

GENDER MATTERS: HISTORICAL DISCOURSES
ON FRIENDSHIP
AN INTRODUCTION

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I. FRIENDSHIP: (NOT) A UNIVERSAL MODEL

Since antiquity, friendship has been considered an important social bond, the most noble type of human relationship. Aristotle, whose thoughts on friendship constitute a major philosophical framework for thinking and writing about friendship, claims, at the beginning of the famous chapter XVIII of *The Nicomachean Ethics*, that there is nothing more precious than a good friend because friendship “is a virtue or implies virtue, and is besides most necessary with a view to living. For without friends no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods” (Aristotle 2009, 142). In his treatise *Laelius de amicitia* (*Laelius on Friendship*), Cicero advises his readers “to prefer friendship to all things else within human attainment,” and he adds “that friendship can exist only between good men” (Cicero 2005). While these sources—as well as Plato’s *Lysis* (Wolf 2020, 158–183) and other ancient texts—proclaim friendship as a universal concept, the ancient tradition of *philia* and *amicitia* is an androcentric model: a perfect friendship is invariably defined as one between men who are equal and equally virtuous in both political and private affairs. Friendship between men and women, if it existed at all, is restricted to the hierarchical context of kinships, such as those between parents and children, sisters and brothers, and the bond between husband and wife. Friendships among women, however, are categorically excluded from ancient models. Due to a long

tradition of political gender hierarchy in ancient times and Christian misogyny since the Middle Ages that constructed a model of women's otherness as moral, physical, or intellectual deficiency, female friendship is not addressed as a possible social form.

This exclusion was not limited to ancient forms of friendship; indeed it continued to influence the discourses on *philia* and *amicitia* into the early modern period. With the Renaissance, ancient ideas took center stage in Europe, including the concept of friendship, which became an important topic, particularly in humanist writings. In the context of the Counter-Reformation, it was then re-christianized and associated with *agapè* and spiritual forms before being influenced finally by the secularization process and modern changes in gender relations. However, the *querelle des femmes* (Bock and Zimmermann 1997; Hassauer 2008)—which launched with Christine de Pizan's collection of women's biographies *La Cité des dames* (1405) featuring a city populated by heroic women—began to challenge received ideas regarding male and female roles as well as mixed relationships and the role of women in intellectual circles. Consequently, over a period of centuries, femininity, marriage, and family gradually gained greater status, a shift that transformed the notion of friendship and, by association, the perception of men and women's capacities for virtue and affect. Against this backdrop, the categories of intimacy, love, confidence, and affection—crucial to the practice of friendship—were also fundamentally reshaped. At first, the social institution of marriage became evermore significant for premodern societies. Concomitantly, marital forms of friendship, in particular, were elevated in the early modern era. A long formative period of Christian clerical culture and theological misogyny, with its profound suspicion of human and especially female bodies, slowly came to an end. In keeping with this, mixed forms of community—particularly as practiced in aristocratic and royal courtly life—as well as matrimony and sexuality were no longer perceived as threats to morality. In parallel to this mixed courtly culture, the idea of friendship, trust, and affection between spouses progressively unfolded, and the couple's relationship and associated intellectual-emotional bond were increasingly spotlighted (Schnell 2002).¹ This highly complex process, which paved

¹ Rüdiger Schnell offers an expert, in-depth study of the process of modern change in emotional relationships within marriage based on a medieval and early modern corpus.

the way to a more equal marital partnership and conjugal friendship, especially in urban centers (Davis 1975), began before Reformation and Puritanism, and its expansion was not limited to the Protestant milieu. In contrast to the modern sentimental idea of friendship, which did not spread through Europe until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, friendship among spouses was primarily associated with pragmatic, economic, political, and social regulatory factors. Meanwhile, male friendship was still considered the most prestigious relationship in pre-modern society.

