

The spy who loved me? Familiar letters from Nicholas Faunt to Anthony Bacon¹

Anthony Bacon (1558-1601) died young, lived abroad for half his adult life and was entirely eclipsed after his death by his more famous brother Francis. But during his short life, he maintained an active career as an intelligencer, first on the continent in the service of his uncle William Cecil, Lord Burghley, and the queen's principal secretary Sir Francis Walsingham, and subsequently in England as the earl of Essex's personal spy-master.² Many of his letters survived, and after passing through the hands of Francis Bacon, Francis's chaplain William Rawley and Rawley's executor Thomas Tension, came to rest in Lambeth Palace Library when Tenison was promoted to archbishop of Canterbury in 1695.

Efficient though Anthony was at filing away letters he received, he was less careful in copying and archiving his own compositions.³ His papers as a whole, while extensive, are notably one-sided. Although autograph drafts of some of Anthony's own letters survive, the majority of the items in the collection are 'orphans', dispatches from others without their corresponding prompt or response from Anthony. This archival patchiness may be one reason for the very modest attention that Anthony Bacon has received as a historical figure – despite the use to which his letters have been put in telling the stories of others (notably Francis Bacon and the earl of Essex), only one dedicated biography of Anthony exists.⁴

¹ This article has benefitted enormously from the comments and suggestions of Prof Lisa Jardine, Dr Matthew Symonds and my anonymous reader.

² Although this article doesn't engage directly with Anthony Bacon's work as an intelligencer, both he and Nicholas Faunt were active information gatherers. Plentiful recent analytical attention has focussed on the development of the Elizabethan secret services. See for example Alison Plowden, The Elizabethan Secret Service (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf: 1991); Alan Haynes, Invisible Power: The Elizabethan Secret Services 1570-1603 (Stroud, Gloucestershire and Wolfeboro Falls, NJ: Alan Sutton, 1992); Paul E.J. Hammer, 'The Uses of Scholarship: The Secretariat of Robert Devereux, Second Earl of Essex, c.1585-1601', English Historical Review 109 (1994), 26-51; Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, The Practice of Diplomacy: Its Evolution, Theory and Administration (London: Routledge, 1995); John Bossy, Under the Molehill: An Elizabethan Spy Story (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001) and Robyn Adams, 'A Spy on the Payroll? William Herle and the Mid-Elizabethan Polity', Historical Research 82 (2009), 1-15.

³ Throughout this article I refer to the Bacon brothers by their first names – Anthony and Francis. For other individuals, where confusion over a shared family name doesn't arise, I use surnames only.

⁴ Thomas Birch was the first historian to use the archive in his Memoirs of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, 2 vols (London: A. Millar, 1754). Recent scholars to make use of the resource include Paul E.J. Hammer in The Polarisation of Elizabethan Politics: The Political Career of Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex, 1585-1597 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) and Lisa Jardine and Alan Stewart in Hostage to Fortune: The Troubled Life of Francis Bacon, 1561-1626 (London: Victor Gollancz, 1998). Although Daphne du Maurier's Golden Lads: A Study of Anthony Bacon, Francis and their Friends (London: Victor Gollancz, 1975) remains to date the only full-length biography of Anthony, his position in the life of his brother was wholly reassessed by Jardine and Stewart, Hostage to Fortune.

One of his correspondents was Nicholas Faunt (c.1554-1608). Later to rise to the position of clerk of the signet, and author after Walsingham's death of a 'discourse touching the office of principal secretary of estate' in which he analysed the role of secretary to the sovereign, in the early 1580s Faunt was just another young graduate in Walsingham's service. He met Anthony in Paris in 1580 and took an immediate liking to the younger man. When after a few months together they parted to recommence their respective continental tours, they began an epistolary relationship that was to last for the rest of their lives.

