

Rosalind and Celia

Biblical and Renaissance Ideals of Friendship in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the relationship between Rosalind and Celia from Shakespeare's As You Like It. The study investigates a hitherto undiscovered link between their friendship and that of David and Jonathan from the Bible. Both friendships are analysed in the context of the classical and Renaissance discourse on amicitia perfecta, highlighting the most important features of idealised friendship from Cicero's De Amicitia and Montaigne's essay On Friendship. Furthermore, amicitia perfecta is proposed as a new, alternative framework to understand the relationship of Rosalind and Celia, which is often discussed in the context of homoerotic desire. Finally, the essay emphasises the significance of the fact that the ideal friends presented in Shakespeare's comedy are female in a culture when women were thought to be excluded from, and incapable of, true friendship.

This paper proposes a new link between the friendship of Rosalind and Celia from Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and the one between David and Jonathan from the Bible, which has not yet received sufficient scholarly attention.¹ Most of the interpretations of the drama focus only on the male protagonists, overshadowing the role which the friendship of Rosalind and Celia plays. This is also true in terms of analysing biblical references in the play: apart from identifying shorter allusions to the Bible

1 Shaheen in his seminal work does not mention the parallel with David and Jonathan among the biblical references to the play (214–229), and there is only one brief remark in Northrop Frye's notes to Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde. Euphues Golden Legacie* (1590), which connects Rosalind and Celia with this biblical narrative: "David–Jonathan set-up with the two girls; in Shakespeare Celia just sneaks off with Rosalind, whereas in Lodge that's only a suggested possibility and the king actually banishes both" (Frye 148). I do not argue for any textual borrowing or direct influence but examine these two friendship narratives as cultural parallels, suggesting new avenues for interpretation.

(Shaheen 214–229), larger biblical frameworks applied by critics to interpret *As You Like It* typically centre around brotherly rivalry between Oliver and Orlando, Duke Frederick and Duke Senior, featuring biblical brothers like Esau and Jacob,² while in the case of the two female characters, there is only one model examined: Ruth and Naomi.³ This study discusses similarities between the Rosalind–Celia and David–Jonathan⁴ narratives, and investigates how the concept of ideal friendship, *amicitia perfecta*, born in classical culture and revived in the Renaissance, relates to this Shakespearean friendship and its biblical model.

The first and probably most apparent parallel between the two stories is that in both cases the reigning king or duke is a father of one of the friends and the enemy of the other. The royal child defends his or her friend, confronting his or her own royal father, who in turn calls his child a traitor and reproaches him or her for supporting the friend, to the detriment of his or her own interests. Then he claims that the friend is a rival to his child, and, as such, he or she should be eliminated. Both narratives suggest that the friend seems to be more popular with the people than the king's or duke's child,⁵ which is a threat in terms of future royal succession. In the play, Duke Frederick announces that he banishes Rosalind, which provokes Celia to passionately argue that Rosalind is innocent and they are life-long friends. To this pleading Duke Frederick answers:

She is too subtle for thee, and her smoothness,
Her very silence and her patience
Speak to the people, and they pity her.
Thou art a fool. She robs thee of thy name,

2 See Montrose and Fabiny.

3 See Julie Crawford's analysis in her article "The Place of a Cousin in *As You Like It*."

4 The story of David and Jonathan can be found in the two Books of Samuel in the Old Testament. David, a young shepherd, is taken by King Saul to his court after his victory over the Philistine Goliath. David makes friends with Jonathan, the son of the king. However, Saul becomes jealous of David and starts to persecute him. Although being chosen by God to be the next king, David needs to leave the court and hide from Saul's anger. Jonathan defends him against his father and tries to help him as much as he can. Finally, in a battle against the Philistines both Saul and Jonathan die, and David mourns bitterly over the death of his friend.

5 In the case of David and Jonathan, David's popularity is expressed by the song of his victory over Goliath, which arouses Saul's jealousy (I Sam 18:7–9), thus his fame must have obscured Jonathan's as well. In *As You Like It*, Duke Frederick refers to Rosalind's popularity as a reason for banishing her (1.3.74–79).

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And thou wilt show more bright and seem more virtuous
When she is gone. Then open not thy lips.
Firm and irrevocable is my doom
Which I have passed upon her. She is banished. (1.3.74–81)

In the Bible, Jonathan defends his friend David against the jealous contriving of his father, King Saul. Just like in *As You Like It*, the king answers by pointing out the fact that if the rival were gone, his son would have a great advantage:

Then Saúl was angry with Ionathán, & said vnto him, Thou sonne of the wicked rebellious woman, do not I knowe, that thou hast chosen the sonne of Ishái to thy confusion and to the confusion and shame of thy mother? For as long as the sonne of Ishái liueth vpon the earth, thou shalt not be stablished, nor thy kingdome: wherefore now send and set him vnto me, for he shal surely dye. (I Sam 20:30–31)⁶

In both cases, Jonathan and Celia are popular with the people, but not as popular as David and Rosalind, towards whom even more sympathy is aroused after they are exiled and mistreated by the king.

