

## HUMANISM AND FRIENDSHIP IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY EUROPE

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Although it has a long history, friendship has only a relatively short historiography. Curiously enough, the topic has never been seriously investigated by the historians associated with *Annales*, despite Lucien Febvre's interest in the history of love and other sentiments. Until the 1980's, the bibliography of the subject was very brief indeed, and the majority of items were focussed on the idea of friendship in the ancient world and the eighteenth century, especially in particular writers such as Seneca or Rousseau.<sup>1</sup>

In the eighties, for whatever reason, there was a sudden rise of interest in the subject in a number of countries and a number of disciplines, including sociology and the history of art, literature and philosophy as well as social history.

However, compared to classicists, to medievalists, and to specialists on the nineteenth century, historians of the early modern period have been slow to discover friendship, especially in its narrow and distinctively modern sense of a disinterested, equal relationship between unrelated individuals. Let us call this 'private' as opposed to 'political' or 'instrumental' friendship.<sup>2</sup> Recent literary and philosophical studies include Reginald Hyatte's *The Arts of Friendship* and Ullrich Langer's *Perfect Friendship* (both published in 1994).<sup>3</sup> Among more strictly historical studies one might cite an article by the Venetian historian

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1 J. Steinberger, *Begriff und Wesen der Freundschaft bei Aristoteles und Ciceron* (Munich 1955); W. Brinckmann, *Der Begriff der Freundschaft in Senecas Briefen* (Cologne 1963); William Acher, *Jean-Jaques Rousseau écrivain de l'amitié* (Paris 1971); Jean-Claude Fraisse, *Philia: la notion d'amitié dans la philosophie antique* (Paris 1974).

2 For the latter see Jeremy Boissevain's classic *Friends of Friends* (Oxford 1974). Historical studies of this type include Richard Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence* (New York 1980), ch. 4; Kate J.P. Lowe, 'Towards an Understanding of Goro Gheri's Views on *Amicizia* in Early Sixteenth-Century Medicean Florence', in: Peter Denley and Caroline Elam ed., *Florence and Italy. Renaissance Studies in Honour of Nicolai Rubinstein* (London 1988) 91-105; F. William Kent, *Bartolommeo Cederni and his Friends* (Florence 1991). The links between political and other friendships are discussed by Guy F. Lytle, 'Friendship and Patronage in Renaissance Europe', in: F. William Kent and Patricia Simons ed., *Patronage Art and Society in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford 1987) 47-61.

3 Reginald Hyatte, *The Arts of Friendship. The Idealization of Friendship in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature* (Leiden 1994); Ullrich Langer, *Perfect Friendship. Studies in Literature and Moral Philosophy from Boccaccio to Corneille* (Geneva 1994); Barry Weller, 'The Rhetoric of Friendship in Montaigne's *Essais*', *New Literary History* 9 (1978) 507-524.

Gaetano Cozzi, published in 1960, which now seems pioneering, and recent monographs on Italy by John Najemy and on the Netherlands by Mark Morford (a classicist who became interested in later neo-stoicism).<sup>4</sup> The decision of *Groniek* to devote a special number to early modern friendship has come just at the moment of 'lift-off'.<sup>5</sup>

Each of the pieces in this special number has something new to offer. Han van Ruler's piece on the theory of friendship is concerned, like a number of the books already cited, with the classical tradition, but offers something new, by bringing Dutch philosophers such as Adrianus Heereboord and Gisbertus Voetius into the discussion. Luuc Kooijmans focusses on a few individuals. He offers a Dutch equivalent of the studies of Francesco Vettori and his '*caro compare*' Niccolo Machiavelli, Albrecht Dürer and Willibald Pirckheimer, Michel de Montaigne and Etienne de la Boétie, or Philip Sidney and Fulke Greville. Paul Knevel's study of the *schutterij* introduces the important topic of the settings for friendship, with the militia taking its place alongside the monastery, the university and so on. Pieter Spierenburg's essay on criminals is the first study of ordinary people I have seen in a field so far dominated by elites. Finally, Arnold Labrie steps outside the Netherlands and presents a perceptive study of romantic friendship in Germany.

I do not feel qualified to comment in detail on this work, most of it based on sources I have not used. It is also too early for even the most sketchy of attempts at synthesis. My contribution will therefore be limited to one period and one social group. Like Labrie, I will try to reconstitute a particular cultural style of friendship, in my case that current among humanists in the sixteenth century, with special reference to Italy and the Netherlands.