Faunt took his letter-writing seriously, frequently writing to Anthony above twice a month, and regularly filling both sides of a folded folio sheet. Anthony lived abroad for over twelve years, from 1579 until 1592, and Faunt wrote many of his letters to Anthony in the early years of what he came to call this 'voluntary banishment'.⁵ Between 1581, when Faunt himself was still travelling in Europe gathering intelligence for Walsingham, and the beginning of 1584, by which point he had settled into his post in the principal secretary's private office, Faunt wrote to Anthony dozens of times. For a man who later described his role as entailing 'continuall attend[ance] in the [secretary's] Chamber' and whose 'peticuler charge may bee to indorse them or giue them their due titles, as they dayly come in of all sortes',⁶ Faunt showed assiduity in writing so regularly and at such length to his friend. As a servant to the queen's principal secretary, Faunt took up his pen habitually and with wearisome frequency, and when he wasn't at his desk he was a 'continuall Cortier', lingering in antechambers while his master waited on the queen.⁷ As he asserted on numerous occasions, correspondence with his friend 'doth much recreate my tyred spirites in this tedious seruice'.⁸

The letters of this period are a marvellous resource. Faunt wrote about the permanent English embassy at Paris, and about expatriate Englishmen in Italy. He had access to confidential political intelligence in his role as Walsingham's employee, a position which he exploited to tell Anthony the gossip at Court and keep him abreast of current affairs. His letters abound with the latest news from Scotland, the Low Countries, Ireland and France. Historians have known about this modest

⁵ Nicholas Faunt (hereafter NF) to Anthony Bacon (AB), 17 December 1583, Lambeth Palace Library (LPL) MS 647, fol. 166r. In my quotations from archival manuscript sources I have silently expanded all contractions and abbreviations, but retained authorial spelling and punctuation. Where an amendment has been necessary for grammatical reasons, I indicate this by the use of square brackets [].

⁶ Charles Hughes (ed.) 'Nicholas Faunt's Discourse Touching the Office of Principal Secretary of Estate, &c, 1592,' *The English Historical Review*, 20, 1905, 499-508, 501.

⁷ NF to AB, 1 August 1582, LPL MS 647, fol. 130v.

⁸ NF to AB, 15 March 1593, LPL MS 647, fol. 129v .

goldmine for many years. Faunt's *ODNB* entry praises his letters for providing 'valuable background on the political scene.'⁹ They have also given those few scholars who have paid attention to Anthony the necessary framework to tell the story of his first years in France, as Faunt's regular dispatches give us a fair idea of where Anthony was between 1581 and 1584.

In this article, however, I look at a different aspect of the two men's correspondence. Amid the politics and beneath the conventional epistolary declarations of service lies the evidence of a disarmingly passionate friendship. It may be the case that the relationship engineered between Faunt and Anthony was contingent upon and designed to support their work as information gatherers employed by the English state. Certainly the use of a richly affective rhetoric is not unknown in correspondence between public men. Scholarship has highlighted the frequency with which relationships of duty and service were articulated in the language of love and devotion. Indeed, Lisa Jardine has examined correspondence between Anthony Bacon and the earl of Essex, and concluded that the 'terms of passionate commitment' in the letters 'are virtually indistinguishable from those in a contemporary love sonnet'.¹⁰ But as I shall explain, the ambiguous nature of the two men's social position makes the relationship between Faunt and Anthony somewhat different. In short, neither man could wholly stand patron to the other, and in the absence of a clear status hierarchy the particular form of intimacy demonstrated by Faunt takes on a new inflection. By focussing on one letter sent from Faunt to Anthony in February 1583, and its aftermath, I want to propose a slightly different reading of the affective, personal aspects of their epistolary friendship.

From the beginning, their acquaintance had had a professional aspect. Faunt was extremely well-placed to supply Anthony with information, both from his own travels on the continent and by virtue of his job within Walsingham's intelligence office. In addition, once he had returned to England he began to act as Anthony's personal representative, handling his 'priuat affayres there according so such Instructions as

⁹ Carole Levin, 'Nicholas Faunt', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) [online edition, <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.catalogue.ujls.lon.ac.uk/view/article/92111>]. Accessed 21 August 2009.