The connection between the two narratives is further supported by the fact that the friendships are sealed by oaths, which contain the element of ceding the royal power: both Celia and Jonathan promise to give the throne to their friend in the future. This selfless attitude is characteristic of both figures, and both can be associated with the virtue of charity.⁷ Shakespeare's play includes two instances of this kind: the first vow is taken when Celia, daughter of the reigning Duke, expresses her intent to give back the kingdom to Rosalind, the heiress of the lawful, but banished Duke:

6 In this paper, biblical quotations are taken from the Geneva Bible (1560, first edition), because this translation, made by Protestants who fled to Geneva under Queen Mary, was one of the most popular versions read in Shakespeare's time (Rhodes 20).

7 Knowles claims that Celia's name, "heavenly," refers to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, in which the allegorical figure of "Dame Caelia" has three daughters: Fidelity (faith), Speranza (hope), Charissa (charity), alluding to the famous Hymn of Love in I Corinthians 13 (Dusinberre 146n2). I would agree that Celia in the play represents all these characteristics, including charity or love, which is an essential force in the dynamics of the drama. Interestingly, Jonathan has also been associated with charity in the Christian tradition (see note 12 below).

You know my father hath no child but I, nor
 none is like to have; and truly, when he dies, thou
 shalt be his heir, for what he hath taken away from
 thy father perforce, I will render thee again in
 affection. By mine honour I will, and when I break
 that oath, let me turn monster. (1.2.17–22)

The aggressive seizing of power by the brother “perforce” stands in sharp contrast with giving back that power by the quasi-sister “in affection.” Celia’s reference to a “monster” evokes inhuman, unnatural behaviour and beastliness, associated with the breaker of the oath.

Another instance which can be considered an oath can be found in Act 1 Scene 3 (93–102), after Rosalind is banished. Celia refuses to be separated from her friend: “Shall we be sundered? Shall we part, sweet girl? / No, let my father seek another heir” (1.3.95–96). In these lines, Julie Crawford identifies an allusion to the liturgical text of the marriage ceremony in the *Book of Common Prayer* (113): “Those whom God hath joined together, let no man put asunder” (qtd. in Crawford 113). Celia ends her speech with the affirmation: “Say what thou canst, I’ll go along with thee.” (1.3.102), which, as Juliet Dusinberre points out in the Arden Third Series edition of the play (185 n103), echoes the story of Ruth and Naomi: “For whither thou goest, I will go” (1:16). Thus, Celia’s words can be considered as a pledge of loyalty, corroborated by allusions to the marriage liturgy and the most famous female friendship narrative from the Bible (Crawford 113). Crawford, commenting on 1.3.70–71 (“We still have slept together, / Rose at an instant, learned, played, ate together”) suggests that although marriage is alluded to as well, the girls’ relationship can be regarded as sworn sisterhood: “Celia and Rosalind’s bond is thus less marriage-like than a form of sworn kinship that carries a similarly potent social legibility and meaning” (113). Later, she adds: “There is abundant evidence that early modern women’s relationships with one another, much like those between men, were enmeshed in complex webs of avowed kinship” (126). Therefore, it seems that the kind of relationship and vows depicted by Shakespeare reflect contemporary social practices.

In the Book of Samuel, three vows can be detected in the narrative of David and Jonathan: the Geneva Bible (1560) translates them two times as “couenant” (I Sam 18:3, 23: 18) and once as “bonde” (I Sam 20:16). The first one is right after David’s epic victory over Goliath: “Then Ionathán and Dauid made a couenant:

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for he loued him as his owne soule.” (I Sam 18:3). The second covenant is made between them at the New Moon feast (ch. 20): Jonathan promises to inform David about his father’s intentions and secures David’s good will towards his offsprings and kinship, acknowledging him as an equal and potentially more powerful person, whose protection and support is worth asking for (I Sam 20:13–16): “So Ionathán made a bonde with the house of Daud, *saying*, Let the Lord require it at the hands of Dauids enemies. And again Ionathán sware vnto Daud, because he loued him (for he loued him as his owne soule)” (I Sam 20:16–17).

The third oath is taken when David is hiding from Saul in the forest and Jonathan secretly meets him to encourage him. The prince acknowledges David’s rightful claim to the throne (by divine election), and envisions him as the future king, and himself as his loyal subject. After both promises, the two friends swear loyalty to each other again.