### Humanism

From the days of Petrarch, who recorded the deaths of his friends on the flyleaf of his Vergil, friendship had been important in the humanist movement. The best-documented networks of friends in the sixteenth century are generally those of humanists, among them Erasmus, Bembo and Lipsius. The international circle of Erasmus included Thomas More (a close friend for a few years at

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4 Gaetano Cozzi, 'Una vicenda della Venezia barocca. Marco Trevisan e la sua "eroica amicizia"', *Studi Veneziani* 2 (1960) 61-154; John M. Najemy, *Between Friends. Discourses of Power and Desire in the Machiavelli-Vettori Letters* (Princeton 1993); Mark Morford, *Stoics and Neostoics. Rubens and the Circle of Lipsius* (Princeton 1991). Cf. Keith Andrews, 'Dürer and Pirckheimer. A Renaissance Friendship', *Bulletin of the Society for Renaissance studies* 4, no. 2 (1986-7) 7-15.

5 Two French studies were published last year, Anne Vincent-Buffault's *L'exercice de l'amitié* (Paris 1995), and the *Mélanges* for Robert Sauzet, *Foi, fidélité, amitié en Europe à la période moderne* (Tours 1995). Elizabeth Cropper and Charles Dempsey, *Nicolas Poussin. Friendship and the Love of Painting* is announced by Yale University Press for the spring of 1996.

least), the Valencian humanist Juan Luis Vives (who called Erasmus "*amicus probatissimus*"), the German humanist Beatus Rhenanus (who called him "most constant in keeping up friendships"), and the town clerk of Antwerp, Peter Gillis.<sup>6</sup> The circle of Erasmus' contemporary the Venetian patrician Pietro Bembo included the painter Raphael, the diplomat Baldassare Castiglione, who evoked the loss of "*tanti amici*" in the prologue to his *Courtier*; and the humanist bishop Jacopo Sadoletto, who once described himself as "*homo cum fide amicitias colens*". The circle of the Netherlander Justus Lipsius included the geographer Abraham Ortelius, the poet and academic entrepreneur Janus Dousa, the printer Christophe Plantin and the painter Peter Paul Rubens.

In this essay I shall concentrate on change, claiming that the Renaissance, especially the later Renaissance, marks a turning point in the history of friendship, a claim that I shall try to justify by discussing the rise of new cultural practices. The evidence comes almost entirely from humanist circles and concerns friendship between males. I am not of course claiming that friendship among ordinary people, or friendship between women, or friendship between men and women did not exist in this period. The claim made here is simply that the humanists were the main innovators. The spiritual friendship between Giulia Gonzaga and Juan de Valdés, like that between Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna, followed the medieval model. Some Renaissance women were interested in the humanist movement, but few were able to participate fully in it, and those who tried were sometimes firmly discouraged by male colleagues.<sup>7</sup>

Why the cultural style of friendship altered at this time is not clear. As a first step, one might relate the changes to the increased interest in Roman and Greek antiquity and the importance of friendship in ancient times. Cicero's *Laelius* or *De amicitia* was of course well known in the Middle Ages, but it became much more widely known in the age of print. There were several editions of the text before 1500 and many more in the following century. The book was translated into French, Spanish and Portuguese in the early fifteenth century. It was published in English in 1481, Czech in 1513, Italian in 1523, Portuguese in 1531, German in 1534, French again in 1537, Spanish in 1546, 1548 and 1549 (three different translations), English again in 1550 and 1577, French again in 1579, and Polish in 1603.

Cicero's dialogue (like Seneca's *Letters to Lucilius*, another text much read in the later sixteenth century) gave friendship a particular colouring, flavour or cultural style, part aristotelian and part stoic. It included the notorious statement by Gaius Blossius (rejected by Laelius) that he would set fire to the Capitol if his friend Tiberius Gracchus had asked him to do so (E.M. Forster's

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6 Quoted in Johan Huizinga, *Erasmus of Rotterdam* (English translation 1924; reprint London 1952) 119; Yvonne Charlier, *Erasme et l'amitié d'après sa correspondance* (Paris 1977).

7 Margareth L. King, 'Thwarted Ambitions. Six Learned Women of the Italian Renaissance', *Soundings* 59 (1976) 280-300; Lisa Jardine, 'The Myth of the Learned Lady in the Renaissance', *Historical Journal* 28 (1985) 799-820.



famous remark about placing love of friends before love of country has its place in a cultural tradition). Its reception - and also, of course, that of Aristotle's *Ethics*, not to mention Plato - was followed by a 'cult of friendship', at least among upper-class male intellectuals.