¹⁰ Lisa Jardine, *Reading Shakespeare Historically* (London: Routledge, 1996), 117. Other intimate male relationships that have received critical attention include John Donne and Sir Henry Wotton (Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 90-122), Fulke Greville and Sir Philip Sidney and Francis Bacon and Tobie Matthew (both in Alan Bray, *The Friend*, ed. Mark D. Jordan (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 42-77). The most extreme example is probably to be found in the matrimonial register used by James I in letters to George Villiers, duke of Buckingham as explored in Bray, *The Friend*, 78-139.

[he] purposed to send'.¹¹ Faunt persuaded Anthony's mother to consent to her son's further residence abroad, and took it upon himself to chivy Francis for letters to his brother – a service that Francis swiftly came to resent. Faunt gathered up letters from Anthony's friends in England to send en masse to France, and enclosed with these familiar letters whatever discourses and political notes passed across his desk. He was candid about this appropriation of intelligence material intended for others. When in early 1583 he drew Anthony's attention to a packet of four separate briefing documents he sent with his dispatch, he explained that 'as it happely fell out I had [them] ready lying by mee... thoughte in deed they were meant to another by direction therin... whom I will content with the like at better leysure'.¹² Who knows if the intended recipient ever got his copy of the material Faunt sent to Anthony, but the latter used this access to confidential data to compile his own digests and analyses of the European political landscape, a key task for a spy in the field. Francis Bacon, seeking preferment in London, also took a role in these acts of shared composition, with Faunt providing raw material, Anthony offering a specific focus on French affairs, and Francis contributing whatever he could extract from his well-connected relations at the Court. A piece of political analysis called 'Notes on the State of Christendom', now in the British Library Harley manuscript collection, is probably typical of the sort of document Anthony helped to produce with Faunt's leaked data.¹³ Written in Francis's hand with additions in Anthony's continental italic (he seems to have inked in specific names in spaces left blank for the purpose), the document runs to ten leaves of information about the various ruling houses of Europe. From references to public figures and events, Francis Bacon's nineteenth-century biographer James Spedding concluded it was compiled at some point during 1582.¹⁴ Faunt's letters after this point continued to contain extensive information about the European political landscape, and judging by the surviving letters's well-annotated state, and the duplication of some of Faunt's material in a workbook belonging to Anthony now held in Edinburgh, further briefing documents and 'notes' were being contemplated if not executed in the years after 1582.¹⁵

¹¹ NF to AB, 2/12 March 1582, LPL MS 647 fol. 108r. When writing from France, Faunt followed the continental calendar, which was ten days 'ahead' of England. Where necessary I give both the date used in the letter's endorsement, and the (assumed) English equivalent. In addition, I have silently amended dates in January, February and March to accord with the Gregorian calendar (in which the new year starts on 1 January) rather than the contemporary Julian calendar (which commenced the new year on March 25, the feast of the Annunciation).

¹² NF to AB, 22 February 1583, LPL MS 647, fol. 120v.

¹³ British Library Harley MS 7021, fols 1-10.

¹⁴ James Spedding (ed.) *Letters and Life*, 7 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861-74), vol. 1, 16.

¹⁵ Briefings including 'a litle discourse lately receaved of the greatnes of the house of *Austria*' and 'some effectes that followe the late altercacion in the Lowe Countryes', sent to Anthony by Faunt in February 1583, appear to have been copied into the former's workbook as 'the

It is evident why Anthony liked this arrangement. Faunt was able to provide him with the latest news and current events, the context into which his own specific intelligence could fit. Moreover, his provision of analytical and discursive material facilitated Anthony's composition of reports which increased his standing as an intelligencer, even if he didn't obtain appreciable benefit from the work in the short term. But Faunt was not likely to win the same professional standing from his position as Anthony's informant in Walsingham's office. It seems, however, that the profit he sought tended to emotional rather than material gain. In exchange for information, Faunt sought to acquire in Anthony the only sort of friend that sixteenth-century educated Englishmen thought worthy of the name.