And Ionathán Sauls sonne arose and went to Daud into the wood, and comforted him in God, And said vnto him, Feare not: for the hand of Saúl my father shal not finde thee, and thou shalt be King ouer Israel, and I shal be next vnto thee, and also Saúl my father knoweth it. So they twaine made a couenant before the Lord, and Daud did remaine in the wood: but Ionathán went to his house. (I Sam 23:16–18)

Thirdly, the most striking and far-reaching similarity between the two accounts is the portrayal of an exceptionally strong and close friendship, entailing the unity of the two friends, often expressed with language reminiscent of matrimony. In both cases, this has led to speculations about the homoerotic nature of the relationships in question.⁸ My contention is that it is more worthwhile examining these relation-

8 In my paper, I use the term “homoerotic” based on Traub’s rationale: “‘Homoeroticism,’ while somewhat cumbersome and etymologically predicated on gender sameness, conveys a more fluid and contingent sense of erotic affect than either ‘lesbian’ or ‘homosexual’; neither a category of self nor normatively male, homoeroticism retains the necessary strangeness and historical contiguity between early modern and contemporary forms of desire” (16). In the case of *Rosalind and Celia*, the question of homoeroticism has been raised by scholars including Traub (171, 310) and Crawford. According to Traub, female homoerotic desire has been overlooked by critics and contemporary audiences in plays like *As You Like It*, “because the palpable ‘femininity’ of these characters blinds us—and, I suspect, may have blinded many of their contemporaries as well—to the eroticism evident in their language of desire” (182).

ships in the light of the early modern discourse of friendship, which also seems to account for the homoerotic overtones of the Shakespearean texts.

The David and Jonathan narrative has a longer and more complicated tradition of homoerotic interpretation than the Rosalind–Celia relationship; it has received considerable attention lately regarding homoeroticism and homosexuality, both in scholarly circles and in popular culture.⁹ Although it lies outside the scope of this study to investigate the question in more detail, it should be pointed out that it was not until the nineteenth century that David and Jonathan became synonyms for homosexuality (Harding, “Opposite Sex Marriage” 46), thus our contemporary concerns should not be projected onto sixteenth-century (or earlier) readers. Furthermore, most biblical scholars today argue for a non-homoerotic reading of the story, although the two figures, taken out of their context, have become symbols for same-sex love.¹⁰

However, David and Jonathan were regarded quite differently in early modern culture: as biblical examples of perfect friendship. For example, in Daneau Lambert’s treatise on Christian friendship (1579),¹¹ they are cited repeatedly as outstanding examples of this kind of relationship. The author discusses the main characteristics of the ideal Christian *amicitia*, supported by Biblical passages, illustrating almost every point with the help of this friendship. Interestingly, the Latin original, unlike the English translation (1586), puts Jonathan’s name into the subtitle

9 Some commentators, mostly non-professionals, argue for a homoerotic interpretation of the story; some of them claim that David and Jonathan had a sexual kind of relationship (Olyan 7). However, the majority of interpreters, mainly biblical scholars, reject the homoerotic reading, focussing on the close friendship of the heroes in the context of covenant discourse typical of ancient West Asian cultures (Olyan 7). Thus, the relationship of David and Jonathan, as presented in the Bible, is the subject of heated debates between conservative and liberal theologians (Wernik 49–50). As for the Biblical text itself, there is no definitive conclusion in literature whether it implies that David and Jonathan had homoerotic feelings, let alone a sexual relationship with each other. It seems to be rather a question of hermeneutics, highly depending on the interpreter’s views and beliefs on divine inspiration, the unity and consistency of the Biblical text. For a summary of the different standpoints in scholarship, see, for example, Olyan, and the introduction to *The Love of David and Jonathan: Ideology, Text, Reception* by James E. Harding (1–30).

10 This leads Harding to question whether “David and Jonathan are any longer ‘biblical characters’ at all, since they are detached from their ‘original’ biblical context and have ceased to be controlled by it” (Harding 3).

11 Lambert, Daneau. *Tractatus Duo* (1579). The English translation, *True and Christian Friendship* is from 1586.

as well.¹² David and Jonathan were also listed among the classical heroes of friendship, for instance, by Spenser in *The Faerie Queene* (1590), which suggests that they had found their way into the pantheon of classical friends by the sixteenth century. The Spenserian protagonist arrives at the garden of Venus, where, after seeing lovers, he catches sight of “another sort / Of flowers lincked in true hearts consent / Which loued not as these, for like intent, / But on chaste vertue grounded their desire” (Book IV, Canto X, 48–51). David and Jonathan are praised as ideal friends among Hercules and Hylas, Theseus and Pirithous, Pylades and Orestes, Titus and Gesippus, Damon and Pythias (Book IV, Canto X, 55–60). This is not surprising, since their story fits the patterns of *amicitia perfecta* well, and I would also suggest that in the Renaissance their friendship was read in the light of the classical tradition; thus, Biblical ideals of friendship were merged with, or rather, dominated by, classical ideas.

Therefore, it seems that the parallel between Rosalind–Celia and David–Jonathan did not come *ex nihilo*: the latter has been viewed as a model for friendship for centuries. Furthermore, both seem to conform to the rules of an ideal friendship celebrated by humanists, which, in my interpretation, can account for elements implying a marriage-like unity in the text.

