

Friendship and Freedom of Speech. Experiments with Life-writing in Fulke Greville's *Life of the Renowned Sir Philip Sidney*

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Introduction

Few writers have enjoyed as complex afterlives as Fulke Greville (1554–1628), courtier and diplomat under Elizabeth I, treasurer of the Exchequer under James I, author of a sonnet-cycle, *Caelica*, several philosophical treatises and two Senecan tragedies. Greville is beyond question the most uncanonical of Elizabethan authors, his fame, considerable during his lifetime, overshadowed by more famous contemporaries like Sidney and Shakespeare. Few people who visit Warwick Castle, the castle rebuilt by Greville during the period of forced retirement from political life do so in pursuit of traces of the man responsible for its reconstruction. Even fewer stop to pause at his tomb in St. Mary's Church. There, directly opposite the splendid Beauchamp chapel with its medieval stained-glass windows, the magnificent fourteenth century bronze effigy of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick, and the garish Renaissance monuments of his descendants, Robert and Ambrose Dudley, in a small, scarcely-lit chapterhouse chapel stands Greville's last testimony to the world: a sarcophagus of solid black marble, under a canopy supported by columns. Like the monument itself, the epitaph stands out from its surroundings through its stark simplicity: *Fulke Grevill, Servant to Queene Elizabeth, concellor to King James and frend to Sir Philip Sidney. Trophaeum peccati*. Where the surrounding monuments pair the commemoration of worldly honours and offices with a calm assurance of salvation without effort or contradiction, Greville's sarcophagus seems to invoke the achievements of a life only to renounce them.



Abbildung 1
Tomb of Fulke Greville in St Mary's Church, Warwick.

Of all the questions the monument confronts us with, the most pertinent is perhaps how we are to understand the pairing of different roles, that on first appearance seem to belong to disjunct, different domains: servant, counsellor, friend. This question lies at the heart of the research project *Writing self and other. The politics of friendship in the work of Fulke Greville*. It argues that the disjunction between the world of politics and the domain of private ethics, which the grand narratives of intellectual history have posited for the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth century, associated with the new languages of politics, Neostoicism and reason of State that supplied the ideological armour of the early modern state is in fact misconstrued.¹ There is a kinship affinity between the early modern reflexions on friendship, and early modern political languages of active citizenship, with its shared emphasis on the need for honest counsel and the individual's moral obligation of speaking with candour. The boundaries between ethics

and politics here show themselves to be permeable, but they were, nevertheless, boundaries. The practice of frank criticism or *parrhesia*, which played an important role in the philosophical praxis of the Hellenistic world, and which was closely associated with the ideal of perfect friendship, needed to be firmly circumscribed before it could be accommodated to the framework provided by the language of counsel.² At the same time, an exchange and

critical engagement with the concepts of friendship did undeniably take place, questioning hackneyed oppositions between ›public‹ and ›private‹ in the historiography of the early modern period.

More fundamentally, as I aim to demonstrate, is that the idea of friendship equipped critical minds like Greville with the concepts with which to engage in an analysis of the origin and function of monarchical authority. Greville scholarship has been hampered by the apparent impossibility of determining Greville's political position. He has variably been described as a defender of the Ancient Constitution, a determined, albeit reluctant supporter of royal absolutism, or alternatively as

1. See for such a reading of the new humanism Tuck 1997, ch. 2; Keohane, 1980, ch. 4, 119–150.
2. For a general introduction to the concept of *parrhesia* in Antiquity, see Foucault 2001b, ch. 4, 89–166. On *parrhesia* and philosophical praxis see Foucault 2001a. Foucault is however less attentive to the religious dimension of *parrhesia* in Christian Antiquity. For this subject see Fitzgerald 1996. On the translation of the notion of *parrhesia*, via the rhetorical figure of *licentia* into the language of counsel of Tudor and Stuart England, see Colclough 2005, 37–76.

a radical, albeit circumspect, critic of monarchical authority.¹ What such arguments fail to take into account is the extent to which Greville's political philosophy extends to an analysis of the origin of political power. While most critics agree on the fact that Greville appears to regard monarchy, imperfect though it may be, as the best form of government in a fallen world, they have failed to acknowledge how the idea of politics as the art of ruling in a fallen world reflects back on monarchy itself.

