then, is not so much an elimination but a dilation of emotion that has the power to account for both the affection and antagonism that exists in a relationship, all the while maintaining a sense of harmony that would otherwise only be possible through a more total disengagement.

In fact, it is precisely this capacity for emotional range that distinguishes friendship from love in Wroth's romance. Whereas love bonds are definitively disturbed, maybe even permanently ruined, by an act of dishonesty or betrayal, friendship is able to treat such moments as an opportunity to enact an additional set of standards that might enhance or improve the relationship between persons. In this sense, romantic love bonds have to be perfect or exist on a premise of perfection: persons must be wholly constant, unwavering, and exclusive in order for the relation to be. When Amphilanthus expresses desire for another woman, he effectively shatters the prospect of a love relationship and engenders a rivalry between women *because* there is a need to eliminate or “cut” someone out if the exclusive consideration and thus possibility of love is to be reestablished. Friendship, however, has no such exclusionary mandate, so even though Pamphilia's learning of Antissia's shared love for Amphilanthus registers a rivalrous rift between the two women, such a feeling is able to be part of a larger range of affect the two women might develop for one another as their relationship continues. Similarly, Amphilanthus's inconstancy shatters the prospect of a pure love relationship with Pamphilia, but it inaugurates the possibility of a cross-gender friendship in so much that it introduces the conflicted set of feelings which friendship is able to manage.

Furthermore, it is this notion of emotional expansion and the varied relations it can court that spawns the possibility of multiple friendships and group configurations that, as my third chapter on Donne's courtship of multiple female patrons discussed, the early modern period was increasingly eager to embrace and criticism of the early modern has increasingly explored. Critics have previously gestured to such friendly expansion through an emphasis on the economic logic and concerns that were rising in the period. As John S. Garrison has argued, “friendship within groups” were becoming a preferable alternative to exclusive paired or “dyadic” forms of friendly equality on account of the group's literal value and production, the fact that a larger and more diversified set of social contacts could engender a greater amount of possibilities for individual profit-seeking and material gain.¹³ Indeed, Wroth's romance features the creation of non-dyadic groups on account of individual relationships' limits and unreliability.

¹³ As Garrison himself puts it, “these new formations can be attributed to dramatically expanding economic opportunities, as well as to the introduction of new spaces and goods for exchange. Put simply, there was much money to be made and new ways to make that money.” See *Friendship and Queer Theory in the Renaissance* (New York: Routledge, 2014), xxii. Rather positively, as Garrison also points out, the pursuit of such novel economic opportunities inevitably welcomed a whole range of new economic actors—particularly women—into a once exclusively homosocial landscape.

To return to the specific example of Pamphilia and Antissia: only one can ultimately be coupled with Amphilanthus, meaning that at least one or even both will have to forego the investment in an exclusive union with Amphilanthus and engage with a larger social world if she is to find a replacement for her romantic affections. Furthermore, several male characters express romantic interest in Pamphilia and Antissia, thereby transforming the women's singular quest for a specific love interest into an expanded exploration of various romantic options. Those scenarios also don't account for Amphilanthus's flagrant inconstancy which courts both Pamphilia and Antissia's affections, suspends any kind of dyadic resolution for either woman, and leaves open the possibility that Amphilanthus will court additional female romantic interests, which he does. *Urania* thus routinely deconstructs the dyadic model of social life—be it a reliance on the harmony of similar friendly pairs or the singular “constant” pursuit of a specific romantic partner—and embraces the cultivation of more diverse and varied forms of social organization as a means to hedge against the contingency of any singular relationship.

But *Urania* also offers a logic for these group configurations that is devoid of the economic motivations emphasized by previous critical work. After all, the characters in Wroth's romance are not motivated by the prospect of material gain like Garrison's early modern agents: already “monarchs or others with high political status,”¹⁴ they don't stand to get anything by foregoing their first romantic choice. They also don't stand to get anything by maintaining a congenial relationship with their rivals and those that seem like foregone romantic possibilities. Rather, the characters are motivated by a kind of emotional expansion that allows them to court and appreciate the variety of feelings a relationship may inspire. Not bound to a particular emotional consistency or personal criteria, they can in turn bond with a larger network of people. Such an expansion allows them to loosen their commitment to singular individuals and, as the *Urania* will describe it, attain a personal and social “freedom” that was previously unavailable in the rigid emphasis on social dyads.

It is as if persons in *Urania* cannot help but accrue as many friends as possible even when such a process isn't necessarily natural. The tenet of likeness offers a potent basis for friendship, but such a tenet is also limited both in its ability to sustain relationships with a single other as well as a larger community of people. Fully aware of these limits, Wroth offers a vision of friendship that is armed with a kind of adaptive Neo-Stoic infrastructure: the ability to change in response to factors—namely shared desire and likeness—that are the source of antagonism, as well as the ability to use that momentary change as an opportunity to try out alternative arrangements that in turn become larger social networks. This is not so much a redefinition of friendship but an attempt to articulate the ways in which friendship is capable of living up to its original ideal of social harmony between individuals while also extending beyond such an exclusive scope.

Finally, this recasting of *Urania* as a progressive embracement, rather than deconstruction, of a friendly ideal also challenges the conception of romance, or at least friendship's status in that genre. Critics have long appreciated *Urania* for what Josephine Roberts calls its “satirical method” that “reveals a rupture between the world of high idealism and that of hard, pragmatic circumstance.”¹⁵ Indeed, it is this assessment that underscores Cavanagh's own diagnosis of *Urania* as a romance about how “seemingly contradictory qualities

¹⁴ Cavanagh, 149.