Laurie Shannon has drawn attention to the 'virtual chorus of Renaissance writers who celebrated friendship' between men. So dominant was the trope in humanist writings that the phrase 'Renaissance friendship' is still freighted with meaning: as Shannon suggests, it conjures up for us an 'era of affectivity', one whose privileging of same-sex bonds highlights the gulf between 'early modern "homonormative" affects and contemporary heterosexual, erotic normativity'.¹⁶ In the first English publication of Cicero's *De Amicitia* in 1481 (in a translation by John Tiptoft), in Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Boke Named the Governour* (1531) and in Desiderius Erasmus's *Adagia* (1536), readers were guided through the English Renaissance rediscovery of friendship. They were taught by Tiptoft that two friends 'shold make wel nygh one', by Elyot that 'a frende is properly named of Philosophers the other I', and by Erasmus that 'amicas alter ipse'.¹⁷ For Faunt that high-minded ideal appeared to provide a model which he could follow. Soaked in humanist pedagogy from his time at the King's School in Canterbury and Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, he was only too ready to seize the opportunity to develop an emotionally intense relationship with another man. Sensitive and prone to depression, Faunt had already experienced a degree of heartbreak when the man with whom he had shared his continental peregrination, a young Northamptonshire gentleman called Edward Knightley, left him in Paris to return to his legal studies in London. As he wrote at the time to Anthony, 'the soddayne departure of so deare a frend as he is to mee, hath bredd me

discourse containing the greatness of the house of Austria' and 'the state of affairs in the Low Countries touching the late accident happened at Antwerp' (NF to AB, 22 February 1583, LPL MS 647 fol. 121r; EUL Laing MS La.iii. 193, fol. 130r-134r, quoted with modern spelling in Jardine and Stewart, *Hostage to Fortune*, 87).

¹⁶ Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*, 1.

¹⁷ Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Amicitia*, trans. John Tiptoft (London: William Caxton, 1481), Sir Thomas Elyot, *The Boke Named the Governour* (London: Thomas Bertheleti (?), 1531), Desiderius Erasmus, *Adagia*, trans. Richard Taverner (London: Richard Bankes, 1539) in Shannon, *Sovereign Amity*, 3.

some trauaile these fewe dayes', and begged him to excuse the 'barren and melancholy lettres' that were sure to follow as a result of the sad parting.¹⁸

Anthony was an ambitious target as the object of Faunt's friendly affections. The social gap between the two men was extremely awkward: Anthony was the impecunious fourth son of a senior statesman, while Faunt's heritage was country gentry of the middling sort. But if Anthony's precarious financial state meant he was in no position to stand patron to his friend, nor were their conditions so alike as to allow the development of an easy intimacy. One of the most frequent observations in friendship literature was that true friends were of a similar social class. Centuries before, Cicero had pointed out that friends should be loved with the disinterested passion with which one loved oneself, and Montaigne in his 1580 essay on friendship stressed that if all things were common between friends, 'they can neither lend nor give aught to each other.' A materially advantageous relationship didn't warrant the term 'friend'.¹⁹

This emotional utopianism has of course been challenged. Tom McFaul has pointed out that the Ciceronian ideal was merely a fantasy of equal male friendship, although the model informs us 'what men at least claimed to want from relationships with other men'.²⁰ The late Alan Bray investigated the material use to which tokens of richly intense friendships were put, and in his analysis of the friendship between Sir Philip Sidney and Fulke Greville showed how the latter benefitted from his association with his higher-status friend, even after Sidney's death, through circulation of his affectionate letters.²¹ Lisa Jardine and William Sherman have uncovered another form of mutual obligation and indebtedness in this period, in which university-educated young men provided 'scholarly services' for aristocratic statesmen in exchange for professional advancement or political influence (in what Jardine and Sherman term a 'knowledge transaction').²²

¹⁸ NF to AB, 8 February 1582, LPL MS 647, fol. 104r. Faunt's depressive tendencies are fully in evidence in his letters to Anthony from England in 1582 and 1583, when he is frequently 'ouercome with melancholy & distraction of mynde' from the pains of Court service (NF to AB, 8 May 1582, LPL MS 647, fol. 127r).

