

In Britain where rape crisis workers have resisted state control to a greater extent than in the US, often to the detriment of their funding, similar contradictions have arisen. Here too state funding has been shifted to supporting the more politically palatable victim support services and therapeutic initiatives, leaving rape crisis centres severely underresourced and able to provide only a skeleton service. Yet as Matthews shows, accepting state funding inevitably leads to a more accommodating stance. Within this context this book is invaluable in identifying the possibilities of working with the state without 'selling out' or retreating into separatism. It does, however, underline the real conflicts and contradictions that arise both in relation to the focus of the work and the structure of the organization and process of decision-making. In practice, Matthews argues, bureaucracy is necessary in a society where it is so pervasive and where it gave the movement access to resources without which it could no longer function.

Sue Lees

The Usurer's Daughter: Male Friendship and Fictions of Women in Sixteenth-century England

Lorna Hutson

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You can choose your friends, but you can't choose your relations: from a historical perspective, this apparently obvious distinction looks less certain. Until around the seventeenth century 'friends' meant those close to you, whether kin or not, so the contrast drawn in the proverb would be meaningless. Moreover, the notion that friends might be primarily people you *chose*, motivated by a sense of sympathy and common principles, rather than those attached to you by codes of tradition and loyalty, is equally historical; and the sixteenth century in England is a period of transition in this as in so much else. The meaning of friendship, specifically of friendship between men, mutates away from the alliances of a quasi-feudal and militarized nobility, held in place by codes of honour and the exchange of gifts, towards the insecure and speculative alliances of a mobile and educated courtly culture, characterized as freely chosen bonds between like-minded men. Throughout the sixteenth century a stream of literature comments on and participates in this shift, reflecting directly or indirectly on the nature, duties and pleasures of friendship, evoking it as an idealized guiding principle, a solace in a harsh and

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untrustworthy world. The pleasure which the literature insists on is that of the meeting of minds. Sympathy in the fullest sense is identified as the privilege of friendship.

This process of transformation and redefinition is the starting point for Lorna Hutson's wide-ranging and impressive analysis, which engages both with the nature of the humanist reinvention of friendship, and with its consequences for the representation of women in the literature of the period. Her argument moves persuasively across disciplinary boundaries, drawing on economics and anthropology alongside history and literature, investigating legal, religious and didactic writings as well as fiction and drama, encompassing along the way topics such as housekeeping, female chastity and theories of comedy, in addition to her primary subject matter of male friendship. All are drawn together into an account which places women crucially as signs of love and friendship between men, in an extended contest over the nature of masculinity.

This transformation, inevitably, was productive of anxiety; where friendship had once been guaranteed in the definite symbols of the vow and the gift, humanism had a destabilizing impact. On the one hand it scorned and devalued the concrete symbol, regarding the exchange of gifts as unworthy of the educated man, whose love should be guided by sympathy, not by inducement. But at the same time, by displacing the signs of true friendship into speech acts, the humanists gave rise to a whole new set of problems; for the speech act, which was valued the more the greater its rhetorical skill, was also undermined by the uncertainty at the heart of persuasive rhetoric: how can one know whether the words spoken are purely for effect? How is persuasive skill to be distinguished from deceit? For, of course, the high-minded account of friendship as meeting of minds is only part of the story. Friends remained people who did things for you, who had your interests at heart and cared for your credit; and friends might advantageously be won on false pretences. The instability in concepts such as 'interest' and 'credit', crossing the boundaries between economics and personal honour, is not a matter of chance; and women as signs of credit between men are similarly positioned.

Simultaneously, masculinity itself was in the process of redefinition – 'From Errant Knight to Prudent Captain', as Hutson puts it. Humanist writings on domestic economy elaborate a version of the ideal household founded on the contrast and separation of men's and women's activities, governed (of course) by the prudent man. These functioned, Hutson argues, as an intervention into the contemporary debates on economics in the marketplace, and the whole embittered question of the charging of interest – usury – by way of a notion of the good ordering and use of

worldly goods. The need to train a wife in such right use and order serves to justify carefulness: 'the Christian layman is able to transgress the permitted bounds of his worldly activities to the extent that such transgression redefines him as a good husband' (p. 49). The idea of the well-taught and well-governed wife, who looks after her husband's interests, further extends into the sexual sphere: she will conserve his honour and use her value with care, just as she would not waste any other of his goods.