Elsewhere I have argued how Greville's critique of absolute monarchy derives from a suspicion of the sacralisation of power, rooted in a strongly Calvinist objection to all forms of political idolatry. What I aim to argue here is that the analysis of the role of friendship in Greville's political works allows for the articulating a principle if not of resistance, then at least of freedom and autonomous agency in a context otherwise determined an insistence of obedience and conformity. By bringing to bear the notion of friendship, with its Aristotelian, Ciceronian and Augustinian strands on his analysis of the origin, development and exercise of political power, Greville attempted to address one of the key-problems of political life namely how to ensure obedience without servility, service without self-abasement, in other words, how to achieve a balance between the need for order and man's natural desire for freedom and equality. The question of friendship, as I will argue, was thus directly pertinent to the problem of subjectivity. While one can trace Greville's engagement with these questions in other works, especially in the verse treatise *Of Monarchy*, I will, for present purposes focus on Greville's *Life of the Renowned Sir Philip Sidney*. The *Life*, it can be argued, takes a key position within Greville's oeuvre. It was a memorial to the friend of Greville's youth, whose memory he would continue to honour and cherish, and played an important role in the formation of Sidney's legend. The Sidney it portrayed was Greville's creation, a man of exemplary political and moral virtues, who embodied the highest ideals of Elizabethan England, construed retrospectively as a lost golden age. At the same time the *Life* is also Greville's most personal work, in which autobiography continuously encroaches on biography, and in which Greville repeatedly draws attention to the bond of their friendship, over which time has had no power, and which extends even beyond the grave.

1. See for this first position Herman 2002, 969–1004. For Greville as a supporter of monarchical authority, see Rebholz 1971, 148 f. and Rees 1971, 130–133. For Greville as a critic of the cult of Elizabeth and the monarchical arts of power, see Norbrook [1984] 2002, 1401–1454. Recently, Katrin Röder has analyzed the auctorial strategies of Greville's works to argue that Greville entertains and examines both the arguments in favour of contractualism and those in favour of absolute monarchy, thereby suspending, and it is argued, ironizing their respective truth-claims. While I agree with Röder that Greville uses arguments from different political languages, I do not believe that he does so to achieve an effect of opacity or indeterminacy (Röder 2006, 165–170, compare 235–285).

Using the case study of the *Life* to chart the interplay between friendship as a life experience, and friendship as a virtue that skirts the boundaries between the domains of ethics and politics, the study of friendship in the early modern period can be extended to include something more encompassing than the description of patronage relations, or the analysis of the homoerotic desire haunting much of the descriptions of ideal friendship in the Renaissance. Neither perspective is per sé invalid, yet their explanatory capacity should not be overstretched. To argue that friendship could not function as an ideal according to which individuals attempted to style their actions, because the socio-political framework of friendship was determined by patronage-relationships would amount to the same as denying that individuals could have sincerely held convictions, because of the existence of faction and clientelism.

Philip Sidney and the politics of nostalgia

Fulke Greville was born on October 3, 1554 in Beauchamp Court in Alcester. His father, also named Fulke, was prominent member of the Warwickshire gentry, serving several turns as a Sheriff and Justice of the Peace. He was knighted by Robert Dudley, the Earl of Leicester, in 1566. Through Fulke's paternal grandmother, Elizabeth Willoughby, heiress of Robert Willoughby and *de iure* Baroness Willoughby de Broke, the Grevilles acquired a substantial part of their landed wealth, including thirty two manors in seven counties, as well as their connections to noble families such as the Ferrers, Talbots, Dudleys, and, through them, the Sidneys.² Perhaps at the instigation of Henry Sidney, Philip's father, both boys entered Shrewsbury Grammar School together on October 17, 1564. One of Sidney's books with childlike scribbling in the margin stands as early testimony of their friendship.³ After Shrewsbury their ways parted, with Sidney matriculating at Christ Church, Oxford, and Greville enrolling at Jesus College, Cambridge. Greville left Cambridge without a degree, and made his entry at court, probably some time between 1575 and 1577. Through the intercession of Henry Sidney, he obtained a sinecure at the Council of the Marches of Wales, which for many years would provide the mainstay of his income.

The bond with Sidney was strengthened further by the young men's experiences of the frustrations and setbacks life at court. Both had allied themselves with the faction spearheaded by Leicester and Francis Walsingham, which advocated an offensive anti-Spanish foreign policy, support for the Protestant powers of Europe, and opposed the alliance through marriage of Elizabeth to a Catholic prince. Sidney soon became the glittering

2. Rebholz 1971, 3–5.

3. It reads: »foulke grevill« and, in another hand, »foulke grivill is a good boy witness [illegible hand]«, cited in Duncan-Jones 1991, 30.