¹⁹ Michel de Montaigne, 'On Friendship', *The Essays of Montaigne*, trans. John Florio, 1603 (London: Gibbings and Co., 1906), vol. 2, 22-23. Although Florio's was the first translation of Montaigne's essays into English, 'On Friendship' had appeared in the first French edition of 1580. Anthony certainly knew the essays, and indeed the essayist, well, and it is likely that Faunt had come across the work during his time in France in the early 1580s.

²⁰ Tom MacFaul, *Male Friendship in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 6.

²¹ Bray, *The Friend*, 42-77.

²² Lisa Jardine and William Sherman, 'Pragmatic Readers: knowledge transactions and scholarly services in late Elizabethan England', in Anthony Fletcher and Peter Roberts (eds),

But in all these transactions, the value of the regard and affection – the ‘countenance’ – of each party was understood. In the case of Anthony and Faunt, things were not so clear. Anthony was the son of the queen’s late lord keeper, and enjoyed connections on his mother’s side with the Killigrews, the Russells and (most significantly) the Cecils. Although in the early 1580s it was not yet clear that their undersized young cousin Robert Cecil was to steal a march on Anthony and Francis, engrossing Burghley’s gifts of patronage and cutting the Bacon brothers off from the queen’s preferment, Anthony had already been left too ill-provided for to offer Faunt any meaningful patronage. Indeed, because of the access to high-level political intelligence his acquaintance with Faunt brought him, the two men were placed in an uncomfortable situation: Anthony was obliged to the lower-status Faunt, with no means to ‘repay’ the debt. Given the ambiguous nature of their relationship, it is not wholly surprising that Faunt’s response to a declaration of affectionate friendship from Anthony was extreme. Writing in January 1583, in a letter now lost, Anthony apologised for his infrequent letters and appears to have acknowledged Faunt as an intimate friend with all the rights and privileges afforded such a position. The effect on Faunt was startling.

In February 1583, he admitted his profound and singular affection for Anthony which, because it was ‘aright sincere and vnfayned’,

cannot be giuen in the highest measure but to one only: Nowe though I had longe ago propounded in my mynde your selfe to be the same one only yet still fearing to be thought ouer presumptuous and bold in this behalfe I have deferred the signifying therof vnto you vtill vpon some further experience you might see what especially moved mee to make so singular a choyce for so unworthy a gyfte, as is the free possession of my whole mynde and most secreat thoughtes.²³

Although Faunt framed his hesitation in confessing his ‘ouer presumptuous’ feelings as the fault of his own incapacity to demonstrate ‘by some further experience’ his merit as a friend, it’s clear that he had been waiting for a sign from Anthony that such a declaration would be welcome.

Religion, culture and society in early modern Britain: Essays in honour of Patrick Collinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 102-124.