When investigating these instances in the context of the early modern *amicitia perfecta* discourse, two pre-eminent texts serve as the basis for inquiry, which have exerted a huge influence on contemporary thinking. The first one is Cicero’s famous treatise entitled *De Amicitia*, which, among other works by the author, formed part of the grammar school curriculum (Gillespie 108). It was very popular in the second half of the sixteenth century, given the large number of printings of the Latin version, but it also reached the English reading public in translation, published in 1481, 1530, 1550, 1562, and 1577 as well (Stretter 348). The other work this analysis relies on is Montaigne’s essay *On Friendship*, because he was the one who most concisely articulated the ideas of *amicitia perfecta* in the sixteenth century, heavily drawing on, and sometimes adding to, Cicero. His essay, which can be regarded as a cornerstone of early modern discourse on *amicitia*, was first published in French in 1580, and in English in Florio’s translation in 1603 (Gillespie 343). Although concrete

12 In the Latin version, the title of the first section is *Ionathan, sive de amicitia vera et Christiana, quae est Charitatis maximus effectus* [*Jonathan, or the true and Christian friendship, which is the greatest result of charity*] (5), in which Jonathan’s friendship is associated according to the Christian tradition with the virtue of charity.

word-by-word textual links cannot be established between their works and *As You Like It*, my contention is that the friendship ideas expressed in them reflect the cultural context in which the David–Jonathan narrative was read and *As You Like It* was written, and thus, it is fruitful to incorporate them into the analysis.¹³

The friendship of David and Jonathan is famously characterised by the unity of souls in the First Book of Samuel: “And when he made an end of speaking vnto Saul, the soule of Ionathán was knit with the soule of Daud, and Ionathán loued him, as his owne soule” (I Sam 18:1). The “knitting of souls” is one of the metaphors in the Hebrew Bible denoting friendship (Ryken et al. 309); however, it seems also to bear a resemblance to one of the most essential features of *amicitia perfecta*: the Platonic idea of the mixing of the souls. “In the amitie I speake of, they entermixe and confound themselves one in the other, with so vniversall a commixture, that they weare out, and can no more finde the seame that hath conjoynd them together” (Montaigne 92). True friendship, according to this tradition, is a harmony of character and thinking, which culminates in a kind of unity of the souls, the friend becoming *alter ipse*, another self. In Montaigne’s famous words, friendship is “no other then one soule in two bodies, according to the fit definition of Aristotle” (Montaigne 94). The biblical element when “the soule of Ionathan was knit with the soule of Daud” (I Sam 18:1) thus does not only signal an exceptionally strong relationship, but it could also have been read in the Renaissance with the platonic blending of souls in mind, which provides a stronger reason for admitting David and Jonathan among exemplary friends.

The friendship of Rosalind and Celia are portrayed in a similar vein. The characters are introduced as two young girls, who grew up together, sharing each other’s life to such an extent that Celia would have followed Rosalind into exile in the past, as she does later in the play. It is important to note that these character traits are mentioned

13 Cicero, as a school text, was most probably known by Shakespeare. Florio’s translation of the *Essais* was published in 1603, later than Shakespeare wrote *As You Like It* (1598) (Dusinberre 1). However, there is a possibility that Shakespeare was familiar with the text: John Florio was part of Shakespeare’s circle of friends and acquaintances, and there may have been other, earlier translations of the *Essais* which have not survived, and Gillespie suggests that Florio’s version “may have been in progress as early as 1598” (343). Nevertheless, Gillespie warns against identifying Montaigne allusions in Shakespeare, claiming that “[o]utside the *Tempest*, Shakespeare’s use of Montaigne as a direct source is a matter of speculation only” (346). Therefore, in this paper Florio’s Montaigne is cited not as a source, but rather as a point of comparison regarding early modern popular concepts of friendship.

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by Charles, who can be regarded as an objective observer, and it is not in his interests to compliment the ladies. Rosalind and Celia are presented as highly similar throughout the play, sharing the same status at the court (1.1.105–106). They only differ in hair colour: Rosalind is fair-haired, while Celia is brown (4.3.83–85). Rosalind is claimed to be “more than common tall” (1.3.112); however, there are some contradictions in the drama’s text concerning the girls’ height (177n162). In terms of personality, Rosalind seems to be more active and outspoken than Celia. Apart from these minor differences, their depiction resonates with classical friendship ideals when the friend functions as *alter ipse*, another self of equal status and qualities.

OLIVER Can you tell if Rosalind, the Duke’s daughter, be banished with her father?