While the idea of female friendship proved unrealizable in the writings of learned Renaissance women, a spectacular turn commenced: the rise of a completely new vision of friendship for both men and women. This occurred in the age of “women’s culture,” as Baader (1986) terms the social shift brought about by seventeenth-century French salons. The new sentimental forms of friendship were open to mixed-gender, female, and tender male relationships. Now, instead of regulating affects for higher-order political and moral purposes, they would provide autonomy and individualization for a subject confronted with modern living conditions. In this context, friendly relations encompassing both sexes are not only designed to regulate strong emotions and guide them into reasonable channels, but also to produce highly nuanced affective representations. A new culture of affect was created through specific modes of literary and epistolary expression alongside other aesthetic and symbolic forms. Hence, sentimental novels, theater, and poetry not only express and reflect new categories of emotion, but also *produce* them, thereby representing the affective culture of friends in a new way. An innovative discourse with new vocabulary emerged, including the terms *tender friendship* and *tender love* (Madeleine de Scudéry).² For the first time in history, after being excluded from true friendship for centuries, women appear as individuals capable of maintaining friendships; furthermore, they are ascribed a special talent for this due to their supposed emotional and moral orientation.

² These terms appear in the famous map of a utopian country of the tender in Madeleine Scudéry’s novel *Clélie. Histoire romaine* (1660). For a recent discussion of the topic of *tendresse*, see Steigerwald and Meyer-Sickendiek (2020); and here especially in the context of Spanish literature, see Gronemann (2020) and Komorowska (2020).

Remarkably, the eighteenth century also witnessed a veritable cult of male friendship, recalling a historical model of friendship, namely the intimate intellectual bond between La Boétie and Montaigne, neither of whom, famously, conceded any capacity for friendship to women (see below). This decisive and complex moment of emotional change not only underscores that the concept of friendship has profoundly shifted throughout history in its permanent intertwinement with other social, political, and cultural factors; it also reveals that friendship itself is a thoroughly gendered category. In focusing our analysis on gender and friendship as it appears in Spanish literature, we must leave the beaten path and take a new vantage point so as to grasp not only the concept of the friend, but also its centuries-long gendering process. Since the relationship between friends plays a significant role in the Spanish corpus of the seventeenth and eighteenth century,³ we propose investigating the discursive construction of male, mixed, and also female forms of friendship, whether or not they are designated as such.

Surprisingly, the research on early modern and Enlightenment models of friendship that has flourished over the past four decades has not placed the category of gender at the forefront of the discussion.⁴ In accordance with the existing scholarship, we assume that friendship becomes an important venue for the negotiation of changing structures in the socioeconomic, cultural, and political sphere—from the seventeenth-century patronage model to the model of *amistad ilustrada* between Enlightened citizens, but we propose taking a closer look at the implications of gender. Thus, our volume includes analysis of seventeenth-century authors such as María de Zayas and the Portuguese playwright Ángela de Azevedo who challenge male models of sociability, and it investigates the debate around women's participation in the new Sociedades Económicas as well as the figure of the enlightened *hombria de bien*.

³ The representation of friendship in early modern Spanish literature has been studied by Gil-Osle (2013); Komorowska (2018; forthcoming); Gilbert-Santamaría (2020).

⁴ So for example Mauser and Becker-Cantarino (1991); Langer (1994); Hyatte (1994); Hutson (1994); Eichler (1999); Manger (2006); Mary Trojani (2004); Classen and Sandidge (2010); Lochman, López and Hutson (2011); Descharmes et al. (2011); Münchberg and Reidenbach (2012); Masciandaro (2013); Gil-Osle (2016); McCue Gill and Rolfe Prodan (2014); Seifert and Wilkin (2015); Gies (2016).

