

rative pattern of Middle English romance, the texts that King discusses in the first part of the book tend to drop out of sight while he talks about Ireland and Queen Elizabeth. In general, this is not a bad thing, because King has good observations to make about both subjects. His comments on Radigund, the Amazonian virago of book 5, are a case in point: although students of the poem's historical allegory usually identify her with Mary Stuart, King argues (persuasively, I think) that Radigund functions more effectively as a representation of Elizabeth's emasculating power over her courtiers and deputies. In short, King is a thoughtful reader of Spenser's poetry, even when he is not talking about the poet's debt to his medieval predecessors.

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Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts. Laurie Shannon. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002. Pp. vii+240.

"For thy sweet love rememb' red such wealth brings / That then I scorn to change my state with kings." With this epigraph from Shakespeare's Sonnet 29, *Sovereign Amity* announces its object of study: the early modern association between same-sex friendship and monarchy. "Sovereignty" is the term that Renaissance writers used to describe both the state of idealized friendship and the prerogatives of regal power; the coupling of "sovereign" with "amity" in this book's title makes the connection explicit. According to Shannon, the exaltation of intimate masculine friendship—initially expressed in classical texts and rearticulated by Renaissance political theorists, writers of conduct books, and playwrights—expresses a "fantasy of private agency," of self-possession, that is "calibrated through a figure of regal political power" (p. 9). The monarch, however, is not merely a metaphor for friendship in Shannon's study, for she materializes kingship in order to argue that the literary personage least likely to enjoy the private sovereignty experienced in friendship is the king. As the later chapters of her book demonstrate, the rules of *amicitia* and the rules of proper monarchy conflict; thus, representations of a good king depict him as, despite the presence of counselors and advisers, essentially solitary and friendless.

Because many of the texts Shannon interprets have been, since Laurens Mills's 1937 study *One Soule in Bodies Twain: Friendship in Tudor Literature and Stuart Drama*, part of the masculine friendship canon

(Cicero, Plutarch, Montaigne, Erasmus, Francis Bacon, and Thomas Elyot), it is in mining the connection between amity and sovereignty that Shannon's contribution is most evident.¹ Two critical conversations appear to form the backdrop of her attempt to place "friendship discourses historically in order to assess the . . . local cultural work they do" (p. 2). The first conversation concerns the relationship between friendship and eroticism; the second involves the relation between monarchy and tyranny. Taking her cue from Alan Bray (who analyzed sodomy as the limit case of idealized male friendship) and Jeffrey Masten (who connected male authorial collaboration to literary thematizations of erotic similitude),² Shannon assumes that in this period friendship, eroticism, and love have unstable boundaries and are potentially fungible. In the texts analyzed by Bray and Masten, likeness between men carries a positive valence; its idioms of similitude, parity, reciprocity, mutuality, and equality articulate both the subject's identity and his affective relations to other masculine subjects. To this recognition of the generative effects of the likeness topos, Shannon adds a focus on self-rule, self-disposition, and liberty of speech, seeking in the end to understand the role of amity in promoting a "politics of likeness" (p. 22).

The second tacit context for joining amity to sovereignty is recent scholarship on the meaning and function of early modern monarchy, including work by Rebecca Bushnell and Constance Jordan.³ Shannon emphasizes that the role of the monarch's counselors—both those who flatter him and those who challenge his tyranny—is shaped by friendship discourses. At the same time, "for all its markedly political terminologies," the political efficacy of friendship discourse is limited, for it "offers no comportment or affect to be generalized beyond the pair, no pattern to link all political subjects *to one another*" (p. 18). The private sovereignty of friends is crafted from a "position of nonparticipation in direct forms of institutional governance" (p. 19). The politics of amity remain, precisely, intimate.

1. Laurens J. Mills, *One Soule in Bodies Twain: Friendship in Tudor Literature and Stuart Drama* (Bloomington, Ind.: Principia, 1937).

2. Alan Bray, *Homosexuality in Renaissance England* (London: Gay Men's Press, 1982), and "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England," *History Workshop Journal* 29 (1990): 1–19; Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

3. Rebecca Bushnell, *Tragedies of Tyrants: Political Thought and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990); Constance Jordan, *Shakespeare's Monarchies: Ruler and Subject in the Romances* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997).

