Seventeenth-Century Friendship Poems and Friendship Discourse:

Summary of M.A. Thesis Presentation

Name Address
Email
Matrikelnummer:

Date: August 4, 2014
I Preliminary Outline of the Thesis

1 Introduction

2 Classical Friendship Theories
   2.1 Plato’s Lysis: Desire for the Good
   2.2 Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics: Reciprocity and Self-Love
   2.3 Cicero’s Laelius de Amicitia: A ‘Guide’ to Friendship Conduct

3 The Concept of Friendship in the Seventeenth Century
   3.1 Renaissance Humanists and the Notion of Friendship (and Love)
      3.1.1 Francis Bacon: Treacherous Patronage, Functional Friends and Love
      3.1.2 Michel de Montaigne: The Superiority of Friendship over Love
   3.2 Practices of Friendship
      3.2.1 Patronage: Affection for Sale?
      3.2.2 The Homoerotic Side of Friendship
   3.3 Spaces of Friendship
      3.3.1 Poetry
      3.3.2 The Court
      3.3.3 The Tavern
      3.3.4 The Country House

4 Friendship in Royalist Poetry
   4.1 Robert Herrick
   4.2 Katherine Philips

5 Conclusion

II Abstract

“We asked one hundred men and women: what does the term ‘friendship’ mean to you?” If there is something that Family Feud taught us, it is probably that surveys will not be answered with universalities applicable to everyone. Just as tastes differ from person to person, the question of one’s own ideal of friendship would certainly lead to one hundred individual answers. Leaving the game show sector and turning towards a more academic approach to the topic, we can assume that what all idea(l)s of friendship have in common is that they trace back to the idealised concept of friendship, also referred to as philia or amicitia, established by classical Greek and Roman humanist tradition as an affective, virtuous relationship usually reserved for men.

Having been a popular topic dealt with in both classical philosophical and poetical writing, friendship was increasingly neglected in the centuries that followed. It was not until the Renaissance that the classical friendship ideal was eventually revived by
Renaissance humanism and found its way back into literary treatments of the subject. Still, as closely as seventeenth-century humanism was connected to ancient doctrine, the concept of friendship, however, underwent a certain change in meaning. Hence, philosophers like Francis Bacon or Michel E. de Montaigne began to de-idealise the classical approach to friendship as being based on virtue, and established their view of friendship as a rather pragmatic and functional relationship between two people (i.e. mainly men).

The aim of this thesis is to examine seventeenth-century friendship theory as well as discourse and to study friendship practices, such as the spaces important to friendship or the interaction of same-sex friends, whose intimacy was often regarded as being on the edge of sodomy. Having dealt with the discourse of friendship, the thesis will further provide case studies of selected poems dealing with and writing about an idealised bond of friendship and its execution. Hence, as a particularly interesting instance of the treatment of friendship poetry of the period, the thesis will have a look at royalist poems written during and after the Civil War by so-called Cavalier poets like Robert Herrick and Katherine Philips. Finally, the thesis will argue that, defeated by the parliamentarians and having lost their king Charles I, Cavalier poets offer us a significant example of the idealisation of friendship, as they not only wrote against the new government, but also tried to maintain the spirit and bond of royalist friendship and cheer each other up through their writings.

III A Short Summary of the Present Fruits of my Thesis (or: What I Have Been Working on So Far)

a) Classical Friendship Theories
To begin with, the first part of the thesis will deal with the classical concept of friendship as established by Plato (Lysis), Aristotle (Nicomachean Ethics) and Cicero (Laelius de Amicitia). According to Plato, friendship equals the desire for the good for one’s own sake. This view originates from his understanding of the foundation of friendship mainly consisting of the material values (i.e. another person’s property and financial goods) and benefits one is able to derive from another person (cf. Hodgson 2003: 34-35). Hence, Plato regards the bond of friendship as a way to be led to virtue through the advantages a friend can offer oneself. In comparison to that, Aristotle, on the other hand, introduces friendship as a virtue itself and thereby emphasises that it is an altruistic bond entered by people who
are aware of their equality and reciprocity of affection, claiming that “a friend is another self” (*NE*, 1166a30-33, trans. Pakaluk 2005: 29). In addition, he differentiates between three different kinds of friendship: the useful, the pleasant and the virtuous friendship, the latter representing the ideal. Cicero’s concept of friendship is in turn strongly based on the Aristotelian ideal of friendship and therefore he more or less shares the same view of the subject. In sum, his understanding of friendship implies a “community of views on all matters human and divine, together with goodwill and affection” (*LDA*, 6.20, trans. Powell 1990: 37). Notwithstanding that all three philosophers established a different concept of friendship, they nevertheless are in agreement about the rarity of it, as it can only exist between good and virtuous men. At the same time they exclude women and bad men from their conception, the first because of the subordinate role of the female and the latter because of the assumption that the bad only seeks for the equally bad and is, hence, not worthy of having friends.