¹⁵ Wroth, *The First Part of the Countess of Montgomery's Urania*, ed. Roberts, xiii.

of true friendship and ‘reality’ intersect and collide.”¹⁶ But the very fact that friendship often gets better as things go on in the *Urania* transforms romance into a far more constructive genre, one that shows that the qualities of “true” friendship and “reality” are capable of being one in the same. This is perhaps the defining feature and ultimate appeal of friendship. Friendship is long—it happens before, during, and after marriage—and thus cannot be read through individual “realist” moments or trip ups. But friendship’s long-form quality makes it a relationship that is able to transform that which would seem socially stifling, disappointing, or disturbing it into an expression of virtue and idealism. The “reality” of friendship is multitudinous: it involves delight and pain, satisfaction and disappointment, sympathy and hostility. But such a constant introduction of positive and negative feelings makes it an emotionally pliable and expansive, rather than continuously shattered, relationship that is ultimately defined by endurance and growth. That growth, of course, manifests in friendship’s ability to manage a variety of feelings within a given relation. But it also manifests in friendship’s use of those feelings, and the strategies developed in response, as the experience necessary to know how to connect with those who are not immediately attractive, alike, and compatible. Friendships don’t last in *Urania* because its characters insist on the exclusivity of their bonds—bonds constituted by a single factor that connects two persons and two persons only. Friendships last because characters open and remain open to a whole host of emotional experiences, along with the network of people that such generosity might make room for.

The Lies That Bind

Despite the ultimate emergence and tacit celebration of social networks in *Urania*, the characters in Wroth’s romance do not start out as progressive denizens ready to embrace a variety of pluralist social options. From the beginning, they are overwhelmingly governed by an investment in social, notably romantic, pairing.¹⁷ In other words, the desire for romantic union and its implicit privileging of the couple form is so strong in *Urania* that characters are quick to assert themselves as destined for a particular romantic pairing and take pains to insist on that supposed destiny. Within the first twenty pages of Wroth’s romance, the hero Parselius, after a brief but committed courtship with the titular heroine Urania, “resolve[s], whatsoever she was, to make [Urania] his Wife” (26.19-20). Shortly after being rescued by Amphilanthus, Antissia has the “fortune” to “marke (with so yielding a heart) the loveliness, sweetnes, braverie, and strength of the famous Amphilanthus” and both are “content to think they loved, and so to know those

¹⁶ Cavanagh, 151.

¹⁷ In the afterword to *Sex Before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern England*, ed. James M. Bromley and Will Stockton (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), Valerie Traub describes such an investment in pairing as a “stubborn assumption[.]” that “apotheosis is to be found in the couple form” (291). To be clear, Traub primarily views such a “stubborn assumption[.]” as a hallmark of contemporary reading. As she puts it, “[d]espite [the] pedagogical state of the art... understandings of early modern sex remain circumscribed by a number of stubborn assumptions: that it is almost always heterosexual; that it ultimately tends toward the ‘consummation’ of penis in vagina;...; that, unless it is a matter of violent assault, it is inevitably a prelude to or sign of marriage” (291). John S. Garrison has subsequently noted that such investment in the couple and the corresponding set of values also holds undue sway over the critical imagination of early modern social life (xiii). Wroth makes such an assumption an ideological backdrop of her own romance.

paines” (60.39-40; 61.6-7). And when Pamphilia condemns Amphilanthus’s first praise of Antissia, Amphilanthus, fully aware of Pamphila’s devotion to him, observes that he “had never seene...so much prettie envie in her” (61.42-62.1). With such strong convictions, characters are already wedded to the organization of romantic coupling and have little interest in, to use Garrison’s phrase, “rethink[ing] the model of dyadic sociality itself.”¹⁸

However, the more astute characters like Pamphilia do find themselves lamenting the fact that they are bound to such a rigid social paradigm. Upon hearing Amphilanthus’s praise for Antissia, Pamphilia is perturbed that the man she has only loved could so easily change his affection. But she is equally perturbed by the torment she inflicts on herself by continuing to love him. “Alas,” she proclaims,

what have I deserved to bee thus tyrannically tortured by love? and in his most violent course, to whom I have ever been a most true servant? Had I wrong’d his name, scornd his power, or his might, then I had been justly censured to punishment: but ill Kings, the more they see obedience, tread the more upon their subjects; so doth this all conquering King. O love, look but on me, my heart is thy prey, my self thy slave, then take some pity on me. (62.7-13)

As Pamphilia observes, there is no good reason for the state of her and Amphilanthus’s relationship. She has not “wrong’d” or broken her devotion to Amphilanthus and has been nothing but a “true servant” to their love relationship all this time. Ironically, such devotion to love seems only to license more abuse, Pamphilia noting that “ill Kings, the more they see obedience, tread the more upon their subjects.” She should, quite simply, get over Amphilanthus and stop loving him. But Pamphilia’s ideological vision of her love relationship with Amphilanthus as nothing less than a two-way master-subject monarchy leaves her unable to conceive of herself as anything other than a “slave” bound to a “King.” Accordingly, she resigns herself to being “tyrannically tortured by love,” or essentially bound to a narrative that only sees a future in the dyadic union with this supposedly intended partner.

But in having Pamphilia describe her experience with love as “tyrannical,” Wroth also plays on a prevalent conception of friendship as an expressly anti-tyrannical relationship. She thus introduces the specter of an alternative to the rigid, romantically-based organization of social life. As Laurie Shannon has shown, “writers commonly employed the trope of a virtuous friendship between equals as a contrast to the conditions of engagement with a political tyrant. The unsubordinating relation of friendly equals represents an alternative to the subordination without limits attempted by the tyrannical rulers and always potential in an ideology of more or less absolute monarchy.”¹⁹ Wroth, by contrast, doesn’t explicitly evoke the anti-tyranny of friendship, but she does align the conception of tyranny to romantic love. It is dyadic love, the relationship that Pamphilia so adamantly envisions for her and Amphilanthus, that creates a vicious and inescapable cycle of tyrannical abuse and slavish subordination as partners remain hopelessly bound to the actions of their supposedly intended partners. Any disturbance in the sanctity of the pair can only be read as tragedy and can only be experienced as betrayal. Thus, Wroth, in Pamphilia’s lament, subtly introduces the possibility of another way, one in which

¹⁸ Garrison, xiii.