I am using the term 'cult' advisedly. The idea is normally associated with the late eighteenth and nineteenth century in Germany in particular.<sup>8</sup> It is sometimes discussed as an example of the influence of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. *Amitié* is indeed a major theme in Rousseau's *Confessions* and in his *Nouvelle Héloïse* as indeed in his correspondence. It is generally described in sentimental terms as *doux* or *tendre*. For Rousseau friendship was sacred, "un sentiment céleste", "une chose si sainte que le nom n'en doit pas même être employée dans l'usage ordinaire".<sup>9</sup>

However, an emotional and religious rhetoric of friendship can also be found among Renaissance humanists. Listen for a moment to Erasmus writing to Cornelius Gerard as "*Corneli dulcissime*", or to Peter Gillis (1517) as "*amicorum suavissime*", or "*amice incomparabilis*"<sup>10</sup>, or to More writing to Erasmus (1516) "*Erasme dulcissime mihi que oculis charios*". Johan Huizinga, one of the first scholars to take the history of the emotions seriously, commented à propos of Erasmus that "sentimental friendships" were in fashion in his day.<sup>11</sup> Montaigne's language was equally emotional. "L'amitié, c'est une chaleur generale [...] constante [...] toute douceur." It requires a union of souls. His own friendship with La Boétie (who had died nearly twenty years earlier, in 1563), he describes in the language of what we might call a grand passion as the result of a "force inexplicable et fatale".<sup>12</sup> Even the cool, detached Francis Bacon writes of the need for friends for the "discharge of the fullness and swellings of the heart".

As for religious metaphors, there are frequent references to altars, the recurrent phrase being "*ad amicitiae Aram*".<sup>13</sup> One Netherlander gave a friend a drawing of an altar consecrated to eternal love (*amori eterno*) complete with a cupid and two men shaking hands (a new gesture in this period).<sup>14</sup> There are

8 Wolfdietrich Rasch, *Freundschaftskult und Freundschaftsdichtung im deutschen Schrifttum des 18. Jhs.* (Halle 1936); Albert Salomon, 'Der Freundschaftskult des 18. Jht in Deutschland', *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 8 (1979) 279-308; cf. Arnold Labrie, 'Eenzaamheid en sociabiliteit. Romantische vriendschap in Duitsland', *Groniek* 29 (1995) 68-86.

9 Acher, *Rousseau*.

10 Desiderius Erasmus, *Opus epistolarum Des. Erasmi Roterodami* P.S. Allen a.o. ed. (Oxford 1906-1958) letters no. 481, no. 687 and no. 715.

11 Huizinga, *Erasmus*, 11-12.

12 Barry Weller, 'Rhetoric of Friendship', 507-524.

13 Camden in Groe's album, quoted in Rosenheim, 'The Album amicorum', *Archaeologia* 62 (1910) 251-308, 287; George Craig's album, James F.K. Johnstone, *The Alba amicorum of George Strachan, George Craig, Thomas Cumming* (Aberdeen 1924) 20.

14 Philipp van Winghe in Abraham Ortelius, *Album amicorum* (facsimile ed., Paris 1970) f.51 verso (see illustration). On the handshake, Herman Roodenburg, 'The Hand of Friendship', in: Jan Bremmer and Herman Roodenburg ed., *The Cultural History of Gesture* (Cambridge 1991) 152-189.

also frequent references to eternity, to "*amicitia nunquam dissolvenda*" or to "immortal love".<sup>15</sup>

It would of course be rash to claim that this rhetoric of friendship was completely new in the sixteenth century. How much further back can one go? It might be prudent to leave this question to the medievalists. The subject deserves more careful study over the long term, perhaps by a team of scholars. I suspect that such a study would reveal neither a steady state nor a unilinear evolution. My guess would be that such an analysis would bring to light fluctuations in the emotional temperature of friendship over the ages, or at least fluctuations in the conventions for expressing - or disguising - warmth. Other cultural practices associated with humanist friendships are more obviously new. Dedicatory verses in a friend's book, for example; orations or letters of consolation on the death of friends, and so on.<sup>16</sup> In what follows I shall focus on four of these practices: laws of friendship, inscriptions, portraits, and albums.

