

## **‘*The Friend Comes of Age*’**

**Seminar leader: Will Tosh, Shakespeare’s Globe**

Friday 2 April 4pm EDT (Zoom)

2021 sees the eighteenth anniversary of the posthumous publication of *The Friend*, and twenty years since the death of its author, Alan Bray. This seminar asks us to think about the impact of Bray’s contribution to queer Shakespeare scholarship.

John Garrison, Grinnell College

### **The Sonnet as a Body of Memory**

Much of Alan Bray’s contribution to the history of same-sex relations in *The Friend* involved rendering visible to role of bodily contact between men as an expression of mutual love. This ranged from depictions of kissing, bed sharing, and embracing as public, lived demonstrations of love to the sharing of joint tombs as fantasmatic wishes for reunion after death. This paper extends Bray’s thinking to consider how forms of textual-bodily contact might fit into this archive of expression. At several points, Shakespeare likens his poems to the human body in order to discuss how the addressee or reader might experience the poem. In other instances, he uses the body to describe how he remembers the pleasures that the beloved brings him. These expressions can be as conventional as punning on the term ‘will’ to signify his own body and the experience of desire. At other times, specific body parts recall past pleasures and bring those feelings into the present. In order to understand the intermingling of memory and bodily desire, I draw upon Roland Barthes’ work in *A Lover’s Discourse* and selected essays in *The Rustle of Language* but also recent work by early modern scholars of affect studies. The essay takes as its case studies Sonnets 27, 74, 135, 136, 138, and 147.

Huw Griffiths, The University of Sydney

### **Elegiac Histories**

Years later they found a single baroque pearl which had dropped that night from a white-leaded ear, but they assumed it was a fake, and they put it in the dressing-up box with the rest of their spare jewellery. (Neil Bartlett, *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall* (1990))

*The Friend* is elegiac. The book’s editor, Mark D. Jordan, writes in his prefatory note of the process of putting it together after Alan Bray’s death. He describes his ‘overriding desire’ posthumously to respect Bray’s wishes at the same time as being obliged to reconstruct some aspects of the book’s bibliographic apparatus.

In his own introduction to the book, Bray also navigates the posthumous legacy of a dead friend and scholar, Michel Rey. He acknowledges Rey’s influence over the work: ‘There is much in this book he would not have liked – I can hear his voice now – but let no one be in doubt how much this is his book as well as mine’ (4).

And, of course, through the framework of these paired stories of loss and reconstruction, lies the subject of the book itself: male friends joined together as couples in early modern tombs.

I trace these elegiac histories and historiographies as a response to the period that intervened between the publication of Bray's first book in 1982 and the posthumous publication of *The Friend* in 2002, a period dominated by the AIDS crisis. I read Bray's work alongside other books from the period, including contemporary novels (such as Neil Bartlett's *Ready to Catch Him Should He Fall*) that also construct elegiac histories across and between different periods of time.

Jonathan Shelley, Georgia Institute of Technology

### **Matteo Ricci's *Jiayo Lun* (Essay on Friendship) and The Place of European Renaissance Friendship in China**

This essay examines the Italian Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci's *Jiayo Lun* (Essay on Friendship) (1595) and selections from his recently translated letters to explore the role of friendship in the creation of transnational, cross-cultural relationships in the early modern period. A collection of Western maxims that successfully ingratiated Ricci to the Chinese ruling governance at the time, Ricci's essay reveals how the ideals of friendship were a potent tool for instigating social connection—more potent, it seems, than his own proselytizing. As Ricci would write in his letter to his superior in Rome, 'This Amicitia has earned more good reputation for me and for our Europe than what we have done.' Ricci's essay thus reveals the ways in which friendship could certainly be a rhetorical means—if not rhetorical cover—for advancing underlying (in this case theological) interests. But it also shows how global exchange in the early modern period came to be seen as an opportunity for sharing virtuous ideals and new forms of fellowship. Friendship served as a central organizing frame for Ricci's cross-cultural interactions—a kind of 'public sphere' significance, to use Alan Bray's terms—and friendship's enduring influence in Ricci's world encourages us to think about the occurrences and applications of friendship outside the European continent.

