



The Imperfect Friend: Emotion and Rhetoric in Sidney, Milton and Their Contexts

Wendy Olmsted

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Many writers in early modern England drew on the rhetorical tradition to explore affective experience. In *The Imperfect Friend*, Wendy Olmsted examines a broad range of Renaissance and Reformation sources, all of which aim to cultivate 'emotional intelligence' through rhetorical means, with a view to understanding how emotion functions in these texts. In the works of Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), John Milton (1608-1674), and many others, characters are depicted conversing with one another about their emotions. While counselors appeal to objective reasons for feeling a certain way, their efforts to shape emotion often encounter resistance.

This volume demonstrates how, in Renaissance and Reformation literature, failures of persuasion arise from conflicts among competing rhetorical frameworks among characters. Multiple frameworks, Olmsted argues, produce tensions and, consequently, an interiorized conflicted self. By situating emotional discourse within distinct historical and socio-cultural perspectives, *The Imperfect Friend* sheds new light on how the writings of Sidney, Milton, and others grappled with problems of personal identity. From their innovations, the study concludes, friendship emerges as a favourite site of counseling the afflicted and perturbed.

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