trattandoli come figli. Gli viene proposto, come figlio di Dio, di imitare la condotta di quest’ultimo. È «la legge della libertà». Libertà per il servizio di Dio, sancito nell’alleanza, espresso nella vita e nel culto. Dall’esodo trae origine anche il rito pasquale. Nelle epoche successive, i figli di Israele avrebbero via via composto e cantato i sette salmi della «lode di Pasqua» (Sal 113–118) e della «grande lode» (Sal 136), poi ripresi nella celebrazione familiare della festa.

Attraverso «gli inni alla libertà» la parola dell’uomo e quella di Dio entrano in un reciproco scambio, costitutivo del rito. E’ utilmente premesso al volume un essenziale Lexique des termes techniques (pp. 17–19), sulla terminologia retorica più frequentemente utilizzata dall’A.

Sommario


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Interdisciplinary interest in emotion as a critical category of thought has led to a range of scholarship discussing the ways in which affect permeates all discourse, shaping identity and behavior within private, professional, and public spheres. Wendy Olmsted’s book, The Imperfect Friend, contributes to this conversation by exploring the rhetorical management of emotion evident in early modern texts. Focusing on the attempts of friends to persuade each other, Olmsted’s exploration of the “gentle strand in the history of emotional persuasion” provides insight both into the organization of early modern affect as well as the role of emotion in rhetoric generally (p. 20). Like her other historical work, it is characterized by close attention to the textual basis for her claims about the practice of rhetoric and about early modern identity and culture.

Olmsted traces a general distrust of strong emotion among early modern writers, as well as a distrust of the use of force or coercion to impose
agreement. Against the backdrop of these doubts and the powerful hope among Renaissance rhetoricians that public “eloquence could compel people to follow the laws” (p. 20), Olmsted identifies friendship as an alternative space where eloquence is used to gain assent and build emotional stability without the threat of coercion. Olmsted commits chapters to legal and religious discourse, poetry, justice, honor, and, finally, marriage. Tracing the rhetorical means of persuading emotion in these contexts reveals how, for instance, Protestant writers could envision “friendship . . . as a model for ideal marriage” in order to promote marital harmony (p. 176).

Olmsted finds social relationships represented in early modern literary texts and prose treatises as “nearly utopian site[s] where one friend appeals reasonably to the heart of the other” (p. 5). According to Olmsted, these texts display “historically and culturally specific topoi for producing [and regulating] emotion” (p. 6). Hospitality, for instance, emerges as one of the central topoi in Sidney’s texts through which discourse on emotion is reproduced. Expecting an individual to be a good host no matter the context or guest, for instance, promoted the regulation of extremes of love, anger, and grief. Each era, Olmsted suggests, has its own cultural resources through which emotion is managed, resources that are an understudied aspect of rhetoric. As other scholars have concluded as well, emotion, far from being irrational, is open to persuasion. What Olmsted adds to our understanding of emotion is the way in which early modern culture made it possible for individuals to effect such persuasion through temperate means.

Olmsted looks primarily to the text and contexts of Sidney’s Old Arcadia, New Arcadia, and A Defence of Poetry, as well as Milton’s early prose and Paradise Lost, for the instances of social counsel from which to construct an account of how early modern affect is worked upon by rhetoric. What she finds is that intimate counselors go beyond agonistic rhetoric, choosing to correct unproductive or excessive emotion through moderate appeals to emotional frameworks based on personal honor, Neo-Platonic ideals, and humanist morality. Not all such appeals work, however, and it is in their failure that Olmsted locates the most valuable resources for those studying the emotional world view of a given historical moment. Readers who attend to the successes and failures of emotion-based topoi in early modern texts, Olmsted argues, are confronted with “incommensurable emotional frameworks” which are the preconditions for a “historically specific interiority” (p. 14, 13). Such tensions locate emotion within social discourse and make visible a “rhetoric of inwardness” within early modern culture (p. 13). One might say that where scholars like Susan Jarratt have used the dramatization of public and internal debate in Greek epic to trace the emergence of rhetorical consciousness, Olmsted uses the dramatization of rhetorical counsel in early modern texts to trace the cultivation of “emotional intelligence” (p. 4). Such intelligence is central to one’s experience of interiority, since the tension created by the competing claims on one’s affective state by different emotional frameworks destabilizes the sense of self based on emotion as a natural or singular possession, and challenges individuals to assert a self
able to cope with such ambiguity. Within such a environment, the question “How do I feel?” is never an innocent one.