CHARLES O no; for the Duke’s daughter, her cousin, so loves her, being ever from their cradles bred together, that she would have followed her exile or have died to stay behind her. She is at the court and no less beloved of her uncle than his own daughter, and never two ladies loved as they do. (1.1.100–107)

The closing remark highlights the strong and affectionate nature of their friendship; as Crawford puts it, “[f]rom the outset, then, Celia and Rosalind are identified not only as cousins—a term, like ‘friend,’ that encompasses a wide range of relationships—but also as being *in excess* of that nomination” (105). The kind of hyperbolic language used by Charles, singling out the friendship in question as unique, exceptionally close, and unprecedented, is a conventional feature in the *amicitia perfecta* tradition, and should not be taken literally as a sign of homoeroticism. According to Cicero and Montaigne, a perfect friendship is hard to find, if it can be found at all. The authors emphasise how their friendship (Laelius and Africanus, Montaigne and Étienne de la Boétie) excels others, in terms of rarity and unity as well. In early modern friendship discourse, hyperbolic phrases describing the friendship such as “truely a man shall not commonly heare of the like” (Montaigne 90), were a common tool to elevate the friendship in question to the level of *amicitia perfecta*.

The friends’ unity involves a certain interchangeability, and thus, sharing families as well. For instance, after Jonathan’s death, David takes care of his lame child, Mephiboshet (I Sam 9). In Shakespeare, Celia encourages Rosalind to be happy

for her sake and to assume her own role as Duke Frederick's daughter: as the friend is viewed as another self, identifying and treating the friend's family as one's own comes naturally (1.2.8–16). The first line Celia speaks sums up her endeavours: "I pray thee, Rosalind, sweet my coz, be merry" (1.2.1). Crawford reads this passage as indicative of their homoerotic relationship: she cites Masten according to whom "sweet" carries homoerotic overtones, and argues that "coz" or "cousin" "carries a similar erotic valence" (106). However, later she asserts that cousin in early modern times meant "next of kin" or "an intimate more generally" (107), and had several layers of meaning ranging from "familial, erotic, economic resonances" (108). To my mind, this expression aptly illustrates the ambiguities inherent in the discourses of *amicitia*, illustrating the thin line between the homosocial and the homoerotic. While being potentially homoerotic, its meaning is not confined to this interpretation. In addition, in many cases, cousin only denoted "an imprecise degree of kinship" (Donno 62n4), as that of Sir Toby and Olivia in *Twelfth Night*.

When Celia defends Rosalind against her father, she also claims their unity and inseparability in ways which can be read as homoerotic, but also as an example for the perfect unity of the ideal friends.

I was too young that time to value her,
But now I know her. If she be a traitor,
Why, so am I. We still have slept together,
Rose at an instant, learned, played, ate together,
And whereso'er we went, like Juno's swans,
Still we went coupled and inseparable. (1.3.68–73)

Celia completely identifies herself with her friend, who is another self, according to classical theory, and thus requires that she be treated the same way as Rosalind. In her speech, she recalls their common past, childhood memories, in very similar terms as Helena in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Dusinberre 183n68).¹⁴

The image expressing the harmony of the girls is that of "Juno's swans" (1.3.72), which, according to some scholars, "yokes the goddesses of sexuality and marriage into one powerful image of avowed same-sex love" (DiGangi qtd. in Crawford 113; see

14 "So we grew together / Like to a double cherry, seeming parted, / But yet an union in partition, / Two lovely berries moulded on one stem; / So with two seeming bodies but one heart" (3.2.208–210). Here Helena also echoes the "one soule in two bodies" (Montaigne 93) theory.

also Traub 171). In mythology, Venus' chariot is pulled by swans (Dusinberre 183n72); if the phrase were about her swans, it would more obviously refer to sexual love. However, Juno was the goddess of marriage, and not always a very positive figure of ancient mythology; for the girls, and especially for Celia, who utters this sentence, the institution and thus the goddess of marriage probably was not the most positive one either as it threatened their unity as friends. I would suggest that the image might focus more on the unity and inseparability of the two swans, whether they be Juno's or Venus', than the sexual/non-sexual or marriage-like aspects of the girls' relationship, while bringing together the two goddesses whose "reconciliation . . . was part of Elizabeth's iconography" (Dusinberre, 183n72).

Another passage illustrates that marriage was thought to be inferior to the ideal friendship in the *amicita perfecta* discourse, thus it would not have been a reasonable framework to understand the relationships in question: David's lament over Jonathan's death in the opening chapter of Samuel ("Wo is me for thee, my brother Ionathán: very kinde hast thou bene vnto me: thy loue to me was wonderful, passing the loue of women" [II Sam 1:26]). Before examining the implied comparison with opposite-sex love or marriage, the term "brother" deserves to be highlighted. Calling a friend a brother is not a surprising metaphor, and it must have been read as a commonplace in early modern England, where the notion of sworn brotherhood was familiar (Simonkay 159). Similarly, the female friendship in *As You Like It* is compared to a relationship between siblings.