### Cultural practices

Rousseau drew up 'rules' of friendship in 1757.<sup>17</sup> Once more, however, we find that he was not the innovator. Cicero's Laelius speaks of the *prima lex amicitiae*, but the first literal example of the practice known to me is that of the so-called 'Compagnia degli Amici' in Venice, a group which included Pietro Bembo. Their 'Leggi' were put in writing around the year 1506 in order to "ensure that from this time forth dear and sure and true friends should remain united as long as they live". The members, "like brothers", promised to help one another when necessary, even by arms, an apparently archaic element reminiscent of political friendship in the Middle Ages. There was also a discussion of the procedure for admitting more members, male or female, with a feast to welcome the new arrival, and also poems (cf. the atmosphere of Bembo's dialogue the *Asolani*, also the Abbey of Thélème).<sup>18</sup> 'Laws' of conviviality were formulated by Justus Lipsius and Ben Jonson among others, the respective settings being Lipsius' garden and a London tavern (the Old Devil).<sup>19</sup> Laws of friendship were also listed by the Portuguese friar Heitor Pinto and the English merchant William Martyn.<sup>20</sup>

Inscriptions on books express the idea that friends should share everything. The formula in Latin was '*Et amicorum*'. The Venetian poet Leonardo Giustini-

15 Johnstone, *The Alba amicorum*, 21; Ortelius, *Album*, opening.

16 George W. McClure, *Sorrow and Consolation in Italian Humanism* (Princeton 1991).

17 Acher, *Rousseau*, 106.

18 A. Ballarin, 'Giorgione e la Compagnia degli Amici. Il "Doppio ritratto" Ludovisi', *Storia dell'arte italiana* 5 (Torino 1983) 481-541, at pp. 490-492.

19 Justus Lipsius quoted in Morford, *Stoics and Neostoics*.

20 Heitor Pinto, *Imagem da vida cristã* (1575: ed. M. Alves Correia, 4 vols, Lisbon 1940); William Martyn, *Youth's Instruction* (London 1612).

an who flourished in the early fifteenth century has been described as "perhaps the first man to use a friendship formula." Following him, other Italians such as the humanists Filelfo and Poliziano, and Poliziano's patron Lorenzo de' Medici. The first non-Italian to use the formula seems to have been the Nuremberg patrician Willibald Pirckheimer, the friend of Dürer and like him a lover of Italy. Around the year 1506 another Italophil, the French bookcollector Jean Grolier, had the formula tooled on his bindings. So did Rabelais. The formula died out, alas, around the year 1600.<sup>21</sup> It was particularly appropriate that books should link friends within the humanist community.

Inscriptions are not the only evidence from material culture. Friendship portraits, commissioned as gifts, are another. The earliest case I know goes back to 1458, when the Central European humanist Janus Pannonius wrote some lines on Andrea Mantegna's portrait of him and Galeotto da Narni (it is worth adding that Mantegna himself was described as "an incomparable friend" by the humanist Felice Feliciano of Verona).<sup>22</sup> By the early sixteenth century, the friendship portrait seems to have become an institution. Bembo, for instance, owned a double portrait by his friend Raphael of his other friends *Andrea Navagero and Agostino Beazzano*, until he presented it to Beazzano himself.<sup>23</sup> Another Italian example reveals a link with Cicero: a Moroni portrait at Brescia shows a gentleman holding a book entitled *Dell'amicitia*.

From the Erasmus circle, the obvious example, frequently discussed, is that of the paired portraits of Erasmus and Peter Gillis by Quentin Matsys.<sup>24</sup> Less well known is the case of the Polish humanist poet Johannes Dantiscus, who was not a part of the inner circle of Erasmus but corresponded with him and sent him a portrait medal. After he became bishop of Warmia in 1537, Dantiscus hung a Holbein portrait of Erasmus in his palace. Erasmus in turn kept a bust of Dantiscus in his study.<sup>25</sup> From the Lipsius circle comes the Rubens self-portrait with friends (1606) as well as the more famous portrait of *Four philosophers* (c. 1615) representing the painter, his brother, Woverius and Lipsius himself.<sup>26</sup>

21 G.D. Hobson, 'Et amicorum', *The Library*, 5th series 4 (1949-50) 87-99.

22 Paul Kristeller, *Andrea Mantegna* (Berlin and Leipzig 1902) 489.

23 Vittore Golzio ed., *Rafaello nei documenti* (Città del Vaticano 1936) 162.

24 Lorne Campbell, Margaret M. Philips, H.S. Herbruggen and J.B. Trapp, 'Q. Matsys, Erasmus, P. Gillis and T. More', *Burlington Magazine* 120 (1978) 716-725.

25 Harold B. Segel, *Renaissance Culture in Poland. The Rise of Humanism 1470-1543* (Ithaca 1989) 178.

26 Morford, *Stoics and Neostoics*. For a later period, Enikő Buzási, 'A barátság-motívum térhódítása a 18. századi magyar portréfésésben' (the friendship motif in Hungarian portraits of the eighteenth century), *Különlenyomat a Művészettörténeti Értesítő* 4 (1984) 212-236.