¹⁹ Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 56. Cicero notes the anti-tyrannical nature of friendship in *De amicitia*, claiming that “we live in one way with a tyrant and in another with a friend” (197).

persons are not solely bound to the narrative of a particular individual and are subsequently able to exist in far more equitable circumstances with one another.

The implicit struggle of *Urania*, then, is to escape the devotion to dyadic union—something that inspires characters to see almost any other social connection as a threat—and to assume an anti-tyrannical friendliness that might be able to humor a larger variety of social possibilities with multiple persons. However, this proves to be a particularly difficult precisely because the social tenets available are primarily equipped to foster relationships between close dyadic pairs rather than enable a suppression of feeling that might facilitate a relationship between rivalrous persons. More specifically, the traditional “laws” of friendship demand an overbearing honesty to oneself and others that not only risks stoking antagonism but also leaves little room for any kind of personal negotiation that might result in alteration. As Cicero writes in *De amicitia*, “the first law of friendship” is “to give true advice with all frankness.”²⁰ Furthermore, “friends frequently must be not only advised, but also rebuked,” even though, as Cicero acknowledges, such a mandate of “plain speaking” often leads to “hate” rather than amelioration. (Accordingly, Cicero advises that “reason and care” be used, “complaisance” and “flattery” avoided, when such truth is uttered.²¹) But while such a tactic may work in order to demonstrate or prove the constancy within a one-to-one relationship—such as if Pamphilia was to tell Antissia she despises her precisely because she, Pamphilia, is committed to winning Amphilanthus for herself—it fails to engender a social connection with anyone *outside* of a prescribed and exclusive relationship. Indeed, Pamphilia and Antissia could plainly tell the truth to one another and thus be “friends” in a classical, Ciceronian sense. But such a friendship would be one marked by a perennial animosity that stubbornly insists on the singularity of a particular social experience, in this case uniting with Amphilanthus.

Sensitive to the ways in which the traditional “laws” of friendship privilege a certain kind of social interaction and organization, Wroth’s romance ultimately seeks to articulate an expanded set of strategies that might be able to cultivate a larger number and range of social valences. But even these practices are initially stifled by, or at least filtered through, the traditional demands of friendship. Indeed, when Antissia first dubiously identifies herself as a “friend” to Pamphilia, Pamphilia counters this awkwardness by exhorting Antissia to tell the truth. “Mee thinks you grow too neere to me,” Pamphilia contends,

bare friendship not being able so cunningly to sift on, therefore it makes me
thinke some other cause moves this care in you; if so, freely speak it, and I
will as freely satisfie. (95.3-8)

Pamphilia’s response attempts to distance herself from Antissia’s seemingly errant claim to friendship, but it also falls back on a prescribed means of social convention. In her request that Antissia “freely speak,” Pamphilia nudges their dubious friendship into the realm of proper friendly conduct, even if that might mean vocalizing the “other cause” that “moves” Antissia and rupturing any sense of momentary peace that they have.

What is canny about this utterance though is how it engenders a two-faced dynamic that gestures towards the honesty of friendliness all the while maintaining a kind of functional ambiguity. Pamphilia’s request that Antissia tell the truth is not an outright lie, but it is still a kind of stopgap that allows the two to avoid facing the very real antagonism that girds their interaction. Indeed, the two as a result of Pamphilia’s request for the truth engage in a game of

²⁰ Cicero, 157.

²¹ Cicero, 197.

verbal chicken that only prolongs their evasiveness: Antissia implores Pamphilia to set the example and “confesse [her] love” so that she herself may “soone follow” (95.9-10). Pamphilia in turn accuses Antissia of “base...suspition” and “mistrust [of] her friend” for daring to assume that she is less than forthright (95.14-16). Antissia then charges Pamphilia with avoiding the issue entirely: “this is no answere to my question” (95.21-22).

But such evasive strategies also start to give way as it becomes increasingly difficult to avoid the candor or “free[] speaking” that the moment seems to call for. When Pamphilia once again tries to stave off an admission of love for Amphilanthus by asking Antissia “What harme then could it be to you, if I should love him?”, Antissia comes back with the most candid reply of the exchange: she admits that such a love would result in “The losse of my content...[to] know the birth of so much folly,” for loving Amphilanthus would force her to “adventure to be a rivall with the rarest Princesse Pamphilia” (96.31-35). Granted, Antissia’s admission is a half-truth in so much that she has already registered her jealousy of Pamphilia several times in private and thus would have no “loss of [] content” if she were to start now; however, it is a full truth in so much as it acknowledges the latent antagonism that underscores the two women’s relationship. What had previously been masked behind a set of strategic rhetorical evasions is finally brought out in the open.

Indeed, it is this moment that finds Pamphilia and Antissia’s “friendship” at a critical juncture. This is, quite literally, the moment of truth that Antissia had asked for from the start, and the traditional rules of friendship dictate that one should reply with all honesty. But rather than embrace the honesty that Antissia has heralded—a move that would require her to affirm her love for Amphilanthus and thus privilege her desire for romantic union—Pamphilia doubles down on the conversation’s duplicity and chooses to lie outright. First, she denies loving Amphilanthus and claims that her affection for him is based on his “never enough praised merits, but not for love otherwise” (96.36-37); second, she actually encourages Antissia to pursue Amphilanthus by assuring Antissia that “she did resemble him” and was thus “like to true vertue” (97.9-10). Not only does this keep the two women from going at one another, it actually yields the most halcyon image of the two to date: upon hearing this answer, Antissia embraces Pamphilia and the two leave “holding each other by the arme, with as much love, as love in them could joyne” (97.13-14).