Abbildung 2

Philip Sidney's hearse accompanied by his four «deer lovinge frende(s)» as pall-bearers, with Fulke Greville, fourth left. From: Lant, Thomas: «Procession at the Obsequies of Sir Philip Sidney». Engraved by Theodor de Bry, plate 16.

centre of this group, as well the point of orientation for poets and literati seeking patronage, Greville in Sidney's orbit as his client and companion. In 1576 their hopes for a more active pro-Protestant policy seemed to have come real, as Elizabeth sent Sidney on a diplomatic mission to congratulate the emperor Rudolf II on his accession to the throne, giving him tacit permission to solicit the Protestant German about the formation of a defensive league. Greville accompanied Sidney on his European tour, during which he became acquainted of many of the intellectual and political figureheads of international Protestantism, including the Prince of Orange, Philip du Plessis-Mornay, Prince Casimir, brother of the Elector Palatinate, and Hubert Languet.

Yet soon after his return Sidney incurred the anger of the Queen through his opposition against the Alençon-match, leading to his retirement from Court. With the exception of one minor commission in 1579, Greville's hopes for an active role in politics were similarly thwarted. The distrust Elizabeth felt for Sidney seems to have extended to Greville well, and led her to rein in his ambitions, not allowing him to take part in any foreign enterprise, military or diplomatic. In 1585, discontent spilled over into disobedience, as the two men decided to join Drake's expedition to the West Indies. Yet as Drake's ships lay in preparation to take to sea, a messenger of the Queen arrived, commanding Drake to stay his fleet, and a letter ordering Sidney to return to court, »holding in the one hand grace, the other thunder«¹. Shortly afterwards, and probably in response to this desperate endeavour, the Queen finally granted Sidney a chance to fulfil the role for which he had so long waited, appointing him governor of Flushing as deputy

to his uncle Leicester, who had taken up the position of Governor-General of the United Provinces in their struggle against the Spanish king. Greville, again, was forced to stay behind.

The events that were to follow are too well-known to recount in detail. Sidney, whose popularity with the Dutch soon outshone that of his uncle, was injured at the thigh during a skirmish against the Spanish near the town of Zutphen. The wound, hardly life-threatening at first, became gangrenous leading to Sidney's death on the seventeenth of October 1586, at the age of thirty-two. His body was embalmed and transported to England. The outburst of grief caused by Sidney's death, and the flood of funerary poetry and elegies that followed it may appear hard to understand in view of the effective failure of his political career. What Sidney had come to mean in the popular imagination, rather, was the embodiment of an ideal, a mechanism that was later to repeat itself with the Earl of Essex, and, much later, with Henry, the Prince of Wales. Sidney was hailed, in death, as the perfect courtier, the epitome of chivalry, who was at the same time a poet and a Maecenas.² Some of the elegies, indeed, conflate the poet with his creations, addressing themselves to *Astrophil and Stella*, or to Philisides, the Shepherd Knight from the *Arcadia*.

How Greville took the death of his friend we cannot know for certain. Although their friendship may appear to have been predetermined by the demands of local alliance, family interest and court faction, there is no need to doubt that the affection between them, affection for which we have the testimony of several contemporaries, was both sincere and deeply felt. In a

1. Greville 1986, 45. All following references in the text to the *Life of Sir Philip Sidney* will be to the page numbers in Gouws's edition. I have, however, not followed Gouws decision in calling a work which is commonly known as the *Life as A Dedication to Sir Philip Sidney*.