## The Album

However, the most remarkable new institution associated with friendship is surely the literary genre or social institution variously known as the *Album amicorum*, *liber amicorum* or *Hortus amicorum*. More than fifteen hundred surviving examples are known from the sixteenth century alone, hundreds of them now in the British Library.<sup>27</sup> The *album amicorum* was a kind of visitor's book in reverse, in which a traveller, usually a student, would invite famous people he met (such as Luther or Melanchton), or his teachers, or his fellow-students or other friends to write something: a proverb, or verses, or whatever. The custom seems to have begun in the circle of patricians of Augsburg and Nuremberg, spreading to Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Poland and Scotland.<sup>28</sup> A list of albums associated with the Netherlands includes nearly two hundred examples begun before the year 1600.<sup>29</sup>

By 1558, demand was already such that blank albums were being printed, the first one being entitled *Thesaurus amicorum*.<sup>30</sup> Some of these books were produced by professional artists and include portraits (linked to the friendship portrait). They also contained personal devices or *imprese*, symbols with mottoes. It is clear that the albums, although not confined to friends in any strict sense of the term, have much to say about the stylisation of friendship - the phrasing of entries, the pictures of famous friends from the past such as Pylades and Orestes, and so on.<sup>31</sup>

These albums also have much to teach us about friendship networks. There is a cluster of albums from the Netherlands in the later sixteenth century, including those kept by Abraham Ortelius, Otto van Veen, Janus Dousa and the humanist Bonaventure de Smet, known as Vulcanius.<sup>32</sup> These albums include many of the same people, artists (Lucas de Heere, Hubert Goltzius, and Georg Hoefnagel, who painted an allegory of his friendship with J. Rademacher); merchants (including the printer Christophe Plantin), and a number of humanists, including Philip Marnix, Justus Lipsius, and Hugo Grotius. Women occur only rarely, among them Charlotte de Straten and Philip's daughter Marie de

27 Margaret A.E. Nickson, *Early Autograph Albums in the British Museum* (London 1970); Jörg-Ulrich Fechner, *Stammbücher als kulturhistorische Quellen* (Munich 1981); Wolfgang Klose, *Corpus Album Amicorum* (Stuttgart 1980).

28 Johnstone (1924) on three Scots studying abroad.

29 C.L. Heesakkers and Kees Thomassen ed., *Voorlopige lijst van alba amicorum uit de Nederlanden voor 1800* (The Hague 1986).

30 Rosenheim, 'The Album amicorum', 254.

31 J. van den Gheyn ed., *Album amicorum de Otto Venius* (Brussels 1911). The album also shows Abauchas and Gyndanes, and Antiphilus and Demetrius, examples taken from Lucian.

32 The Ortelius album, now in Cambridge, was published in facsimile in Paris in 1970. The Veen album was published in facsimile in 1911 (note 33 above). On Dousa, C.L. Heesakkers, *Janus Dousa and his Friends* (Leiden 1976). On Vulcanius, Alphonse Roersch, 'L'album amicorum de Bonaventure Vulcanius', *Revue du 16e siècle* 14 (1927) 61-76.

Marnix, whose albums are now in the British Library. A careful comparison of these texts would do much to illuminate the history of friendship in the Netherlands, not to mention the history of the republic of letters.

This network was centered in Antwerp but spread beyond the Netherlands, North and South, to include Frenchmen (Jean Dorat, Jean Antoine de Baïf, Hubert Languet, François Hotman), Englishmen (William Camden, John Dee, Daniel Rogers, Thomas Wilson), Italians (Pietro Bizzarri and Piero Ligorio), and Spaniards (Benito Arias Montano and Fadrique Furió Ceriol). The network was largely protestant, but not completely so, as if friendship could surmount differences of belief even in the age of religious wars.<sup>33</sup>

To end with a large question. Why did this particular cultural style of friendship emerge in the sixteenth century? The growing desire to imitate the models of Cicero and Seneca is surely an insufficient explanation for the trend. On the contrary, the fashion for these authors is itself in need of explanation. It is obviously difficult to offer anything more than speculations, but it may be worth trying to link the changes described above to other forms of sociability, whether as models, or substitutes. Among models, I would single out the humanist academy or sodality, originally a relatively informal discussion group. The invisible or 'imagined community' of friends (especially pairs of friends) linked by letters and occasional conviviality may also have offered some kind of substitute for the decline of such groups as the religious confraternities, threatened by both the Protestant and Catholic Reformations; the craft guilds, threatened by economic changes; brothers in arms threatened by new modes of warfare; and finally of youth groups, attacked as sources of disorder by the reformers of popular culture.

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33 Rosenheim, 'The Album amicorum', 280, 286.