Of course, Pamphilia’s lie can be considered a last ditch attempt at keeping things peaceable in an otherwise contentious moment, a phenomenon that Cavanagh seems to identify when she describes the propensity of Wroth’s characters to “choose lies or betrayal when their lives become uncomfortably complicated.”²² Indeed, Wroth’s own qualified description of Pamphilia and Antissia leaving with “as much love, as love in them could joyne” acknowledges—maybe even sardonically—the muted feelings the two very likely still have for each other as well as the abundance of deception still at play. Pamphilia after all is still very much in love with Amphilanthus and probably doesn’t believe that Antissia is of equal “vertue” to him; Antissia is not totally convinced that Pamphilia is over Amphilanthus or that there is no longer any rivalry to be had. In that sense, the two, left with no better options, resign themselves to a rhetorical draw. Given the possibilities that could erupt from bare faced rivalry, it may just be easier to lie.

However, in a social world that before this has so implicitly prioritized the pursuit of dyadic love bonds, *this* lie stands as a novel departure from the paradigm of private affection in

²² Cavanagh, 151.

pairs and the social antagonism that it inspires. In fact, Pamphilia and Antissia openly acknowledge how the moves within their conversation are deliberate attempts to withdraw from the dyadic assumption of social life that assumes union with Amphilanthus is the only satisfactory social option. Right after Pamphilia claims to love Amphilanthus only for “his never enough praised merits,” Antissia, in a nod to friendship’s counter-tyrannical efforts, thanks Pamphilia for “this royall freedome she had found in her.” Similarly, Pamphilia, right before embracing Antissia, points out that the love for Amphilanthus and “his dependences doe so vex us, as they take away all other societie” (97.10-11). It’s a remarkably self-aware statement that recognizes the ways in which the overzealous allegiance to dyadic union and all its attendant responses—jealousy, rivalry, competition—stifles a larger friendly “societie” that could otherwise exist between them and others. If Pamphilia and Antissia could free themselves from an exclusive devotion to a singular person, they would open themselves up to interactions or friendship with other potential love interests and no longer have to engage in their rivalry with each other. The lie thus doesn’t abandon ugly feelings the characters have for one another. Instead, it allows the characters to live with those feelings by placing them alongside a larger set of sympathies and social interests.

What then appears to be, at worst, an episode of extended lying that is patently antithetical to friendship instead becomes a way to model an alternative vision of social organization that would make cooperative living possible. That is to say that Pamphilia’s lie about her feelings for Amphilanthus, much like the claim to friendship, is a disingenuous nicety. But it is lie that has a social interest in that it feigns a “favour” for Antissia—in essence a claim for her superiority and thus difference—that allows Pamphilia to coexist, rather than compete, with another (97.3). Thought another way, Pamphilia and Antissia at the beginning of this scene are chiefly interested in asserting a private confidence in their individual love for Amphilanthus. However, once such exclusivity becomes a distinct impossibility—as it is clear that both love him—Pamphilia performs a social recalibration and shifts her concern to the greater community of persons in *Urania*. This creation of community, however, requires a differentiation, so while Pamphilia and Antissia’s demonstration of friendship here may be noticeably imperfect, it reflects an expanding of the self, particularly on Pamphilia’s part, that makes possible a larger and potentially better union.

Indeed, we see this commitment to the expanded society of friendship take hold as the romance progresses. Not long after Pamphilia lies about her lack of desire for Amphilanthus, Antissia experiences another pang of jealousy over the prospect that Amphilanthus may in fact prefer Pamphilia over her. “Amphilanthus, thou wert Noble, just, free: How is this change?” (113.8), she privately laments:

Could not I (blinde foole that I was) have markt his often frequenting Pamphilia’s Chamber? his private discourse with her? his seeking opportunitie to bee in her presence? his stolne lookes? his fearefull but amorous touching her hand? his kissing his owne hand, rather coming from hers, then going to hers? (113.12-17)

Yet while Antissia makes clear that she knows who her rival is at this moment, she ultimately doesn’t blame or disparage Pamphilia for causing Amphilanthus’s apparent “change.” This time, she blames Amphilanthus and love itself, confessing

Alas, Pamphilia, I pitie thee, and indeed love thee no whit lesse then before; I cannot, nor may not blame thee for loving him, since none can resist his conquering force in love, nor for seeking him: for whose soule would not covet

him? but I blame him for spoiling poore hearts to his glorious triumph. (113.24-28)

Like Pamphilia before her, Antissia evokes the language of tyrannical conquest to describe love and Amphilanthus's endeavors. But in this case, both Pamphilia and Antissia are righteous friendly subjects unfortunately overtaken by an unjust romantic "triumph." That is to say that they may not be able to help loving him—"none can resist his conquering force in love"—but they don't and shouldn't let that determine how they feel about each other. Accordingly, Antissia doesn't lash out at her rival but makes an effort to not be "spoyl[ed]" by love and thus remain steadfast in her friendship with Pamphilia. It is their shared frustration over Amphilanthus that should prevail, not the antagonism that results from their common erotic love. By declaring that she will love Pamphilia "no whit lesse then before," Antissia adopts a rather Neo-Stoic position, one that seeks to contextualize this moment as an intermittent disturbance that she would be better off just letting pass by.

But such a position is only possible as an extension of the lie that Pamphilia had previously authored. In other words, Antissia in this moment is not lying about the nature of Amphilanthus, but her claim to some sort of consistency in her and Pamphilia's affection is a continuation of the fiction that they are unproblematic friends. The very idea that Antissia had loved Pamphilia "no whit lesse then before" is shaky. The two's relationship has always been defined by interchanging moments of affection and jealousy. Yet here, Antissia expands her emotional range to include, and even prioritize, her "pitie" and "love" for Pamphilia over her jealousy.