2. Alexander 2006, 56–75.

letter to Archibald Douglas, the Scottish ambassador, we are offered a rare glimpse of Sidney's death as something not quite captured by the word loss:

The only question I now study is whether weeping sorrow or speaking sorrow may most honour his memory that I think death is sorry for. What he was to God, his friends, his country, fame hath told, though his expectation went beyond her. O good my Lord, give me leave to join with you in praising and lamenting him, the name of whose friendship carried me above my own worth, and I fear hath left me to play the ill poet in my own part. Well my Lord, divide me not from him, but love his memory, and me in it.¹

Greville would be forced to play the ill poet in his own part for over forty years to come. Yet he would cherish the memory of his friend with a love that, as has been suggested, grew stronger as the reality of the world in which he lived seemed to become ever more remote from the ideals of his youth.²

Of course, Greville's stake in cultivating the memory of Sidney was not free from more self-seeking motives. As Sidney's fame continued to grow after his death, Greville's reputation of having been one of Sidney's closest friends was as valuable as the ›countenance‹ Sidney had given him during his lifetime.³ In his will, Sidney had bequeathed his books to his two literary comrades in arms, Greville and Edward Dyer, and before leaving on his ill-fated expedition to the Netherlands, he had entrusted the unfinished manuscript of the *New Arcadia* to him. Greville, who was always slightly ambiguous about the *Arcadia*, and regarded it as the least of his friend's achievements, nevertheless took his role as Sidney's literary executor serious enough to see the expanded, unfinished manuscript to the press, which led to a conflict with Sidney's sister Mary, the Countess of Pembroke, who regarded the *Arcadia*, dedicated, after all, to her, as her property, and herself as the guardian of Philip's literary heritage.⁴

Freedom of speech and political dissent

A precise date for the composition of the *Life of the Renowned Sir Philip Sidney* is difficult to establish, yet most biographers agree that its genesis should be placed in the period of Greville's political inactivity, the years between 1610 and 1614. Its initial place would have been in an edition of Greville's juvenilia, including the plays and the sonnet-cycle *Caelica*, where it would take the form of a dedication. But although the work probably circulated in manuscript during Greville's lifetime, a printed edition did not appear until 1651,

when it had been renamed *The life of the Renowned Sr. Philip Sidney. With the true interest of England as it then stood in relation to all forrain princes [...]*⁵. The interest of England refers to Greville's description of the statecraft of Elizabeth I (chapter X–XVII) and perhaps more specifically to those chapters that ascribe to Sidney the formulation of a policy of godly Protestant reason of State (chapter VIII–X). Yet the recasting of the work as a biography, by severing the links between biography, autobiography and history inadvertently distorts the nature of the work.

The *Life*, as Katrin Röder has recently argued, employs generic heterogeneity as a functional strategy. It fuses biography and autobiography, with the narrative voice switching – sometimes within one sentence – from ›he‹ to the autobiographic ›I‹.⁶ Equally remarkable is Greville's seemingly compulsive tendency to reinscribe himself in the story of the life of his friend, speaking either from a privileged position as Sidney's bosom friend, privy to his innermost thoughts, or as a kind of spectral ›witness‹, for example when Sidney's father is claimed to have called his son ›lumen familiae suae‹, something which Greville asserted he heard ›even though I unseen‹. (*Life*, 5) Yet what Röder sees as a literary form arising from the pressures of writing under conditions of censorship, I rather interpret as an attempt to articulate, through the act of commemoration, a voice of frank criticism.

The *Life* opens with uncharacteristic boldness in admitting that it is the difference between the times of his youth and the current age of corruption and degeneration, between what is elsewhere called ›the real and large complexions of those active times and the narrow salves of this effeminate age‹ (*Life*, 7) which has prompted him to return to the memory of Sidney. Greville, choosing the ›safe memory of dead men‹ over the ›doubtful conversation among the living‹, dedicates his work not to a living patron, but to the memory of the deceased Sidney, to whom he acknowledges his debt to be far greater. (*Life*, 3) Within this public recognition of debt or dependence, however, lies Greville's claim to independence:

For my own part, I observed, honoured and loved him so much as, with what caution soever I have passed through my days hitherto among the living, yet in him I challenge a kind of freedom even among the dead. (*Life*, 4)

1. Cited in Rebholz 1971, 74.

2. Ibid., 75 f.

3. Ibid., 75.

4. Alexander 2006, 76–89.

5. *The life of the renowned Sr Philip Sidney. with the true interest of England as it then stood in relation to all forrain princes: and particularly for suppressing the power of Spain stated by him. His principall actions, counsels, designs, and death. Together with a short account of the maxims and policies used by Queen Elizabeth in her government. Written by Sir Fulke Grevil Knight, Lord Brook, a servant to Queen Elizabeth, and his companion & friend* (1652, i.e. 1651). London: Printed for Henry Seile over against St Dunstons Church in Fleet-street.

