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**Allan Hepburn, ed., 2024.**  
*Friendship and the Novel*  
**(Montreal & Kingston, London, Chicago:  
McGill-Queen's University Press)**

In the Introduction to *Friendship and the Novel*, the volume's editor Allan Hepburn observes that, while "philosophy has a rich tradition of discussing friendship" (6), "[l]iterary criticism about friendship is surprisingly thin" (5). I decided to check if this is (still) the case by entering the search term "friendship" into my university library online database, and looking at the first one hundred results, favouring monographs and excluding works of fiction. The overall scholarship on friendship is substantial, covering multiple disciplines, whose representation at times ranges from more general to very narrow and specific areas of interest (for instance, from *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Friendship* edited by Diane Jeske [New York, London: Routledge, 2023] to *Nietzsche and Friendship* by Willow Verkerk [London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019] or *Male Friendship in Ming China* by Martin Huang [Leiden, Boston: Brill; 2007]). It is true that so far friendship has been most extensively examined in philosophy, followed by anthropology, sociology, history, psychology, and education sciences. However, in the last three decades, there have also been more studies on cultural representations of friendship in fiction in various media, including film and television (e.g. the TV series *Friends*), but most importantly literature, that could be added to the short list provided by Hepburn showcasing a few literary scholars' analyses of female and male friendships. Perhaps literary criticism about friendship will appear a little less "thin" if the provided list is expanded by the following additions: *The Arts of Friendship: The Idealization of Friendship in Medieval and Early Renaissance Literature* by Reginald Hyatte (Leiden, New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), *Narrating Friendship and the British Novel, 1760-1830* by Katrin Berndt (London, New York: Routledge: 2017), three larger volumes including chapters on literature: *Dialectics of Friendship* edited by Roy Porter and Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Routledge, 2021; first published in 1989), *Friendship* by A. C. Grayling (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2013), and *A Tremendous Thing: Friendship from the Iliad to the Internet* by Gregory Jusdanis

(Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2014), as well as, finally, *The Politics and Poetics of Friendship* co-edited by Robert Kusek and myself (Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press, 2017), containing twenty-two essays, eighteen of which are written from the perspective of literary studies.

*Friendship and the Novel*, published in 2024, resulted from a colloquium organised in May 2022 in Montreal by its author (Allan Hepburn is James McGill Professor of Twentieth-Century Literature at McGill University). The volume opens with the abovementioned Introduction titled “Friendship and the Novel: Plot, Feeling, Form,” where Hepburn asks, “Is the novel even conceivable without the familiar figure of the friend?” (3) and closes with Afterword: “Friendship: A Coda” by Maria DiBattista. The collection offers eleven essays divided into four thematic parts. The texts differ greatly and require a brief individual commentary.

Part one, “Patterns,” consists of three chapters. “Between Women and Men: George Eliot’s Friendships” by Deborah Epstein Nord examines male-female friendly relationships across Eliot’s novels as the author’s model for all human relations. This catalogue-like study focuses entirely on describing the plot and characters. “Faux Amis in Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette*” by Lisa Sternlieb is a more interesting analysis of “a novel about profound and desperate friendlessness” (50) that includes biographical aspects, contemporaneous reception of Brontë’s writing, and reader-response theory, i.e. Brontë’s designs of her virtual readers. Sternlieb proposes that Brontë worked through the pain caused by a scathing review of *Jane Eyre* by creating her new narrator, Lucy, who refers to an unfriendly reader (50), and is very much unlike Jane, who speaks to the imaginary ideal reader of her narrative. Jonathan Greenberg’s “Friendship, Liberalism, and the Novel: *A Passage to India*” is another more ambitious chapter. It demonstrates how E. M. Forster addressed transcultural friendship across socio-political divides as well as political issues that are still very relevant today – largely thanks to the genre of the novel, which can accommodate difference unlike “more monological kinds of discourse” (88).

Part two, “American Examples,” comprises two essays. “Henry James’s *Ficelles* as Friends” by Brian Gingrich highlights the role of supporting actors, the main heroes’ friends, and reads them as “functional partners” (99), a device serving as “the reader’s friend” and helper in constructing narratives. In “Willa Cather and the Posterity of Friendship,” Allan Hepburn discusses friendship as an alternative to marriage and kinship in Cather’s output – including beyond the grave, after a friend’s death, as the analysis additionally concerns itself with the temporality of friendship, while providing a catalogue of characters across Cather’s oeuvre.