What is key to this moment though is that it doesn't feature the relinquishment of original romantic commitments—the very thing that gives Pamphilia and Antissia their likeness—but a reinterpretation of the dynamics that inform existing social connections. Simply put, Antissia is still in love with Amphilanthus, and she has a strong sense that Pamphilia is as well. In this way, Pamphilia and Antissia do still risk rubbing up against the problems that lead to discord and might also lead to rupture. But rather than give up her desire in an attempt to avoid conflict, Antissia retains and emphasizes it, thereby articulating a new dynamic between her, Pamphilia, and Amphilanthus. It is not the case that they have effectively "moved on" from their feelings about Amphilanthus, dropped the shared likeness or similitude that connected them, and thus moved on to another set of friends. Instead, Antissia uses the antagonisms produced by similitude to articulate a whole host of emotional reactions, one that can envision her and Pamphilia as far more kindred spirits pitted against a common enemy that is Amphilanthus.

Love's "Phansies" and Friendship's Endurance

Although *Urania* primarily depicts its Neo-Stoicism through its characters' efforts to retain the affections of those they love alongside the disappointment and betrayal they often experience, another more perverse demonstration of the romance's Neo-Stoic outlook can be found in the fact that characters never seem to truly get over their rivalries. Specifically, Antissia's hostility that had previously been directed toward her similar rival Pamphilia does not go away but is essentially diverted. Right after pardoning Pamphilia, Antissia announces her new plans for Amphilanthus, the "Unnaturall man that preyes on his owne kind, nourishing his life with the ruine of simple innocent Lovers." This cruelty, she declares,

hath wrought this hardnesse in mee, as from hence to love thee, but till I can bee reveng'd of thee; and such a revenge will I have, as thy hard heart shall melt for

it, if any goodnesse bee left in it; for over the world will I seeke thee (my journey to Romania once ended) to bee thus quit with thee, that thy false eyes, and flattring tongue, shall bee no longer able to deceive or betray thy selfe or others, but behold the true end of me, who gaine my death by thy falsehood, and in thy presence will I conclude my life with my love to thee. (113.28-37)

True to character, Antissia's plan is uncontrolled and wildly passionate, but the nature of her revenge is ultimately two-fold. On the one hand, she expresses a desire to do whatever it takes to ultimately be with Amphilanthus. On the other hand, she suggests she'll go so far as to murder her dear love so that he can "no longer...betray thy selfe or others," even suggesting that she'll engage in a murder-suicide pact that will "conclude my life with my love to thee." In a sense, Antissia takes her newfound appreciation of friendly "societie" to a perverse extreme. Whereas Pamphilia reasonably accepts the prospect of "societie" as an unburdened outlook, Antissia uses it to harden her sense of Amphilanthus's treachery, even registering a profound embarrassment for having not seen it before. That is, she blames Amphilanthus for having caused the "ruine of simple innocent Lovers" (113.29).

This frenzied emotional splitting—the dual love and hate for Amphilanthus—prompts Antissia to court additional friends and lovers and, somewhat inadvertently, expand her social network. This manifests most directly when Antissia is forced to depart Morea for Romania and her betrothed, Leandrus, a move that transforms Antissia's social narrative from a singular attempt to attain Amphilanthus to a courting of various male suitors and similar rivals, like, Pamphilia, that she meets along the way (148).²³ But such a split also reveals how Antissia's relationship with Pamphilia is contingent on how she tempers her feelings for Amphilanthus. In other words, the relation between two people alone is *not* enough to sustain the notion of friendship in *Urania*. Friendship's networked nature leads to an interdependent set of feelings and relations that must be carefully managed.

Practically speaking then, the continued challenge of *Urania* is to maintain the multi-valenced lies and suppressions that make possible a continued group friendship. When it comes to the relationship with Pamphilia alone, the management of such friendliness is somewhat easy thanks to Antissia's reinterpretation of Pamphilia as a fellow "poore heart[]" that is spoiled by Amphilanthus. Indeed, when Antissia returns to Morea, she and Pamphilia revive their displays of affection, "Pamphilia with her left arme embracing her" (319.38) and "Antissia never more pleased, Pamphilia seldome so well contended" (320.1-2). But such a (female) friendship is complicated when Antissia inevitably revitalizes—or, as we are reminded, "never left"—"her plot[] for revenge" (360.4-5) against Amphilanthus, a vengefulness that is only enflamed when Amphilanthus seems to flirt with her and, knowingly and visibly, relishes the fact that "she lov'd him still, (for what man lives, that glories not in multitudes of womens loves?)" (325.4-5). Caught between her care for Pamphilia and anger for Amphilanthus, Antissia becomes frenetic, her "fury" turning to appeasement turning to "her good nature again, or love, or feare," or as the

²³ The moment in which Antissa leaves also features some remarkable moments of affection between Pamphilia and Antissia. In response to Antissia's feeling of melancholy over being away from Pamphilia, Pamphilia recommends that Antissia "nip it in the bud, lest it blow to overthrow your life and happinesse" (147.24-35). In response, Antissia asks Pamphilia to "let youre poore unfortunate friend and servant, bee in absence but sometimes remembred" (147.38-39) and the two then spend the night "lying together, and with sad, but loving discourse passing those dark houres" before parting with "manie teares" and "kisses" (148.9-17).

narrator describes it, “all passions, whirling about like a wheele they draw wyer out with all” (360.24-27). Antissia needs to keep up the guise of emotional calm, but this is difficult when one remains intensely invested in the lives of many, interlocking persons.