Alan Stewart, Columbia University

### **In the chapel of a Cambridge college: The place of Alan Bray's *The Friend***

*The Friend* famously opens in the chapel of Christ's College, Cambridge, where Bray is shown the seventeenth-century monument, marking the burial in a single tomb of two physicians, Sir John Finch and Sir Thomas Baines: the book is prompted by the question Bray was asked by his guide: 'What do you make of this?' This paper asks what it means that *The Friend* starts in the chapel of a Cambridge college. Bray, who spent much of his career in the Inland Revenue, was at pains to assert his distance from academia, and he insists that the moments that shaped *The Friend* 'have rarely been in the setting of the academic seminar room or the university library'; yet the final decade of his life saw Bray move increasingly in academic circles. This monument—simultaneously in a chapel, one of the religious spaces that Bray prioritizes in his book, and in a university college—might stand for the contradictions of *The Friend*. Here I track

the three memorials Finch wrote for Baines (a manuscript 'Dedication', a lost 'Epetaph' on the Istanbul tomb where Baines's bowels were interred, and the Christ's encomium, penned after Finch's death by the philosopher Henry More), and suggest that it was only in the academic space of a Cambridge college that Finch and Baines could be buried and memorialized together

Robert Stretter, Providence College

### **The Medieval Sworn Brother in Renaissance English Literature**

In *The Friend*, Alan Bray argues that Renaissance friendship 'did not mark any radical discontinuity with the past' (67). As a medievalist with one foot firmly in the early modern period, I too work to bridge the artificial chasm between 'the Middle Ages' and 'the Renaissance'— and yet I am struck by one form of discontinuity that does exist in the history of friendship: the literary legacy of the medieval sworn or 'wed' brother. Stories of sworn brotherhood were very popular in medieval literature, especially as a sub-genre of romance, but they are surprisingly rare in Renaissance literature. When medieval sworn brothers do appear, they have often been transformed into friends on the Aristotelian-Ciceronian model. Despite the structural similarities between brotherhood and classical friendship, they are, I argue, fundamentally different kinds of relationships that need to be examined independently.

For our seminar, I wish to explore the question of why sworn brotherhood failed to transfer directly into Renaissance depictions of friendship, why it had to be reimagined in classical terms, especially if, as Bray insists, both brotherhood and friendship are outgrowths of what he calls 'traditional society'. To begin to answer this question, I plan to examine three instances of medieval 'brothers' turned 'friends'. Two are very well known, the other much less so:

- Edward and Gaveston in Marlowe's *Edward II*
- Palamon and Arcite in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen*
- Alexander and Lodowick, the Renaissance version of Amis and Amiloun (or Ami and Amile), two of the most widely known sworn brothers in medieval literature

While it will not be possible to address so much material thoroughly in a short essay, I think it is instructive to examine these pairs alongside one another, however briefly. I hope to use our seminar as a place to test my ideas before expanding the project. I will suggest that the waning of sworn brotherhood as an idealized relationship in English Renaissance literature parallels the shift away from an oath-based culture at the end of the Middle Ages.

Misha Teramura, University of Toronto

### **Arcite: A Love Story**

Alan Bray reveals an evidentiary problem inherent in the early modern discourse of male intimacy: 'The language of love between men that one sees in the English Renaissance is simply that: a language and a convention. It could be heartfelt, as it could be hollow' (*The Friend*, 67). According to recent criticism, few dramatic texts expose the instability of this language as

clearly as *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Just as Bray found the vows of sword brotherhood in ‘The Knight’s Tale’ to bristle with Chaucerian irony (33), so too critics have read Shakespeare and Fletcher’s dramatic adaptation as a parable about the fragility, artificiality, or impossibility of the humanist ideal of *amicitia*, especially when tested by the realities of erotic attraction. However, readings that track the decay of Palamon and Arcite’s relationship often overlook the lesson of the Jailor’s Daughter: ‘Lord, the difference of men!’ (2.1.54–55). If Bray argues that articulations of the conventional language of love between men could fall anywhere on a ‘spectrum’ of sincerity, I propose that *The Two Noble Kinsmen* can be read as a play about a tragic disparity between points on that spectrum: the breakdown of the relationship is a symptom of two different understandings of what that relationship is. Charting a course between the categories of friendship and sexuality, this paper teases out the neglected queer love story at the heart of the play: Arcite’s enduring love for Palamon.