*b) The Seventeenth-Century Concept of Friendship*

**Renaissance Humanism**

After dealing with the roots of the concept of friendship, the thesis will continue with the seventeenth-century treatment of the subject. Many centuries after friendship represented a popular topic dealt with in antiquity, Renaissance humanists took up the subject of friendship again, drawing inspiration from the classical idealisations established by Plato, Aristotle and Cicero. Thus, in choosing the French essayist Michel E. de Montaigne (“De L’Amitié”) and the British philosopher Francis Bacon (“Of Followers and Friends”, “Of Friendship”) as representatives of Renaissance humanist thought, the thesis will examine the connection between the classical and Early Modern friendship notion.

In his essays dealing with the concept of friendship, Bacon establishes a concept, which describes, other than that of Aristotle’s reciprocal view, a rather one-sided and functional approach to friendship by introducing his theory of the so-called ‘three fruits of friendship’ (cf. “Of Friendship”, 391-395). As nourishing as these fruits are supposed to be for a friendship, they can, however, only be enjoyed by one partner of a friendship. The other partner is responsible for serving them to his friend and helping him to advance through his services. Accordingly, the first fruit, the fruit of passion and affection, is responsible for the friend’s state of mental health. The second fruit, the fruit of intellect and rationality, nourishes the friend’s intelligence, while the third fruit is represented by the friend being a personal assistance to his partner in all matters. Consequently, one may
speak of Bacon’s understanding of being one’s friend as being “the instrument of [one’s] partner, a reliable means to pursue one’s interests” (Hodgson 2003: 164).

In contrast to Bacon, Montaigne builds his foundation of friendship on the friends’ mutual communication, as giving advice represents “the chiepest offices of friendship” (trans. Florio 1910: 197). Furthermore, he attaches no value to the utility of the beneficial side of friendship like Bacon does, since to his mind, true friendship and its services are always chosen voluntarily and offered mutually. In general one can say that Montaigne’s approach to friendship draws on that of the classical ideal, as he is also convinced that a friend equals one’s second self as well (cf. ibid.: 203).

Practices of Friendship
Leaving the literary treatment of friendship, the thesis will further deal with examples of the performance of friendship in practice. Hence, patronage will be introduced as a common form of Early Modern friendship, which mainly served to take advantage of a superior person’s wealth and prestige in order to advance oneself socially and financially. This form of friendship (or rather ‘friendship’) was often found between poets and courtly personages. Consequently, patrons enjoyed the poet’s praising verse about his benevolence and grandeur (i.e. his exceptional friendship), and in exchange for the poet’s flattery, they supported their clients with material goods, social prestige and the permission to bear the title of being their friend (cf. Stone 1990: 79; MacFaul 2007: 11).

Another common component of the performance of Early Modern friendship was its emotional and in particular physical expression. Hence, the friends’ embracing or kissing in public, or being each other’s so-called ‘bedfellow’ represented accepted and normal modes of behaviour of an affective friendship. However, as true friendship was said to be found mainly between men and hence represented a homosocial bond where the expression of affection was on the edge of homoeroticism, the friends had to stay in the public sphere in order to not being accused of the sin of sodomy (cf. MacFaul 2007: 17).

Spaces of Friendship
In order to locate seventeenth-century friendship discourse, the thesis will in a next step deal with different spaces in which friendships were made and maintained. Hence, the thesis will argue that poetry, for instance, represents an important space of friendship, even though at first glance it seems to be an admittedly abstract space. However, the notion of
friendship “achieved great popularity through being fictionalised” (Marlow 2003: 4), so that most of the Renaissance friendship discourse indeed took place through the medium of poetry, for example as in the case of patronage. Hence, poetry provided the ideal space for performing and quoting the literary ideal of friendship established by Renaissance humanists like Montaigne and Bacon. In ‘real’ spaces like the tavern, the court or the country house, this friendship ideal was, however, rather devalued and treated casually as the thesis will illustrate in the chapters dealing with the abovementioned locations.

c) Friendship in Royalist Poetry [currently under construction]

In the last part of the thesis, I aim at examining the treatment of friendship in royalist writing. As the abstract has already revealed, the thesis will argue that idealisations of friendship play an essential role in Cavalier poems, as through this medium, the royalist community was able to gather in a space which remained unaffected by the upheavals and consequences of the Civil War. With reference to Hero Chalmers’ claim that to the royalist community the term ‘friendship’ represented a “conjunction of souls irrespective of physical separation” (2004: 72), the thesis will take a look at a selection of poems written by two representatives of Cavalier poetry: Robert Herrick and Katherine Philips. Although the thesis has so far dealt with friendship as a concept only valid for and applicable to the male gender, it is in particular worth dealing with both male and female examples of friendship poetry and to investigate similarities and points of intersection between them (especially because Philips tried to break with the common view that friendship is a good reserved for men only).

IV Works Cited

< http://edok01.tib.uni-hannover.de/edoks/e01dh03/372701175.pdf>