The problem, however, is that this fractured swirl of emotions doesn't lead Antissia to modify her feelings about Amphilanthus; they lead her to a reemphasis on her relationship with Pamphilia. Before leaving for Romania, we had seen Antissia “pitie” but “not blame” Pamphilia for loving Amphilanthus. When, after acknowledging that once again Amphilanthus may actually love Pamphilia over her, she takes her sympathy for Pamphilia a step further. Considering the fact that she hates Amphilanthus yet loves Pamphilia and Pamphilia loves Amphilanthus, she begins to question her own desire to bring harm to a friend's lover. “Alas sweetest Pamphilia,” she asks herself,

how maiest thou curse me, for having a thought to hurt thy love? much more to plot his ruine, and so thine in his; yet thou art the case, for had hee not changed from me to thee, all had been safe, yet I may wrong thee this way too: how know I that he loved mee first, may it not bee, that hee did love thee long before I saw Morea? His fashion at first encounter 'twixt you, when we came to Maninea, expressed a deare respect, and familiar love, then I wrong'd thee, to purchase him. If from thee he did change, the blame is there, and I aske pardon for it; but pardon cannot bee, where such ill remaines. (361.2-10)

Antissia's ability to recognize the interdependent nature of her various relationships is a sign of some emotional growth. As Antissia notes, if she were to hurt Amphilanthus, she would in turn hurt the woman who loves him, Pamphilia; accordingly, to be friends with Pamphilia means that she must refrain from harming Amphilanthus. But while Antissia's newfound fidelity to her sex is admirable, it also takes the form of a dangerous social devotion that blinds her to the modifications she must make to those other than Pamphilia. Indeed, in a perverse bid to demonstrate her allegiance to the world of female friendship, Antissia goes so far as to humor killing herself in order to atone for her sins, calling herself “a mere shame to thy sex, and the disgrace of lovers” and proclaiming, “Die cruel Antissia, and abuse not this place with thy vild living in it” (361.12-14). And in keeping with her original plan for revenge against Amphilanthus, she commissions Dolorindus, the King of Negropont, to kill Amphilanthus, promising to requite Dolorindus's love if he “performes her command” and threatening to “vow [] hatred to him if hee attempt it not” (362.34-41).

Antissia's reaction, then, reveals a failure to escape the dyadic vision of her own life followed by a subsequent perversion of the group alternative that friendship offers. Pamphilia's creation of a friendly network is contingent on her relinquishment, however feigned, of affection for Amphilanthus. It is precisely this move that allows her to inhabit an alternative set of feelings for Amphilanthus, her rival Antissia, and other romantic suitors. Antissia, conversely, never changes her feelings about Amphilanthus: she remains in love with him and angry that he will not commit to her. This insistence allows for a friendship with Pamphilia on the grounds that both are linked by a shared sense of disappointment from the inconstant abuse of a particular man. But any alternatives and nefarious networking, such as the courting of Leandrus and recruitment of Dolorindus, are not an outlet for feelings of anger and disappointment. Instead, they are a tool with which to exact them.

This seems to bring the problem of friendship back to where it started. Driven by an uncompromising honesty about her own romantic convictions, Antissia pursues a social life that envisions a single dyadic outcome. Such a vision had previously seen Pamphilia as the obstacle

to such an end, but it now sees Amphilanthus himself inhabiting that role. The introduction of any additional actors or “friends” is not the result of an emotional expansion but a utilitarian convenience: Pamphilia serves as means to reflect and justify Antissia’s incorrigible anger against Amphilanthus; Dolorindus can help Antissia get to Amphilanthus or at least help to realize a finality to her and Amphilanthus’s fate.

But it is under these circumstances that Wroth shows how the *Urania*’s friendships, along with the devious beneficence that authors them, come not only from figures like Pamphilia but a whole omni-nodal set of social actors. To put it a bit more simply, it is a pair of friends that Antissia brings into her social orbit, not Antissia herself, that is able to enforce the kind of emotional expansion that might allow her to be genial to Amphilanthus. This begins with Dolorindus who, swayed by the Antissia’s promise of romantic affection, does attempt to kill Amphilanthus. But when he fails, he begs for Amphilanthus’s pardon and blames love for his betrayal. “But what excuse can I make?” Dolorindus asks,

say Antissia bad mee kill Amphilanthus, is that enough? O noe, truth tells me that he saved mee from ruine, from starving, from death; shall a woman then make me forget these benefits, and only because I loved her? love should not extend to hurt, or procure murther. [...] Antissia, I now hate thee more, then once I loved thee, and more justly, for thy love hath made me worth-lesse, and spoyled my name, honor, and content; shame is the reward I have gain’d for my love to thee, and the heavy waight of ungratefulnesse lyes on my heart. (393.22-32)

Much like when Antissia complained of Amphilanthus’s “conquering force in love” but nonetheless swore to love Pamphilia “no whit lesse then before,” Dolorindus frames love as the short-term prospect that leads an otherwise reasonable character down a dangerous and uncharacteristic path. Amphilanthus, as a friend, had saved Dolorindus from ruin, starving, and death, yet love was enough to make Dolorindus forget that history and himself in an instant.

But even this betrayal doesn’t destroy a friendship so much as provide an opportunity for characters to prove friendship’s resilience. In a show of remarkable understanding, Amphilanthus pardons Dolorindus by citing their history of friendship and a sympathy for love’s overpowering “command.” “Love commanded you,” Amphilanthus reasons,

when you were his subject, twere treason to have disobeied, or refused to kill a traitor to his Crowne (as I was esteemed). Comfort for your selfe I am free from anger, or spleene; I will not say I forgive, I say you erred not, nor I remember ought, but our first meeting, and our friendship, let all other (like Phansies) passe, I am thy friend, and will cherish thee, and love thee as I did; (395.4-12)

In other words, Amphilanthus is sympathetic to the idea that Dolorindus was inconstant in friendship only because he was being constant in love—so much so that, as Amphilanthus proclaims, he does not pardon Dolorindus but believes that he never “erred” in the first place. Amphilanthus perhaps trivializes the gravity of Dolorindus’s action, but he does so by suggesting that he is able to hold his conflicting views of his friend at the same time. He can “cherish” his friend and be aware of the treachery he attempted; the resolution to this disparity is not to “forgive” his friend but reinterpret his attempted treachery as a reflection of his unerring obedience. The emotional pang that caused their strife is mere “Phansie” that Amphilanthus advises to let “passe” since it is not a true mark of Dolorindus. In proclaiming that he will “love [Dolorindus] as [he] did,” Amphilanthus’s speech ends by noting not a change in their relationship but a commitment to the feeling that has grounded their friendship from the beginning.

