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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).<sup>1</sup> This highly complex process, which paved

<sup>1</sup> 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).<sup>2</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> 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,<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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*.

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

<sup>4</sup> 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