Shannon begins by pointing out that in a hierarchical society so segmented by differences in blood, degree, and status, “likeness in both sex and status *is* (the only) political equality in period terms” (p. 3). She layers onto this insight the fact that “friendship’s first figure is the self. Before it can be doubled it is required to be single, that is, autonomous and integral” (p. 30). The rhetoric of amity among such selves aims at attaining the “highest degree of integrity and unsubordinated being” (p. 56), a mode of self-governance that not only forms the apex of individual or private governance but may be “parlayed into consensual governance, a governing with or by someone else in a state of parity” (p. 125). In addition, the frankness and candor on which true friends must rely infuse relations of amity with a unique form of consent.

Shannon’s exploration of “sovereign amity” progresses through individual readings that deploy an analytics of gender, politics, and eroticism. In part 1, “The Sovereign Subject,” a chapter on Elizabeth Cary’s *The Tragedy of Miriam* introduces gender as a salient aspect of sovereign amity by postulating a conceptual coherence between the symbolics of female chastity and the idioms of masculine friendship. Women’s proverbial and de facto exclusion from idealized friendship operates as the context within which Miriam mobilizes her chastity as a form of political resistance to her husband’s tyranny. Cary’s tragedy thus “records under protest the fatal effects of a woman’s attempts to enact a chaste or constant integrity specifically created for males” (p. 79). Although the precise relations between the terms of this argument are a bit vague, they become clearer in the next chapter, a stunning reading of same-sex friendships in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Having introduced via *Miriam* an understanding of chastity as a principle of self-rule, Shannon asserts that Shakespeare and John Fletcher “construct a female voice as the preeminent advocate of a tyranny-resisting, same-sex principle of friendship, a principle of female association that . . . admits sexuality into the friendship script” (p. 95). Shannon perceptively demonstrates that Emilia’s espousal of female autonomy and amity is not only a personal preference, but a political challenge to Theseus’s effort to compel his subjects’ submission. Emilia’s chastity, homoeroticism, and resistance to tyranny are shown to be one and the same.

If amity can “sovereign” subjects, it also can subject monarchs. Part 2, “The Subjected Sovereign,” analyzes kings’ relations to their “favorites” or “minions.” A monarch’s commitment to *amicitia*, Shannon declares, can only produce *mignonnerie*—the term she uses to refer to the scandal of a monarch’s inability to subordinate his desires to the good

of his realm. After examining the conjunction of amity and misrule through several brief readings, Shannon offers Shakespeare's *Henriad* as a reversal of Marlowe's *Edward II*. Despite the differences in Hal's and Edward's relationships to Falstaff and Gaveston, Shannon persuades that the gestures of kinging and unkinging at the core of these plays are enacted through the idiom of friendship. Both plays reveal that "royal estate pre-empts the king's self-disposition in friendship, the precise power represented as the apex of private agency" (p. 13). The ubiquity of references to friendship in *Henry IV* is convincing in itself, incidentally throwing intriguing light on the role of Poins. Yet, one cannot help but feel that Shannon missed an opportunity to enhance and complicate her thesis by ignoring the young king's friendships with Cambridge, Grey, and Scrope in *Henry V*. The repetition of Henry's dismissal of Falstaff in the political execution of his favorites—particularly his bedfellow, Scrope—is an obvious exorcism of friendship's dangers, simultaneously attesting to the necessary loneliness of the successful monarch while alluding, albeit through a hazy past tense, to the difficulty of keeping intimacy at bay.

The final chapter, on the pair of kings whose severed friendship is one of the tragedies of *The Winter's Tale*, cogently demonstrates how misguided is the usual focus on the reproductive heterosexuality of this play. Shannon's exploration of the relationship between friendship, counsel, and harsh but necessary speech illuminates alternative ways of conceptualizing the psychic and social regeneration that critics have seen as central to Shakespearean romances. One benefit of her emphasis on the "shaping power of friendship" (p. 14) is that it renders less normatively heterosexual the proposed betrothal of Camillo and Paulina in the final act, even as it demonstrates just how normative this union of like minds may have been.

Behind Shannon's impressive readings of individual texts is a historical argument about the demise of friendship discourses with the onset of republicanism and the reconstruction of monarchy, as well as a proposal about the prehistory of liberalism and contract theory: "in Renaissance friendship we see certain forms of agency and capacity imagined that would only later be justified by more abstract arguments entitling political subjects to exercise them" (p. 18). Paramount among these capacities are consent and liberty of speech. Nonetheless, early modern figures and idioms of friendship represent "a road not taken in the abandoned intersubjective roots of a narrowed modern individualism" (p. 19). "Modern bureaucracy," Shannon contends, "is Renaissance friendship's great opposite" (p. 225). Although Shannon's references to post-Renaissance political theories are largely gestural,

the gestures are compelling enough to warrant future investigation into friendship's role in constituting political subjects.