²³ NF to AB, 22 February 1583, LPL MS 647, fol. 119r

[Y]our late Letter hath giuen the finall conclusion and removed all difficulties and doubttes on my part which yet were neuer other then the inequalitie of our conditions and my unhablenes to supply that defecte residing in mee alone ether by industrye or any other effectes of my good will. Nowe finding that you stand very litle vppon such termes ... I see not... any further impediment (th'other being removed throughe the freenes of your good perswasion of mee testified aswell hertofore as in this your said lettre) why I shold not close my hand with yours in wittnes of our perfecte and sincere vnion and band.²⁴

Faunt's ardour (and especially his drift into a marital register) is startling, and unexpected. Previously, his expressions of loyalty had taken the form of reassurances of his 'sincere and constant affection' and the promise to perform for Anthony 'any good office or dutye'.²⁵ Evidently, this letter marked a change. He confessed that he was spiritually and intellectually 'peculiarly devoted vnto' Anthony, and celebrated the latter's 'cheefe and inward authoritie' over him as the 'principall knott of [their] amitie'. He persisted in his declarations of service and loyalty, promising to 'perfourme that you nowe demaund at my handes, as wherin I may at any other tyme stande you in steed sooner then my other consideracions whatsoeuer', but explicitly rejected the notion that either man was in the other's debt. Thanking Anthony for his gracious 'acceptacion' of his letters, Faunt took the opportunity to remark that 'betweene faithfull frendes', and 'where the giuers mynde & good meaning is aright interpreted', then the 'gyfte' itself (that is, the correspondence) 'goeth for gros payment'.²⁶ 'Gross payment' was a rare enough notion in a period that relied on credit and favour, and in his rejection of contemporary ideas of debt and obligation we are reminded of Erasmus's letter to his friend and editor Peter Gilles, included as a preface to the 1514 edition of his *Parabolae*, in which he scorned the trinkets and gifts used as signs of friendship by lesser men, and praised instead their own adoption of epistolary tokens. 'But you and I, whose idea of friendship rests wholly in a meeting of minds and the enjoyment of studies in common, might well greet one another from time to time with presents for the mind and keepsakes of a literary description.'²⁷ In his passionate letter to Anthony, Faunt was instituting a decisive shift in their relationship. Picking up his cue

²⁴ NF to AB, 22 February 1583, LPL MS 647, fol. 119v.

²⁵ NF to AB, 1 December 1582, LPL MS 647, fol. 132v.

²⁶ NF to AB, 22 February 1583, LPL MS 647, fols 119r, 119v and 120r.

²⁷ Desiderius Erasmus, *Parabolae sive Similia*, trans. R.A.B. Mynors, in Craig R. Thompson (ed.), *The Collected Works of Erasmus*, ongoing, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), vol. 23, 131.

from the higher-status partner, but taking it wholly upon himself to demarcate and define their new friendship, Faunt removed their 'knott of amitie' from the realms of mere instrumentality (with its queasy undertones of exploitation and preferment) and placed it squarely on Erasmian turf.

It was pitched with a caveat, however. Faunt was well aware of the 'inequalitie of [their] conditions', and made no attempt to obscure the fact that Anthony was the senior partner in their relationship. For Faunt, the act of bestowing his soul on Anthony was not intended to prompt an exchange. He took pains to assure Anthony that he was not about to ask for his own 'whole mynde' in lieu. Responding to Anthony's thanks for travel advice Faunt had provided in previous letters, he swiftly denied that he had presumed to offer 'matter of instruction', 'both [his] meaning and doing therein tending to a farre contrary ende'. His remembrance was designed merely to 'shewe [his] myndfullnes' of him while he remained so far away, and he didn't fool himself that his own observations were of any interest to Anthony: 'I thinke I did neuer so farre forgett my selfe as to propoude any such stufte of myne for your vse.'²⁸

This tangle of affection and subordination in which Faunt tied himself is not wholly surprising. That such a friendship as theirs could be misconstrued was a real danger. Francis Bacon, for one, treated Faunt with a coolness that occasionally spilt into outright contempt. Declining to receive him when he happened to call at his chambers in May 1583, Francis – not for the first time – made Faunt hover at the door and declare his business to a servant. Writing later about the incident to Anthony, Faunt was anxious that report of his brother's behaviour wouldn't affect their relationship.