Part three, “Modern Instances,” with its four essays is the longest in the book. “The Friendship of Joseph Conrad and André Gide: From Admiration to Disillusion and Back” by Emily O. Wittman stands out as the only fully biographical chapter in the volume, devoted to “one of the great literary friendships of the 20<sup>th</sup> century” (145), which played itself out mainly through letters. “The Elusive Figure of Friendship in Virginia Woolf’s Novels” by Erwin Rosinberg is yet another catalogue with detailed characterisations proposing that friendship “is conveyed primarily through figurative language,” i.e. elusive or mutable symbols (169) in Woolf’s modernist fiction. In “Charles Ryder’s Sentimental Education: The Lessons of Friendship in *Brideshead Revisited*,” Jay Dickson examines Evelyn Waugh’s best-known novel and concludes that “Waugh renders Charles’s friendship with Sebastian in educational terms” (193), while the queer aspect of the relationship is curiously reduced to an endnote (204). In “Muriel Spark’s Ensembles,” Jacqueline Shin analyses “relationships that *look* like friendships but really are not” (208; original emphasis) in Spark’s novels about groups of girls or women—specifically constructed environments that become “microcosms of division” (ibid.). Intriguingly, this highly, perhaps the most, interesting chapter in the collection, is *not* about friendship.

Part four, “Contemporary Friendships,” offers two essays. Robert L. Caserio’s “Critical Distance, Reparative Proximity: Changing Representation of Queer Friendship” centres on Hanya Yanagihara’s *A Little Life* (2015) and Matthew Lopez’s *The Inheritance* (2019)—two novels about “post-homosexual friendship” marked by “the turn against eros” (235). This text provides a particularly valuable analysis of Yanagihara’s writing as a “gothic melodrama” (249). Finally, in “The European Generation X Novel,” Barry McCrea turns to non-English speaking Western European novelists: especially Karl Ove Knausgaard and Elena Ferrante, among a few others, to compare “the vastly different structural role of friendship” (262) in their writing. All the selected Gen X authors are inconsistently put in one category with (Irish and Anglophone) Sally Rooney and (French) Édouard Louis, who are at the same time recognised as millennials. The chapter appears to be less a study of literary friendships (addressed in most detail in Ferrante), and more an attempt at a classification of the European Gen X novel or “Euro Gen X Style” (274) based on a handful of writers mainly from Italy and Norway.

*Friendship and the Novel*, not unlike the collection I myself co-edited, perforce could never be a monograph in a traditional sense but instead is characterised by a certain randomness of an accidental collage of authors and their interests that—due to some configuration of fate—met in one place and time. I believe

this is all one can accomplish when undertaking a subject as broad as “Friendship and the Novel” (and indeed “The Politics and Poetics of Friendship”). Attempts at a synthesis or a theory of friendship – without imposing on oneself very narrow specifications – would be as productive as trying to generalise and essentialise why various people act variously in various situations. People vary and so do friendships – greatly, across time, the globe, and each individual friendship’s duration. A variety of selected examples is something that can certainly be hoped for, and what *Friendship and the Novel* does deliver.

The variety aspect of the volume also applies to the quality of the provided analyses. As mentioned before, several chapters do little more than catalogue characters and portray the workings of their particular types of friendships. In fact, methodologically, the whole collection often appears old-fashioned: there is very little use of contemporary theories that have creatively proliferated in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (the only exception being Caserio’s penultimate essay, which refers to queer and trauma theory). What further contributes to the book’s distinctly 20<sup>th</sup>-century feel is that most of the analysed authors are from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries (which in itself by no means excludes the possibility of applying to them 21<sup>st</sup>-century research methodologies). If it were not for the last two chapters, addressing 21<sup>st</sup>-century literature and going beyond the Anglosphere (together with André Gide from Part Three), the book’s title would be far too broad, and a different one would seem more accurate: e.g. *Friendship in 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-Century Selected American and British Novels*. Similarly broad and vague are the titles of the book’s four parts. “Patterns” is vague and arbitrary – there are always some “patterns” in such compositional divisions. Why are “American Examples” preceded by “Patterns” rather than “British Examples,” which would better reflect the clear pattern? “Modern Instances” and “Contemporary Friendships” are also rather unimaginative, while creating a temporal mini-pattern, albeit inconsistent with the earlier two parts.

Undoubtedly, the essays in *Friendship and the Novel* will be relevant to all readers interested in literary friendships and the novel, as well as to scholars of each author, adding yet another layer to the totality of their work. As stated in the collection’s “Overview” for marketing purposes: friendship remains “an abiding mystery in fiction as in life.” More books should and will be written about it, also in the field of literary criticism, which has now been enriched by Hepburn’s edited collection.