The few recent publications on friendship between men and women and same-sex friendship (male or female) undertake the study of historical practices without examining the process of gendering friendship itself, as we propose here. Furthermore, not a single monograph in this field focuses specifically on friendship and gender in eighteenth-century Spain. Most of the publications on the early modern period do not adopt a historically and culturally specific approach, instead taking the general European viewpoint at a far remove from portrayals of specifically Iberian forms of friendship and social and cultural traditions. Only two of the thirteen essays in *Discourse and Representations of Friendship in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1700* (Lochman, López, and Hutson 2011) address Spanish literature, both considering sixteenth-century examples. Still, collections such as *Men and Women Making Friends in Early Modern France* (Seifert and Wilkin 2015) are very interesting, and they demonstrate that friendship between men and women was already accepted in France within the above-mentioned paradigm of *tendresse* (tenderness in a specific sense). The French discourse contrasts starkly with the Spanish culture of honor. If publications focus explicitly on gender and friendship, they do so from a unilaterally feminist point of view in the vein of Raymond (1990) or—more recently and with greater nuance—Labouvie (2009) and Lochrie and Vishnuvajjala (2022). All this said, most publications about historical forms of friendship have analyzed male friendship without reflecting on its gendered dimension whatsoever; this is the case as recently as 2014, with the collection *Friendship and Sociability in Premodern Europe: Contexts, Concepts and Expressions* (McCue Gill and Rolfe Prodan).

This volume aims to analyze friendship during significant moments of transition from the seventeenth to the early-nineteenth century and thus fill the lacuna in a research landscape that often considers either the seventeenth *or* eighteenth century in isolation, leaving historical transitions unnoticed. Furthermore, we propose a comparative approach that seeks, in regard to each literary genre or specific context, to uncover the gendered structures of friendship for mixed, female and male forms based on the premise that, contrary to frequent assertions, the erstwhile ideal of male friendship is a profoundly gendered discursive construction and not at all universal. We propose an original focus on Spanish literature that considers the interrelatedness of the gendered constructions of male, female, and mixed friendship across

both centuries. Doing so, we reconsider specific studies about the gendering of friendship so as to open the debate about the important factors relating to gender in Spanish literature, in light of the theoretical discussion (Part II of the introduction), and in the literary context with the questions at stake in the seventeenth and eighteenth-century discourses on friendship (Part III of the introduction). In Part IV of the introduction, we will introduce the chapters of this book.

II. FROM (GENDER) BLINDNESS TO INSIGHT: GENDERED IMPLICATIONS IN THE DISCOURSE ON FRIENDSHIP

In his attempt to formulate a philosophy of friendship that encompassed as many aspects and forms of social relationships as possible, Aristotle distinguished between assorted forms of friendship according to different social roles and constellations. Thus, as mentioned above, he includes the relationship between family members (particularly among spouses), between parents and their children, and among siblings. All of these are considered as forms of *philia*, but the relationship between men who are equal in virtue, and preferably equal in social status, is exclusively defined as the true form of friendship. According to Aristotle, forms of friendship motivated by interest or pleasure are considered accidental and temporary and will end once the business or amusement is over (Aristotle 2009, 144). True friendship, on the contrary, is based on the friend's individuality and his virtue; thus it is grounded in shared values and similarity; this excludes hierarchy and any discrepancies of gender, age, and status. Therefore, asymmetrical friendships between two individuals who have a large discrepancy in wealth, social position, experience, or power are more complicated, as there is a permanent suspicion that they might be rooted in the desire to benefit from the friend. For those asymmetrical friendships to function, the weaker friend must honor his wealthier or wiser friend and display reverence in order to close this gap: "This being so, equals must effect the required equalization on a basis of equality in love and in all other respects, while unequals must render what is in proportion to their superiority or inferiority" (Aristotle 2009, 159). This is one of the reasons why, for Aristotle, the relationship between husband and wife is one model of *philia*, but one that is linked to a fixed hierarchy because the husband, as the leader of the *oikos*, plays

the dominant role. Thus, the philosophy of friendship laid out in *Nicomachean Ethics* only mentions women in two possible constellations of *philia*, which are—due to the order of the *oikos*—necessarily hierarchical: as wives and as mothers. Consequently, they never appear as equal friends, and there is no category of female *philia*.⁵