This straungenes hath made mee sometymes to doubt that he greatly mistaketh mee: ffor I do these offices both towardes you and him vppon no base respecte or for insinuation: but only of good affection to ether and for the best consideracions, and yet in truth the rather vnto him by reason of the good acceptacion it hath pleased you to yeld of the poore acquaintaunce and mutuall amity that is betweene vs & I hope shall not be lessened hereafter.²⁹

²⁸ NF to AB, 22 February 1583, LPL MS 647, fol. 120r.

²⁹ NF to AB, 31 May 1583, LPL MS 647, fol. 155r.

That his motives might be thought 'base', or his friendship with Anthony a form of 'insinuation' and a route to professional success, was abhorrent to Faunt. But he appears not entirely to have mastered the anxiety that the Bacon family provoked in him. He was so distracted when he bumped into Lady Bacon and Francis at the Temple Church in November 1583 that he managed to tell her ladyship it had been over three years since he had left France, 'greatly forgetting my selfe seing in truth it is not yet two yeares; but the errorre grewe that I thought it more then three or three & twenty.' The formidable Lady Bacon was doubtless a figure sufficiently intimidating to make anyone stumble over their words, but Faunt was determined to find a means to apologise for his mistake:

I cold not then stay, nether was that a place to trouble her, but I hope to find some opportunitye shortly to repayre vnto her Ladyshipp and make myne owne excuse for myne offence committed: which may be an occasion that shee shall commaund mee to wayte vppon her at some other tymes, if I may giue her any contentment touching your selfe.³⁰

Lady Bacon evidently still regarded Faunt as a useful adjunct to her son, an inferior factotum she could 'commaund... to wayte vppon her'. Faunt had to tread a fine line in his letters to Anthony between over-presumption and obsequious servility, and his impassioned (if muddled) letter of February 1583 was his first attempt at working through the protocol issues thrown up by an affectionate friendship with an ostensible superior.

The friendship was destined to remain largely epistolary, and sustained almost wholly by Faunt. Anthony's feelings, if he ever poured them into a letter, are lost. But it seems from his poor show of letters to Faunt over this period that he didn't feel quite as strongly as his friend. Throughout 1583, Faunt continued to remind Anthony in his regular letters that his 'affection on [his] behalfe [could] hardly abyde any kind of limitacion',³¹ but during this period of his most ardent declarations (and he made explicit reference to their closeness in virtually every letter he sent in the months after February) Faunt received just two letters in return. By the end of the year, realising perhaps that their friendship had become a little one-sided, Faunt's expressions of devotion had cooled. The two men maintained extremely friendly correspondence and continued to exchange up-to-date intelligence and rumour, but Faunt wasn't to

³⁰ NF to AB, 20 November 1583, LPL MS 647, fol. 162r.

³¹ NF to AB, 15 March 1583, LPL MS 647, fol. 128r.

return to his passionate language of unions, bands, joined hands and secret thoughts.

For the space of a year, however, Faunt had attempted to construct an intimate, exclusive friendship at a distance with Anthony. It was an ambition that ultimately failed. As we have seen, Alan Bray suggested that affectionate familiar letters between men could function as material tokens of friendship, favour and preferment.³² We do not know if Anthony's replies – scanty though they were – matched Faunt's level of ardour and commitment, but we know from quotations excerpted by Faunt that his friend compared the relationship to 'that wee find to have bene betweene *Tully* and *Atticus*',³³ and that he had exhorted Faunt 'as I loue you and as I wishe your health to wryte often'.³⁴ Perhaps Faunt's ultimate objective was to provoke in Anthony a reciprocal declaration of exclusive affection, and perhaps – following Bray – he hoped to gain preferment or place through his close association with the better-connected Anthony. But the relationship doesn't sit squarely with this model of early modern male intimacy, and certainly Faunt won no appreciable benefit from the friendship. (We do not know, of course, if he ever attempted to do so.) For the present, I suggest we conclude that the reasons for Faunt's ardent cultivation of friendship were emotional rather than pragmatic.³⁵ He didn't quite manage to win Anthony over, but the prosecution of the friendship in the years ahead suggests that while the tenor of the relationship changed, the intimacy was not wholly forgotten.