In what is then an attempt to unify love and friendship—or perhaps a practical means to make sure that heterosexual love will no longer disturb the security of friendly fellowship—Amphilanthus orders Antissia and Dolorindus to marry (397.19-20). It’s an anticlimactic moment that is given no more than a paragraph in the text and caps Antissia’s romantic search with a fairly unwanted choice. (She had previously expressed far more interest in both Amphilanthus and Leandrus, and she still remains in love with Amphilanthus.) But it serves as a kind of enforced emotional expansion that shows how the creation of friendly community is not necessarily a matter of self-discovery or even self-deceptive lies. It is, arguably, Amphilanthus who in this episode best demonstrates the emotional dilation that makes, or in this case keeps, friendship possible. Maintaining his relation with Dolorindus means accepting the unsavory feelings that Dolorindus is capable of. But successfully transforming these feelings means pushing his friend to live with the love that he and Antissia had humored—in effect requiring them to engage in the expansion that they would rather renounce. Amphilanthus thus forces Antissia to go beyond her affection for him, but he also resolves her homicidal “fury” by making it a permanent part of the social dynamic. After all, Antissia is left with the man that she had recruited to kill on account of love.

To be sure, the fact that the man Antissia had so desperately pined for ultimately decides her romantic fate fits *Urania*’s larger “satirical” treatment of love in addition to suggesting something unsettling about the romantic agency of women. Not all love stories end up perfectly, and some even end with a secondary, perhaps even tertiary, choice. But the length of Wroth’s romance also presents this rather dark, anticlimactic moment as a mere step in a larger social process that does have more positive manifestations. The love union between Antissia and Dolorindus settles little and satisfies few. But while it may be a disappointment for the individual likes of Antissia, it serves as the means for her to consider social interests outside herself. In this sense, Antissia’s marriage is not about her particular paired union but the network possibilities it fosters, possibilities that allow her to be a poor lover but a better friend to a larger swath of people.

“[O]nce her companion”

After Antissia and Dolorindus are married, Amphilanthus visits the newlywed couple in Negropont where he is “by Dolorindus and Antissia infinitely welcom’d and feasted.” At the same time though, Antissia remains “not well-pleased,” for

Although she had directly lost the love she most prized, yet so much she lov’d him still, as she was sorry he should do amisse, which she did confes he did in leaving Pamphilia for Musalina. (496.32-36)

On the surface, Antissia’s anger is rooted in the same romantic inconstancy that she herself experienced from Amphilanthus: he, it turns out, has left Pamphilia for another woman, Musalina. But behind this anger—the very same anger that previously caused her to rival with Pamphilia—is transformed into moment of group concern that suggests a far more variegated sympathy. The fact that Antissia herself has “lov’d” and still “loves” Amphilanthus makes her even more invested in his behavior and thus more upset that “he should do amisse.” But she is displeased with Amphilanthus’s inconstancy not because it prevents her from being with him but because it prevents him from justly treating someone she cares about. In this way, Antissia is a woman who has missed out on her “first” choice but doesn’t let that keep her from cultivating a social congeniality broader than one friend or one lover. If anything, it’s that disappointment that

inspires her to think not about what would be good for herself and Amphilanthus but about what is good for herself, Amphilanthus, Pamphilia, and Dolorindus.

Such group concern is a remarkable departure from the verbal sparring that defined Pamphilia and Antissia's initial interaction. And yet it is also, as I hope I have shown, an almost natural outcome of the repeated conflicts and differences that have emerged from unsustainable similitudes and dyadic commitments. Both Pamphilia and Antissia are well practiced in the performance of dissembling not only to achieve momentary peace but also to carve out a more permanent heterogeneity. Whereas Pamphilia had once momentarily denied her love for Amphilanthus in order to give Antissia the pleasure of believing that she stood unrivaled, Antissia returns the favor not by lying but consciously admitting, then subjugating her romantic attraction for the sake of a larger social concern. In a sense, it is this later moment that marks a return—or perhaps the first true assumption—of honesty in Pamphilia and Antissia's relationship. Rather than lie in an attempt to diffuse the animosity and complication of her and Pamphilia's similitude, Antissia embraces the full range of feelings that surrounds her relationship with Pamphilia as well as Amphilanthus and Dolorindus. Such an embrace cannot be reduced to an individual lie or evasion. It requires a full honesty backed by an understanding of the social world as a larger "societie."

In fact, this larger and more emotionally comprehensive society is made manifest by Pamphilia as well. Early on in the second part of the *Urania*, nearly every couple of narrative consequence—Pamphilia and Amphilanthus, Urania and Steriamus, Parselius and Dalinea, Rosindy and Merianas, and Antissius and Selarina—holds court in an orchard. It is there that the group begins to remember "olde passed times" and Rosindy recounts the time Antissia saw him speak with his sister Pamphila and mistook him for a cheating Amphilanthus. Accordingly, Antissia attacked Rosindy on account of her shared desire for Amphilanthus and belief that Amphilanthus had forsaken her for Pamphilia. Rosindy's account is disparaging, emphasizing the "frenzy" (33.17) and "fury" (33.33) that Antissia had demonstrated, and it inspires the younger Antissius, Antissia's nephew, to join in. "[S]he is my Aunte," announces Antissius, "and as strange a mad peece of woemans flesh as ever came into Negroponte... Therfor that poor Iland... is nott able to comprehend all her frekes and follis" (34.20-26).