But if the household could thus become the defining space for the relation between the careful wife and her enterprising husband, it was also a space which might be entered and violated under the sign of friendship. Implicit in the system is the possibility of betrayal, not only by the wife, but by the friends who may after all be dangerous. It is this possibility that Hutson sees at work in the stories of the mid sixteenth century which she discusses in the middle part of the book, which she describes as 'a literature featuring men who seem obsessed with the problem of "reading" the probable signs of clandestine sexual activity between their wives and daughters and the male "friends" to whom they risk having given the persuasive edge by having (in friendship) communicated too much' (p. 85). These stories she candidly acknowledges are generally now seen as unreadable, and her success in making them seem readable, or at least comprehensible, is one of the most interesting aspects of the book. It is, she argues, precisely because these tales are attempting to redefine masculinity as persuasion rather than force that the story takes second place to the debates: 'fiction ceases to be solely concerned with feats of chivalry, and begins to incorporate the endless reasoning *pro et contra* of which modern readers despair' (p. 97). Real men, in the humanist version of manhood, don't fight; they make plans, and argue.

The uncertainty about meaning which the process of argument around doubtful possibilities implies is both disturbing and productive for the writer. The last section of the book examines this uncertainty in relation to two of Shakespeare's comedies, *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, following up Hutson's opening proposition that 'there is a very precise correlation between the centrality of women to the fiction and drama of the English Renaissance, and the extent to which that fiction and drama acknowledged its own problematic implication in the highly productive but radically uncertain mediation of friendships resting "wholly in a meeting of minds"' (pp. 8–9). It is, she argues, 'the audience's uncertainty about their sexual intentions and desires' (p. 190) that marks a radical break between the women of Shakespeare's drama and that of the earlier parts of the century, in which women figure as almost invariably already unchaste, fixed in their dramatic function of setting

young men against their fathers. Once again, too, the 'persuasive fiction' addressed to women in a specifically humanist sense offers to fashion them, to mould them textually, and thereby justifies the apparent immorality of the theatre: it cannot be immoral if it persuades women that chastity is good.

This discussion perhaps shows symptoms of researcher's tunnel vision, the condition in which one's chosen subject of research is found in and comes to explain everything in the world: it is difficult to feel that humanist theories of argument and plausibility, however influential, entirely account for the representation of women in a form so rich and diverse as Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. Similarly, at the outset Hutson declares that her reading of the representation of women excludes 'contemporary discourses of sexuality and the psyche' in favour of 'a sixteenth-century socio-economic discourse of friendship', but in fiction and drama that at least appears to be concerned very directly with questions of desire and sexuality, it seems a very large exclusion. To read that the story of the Countess of Celant, a narrative of marriage, several love affairs and murder, 'is not, after all, anything to do with female sexuality', is disconcerting; it is easy enough to accept that it is to do with *more* than that, that female sexuality on its own is too readily taken as a catch-all explanation without regard to historical and cultural change; but surely a reading through contemporary (and sixteenth-century) concerns about sexuality and the psyche may also be productive, though differently. Despite its wide disciplinary range, too, the book's focus can seem unduly limited. Is the process being described specific to England, or part of a more general European humanist enterprise, and if the latter, what are the implications of this for the more culturally specific parts of the argument? Does the omission of poetry from the discussion mark a significant difference, or simply lack of space?

Overall, however, this is a very impressive and interesting book, in both its conceptual scope and its scholarship. It makes some demands on the reader, it is clearly aimed at a specialist readership, able to handle the procession of obscure names and rhetorical concepts. But it is thought-provoking and original work, giving insight into unfamiliar material, and new perspectives on the familiar.

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