6. Röder 2006, 97–103 and 103–133.

For all the attention the *Life* has attracted from critics, the frequency in which words like freedom and liberty, and the adjective most commonly associated with them in Greville's idiom, such as 'liberal', 'large' and 'active', feature in it, has gone largely unnoticed, as well as the close association between Sidney's exemplarity and the idea of liberty.

The freedom Greville challenges at the opening of the *Life* is considerable. His biography of Sidney is a portrait in counterpoint to the type of courtier-favourite that had come to dominate the court of James I, and of whom, employing a viscerally literal image of corruption, he asks:

[...] when the pride of flesh and power of favour shall cease in these by death, what then hath time to register, or fame to publish, in these great men's names that will not be offensive and infectious to others; what pen, without blotting, can write the story of their deeds, or what herald blaze their arms without a blemish; and as for their counsels and projects, when they once come to light, shall they not live as noisome and loathsome above ground as their author's carcasses lie in the grave so that the return of such greatness to the world and themselves can be but a private reproach, public ill-example and a fatal scorn to the government they live in? (*Life*, 23)

Likewise, it hardly requires reading between the lines to see in Greville's account of the reign of Elizabeth a trenchant critique of the politics of James I. Whereas James I was known, and criticized, for profligacy, Elizabeth is described as frugal and prudent. Against the (perceived or real) favouritism of James' court, Elizabeth was parsimonious with honours, and did not allow favourites to grow over-mighty. In contrast to James I autocratic tendencies, Elizabeth never sought to enforce legislation or taxation without the agreement of Parliament. In contrast to James' pacifist, pro-Spanish foreign politics, the Queen had maintained a stance of alert wakefulness against Habsburg expansionism, supporting the Dutch, assisting the Huguenots and thwarting its imperialist enterprises in the New World.

That this account of a godly England under a martial Virgin Queen sits uneasily with the facts of Sidney's life and career, the failure of which was in no small amount due to Sidney's desire to steer England further into a course of Protestant interventionism that the Queen deemed desirable, may be clear. At certain point, Greville is, despite himself, forced to admit that Sidney was »greater in himself than in the world«, receiving »no standard at home, because his industry, judgement and affections perchance seemed to great for the cautious wisdoms of little monarchies to be safe in«. (*Life*, 24)

Yet at other incidents which could be interpreted as illustrations of Sidney's failure as a courtier and a politician, such as Sidney's letter against the French match, and the Tennis Court episode, in which Sidney, in full

view of the French delegates, quarrelled with the Earl of Oxford, a supporter of the match, Greville manages adroitly to steer the issue in a way that vindicates his reputation, and indeed enhances it.

Greville gives considerable attention to the letter Sidney – in all likelihood under written on instruction of Leicester and Walsingham – addressed to the Queen, stating the arguments against a marriage against a foreign, Catholic prince.¹ The chapter in the *Life* follow the argument of letter relatively closely, although it gives greater coherence to Sidney's ideas as articulating the principles of a Protestant, anti-Habsburg reason of State, a theme to which he will return in chapter VIII–X. That the Queen hardly took such unsolicited, semi-public advice kindly is well known. John Stubbs, who had dared to bring out a pamphlet which rehearses many of the same arguments that Sidney would formulate in the letter, lost his hand for it.² Sidney's birth, family connections, and the relative courtesy of the letter's tone spared him such a fate, but that he incurred the Queen's disfavour is beyond doubt, even though Greville insists that »howsoever he seemed to stand alone, he stood upright; kept his access to her Majesty as before [...]« (*Life*, 39). This is something Greville completely glosses over. He does not mention Sidney's absence from court, but rather makes it appear as if Sidney's status had increased, rather than diminished through the incident. While Greville acknowledges Elizabeth's magnanimity in not punishing those who offer unwelcome advice, it is Sidney who emerges in full glory:

In this freedom, even while the greatest spirits and estates seemed hoodwinked or blind, and the inferior sort of men made captive by hope, fear or ignorance, did he enjoy the freedom of his thoughts, with all the recreations worthy of them. (*Life*, 38)

This »freedom of thoughts« forms the link between Sidney's frank advice to the Queen, and the Tennis Court incident, which Greville lets follow in its immediate aftermath. In the heady atmosphere of court rivalry, Oxford, at that moment one of the Queen's most powerful favourites, had summarily ordered Sidney to leave the Tennis Court where he and his followers were engaged in a game. Sidney had refused, insults were exchanged, with Oxford calling Sidney a »puppy«, and only the intervention of the Queen had prevented matters from being solved through a duel.