During its reception over the centuries, the Aristotelian model of perfect friendship was increasingly limited to the ideal of the two male friends. This exclusion of women was especially true for the other major ancient theory on friendship, Cicero's *Laelius de amicitia*. The famous dialogue concentrates only on the ideal friendship and—unlike Aristotle—neglects to include the forms of less important, *accidental* friendships based on interest or pleasure. The examples Cicero cites for the ideal friendship model are exclusively male members of the leading political class, embodied by the protagonist Laelius and his friend Africanus who are both Roman consuls. Thus, at the core of the ancient concepts lies an exclusive model of ideal friendship that considers friendly relations between hierarchically differing individuals to be less worthy and, even more so, ultimately excludes them from its idealized model. This exclusion implicitly shuts women out of the highest form of friendship. It describes friendship between men and women as a very different and less significant model, or, in Cicero's case, it leaves such friendships out altogether. This had major implications for the history of friendship, which until the early modern period remained an exclusively male model, both in philosophy and literature. In the extensive survey *Friendship in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Age*, Albrecht Classen explains this omission by pointing to the androcentric model of ideal friendship: "in the history of patriarchal Western literature, friendship among women was mostly excised, ignored, or cast into a shadow of doubt since only men were regarded as strong enough to maintain the serene, mostly rational, idealistic friendship with another person" (Classen 2010, 81). While the model of hierarchical friendship was not open to women and lower-ranking members of society, as it was to noblemen, women remained excluded from the concept of friendship long after the class hierarchy collapsed.

⁵ While Aristotle's idea of the *oikos* is based on the hierarchical *philia* between men and women and constitutes the original form of community, Plato proposes the idea of female guardians as a form of community (Föllinger 1996, 204–214).

They were barred from the concept of true friendship with new arguments, now on the grounds of a supposed biological difference.

To understand the continuities and the transformations of the androcentric discourse in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, we must keep in mind three narratives of gendered friendships within the early modern period: In the first narrative, the philosophical discourse can be regarded as a continuation of the ancient model of true male friendship. In his essay *De l'amitié* (I, 28), Michel de Montaigne develops his ideal of individual friendship in a close reading of the ancient philosophy of friendship. In a gesture reflecting Renaissance Humanists' emphasis on the individual, Montaigne goes a step beyond these ancient sources, claiming that the ideal friendship is more than a relationship based on social and political similarity, as it rests on the friend's absolute singularity. Writing about Etienne de la Boétie, his friend who died at the age of thirty-three, Montaigne famously insists: "Par ce que c'estoit luy, par ce que c'estoit moy" (Montaigne 2007, 195) (Because it was him: because it was me) (Montaigne 2003, 230). According to Jacques Derrida, a major reason for "the double exclusion of the feminine in the philosophical paradigm of friendship" (Derrida 1993, 383)—that is, the exclusion of friendship among women and between men and women—lies in the preference for brotherhood, already present in Aristotle and advanced by Montaigne, who described his friendship with La Boétie as one between "brothers." Derrida quotes Montaigne's essay *De l'amitié*: "In truth, the name of the brother is a beautiful and delectable one, and for this reason we made it, he and I, our alliance" (Derrida 1993, 384).

Furthermore, whereas Aristotle and Cicero omit references to women, Montaigne explicitly addresses the possibility of female friendship only to dismiss it in a misogynistic gesture by condemning the female body and mind:

Joint qu'à dire vray la suffisance ordinaire des femmes n'est pas pour répondre à cette conference et communication, nourrisse de cette sainte cousture; ny leur ame ne semble assez ferme pour soustenir l'estreinte d'un neud si pressé, et si durable. Et certes sans cela, s'il se pouvoit dresser une telle accointance, libre et volontaire, où non seulement les ames eussent cette entiere jouissance, mais encores où les corps eussent part à l'alliance, où l'homme fust engagé tout entier: il est certain que l'amitié en seroit plus pleine et plus comble: mais ce sexe par nul exemple n'y est

encore peu arriver, et par les escholes anciennes en est rejeттé. (Montaigne 2007, 193)