But as the ugliness of this all-male critique continues to go unabated, it is Pamphilia who first interjects and comes to Antissia's defense: "You are som thing curst," sayd Pamphilia, "my lord, mee thinks to your aunte" (34.27-28). And when Rosindy revives his critique of Antissia and mockingly recounts the over the top speech she gave upon saving him from shipwreck, Urania also interjects, suggesting that there must be a more generous way to relate his account of Antissia. "There is even enough," says Urania, "unles better fixed stuff. Butt what food did she give you ore comfort after your neere suffering ship-wrack? If noe other then this [speech], itt wOULD have binn to mee a greater storme then the first" (35.8-10). Neither Pamphilia's or Urania's defense is full throated enough to stop Rosindy's tale, but they at least suggest that there is more to Antissia than "empty blasts of senceles discourse" (35.11). For Pamphilia, the account seems too mean; for Urania, there must be some tangible contributions Antissia made even amidst her frantic behavior.

There is, to be sure, a superficial appeal to this scene overall. Along with the fact that we are witness to a large group of cross-gender friends interacting, we also get to see a distinctly

female brand of fellowship as Pamphilia and Urania band together to guard one of their own.²⁴ Combined with Antissia's championing of Pamphilia as the proper partner for Amphilanthus, one can't help but admire the sense of community that these women have attained over the course of Wroth's narrative. Fully aware of Antissia's foibles, Pamphilia looks out for her; conscious of the way in which Pamphilia's desire for Amphilanthus is a certain death to her own romantic ideality, Antissia advocates for her friend anyway.

It is when the group disbands that Pamphilia reveals the emotional variety behind such friendly circumstances. Registering a certain ambivalence about the whole ordeal, Pamphilia admits to being "nott satisfied with the story of Antissias misfortune." On the one hand, "considering the danger [Antissia] wowl'd have had Amphilanthus in," in this case the murderousness she exuded, "[Pamphilia] Judicially judged [such slander] butt a Just revenge and punishment on her." On the other hand, Pamphilia "griev'd for [Antissia] because [she was] once her companion" (40.25-28). To cap it off, Pamphilia declares, "Truly...I lament for her" as the male interlocutors implore her not to.

But it is precisely this complexity within Pamphilia and Antissia's relationship that reflects friendship's necessary imperfection and ultimate power. Pamphilia does not equivocally love or hate Antissia; she feels both at the same time. Thus, it would be wrong to describe their friendship as one built around absolute accord. However, it is this range of experienced feeling that allows them to have a congenial relationship at this moment and beyond. Pamphilia and Antissia's relationship had once hopelessly looked within, calculating the similarities between them and the antagonisms that would inevitably result. The solution then was to take on a dubious heterogeneity of feeling that could alleviate the charged similitude between them. But such exercises in expansion served as the necessary practice that allow the two friends now to look outside themselves routinely. Like Antissia's critique of Amphilanthus for forsaking Pamphilia, Pamphilia's interjection is not about herself. She was there when Antissia mistook Rosindy for Amphilanthus and attacked him and thus has every right and reason to join her male interlocutors in critique. But rather than humor such rivalry, she marks herself as removed from the burdens of similitude that produce such ire, able to sympathize with a vision of someone who is not herself. Practically speaking, Pamphilia doesn't "get" anything for sympathizing with Antissia. To compound the ugly feelings about Antissia would only elevate Pamphilia's reputation amongst her immediate peers. Indeed, she is discouraged from lamenting for her friend. But Pamphilia defends Antissia because it is now in her nature to do so. To be part of a friendly network means having many friends, which means having the diversity within oneself that allows for a multitude of possible interpersonal connections. It also means not having to prioritize oneself and one's feelings over all others but doing that which might serve as many as possible.

The Future of Friendship

Like the story of Cambel and Triamond in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* or perhaps even Elyot's telling of Titus and Gisippus, this moment of friendship in Wroth's romance remains decidedly incomplete.²⁵ Coming at the beginning of the second part of the *Urania*, a manuscript

²⁴ Friendship within this cross-gender group, we might note, is not contingent on absolute agreement. A certain amount of divergence or disparity is possible.

²⁵ As I discussed in my introduction, Sir Thomas Elyot's telling of Titus and Gisippus ends with a rather open-ended finale in which the exemplary friends separate to live, it seems, different

never published in Wroth's lifetime, this episode, arguably, still allows for a whole host of possibilities to follow. Who is to say that Antissia will not continue to act up? Or that Amphilanthus will not disappoint and betray Pamphilia once again? Furthermore, the second part of the *Urania* itself, just as the first part, remains unfinished. One, then, could easily quibble that any pronouncement or feeling of friendship is uncertain or, at worse, fleeting. Friendship, in this sense, is no more than a set of temporary flashes in which people are uncharacteristically conciliatory.

But while any number of disappointments may befall any combination of characters, it is precisely Wroth's vision of friendship's expansive capacity that inures the relation from such tremors. In a relationship that is defined by its ability to absorb and implement the many feelings that may arise in relations, any kind of break in purely harmonious interaction serves as a crucial lifeblood rather than death knell. A particular moment of friendship may be worrisome or even disturbing, but this vantage ignores the relationship's inherent long-game: its ability to contextualize these moments amongst a host of other social experiences and effectively reformulate them as parts of a constructive process.

There is, then, almost no limit to both the kinds and depth of connection that are possible in friendship. Wroth's romance in particular demonstrates friendship's ability to break limits: the limits that envision life as organized around a dyadic union, that privilege likeness as the most effective criteria of connection, or that believe friendship is most appreciable in an individualistic context. The experiments of literature routinely challenged these limits and thus compelled persons to challenge them in life. Friendship offered the means to imagine and enact a far more interconnected existence, an ever-expanding relation with and in a rapidly expanding world.

lives that are never related to the reader. As I mentioned in my first chapter, Cambel and Triamond rather mysteriously drop out after Canto 5 of *The Faerie Queene* and are never seen or mentioned again in Spenser's (also) unfinished epic.

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