

Renaissance and Reformation
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De Smet, Ingrid A. R., and Paul White, eds. Sodalitas litteratorum. Le compagnonnage littéraire néo-latin et française à la Renaissance. Études à la mémoire de / Studies in memory of Philip Ford

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De Smet, Ingrid A. R., and Paul White, eds.

Sodalitas litteratorum. Le compagnonnage littéraire néo-latin et française à la Renaissance. Études à la mémoire de / Studies in memory of Philip Ford.

Geneva: Droz, 2019. Pp. 318 + 6 b/w ill. ISBN 978-2-600-05945-9 (paperback) US\$67.50.

The editors of this collective volume, Ingrid De Smet and Paul White, trace the use of the Latin term *sodalitas* back to Cicero and note how the term carries the concrete sense of “society” or “club” as well as the abstract sense of “fellowship, community and friendship.” Fittingly, the editors have seized hold of this term as a presiding concept for their edition honouring the work, influence, and mentorship of the late scholar and professor Philip Ford. In this volume, scholars from Britain, France, and Switzerland who knew Ford come together in a modern performance of *sodalitas*, jointly crafting a collection of scholarly work that is also a eulogy for their departed friend and colleague. The volume opens with a (neo-)Greek elegy composed and translated into neo-Latin and English by Stephen Fennel; it continues with fourteen brief essays in French and English; and it closes with a final, Latin elegy in honour of Ford, written by David Money. The international, multilingual community constructed in the space of this edition at once resurrects the ancient concept of *sodalitas* and reanimates the humanist model of Renaissance literary and print culture.

The echoes of the older humanism could not be more appropriate, as the essays of the volume examine how early modern writers, editors, and printers used their creations and publications to establish literary networks and circles. The contributors Sylvie Laigneau-Fontaine and Andrew W. Taylor, for example, examine how a group of neo-Latin and French poets formed a literary community centred around Lyon (the so-called *sodalitium Lugdunense*) by dedicating poems to each other, by exchanging poetry, and by translating one another’s work. These poetic exchanges find a parallel in the exchange of books discussed in Max Engammare’s contribution. Engammare recalls how the reformed writers Calvin, Bullinger, and Bèze sent each other copies of their own books as soon as they were published, often together with a personal letter. This practice not only served the spread of writings and doctrines among the new confession but also contributed to the creation and solidification of bonds among its members. The bonds forged through such exchanges of books and poems are suggestive of a form of *sodalitas* restricted to men and to members

of the elite. Adrian Armstrong, in his essay on the collection of epitaphs composed and printed in honour of Louise de Savoie, addresses this question of membership directly, raising the issue of gender performance and male bonding—a question that is also taken up in Fennel’s discussion of Alessandra Scala. As Armstrong explains, at stake in these texts is whether the men writing about the French regent do so to affirm their enduring bond to the female object or to reinforce their social bonds with one another.

The issue of male bonds and identity construction also preoccupied Ford. In a posthumous essay, appended to the present volume, “Flirting with Boys: Sexual Ambiguity in Ronsard’s Narrative Poetry,” Ford challenges the overly hetero-normative view that sixteenth-century literary circles were exclusively male gatherings constructed at the expense of female objects. In a series of close readings, Ford analyzes a number of blazons of male bodies, revealing how such blazons elicit a gaze that destabilizes the boundaries of gender and heterosexual desire. Ford’s careful analysis of the subversion of homosocial norms finds echoes in the texts of other contributors who similarly probe alternatives to elite, male *sodalitas*. Valérie Worth-Stylianou, for example, examines dedicatory epistles of French translations of medical treatises that were addressed to midwives and surgeons, who, as “manual labourers,” were excluded from the world of ancient learning. In a similar vein, Neil Kenny’s discussion of Guillaume Bouchet’s *Serées* focuses on the figure of the merchant-writer, whose efforts to make classical commonplaces accessible to and relevant for a diverse readership opened up a different kind of community and a different form of sociality.

The volume artfully balances an appreciation of the value of intellectual and literary companionship with a critique of the norms that regulate how such societies are formed and whom they admit. It is thus especially relevant today when many scholars share the contributors’ desire to reclaim sixteenth-century and classical ideals of humanism and find new forms of intellectual fellowship. With funding cuts and social inequalities making the humanities ever more the preserve of a privileged few, a term like *sodalitas* becomes incredibly urgent, as does Ford’s example. In our own work and communities, we would do well to emulate the inclusive ethos that Ford practised as a scholar, colleague, and teacher.

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