Elizabeth, according to Greville, decided to remind Sidney of »the difference in degree between earls and gentlemen' and the respect inferiors ought to their superiors«. (*Life*, 40) Sidney's reply amounts to a vindica-

1. For this letter, see Sidney: »A Discourse of Syr Ph. S. To the Queenes majesty touching hir marriage with Monsieur«, in: Sidney 1962, 51–60.
2. Duncan-Jones 1991, 161–163.

tion of his personal liberty and integrity, yet one that is connected to a larger vision of the relation between monarch, gentry and nobility. He emphasizes that although Oxford is a powerful lord, he is no lord over him »and therefore the difference of degree between free men could not challenge any other homage than precedency«. (*Life*, 41) He also reminds her how her own father, Henry VIII, had safeguarded the rights of the gentry against the nobility. Thus, Greville concludes:

This constant tenor of truth he took upon him, which, as a chief duty in all creatures – both to themselves and the sovereignty above them – protected this gentleman (though he obeyed not) from the displeasure of his sovereign; wherein he left an authentical precedent to after ages that howsoever tyrants allow no scope, stamp or standard, but there own will, yet with princes there is latitude for subjects to reserve native and legal freedom by paying humble tribute in manner, though not in matter, to them. (*Life*, 41)

This remarkable passage shows that it would be extremely reductive to describe Sidney as has sometimes been done, as »embodying« the Ancient Constitution. The question at stake is, assuredly, one of legal rights, and Sidney is here made to speak, in tones in which one can detect an ever so faint hint of threat, not of the rights of the nobility as a bulwark against the power of the monarch, but of the role of the gentry in checking the aspirations of the grandees, aspirations that could easily be directed against the monarch itself. Yet it also speaks of that elusive, but crucial notion of »native liberty« that also figures in Greville's other political works, like the *Treatise of Monarchy*.

The passage also illustrates that, well before the polarization of the 1620's and 1630's, frank criticism could be articulated in a manner that exceeded the limitations set by the standards of the humanist idea of counsel, with its emphasis on balancing the demands of truth with those of decorum. Here, conversely, it is precisely the *absence* of decorum, which less sympathetic biographers could, and indeed have, construed as an instance of Sidney's pride, which seems to draw attention to Sidney's superior moral stance.¹ The conversation between Sidney and the Queen seems almost a classic example of the parrhesiastic game as analysed by Foucault, in which the truth-speaker's claim is validated through the dangers he or she incurs in criticizing a higher power, whereas the moral authority of that power is in term predicated on its willingness to accept the truth-speaker's criticism.² Sidney's integrity and moral worth is affirmed by the fact that he is risking the Queen's wrath in asserting it, while, in Greville's presentation of it, Elizabeth shows herself a good ruler, and not a tyrant, exactly because she listens to, and accepts Sidney's words.

1. On Sidney's pride and irascibility, see Duncan-Jones 1991, 21–23, 41, 153, 197 f., 259, 269, 272, 274.
2. Foucault 2001b, 12–20.

That Sidney's frankness stems from the »freedom of his thoughts«, and not from a mistaken sense of self-worth or pride we can surmise from the fact that Greville does not even stoop to answer such allegations. Instead, he consistently emphasizes Sidney's »commanding yet equal ways« with all men.

While other contemporary sources give us a glimpse of a young man who, apart from possessing great charm as well as considerable gifts and talents, was also hot-headed and prone to spells of melancholia, Greville presents us with a man in whom the mixture of the four humours that make up the individual character had reached a perfect and stable equilibrium. (*Life*, 5) Yet the purpose of this is not mere idealization. In the economy of Greville's portrait, there is a precise balance between power and kindness, between true worth based on full self-possession and the control over others that flows from natural superiority.

