

# EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES



**John S. Garrison, *Friendship and Queer Theory in the Renaissance* (New York: Routledge, 2014). xxix+172pp. ISBN: 978 0 4157 1322 1.**

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In *Friendship and Queer Theory in the Renaissance*, John Garrison provides an exploration of friendship in the early modern period that is not only nuanced, but informative, entertaining, and easily extended to other periods. Garrison's text is an excellent contribution to the studies of friendship in the Renaissance, as well as to queer theory and studies of friendship outside of the Renaissance.

In the preface of the text, Garrison builds upon pre-existing studies of friendship by highlighting the evolution of perspectives on friendship over time and throughout literature, attending to economic, social, spatial, temporal, and queer aspects of friendship. An account of classical perspectives on friendship is provided, and is usefully juxtaposed with Garrison's major claims. Garrison calls for scholars to rethink the heteronormative dyadic approaches to the studies of friendship and other social relationships. Each of the five chapters and the afterword of the text could be viewed as models of an alternative approach to analyzing friendships and relationships in literary texts.

The first chapter provides an analysis of friendship in early modern institutions, specifically the Inns of Court. Francis Bacon's *The Masque of Amity* and Richard Edwards's *Damon and Pythias* are central to Garrison's discussion of friendships that extend beyond dyads and the sometimes queer nature of friendship at the Inns of Court. Garrison highlights the ways in which the Inns of Court create an environment in which friendship extends beyond pairs and the roles the aforementioned dramas play in subverting classical perspectives on friendship within the Inns of Court.

Building upon the brief discussion of friendship connections for the purpose of economic benefit, in the second chapter Garrison explores the roles of same-sex friendships in negotiations, particularly those involving marriage, finances, and war. Drawing examples from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, Garrison highlights the ways in which friendships potentially provide economic benefit. The fruits of business are juxtaposed to the fruits of marriage throughout the chapter, emphasizing the ability of friendships to be both productive and reproductive. Of note in this chapter is an examination of Portia and Nerissa's relationship. Garrison draws parallels between the friendships of Portia and Nerissa and of Antonio and Bassanio, demonstrating that friendships between women were in some ways similar to those between men, specifically in this case in terms of negotiations. While the first portion of chapter two lays the groundwork for chapter three, which focuses on same-sex friendships in a shared household, the second portion of chapter two focuses on *Troilus and Cressida* and the role of friends as negotiators in large social groups and at war. The major similarity between the negotiations is that they are done by proxy; beyond that, the similarities end because Achilles and Patroclus, unlike Antonio, Bassanio, and Graziano, are not seeking personal gain.

Chapter three begins with a brief recounting of the previous chapters, a bridge that becomes necessary because the first half of the second chapter connects very nicely with the topic of same-sex friends sharing households, while the latter portion of the second chapter is relatively disconnected. Garrison assesses the benefits and detriments of same-sex friendships in a household, drawing examples from *Arden of Faversham* and Shakespeare and Middleton's *Timon of Athens*. Though both Arden and Timon experience economic gains from the friendships they maintain, Arden's close, and almost restricted, friendship with Franklin leads to Arden's death, and Timon's lack of scrutiny of the friends he keeps leads to his demise. Garrison suggests a reading of the plays that serves as an assessment of 'the opportunities afforded by a group, or chain, of friends and the negative outcomes that occur when that chain is broken, ignored, or inherently weak at the outset' (p. 62), thus highlighting the importance of balanced 'friendship networks' (p. 62). Having too many friendships that are not kempt or that are toxic can be detrimental to a person's economic, social, and/or physical survival, just as having too few close relationships can result in a person struggling to ward off attacks or to get support when needed. Ultimately, the key is to have a strong network of close-knit, reciprocal friendships. Such a network of friendships can extend beyond conventional friendships to include patronage, as discussed in chapter four.

Garrison, in chapter four, takes the discussion of friendship beyond dramas and the portrayals of friendships within those dramas, and considers friendship and patronage as depicted in Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus* and Shakespeare's *Sonnets*. In his evaluation of the poems cited in this chapter, Garrison demonstrates that friendships need not only be dyadic and that there is a connectedness between poets, patrons, friends here and gone, historical figures, and future audiences and readers.

Furthering his case, Garrison investigates the portrayal of friendships in Milton's *Epitaphium Damonis* and *Paradise Lost*. This chapter seems as though it was a vast undertaking because not only is he looking at Milton's depictions of friendships, the non-dyadic nature of these friendships, and queering them, but he is also tracing the evolution of these depictions in Milton's texts. Garrison writes that he 'see[s] group friendship as having a much more substantial and positive role in Milton's ways of imagining human relationships' (p. 89), and he presents a solid case to support this perspective.

The afterword for the text is, in a way, an abbreviated chapter six. Garrison provides an example of the ways in which friendships that were based on love and affection might not have been economically advantageous, citing Prospero's friendless utopia in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Though same-sex friendships are potentially profitable, there are instances in which the profits wane. Closing the text in this way ultimately leaves the text open-ended, but this is not inherently negative. One of Garrison's objectives is to encourage scholars to reconsider the ways in which they approach research on friendship. Garrison begins the conversation and leaves room for others to continue it.

A major strength of Garrison's text is that he highlights connections between depictions of various friendships throughout literature. An example is provided in chapter two, with the consideration of the representations of friendship in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*, Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and various productions of the play. The connections drawn throughout the text are not only relevant to the study being conducted, but demonstrate that there is ample evidence to support Garrison's claims. The recursive nature of the discussion in which Garrison engages does make it difficult to read chapters of the text individually. While this could be frustrating for scholars seeking very specific information from the text, the recursiveness is one facet of the text that increases its accessibility. Though intended for early modern scholars interested in friendship, queer theory, and/or social relationships, the audience is potentially far broader. For example, popular culture scholars might find the book useful in discussions of famous duos like John

Lennon and Paul McCartney, Elton John and Bernie Taupin, Batman and Robin, and the like. John Garrison's *Friendship and Queer Theory in the Renaissance* is an engaging and entertaining read that subverts commonly held notions about friendship and provides the inspiration and tools for scholars to look at friendship in a different, less dyadic, less heteronormative way.