As Anthony's residence abroad took on a more permanent aspect, Faunt began to lose hope that his friend would ever return to England. He had taken considerable pains to keep alive a relationship forged during a seasonal acquaintance in Paris in 1580, but in the summer of 1583 Faunt confessed his anxiety that he might die before Anthony came home to indulge him with 'such conference as it shall please you at your returne to have with mee from tyme to tyme'.³⁶ The prospect of absolute separation was particularly painful as increasing political instability in France made communication uncertain – in April 1584 and again in April 1585, Faunt discovered that entire series of letters to Anthony had gone astray.³⁷ In such unpredictable circumstances, he ensured that important personal news – such as his marriage –

³² Bray, *The Friend*, 42-77.

³³ NF to AB, 31 May 1583, LPL MS 647, fol. 155r.

³⁴ NF to AB, 6 August 1583, LPL MS 647, fol. 158r.

³⁵ Within the category of 'emotional' I include religious fervour: Faunt was an enthusiastic supporter of the protestant reformation throughout Europe, and saw in Anthony a co-religionist of equal passion.

³⁶ NF to AB, 6 August 1583, LPL MS 647, fol. 157v.

³⁷ NF to AB, 13 April 1584, LPL MS 647, fol. 183r and NF to AB, 16 April 1585, LPL MS 647, fol. 189r.

was carried over from letter to letter.³⁸ Lengthy silences on the part of Anthony inevitably had an impact as Faunt found it impossible to maintain the pitch of ardour he had reached in February 1583, since he was to all intents and purposes writing into a void. But Faunt was both realistic and optimistic about the nature of their intimacy. Writing in March 1584, to explain an intercession he had made on Anthony's behalf to Lady Bacon, Faunt explained that his 'boldnes with her Ladyshipp' was an indication of the 'sincere affection and vnion' between the two men

which howsoeuer for a tyme it be couered like fyre in the Ashes yet being a litle stirred all anawares there must needes some singall sparkes flye abroad as tokens of the restraint it endureth perforce... [M]y hope is that one daye when those ashes may with securitie be removed wee shall to eche others comforte warme vs at that fyre.³⁹

Faunt wasn't wrong. The friendship did survive its eleven year period of epistolary maintenance, and when Anthony returned to England in 1592 Faunt was at Dover to meet him off the boat. Their relationship flourished thereafter, as Faunt continued to involve himself in the lives of Anthony and Francis even as he pursued his career in government administration, eventually becoming a clerk of the signet under Lord Burghley and his son Sir Robert Cecil. What the maturing Faunt felt about his friend Anthony Bacon, home now but frequently house-bound with gout, is unrecorded. But when he and his second wife had a son at some point after 1594, they named the child Anthony.

This has been an extremely brief glance at a private exchange between two men more than four hundred years ago. It raises more questions than can easily be answered, but suggests that current investigations into friendship, intimacy and love (of whatever sort) between men have further discoveries to unearth. But I'd like to end with J. Huizinga's account of the young Erasmus, who wrote impassioned letters to his school-friend Servatius Rogerus. Huizinga, with tact and understatement, suggested that 'a young and very tender heart, marked by many feminine traits, replete with all the sentiment and with all the imaginings of classic literature... was

³⁸ The news in NF to AB, 16 April 1585, LPL MS 647, fol. 190r is repeated as a postscript in NF to AB, 6 October 1585, LPL MS 647, fol. 201v.

³⁹ NF to AB, 2 March 1584, LPL MS 647, fol. 143r.

likely to become somewhat excessive in his affections.⁴⁰ The same might certainly be said of the young Nicholas Faunt.

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⁴⁰ J. Huizinga, Erasmus of Rotterdam, trans F. Hopman (London: Phaidon Press, 1952), 12.