The other is daughter to the banished Duke,
 And here detained by her usurping uncle
 To keep his daughter company, whose loves
 Are *dearer than the natural bond of sisters*. (1.2.262–265, emphasis added)

Although Rosalind and Celia are not sisters by birth (only cousins), they still have a stronger and closer relationship that might only be expected from siblings. "Dearer than . . . natural" does not refer to an "unnatural" quality of their relationship, but it denotes their kind attitude towards each other, their friendship being closer than kinship ties between sisters in general.¹⁵ This passage also emphasises the con-

15 See Traub: "Despite the fact that his words imply that their love is more dear than is natural, his tone is admiring, and presumably no one would have raised an eyebrow" (310). However, the passage does not necessarily imply homoeroticism if we take into consideration the contemporary

trast between more-than-sisterly love and brotherly rivalry in the play, including the “usurping uncle” and the “banished Duke,” but also the bitter conflict between Oliver and Orlando. Conceptualising the friend as a brother or sister is inherent in other discourses of friendship as well, as it had been shown in the David–Jonathan narrative, together with the hyperbolic addition: “dearer than” (1.2.265). Crawford also points at a biblical passage, Proverbs 18, 24 where the two relationships are contrasted: “A man that hathe friends, ought to shew him self friendly: for a friend is nerer then a brother” (105n18).

However, ranking the David–Jonathan relationship higher than “the loue of women” (II Sam 1:26) is one of the hot points nowadays in theological debates concerning homoerotic relationships.¹⁶ It is essential to take into consideration that sixteenth-century interpretations of the passage do not share our postmodern concerns. The marginal gloss of the Geneva Bible, for example, explains to the contemporary reader that here David speaks about the love of women “[e]ther towarde their housbandes, or their children” (136), implying that women are not capable of the kind of love David shares with Jonathan.

Apart from implying women’s inferiority, the debated phrase in question also contrasts “the loue of women” (II Sam 1:26) with friendship, which is a typical feature of the early modern *amicitia perfecta* discourse as well. Montaigne explains why the ideal friendship between two men should be regarded as superior to love and marriage. Although love between men and women is based on choice, as opposed to family ties, it is not as balanced and stable as love in friendship, and it has serious drawbacks as well.¹⁷ Furthermore, love grows while it is fuelled by desire, but

meaning of the word “natural.” According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “natural” has a meaning of “feeling or exhibiting natural kindness, affection, or gratitude . . . having natural feeling” (244), which is often linked to family ties: natural behaviour implies the right attitude towards one’s relatives. For example, in *King Lear*, Gloucester calls Edmund a “loyal and natural boy” (2.1.83), when he is deceived into believing that Edmund had discovered Edgar’s murderous plans against him. Lear refers to his own wicked daughters as “unnatural hags” (2.4.271).

16 See for example Olyan’s study, “Surpassing the Love of Women”; for a short summary of the arguments of both sides, see Wernik (54–55); for the main problems with the interpretation of the passage, see Harding (44–45). The well-known scholar and professor of Hebrew, Robert Alter in his recent commentary on the Old Testament dismisses the homoerotic interpretation of the passage (311).

17 “Hir fire, I confesse it . . . to be more active, more fervent, and more sharpe. But it is a rash and wavering fire, waving and diverse: the fire of an ague subject to fittes and stints, and that hath but slender hold-fast of us. In true friendship, it is a generall & vniversall heate, and equally tempered, a constant and settled heate, all pleasure and smoothnes, that hath no pricking or stinging in it,

when it is realised, “having a corporall end” (91), it loses its intensity. As opposed to the “fleshly” sexual desire, friendship is spiritual. “On the other side, friendship is enjoyed according as it is desired, it is neither bredde, nor nourished, nor encreaseth but in jovissance, as being spirituall, and the mind being refined by use and custome” (91).

Furthermore, marriage cannot compete with friendship, because it is a bargain: “it is a covenant which hath nothing free but the entrance, the continuance beeing forced and constrained, depending else-where then from our will, and a match ordinarily concluded to other ends” (Montaigne 91). In addition, by assuming women’s inferiority, it can be inferred from both Cicero and Montaigne that in marriage the two parties are not equal, thus true friendship cannot develop between them. In contrast, friendship is presented as the utmost good in life, and the best kind of relationship one can have, and as such, it can be an example for married couples, who are yoked together in a less enjoyable and noble way. Montaigne, for example, mentions that gift-giving between husband and wife is prohibited by law “to honour marriage with some imaginary resemblance of this divine bond” (141). Gift-giving in friendship is not conceivable, since friends share everything; in marriage it is also forbidden, in order to render this institution more similar to a higher-level relationship, true friendship. The same contrast can be found in religious texts as well. For example, Henry Smith, “the Silver-tongued Preacher,” in his work entitled *A preparative to marriage* (1591) ends his admonitions, exhortations, and catalogue of the duties of husband and wife with the blessing: “And now the Lord Iesus in whom ye are contracted, knit your hearts together, that ye may love one another like David and Ionathan” (89). Here the preacher clearly places friendship and its biblical manifestation, David and Jonathan as a model for the to-be-married couple, drawing on the biblical motif of the “knitting of souls,” indicating the source (I Samuel 18:1) on the margin. Friendship, associated with spiritual unity, harmony, and equality, is presented here as superior to a common female–male relationship, often characterised by inequality and strife.