For as Greville argues, anyone who but carefully considers his life and deeds

shall find that he had so sweetly yoked fame and conscience together in a large heart as inequality of worth or place in him could not have been other than humble obedience, even to a petty tyrant of Sicily. Besides, the ingenuity of his nature did ever spread itself so freely abroad as who lives that can truly say he ever did him harm, whereas there be many living that may thankfully acknowledge he did them good? (*Life*, 24–25)

It is Sidney's humanity that Greville emphasizes throughout, calling him a »lover of mankind and goodness« who offered comfort and protection to all those who depended on him, »like Zephyrus, giving life where he blew« (*Life*, 21). It is this yoking together of seemingly opposed values, fame and conscience, superior worth and human kindness, which made Sidney a natural leader of men, who was generally obeyed as quickly as he was loved, and whose commanding power did not arise from »violence or usurpation«, but »by a right and acknowledgement falling into his hands as into a natural centre«. (*Life*, 12)

Kindness, beneficence and protection are of course the offices expected from a friend as well as of a patron. As in so many other accounts of early modern friendship, it is difficult to identify the individual strand of antique philosophy that dominates, so wholly enmeshed were the works antiquity; Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Cicero's *Laelius* and Seneca's *De Beneficiis*, in the early modern philosophy of friendship. Yet what stands out in Greville's account is the extent to which Sidney's beneficence seems universal. Indeed Greville is at pains to emphasize an absence in Sidney of any narrow self-interest, extending his benevolence to all those who appeal to it. As such, it deploys the language of friendship, while drastically re-drawing its boundaries to allow us a vision of a more equal, and at the same time more ordered political world.

Friendship is also, as is well known, the social bond which holds together the heavenly city of Augustine's *City of God*. Augustine's conception of friendship breaks with the classical tradition in so far that it is seen as a gift of God, bringing people together in charity inspired by the Holy Spirit.¹ Yet what is interesting in this context is that Augustine's conception of friendship operates on a personal, social and political level as a harmonizing principle. It does so not by abolishing inequality and the natural order of superiority and subordination, but by making rule and care co-extensive. He articulated this principle most clearly in his description of the household, where those who rule serve those whom they seem to rule, because they rule out of compassion and care.² But the same principle poses limits upon the principle of authority in political society, in which the ruler's power can never obliterate fundamental human equality.³

For those in a position of subordination, friendship transforms the very nature of authority:

Where charity is not present, the command of authority is bitter. But where charity exists, the one who command does so with sweetness and the charity makes the very work to be almost no work at all for the one who is commanded, even though in truth the subject is bound to some task.⁴

A similar vision of charity, friendship and benevolence is found in Greville's conception of the origin of political society, which he however, unlike Augustine, places in a distant and irretrievably lost Golden Age:

There was a tyme before the tymes of story,
When Nature rain'd, in stead of lawes or artes,
And mortall Goddes with men made up the glory
Of one republique, by united hearts
Earth was the common seat, their conversation,
In saving love, and ours in adoration.
(*Treatise of Monarchy*, 1)

Kings and subjects are, it is true, joined »with natures chaines«, but authority does not evolve by simple descending process of subordination, but by a circular motion between ruler and ruled »Both nurst alike with mutual feeding vaynes, / Transcendency of either side unknown«. (*Treatise of Monarchy*, 2) It is this movement of circulation, to which Greville alternatively refers as »commerce« or »conversation«, that distinguishes the just societies of the past from the flawed, corrupt and unstable political institutions of the present. Neither did kingship impinge on man's natural liberty, constraining him to tailor his speech to please

the monarch: »Wordes grewe in hearts, mens hearts were large and free, / Bondage had then not brought in flatterie« (*Treatise of Monarchy*, 16).

Against this foil of a Golden Age in which the rule of kings was co-extensive with the care for their subjects, and subordination did not curtail man's natural liberty, the function of Sidney in the *Life* emerges more clearly. His sway over men's hearts, more than a mere personal charisma, exemplifies that form of natural authority that does not reduce those in its power to base subjectivity, while his frank words and demeanour in respect to his superiors (Oxford and the Queen) is a vindication of that natural liberty which Greville regarded as increasingly rare, if not near extinct, in the corrupt world of the Jacobean court.