Sovereign Amity intervenes as well in the history of sexuality, bringing impressive analytical pressure to bear on the concept of norms. Any given cultural moment, Shannon contends, contains "competing 'normativities'. Disparate but equally 'licit' discourses establishing incompatible 'norms' coexist" (p. 55). More precise than a materialist or historicist recognition of cultural contradiction, Shannon's concept of multiple normativities destabilizes the notion of transgression. For an era in which likeness was central to positive ideas about union, heterosexuality—obviously normative in a certain sense—posed an intellectual and social problem. Coining the term "homonormative" to convey the period's "philosophical preference for likeness or a structure of thinking based on resemblance" (p. 94), Shannon suggests that in the Renaissance "homoeroticism instances this likeness norm, so while the 'eroticism' may, sometimes, be transgressive, the 'homo-' prefix itself describes something commonplace, 'normal,' and even proverbial" (p. 94).

Insofar as male bonds (both erotic and nonerotic) were privileged over heterosexual relations, this bias marks the distance between early modern and modern erotic regimes. Indeed, eroticism, Shannon maintains, "seems not to operate as a device governing meanings in the Renaissance; its presence or absence is not determining in nomenclatures, knowledges, or social practices" (pp. 93–94). Furthermore, "categories of relation and their transgression derive less from erotic designations and more from the status of the parties as like or unlike" (p. 94). These are assertions with which I strongly agree, and I have never seen them so crisply formulated. Nonetheless, Shannon occasionally displays an impulse to use the discourse of friendship or the politics of likeness to trump eroticism, as if eroticism were only an epiphenomenon of the intimate politics that is her focus. Eroticism is not an auxiliary metaphor for either friendship or politics; it does not simply trope their prior exigencies. And neither friendship nor politics possesses a stable signification or ground of meaning. Shannon herself seems aware of this; as her final chapter notes, "friendship and sovereignty are so mutually emblematic in *The Winter's Tale* that it is impossible to say, finally, which allegorizes which" (p. 189). This insight could have productively informed the book as a whole. Indeed, Shannon's success in elucidating the mutually constitutive relations among friendship, politics, and eroticism belies the appropriateness of presumptively subordinating any one of these terms to the status of vehicle or metaphor.

Sovereign Amity is an impressive, thoughtful, at times brilliant study; it advances a provocative argument logically in elegant and incisive prose. If aspects of the exposition are occasionally repetitive (discussions of the king's two bodies, the proverbial nature of the friend-kingdom analogy, and the meaning of "placebo"), these are minor problems in a book that is aptly characterized by two further meanings of amity: good will and sure understanding.

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Drama, Performance and Polity in Pre-Cromwellian Ireland. *Alan J. Fletcher*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000. Pp. ix+520.

Drama, Performance and Polity in Pre-Cromwellian Ireland reads like a scholarly detective story. In the course of the book, Alan J. Fletcher narrates a history of early Irish drama that had been virtually lost to us—at worst, assumed never to have existed and, at best, assumed to be the victim of missing written sources and inaccessible oral sources.

Fletcher tells us early on that these missing and inaccessible sources are formidable but by no means insurmountable obstacles in his search for evidence of dramatic activity in pre-Cromwellian Ireland. What is required is a researcher who is willing to consider evidence that has been largely overlooked either because it is legible only to Celticists or because its relevance to dramatic activity has not always been immediately clear. Fletcher proposes three remedies. First, he makes evidence available to those of us who have not been trained to read Irish or very early Irish texts. Second, by "networking texts that might otherwise be discounted as fictions with ones whose purchase on historical reality is less readily contradicted," he hopes to develop "a reasonable hypothesis . . . about the reality which must lie somewhere behind representation" (p. 7). This technique is particularly crucial in Fletcher's first chapter, where he attempts to piece together evidence of the very earliest Gaelic dramatic activity and is confronted with "diverse genres of the sort that historians have traditionally been very wary of: homilies, saints' lives, sagas, poetry, and the like," and with more reliable genres, like Irish annals, that nonetheless consistently blur the boundaries between the "actual" and the "fabulous" (p. 6). But this technique also persists throughout the book as Fletcher moves easily back and forth between the internal evidence that he derives from dramatic texts and the contextualizing that makes that evidence meaningful to him—a process whose interpretive power is evident when he speculates at length about the possible performance of the Dublin *Visitatio*