This hierarchy of relationships is important to consider when analysing passages from *As You Like It* which potentially hint at a marriage-like or homoerotic relationship between Rosalind and Celia. For instance, when her friend is exiled by the Duke, Celia claims that by banishing Rosalind, her father banished herself as well, and she

which the more it is in lustfull love, the more is it but a ranging and mad desire in following that which flies vs” (91).

stresses again their unity, evoking the marriage ceremony from the *Book of Common Prayer* and the story of Ruth and Naomi (Crawford 112–119). Although the vows of Ruth and Naomi are frequently quoted by proponents of same-sex marriage nowadays, it should be kept in mind that holding up friendship as an example for spiritual unity for (to-be-)married couples was in line with early modern thought, as it has been shown. Thus, references to Ruth and Naomi, just like in Henry Smith’s sermon, did not carry the connotations of same-sex love (let alone marriage), beyond the—often blurry—limits of *amicitia*.

The same is true for handling the girls’ claims and acts of showing an extraordinary unity and constant affirmation of parity in general. Crawford highlights several times how they try to balance new, opposite-sex relationships, especially that of Rosalind and Orlando, with the existing old one, the avowed kinship they have with each other, which seems to be recognized both socially and legally (110–112). Considering that *amicitia* was thought to be the best and most enduring form of relationship, it comes as no surprise that the girls want to protect it. Crawford also indicates that although commentators usually interpret the passages when Celia warns Rosalind against falling in love as her unrequited love for Rosalind, she is in fact “working in the service of female cousinship and female chastity more broadly” (109).

Crawford comments on the marriage scene at the end of the play as well, agreeing with Jeffrey Masten that “scholarly editions of *As You Like It* are particularly interventionist on behalf of heterosexuality” (123). Crawford cites an example: editors tend to insert names in the speech prefix to Hymen’s line “You and you are heart in heart” (5.4.130), while in the First Folio there are no names specified. Crawford suggests that instead of claiming that it refers to Celia and Oliver (like the Bedford edition) or to Rosalind and Orlando (like the Arden edition), editors should leave the question open, because it may as well refer to Rosalind and Celia, whose marriage would be just as “thinkable and even” (123).

This reference to a possibly equal marriage is not applicable in the case of Rosalind and Celia if we accept that they are already bound together by an oath and have been “inseparable” (1.3.72) throughout the whole play. Although marriage is the comedic ending of the play, facilitated by a *deus ex machina*, it should not be forgotten that it was considered a different, lower quality kind of relationship than *amicitia perfecta*. Thus, for the two girls, the ideal friends, marriage is not a relevant institution; it would be superfluous and would degrade their connection, according to the rhetorics of *amicitia perfecta*. However, the comedy does present

marriage in a positive manner, in harmony with the genre expectations, but ensures that Rosalind and Celia can continue their relationship. Crawford highlights several times that “if, as Stewart points out, the humanist *amicitia* story features men who resolve their conflict by marrying sisters, *As You Like It* takes a similar tack for women; in marrying brothers, Celia and Rosalind effect an outcome, not unlike that in the Book of Ruth, that ensures their continued kinship and the integrity and security of their inheritance” (121).

Thus, Crawford’s frequent emphasis on the balance between the relationships (opposite-sex and same-sex ones) and on the inseparable unity of the girls suggests a stronger homoerotic reading (e.g. 122; par. 2). If the rhetoric of unity, so typical of *amicitia perfecta* is taken into consideration, the homoerotic overtone becomes only a possibility—one that cannot be excluded, but is not necessarily the only valid way of interpretation. The use of superlatives or exaggerating terms like “never two ladies loved as they do” (1.1.106–107), stressing the extraordinary and unique nature of their relationship, the use of language evocative of marriage, emphasizing the unity of the two people, are all characteristic of the humanist friendship discourse. The spiritual blending of the two people, presenting friendship as more noble than “fleshly” marriage, supports this discourse of *amicitia* and often balances on the thin line between what is considered homoerotic (or even homosexual in today’s terms)¹⁸ and what is not. The story of David and Jonathan, regarded through the lens of classical learning, fit this pattern really well.

Considering all this, I would suggest a paradigm shift: instead of homoerotic desire, *amicitia perfecta* seems to be a more appropriate framework which accounts for potentially homoerotic resonances in the play. This kind of reading preserves an openness to a homoerotic reading, but only to such an extent that this kind of ambiguity is inherent in the *amicitia perfecta* tradition.