In addition, women are in truth not normally capable of responding to such familiarity and mutual confidence as sustain that holy bond of friendship, nor do their souls seem firm enough to withstand the clasp of a knot so lasting and so tightly drawn. And indeed if it were not for that, if it were possible to fashion such a relationship, willing and free, in which not only the souls had this full enjoyment but in which the bodies too shared in the union—where the whole human being was involved—it is certain that the loving-friendship would be more full and more abundant. But there is no example yet of woman attaining to it and by the common agreement of the Ancient schools of philosophy she is excluded from it. (Montaigne 2003, 228–229)

Montaigne justifies this dismissal by portraying women as physically and emotionally weak. According to him, they lack *fermeté*, the stability that would enable them to maintain a durable amicable bond, while men can enjoy the pleasures of friendship with all the senses, with their souls and bodies, as they are entirely engaged (“engagé tout entier”) in this special bond.

Montaigne’s dismissal marks a landmark in the misogynist exclusion of women from friendship during the Humanist era. Accordingly, concerning the early modern period, Penelope Anderson (2010) invokes “the absent female friend.” She gives an important explanation for women’s absence in friendship and argues that they have been excluded from the model of ideal friendship through a fundamental social division between the public and the domestic sphere:

Most women lacked the humanist training that would prepare them for public life, much less the forum in which to exhibit the rhetorical skills acquired through the practice of friendship. [...] Both the withdrawal from public life and the focus on gender politics to the exclusion of civic politics mark the distance between this mode of political engagement and either humanist or democratic masculine friendship. For early modern men, friendship provides a site for powerful emotions that enable successful rhetoric in civic life; the private and the public seamlessly connect in word and action. For women, the double exclusion brought about by friendship treatises that describe women’s friendship as impossible and by the stereotype of women as more problematically emotional makes the claim to

friendship, and especially to its public consequences, harder to articulate. (Anderson 2010, 246–247)

Restricted by an androcentric, misogynist, and heteronormative model of friendship, female friends have no discursive place in history. This lack of categories points not only to the necessity of revealing the unwritten history of female friendship—a desideratum of ours here—but also makes visible, again, the fact that the male concept of friendship is thoroughly gendered, for it is itself constituted by women's exclusion.

This observation can be extended with a second narrative, the famous tale of the two friends, which emerged out of medieval morality tales and became notorious during the Renaissance. The motif is crucial for the question of gendered friendship, as it depicts women not as subjects but objects of exchange between male friends (Komorowska [forthcoming]). Usually, the tale is centered on one friend renouncing a planned marriage in order to cede his fiancée to his friend who has fallen so deeply in love with her that his secret passion threatens to end his life. While there are many variations of this tale dating from the Middle Ages to early modernity, Avalle-Arce (1957) traces one of its most influential sources back to Petrus Alphonsi's *Disciplina clericalis* (1100), who himself was influenced by Islamic, Jewish, and other sources. The gender politics at stake in this story become obvious if we read this model through the lens of Gayle Rubin's influential essay *The Traffic in Women* (1975). Rubin, in turn, cites a study by Marcel Mauss about the community-building structure of gifts as well as Claude Lévi-Strauss's study on kinship: Lévi-Strauss claims that the exchange of brides constitutes the primordial form of community building, as it creates kinship. Rubin has pointed out the extreme degree to which this notion objectifies women. The woman as a gift, and thus an object, constitutes a connecting link between two men, who serve as the subjects of this exchange in premodern society: "Since Lévi-Strauss sees the essence of kinship systems to lie in an exchange of women between men, he constructs an implicit theory of sex oppression" (Rubin 1975, 171). According to Gayle Rubin, these practices have major implications for the relationship between gift and gender:

If women are the gifts, then it is men who are the exchange partners. And it is the partners, not the presents, upon whom reciprocal exchange confers

its quasi-mystical power of social linkage. The relations of such a system are such that women are in no position to realize the benefits of their own circulation. As long as the relations specify that men exchange women, it is men who are the beneficiaries of the product of such exchanges—social organization. (Rubin 1975, 174)

According to this gift system, women are being excluded from the position of givers or receivers. If giving and accepting gifts is regarded as one of the founding processes of friendship relations, they are necessarily excluded from the social system of friends as they have literally nothing to give within this system.

A very different perspective on the role of women is offered within the tradition of the *querelle des femmes*, which constitutes a third narrative of gender and friendship. Here, we can locate a model that is itself constructed in opposition to the normative idea of friendship. By promoting female friendship and friendship between men and women, it challenges the androcentric model. Classen and Sandidge (2010) and Gil-Olse (2016) have pointed to the influence that Moderata Fonte's *Il merito delle donne* (1600) had on the debate around women's capacity for friendship. They reveal that Fonte proposes a new model for friendship between husband and wife and thus co-initiates a new discourse of ideal friendship. It is no coincidence that she wrote her text at the very beginning of the seventeenth century, the century when women writers—for the first time in history—would challenge and subvert premodern gender roles and establish new emotional categories. Female friendship and male-female friendship each came to play a major part in this discussion, as various chapters in this volume will elaborate. Before moving on to the examples, we note that the decisive turning point in the concept of friendship took place around the start of the eighteenth century, when new categories, such as female friendship and mixed friendship outside marriage, emerged and overlapped with traditional patterns in complex ways.

III. GENDER AND FRIENDSHIP IN THE SPANISH TRADITION

The tradition of the Spanish Counter-Reformation showed great distrust towards women's visibility. In his famous treatise, *La perfecta casada* (1583), the theologian and Augustinian Fray Luis de León warns

against the dangers of female sociability and urges the husband not to permit it in his household. He contends that even female neighbors and friends would bring bad manners into his home, eventually causing him to lose control over his *casa*:⁶

[...] que si los que entran en ella son de costumbres diferentes de las que en ella se usan, unos con el ejemplo y otros con la palabra, alteran los ánimos bien ordenados, y poco a poco los desquician del bien. [...] Por donde, acerca de Eurípides, dice bien el que dice: “Nunca, nunca jamás, que no me contento decirlo una sola vez, el cuerdo casado consentirá que entren cualesquier mujeres a conversar con la suya, porque siempre hacen mil daños. Unas, por su interés, tratan de corromper en ella la fe del matrimonio; otras, porque han faltado ellas, gustan de tener compañeros de sus faltas; otras porque saben poco y de puro necias”. (Fray Luis de León 1999, 124–125)

[...] if those who enter it have different customs to those in it, they will upset the well-ordered minds in it either by what they do or say, and little by little lead them away from the good. [...] Therefore, in Euripides, the person who says the following says it rightly: “Never, never—and I want to repeat this over and over again—will the married man allow any type of woman to enter his house to talk to his wife for they always cause great harm. Some out of self-interest try to destroy her faith in the marriage; others, because they have failed in their responsibilities and seek to have companions in crime; others because of their little knowledge and great stupidity”. (Fray Luis de León 1999, 125–126)

Such misogynistic devaluation of female communication is paradigmatic of this influential Christian book of conduct directed at the good wife. If left to enjoy each other’s company without male supervision, Fray Luis de León claims that women would incite each other to dangerously bad habits, adultery, or in the best case, only stupidity: “de puro necias.” Those female friends seem to have nothing in common with ideal male friends. If we are to believe the misogynist clergyman, it is due to untamed female affectivity that women cannot help

⁶ For an analysis of this gendered concept of the household and its importance for models of friendship in seventeenth-century Spanish literature see Komorowska (forthcoming).