Yet the didactic exemplarity of Sidney is troubled. Greville seems unsure to what extent Sidney offers an example that can be followed in what he called »this decrepit age of the world«. Sometimes, he sees the life and deeds of Sidney as setting »a sea-mark raised upon the native coast« which will show the careful reader how to »sail through the straits of true virtue into a calm and spacious ocean of human honour«. (*Life*, 4) Elsewhere, and more often, he sounds more pessimistic, to the extent of describing Sidney's »extraordinary worthiness«, as »fit – as it were by an ostracism – to be divided from us and not incorporated with our corruptions«. (*Life*, 23). Yet, even in uttering that damning verdict on his own times, and indeed in the very same sentence, he utters the wish »that his worth and way may not be fatally buried with him«. (*Life*, 23)

Conclusion

In the period in which Greville worked on the *Life*, he was also making plans for the erection of an elaborate, two-tired funeral monument to Sidney, in which, on the lower, more humble level, his own remains were to be housed after his death. In a letter to his secretary, John Coke, dated 4 September 1615, he discussed the monument in considerable detail, asking Coke to give his opinion on the Latin epitaph he had composed.⁵ Why Greville never brought »Philip's long promysed tomb« to completion is a question which can probably never be answered definitively. Yet in the *Life of the Renowned Sir Philip Sidney*, Greville had erected a monument to a friendship, over which, as he acknowledged, »death hath no power«. It was instrumental in the creation and perpetuation of the Sidney myth. Many of the stories that created the Sidney to which, centuries later, Shelley would pay tribute as »sublimely mild, a Spirit without spot«, like the anecdote of a wounded Sidney

1. Burt 1999, 66.

2. Augustinus 1968, XIX, xxi.

3. Burt 1999, 74.

4. Commentary on the Letter of John to the Parthians, 9.1, quoted in Burt 1999, 74.

5. On this letter, see Farmer 1970, 217–236 and Bray 2003, 47–59. See also Rebholz 1971, 229, 316–318.

giving his drink to a dying soldier with the words »thy need is yet greater than mine«, have their source in Greville's *Life*, rather than in the life of the historical Sidney.¹

Some critics have recently warned that the idea that the book as the monument/tomb in which the friend is at the same time commemorated and buried is in danger of becoming a platitude of historical scholarship.² I believe, however, that we are still far from understanding the rhetoric and philosophy of friendship, either as social praxis, or in its funerary and literary manifestations. One of the problems that hem in our understanding of early modern friendship is the focus on the question of patronage and power, and the shaping power such relations have on the expressions of sexual desire, which have been the object of queer studies for the last two decades. Sometimes, as in the work of Alan Bray, these perspectives have combined beautifully to open a wide panorama of a world in which ties of friendship formed the bedrock of the social world, largely resistant to the changes brought about by the political and religious upheavals of the medieval and early modern periods.

Yet the severing of the praxis of friendship from the domain of political and religious beliefs comes with undeniable drawbacks. It leaves us with an impoverished understanding of the role of friendship in political life, disconnecting politics from ethics, and ethics from lived experience. Questions of what it means to be a subject, crucial to the history of seventeenth century political thought, are divorced from that dimension of individual experience or inwardness which historians are, by and large, happy to leave over to literary specialists. Yet the recent turn towards the role of affect and emotion in early modern history suggest that it is perhaps time for a reappraisal.

Fulke Greville was perhaps to be more right than he could at the time have known when he claimed that Sidney's friendship had lifted him »beyond his own worth«. He was to pursue a career in a political world from which Sidney's ideals seemed to become increasingly remote. He did not only survive his friend, but also the Queen they had both served, as well as her successor, and died as one of the most powerful, richest men in the country. Looking back over a distance of nearly twenty five years, however, he moulded those virtues and qualities he had most loved and admired in his friend; honesty, humanity, goodness and that peculiar

freedom of mind which Greville regarded as the mark of true greatness, into a larger political ideal which created a space for liberty and equality within a monarchical context. Unlike Sidney, Greville's political career was determined by tenacity, caution, and prudence. His own public speeches in parliament are marked by a cautious weighing of arguments pro and contra, and a careful balancing of the rights of both King and Parliament. Yet in giving voice to his long-deceased friend Greville spoke out with complete clarity, vindicating his own critical voice in the freedom among the dead.



Abbildung 3
Fulke Greville (1554–1628).
From: Rebholz 1971, plate 1.

1. »[...] Sidney, as he fought / And as he fell and as he lived and loved / Sublimely mild, a Spirit without spot.« (Shelley 1888, XLV, line 403). Shelley's Adonias, see Shelley, Percy Bysshe (1888): *Adonias*, in: *Prometheus Unbound, with Adonais the Cloud, A Hymn to Intellectual Beauty and an Exhortation*. London: Cassell and Company (= Cassells National Library), 178.
2. See for example Gisèle Mathieu-Castellani, writing about the friendship between Montaigne and La Boétie (Mathieu-Castellani 2004).

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