As it has been shown, the friendship of Rosalind and Celia, just like its biblical model, is presented in similarly ideal and lofty terms in Shakespeare’s drama. However, there are some noteworthy differences between the two narratives. Firstly, the Biblical one ends tragically, with the death of Jonathan, whereas the Shakespearean friendship is put in a comic setting. Furthermore, while David and Jonathan are separated by death, by marrying brothers, the two ladies’ friendship is strengthened (Crawford 102).

18 Homosexuality as such did not exist as a separate concept in the sixteenth century (Traub 16).

Another, more intriguing difference is related to gender: unlike David and Jonathan and the classical heroes of friendship, Shakespeare depicts a female friendship, which, according to the *amicitia perfecta* tradition, cannot exist. Early modern discourses of friendship, based on the classical tradition, held that women were not capable of having an ideal friendship at all, lacking moral and mental means to form this kind of relationship. According to Cicero, friendship is not possible between people who are in need of help or lack independence, because it would be an asymmetrical relationship, and it would not be desired for itself. Cicero argues that if friendship were for defence and help, “women would seek the support of friendship more than men do, the poor more than the rich, the unfortunate more than those who seem happy” (37; caput 13).¹⁹ Consequently, it becomes dubious whether women can partake in *amicitia perfecta* at all. Montaigne gives an unambiguous answer to this question; however, he supports his argument against female friendship differently, implying that women lack the mental capacity and endurance needed for friendship, compared to men.²⁰ Thus, women are “by ancient schooles rejected” (92) from the circle of friends, which seems disconcerting and unjust for the twenty-first-century reader. Nevertheless, Shakespeare seems to have a different opinion and presents this friendship following the rules of *amicitia perfecta*, emphasising the perfect unity of the female protagonists.

Robert Stretter argues that in early modern England there were two trends concerning dramas presenting friendships: they were either pedagogical, moralising, and dry like Richard Edwards’ *Damon and Pythias* (ca. 1564), or they criticised and ridiculed the concept of *amicitia perfecta* as too idealised by representing the discrepancy between ideal and flesh-and-blood friends (346).²¹ Shakespeare’s engaging green-world comedy certainly does not fit the first category, while it might be worth considering whether his play presents friendship as a twist on classical ideas.

In my view, representing the ideals of *amicitia perfecta* by female friends in a cultural context where discourses of the true male friendship were predominant might

19 Here Cicero uses the word *mulierculae* for women, which is a diminutive form, showing contempt towards the status of women (37n2).

20 “Seeing (to speake truly) that the ordinary sufficiency of women cannot answer this conference and communication, the nurse of this sacred bond: nor seeme their minds strong enough to endure the pulling of a knot so hard, so fast, and durable” (91).

21 See Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentleman of Verona*, George Peele’s *The Old Wives Tale*, Beaumont and Fletcher’s *The Coxcomb* (listed and analysed in Stretter 345, 350–351).

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be a manifestation of a comic feature, “the world turned upside down.” In *As You Like It*, male and female stereotypes and conventions of the era are turned “upside down”: Rosalind and Celia, the female friends are allowed to play a key role in the dynamics of the drama, actively managing their own lives, while male protagonists like Orlando or the melancholy Jaques are often passive, only lamenting their fate. It is Rosalind who pulls the strings in the forest of Arden, and by the end, she is the one who “makes things even” (cf. 5.4.107). Apparently, Hymen only gives his blessing, because it would be inappropriate to have everything resolved by the female protagonist. Celia is also actively involved in the plot, although not as much as Rosalind, but she is the one who supports and encourages her all the way, and after all, it is her idea to flee to the forest of Arden. Setting the ideal female friends “whose loves are dearer than the natural bonds of sisters” (1.2.265) against two pairs of real brothers who hate each other provides an even sharper contrast. Therefore, in the world of the comedy, the features traditionally reserved only for male characters, like being the architect of one’s own fortune, manipulating events, and having an enduring, mutual, “perfect” friendship seem to be bestowed upon women.

In conclusion, the friendship of Rosalind and Celia seem to be modelled on the David–Jonathan narrative, which sheds new light on the interpretation of *As You Like It*. Both relationships can be better understood in the cultural context of the era when the classical notion of *amicitia perfecta* was revived and celebrated. David and Jonathan were regarded as embodiments of classical friendship; thus, it is probable that their story was read through the lenses of the Ciceronian friendship tradition; Rosalind and Celia also seem to fit the same pattern. In terms of homoeroticism, it is worth considering reframing our questions, and focusing on the heroines’ *amicitia*: the rhetoric of contemporary friendship discourse can account for those elements that are regarded as homoerotic by some scholars. In addition, the relationship of Rosalind and Celia is also an interesting twist on the original model, since they represent female friendship, which, according to contemporary theories, was not recognized at all: this can be viewed as a comic tool, which turns the usual roles upside down.

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