The texts that Olmsted analyzes are not merely records of emotional self-management or self-discovery; her work reminds us that emotion is not merely a private sensation, but a matter of social judgment and engagement. As she states, the mind “speaks to itself” but “uses a social discourse” (p. 9). Emotions are responses to the social context; thus, altering one’s social context is another way to manage one’s emotions. Olmsted shows how Sidney undermined 16th-century aristocratic culture by exposing the ways in which agonistic rites of chivalry unbalance emotion, “distort[ing] kinship relations, friendships, marriage, courtship, and hospitality” (p. 83). Such a perspective disrupts dominant unproductive discourses of emotion. Alternative frameworks may emerge from one’s awareness of the cultural politics of gender, race, or class, but Olmsted argues they are closely tied to our experience of the physical world as well. The “scattered” geography of Arcadia in Sidney’s works, for instance, “provides a template” for the humanist attempt to manage emotion by tempering the “separateness of solitary life with the civilizing force of company” (p. 76).

Friendship itself emerges as a method for emotional self-fashioning, as in Milton’s Paradise Lost, where Adam seeks Eve’s companionship when his fear of Satan leads to a feeling that solitude is “intensely dangerous” and leads to an immoderate longing for “perpetual society” with Eve (p. 200). Satan is significant not only as a purveyor of extreme desires and anxieties, but because his punishment is an excess of solitude that invites anger and jealousy. Through such examples, Olmsted displays how emotions are products of one’s sense of positionality within social relationships; they have as much to do with one’s relation (or lack of relation) to others as with one’s relation to oneself. Olmsted presents this tension between self and society as key to understanding how emotion permeates early modern discourse. Milton, like several of his contemporaries, treats solitude at times with almost religious reverence, valuing it as a space of reflection and intellectual contentment, “a native country for the soul, a place of freedom and pleasure” (p. 182). But even in these texts, solitude can appear as a form of friendship in which one “discovers in the right kind of solitude a friendship with the self that precedes friendship with others” (p. 176).

It may seem strange to some to link Milton, known for his scathing and vehement rhetoric at times, with any sense of gentle persuasion. Olmsted helps us see that Milton not only depicts a range of rhetorical styles and purposes from mild to furious, but his conspicuous vehemence helps to display one of the ways in which modern limitations on acceptable emotion color our evaluation of early modern prose. Whereas we may feel that some of Milton’s prose breaks rules of emotional decorum, as Olmsted explains, Milton and at least some of his contemporaries would have seen his vigorous rhetoric as commensurate to the situation without crossing the line towards being “one-sided and extreme” (p. 178). For Milton, like Aristotle, “A person’s anger at unjust insult asserts self-worth and restores justice,”
thereby unmasking emotional frameworks that deprive others of the means to restore honor to social relations (p. 108). For many early modern authors, expression and regulation of emotion is closely tied to ethical behavior and the pursuit of justice.

If readers are left wanting something from this book, it will most likely be further engagement with contemporary work on rhetoric and emotion. This is less a critique of the existing text and more a testament to the potential of further work in this area. Olmsted’s close focus on the early modern period leaves ample room for studying the differences among emotional frameworks in other historical periods and provides the theoretical grounding and the intellectual space in which to raise interesting and important questions about emotion and rhetoric. Scholars with interdisciplinary interests may find that Olmsted’s insights into the gentle strand of persuasion have much to offer, for instance, to the contemporary study of diplomacy, the art of teaching, counseling, and to other contexts where coercion or force are considered unfit strategies for persuasion. As teachers, citizens, and friends, we are all involved in the schooling of emotion, helping others negotiate the competing emotional frameworks that determine the limits of persuasion and the shifting boundaries of the self. Just as Milton’s advocacy of uncensored publication supported an arena of competing truths, early modern counsel among friends supported an arena of competing emotional frameworks. Olmsted’s close attention to the early modern organization of these frameworks is both a caution and a model for how we enact persuasive, if imperfect, pedagogies of emotion.

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Questo poderoso volume è il frutto di un colloquio organizzato dalle Università di Napoli (Federico II) e di Strasburgo, all’interno dell’ampio progetto, animato da un gruppo di ricerca misto italo-francese, Alle radici dell’Europa: la cultura d’assemblea e i suoi spazi (religione, retorica, teatro, politica). Tra modelli antichi e ricezione moderna, che ha già fornito numerosi contributi di alto valore, segnalati da L. Pernot nell’Introduzione (p. 10). Il volume fa il punto sul rapporto tra la produzione del discorso e la sua ricezione e tra contesto della performance, uditorio e oratore.