

**Barbara Caine (ed.), *Friendship: A History*, Routledge, London, 2014
pp. 416; RRP £26.00 (approx. \$44 AUD) Paperback.**

Friendship: A History presents a persuasive overview of friendship's intellectual past, focusing on the extensive historical discourse and debate surrounding this form of relationship since the early Classical period. As the first line of the introduction states, no one can underestimate the importance attributed to friendship in contemporary society, nor, I think, can anyone argue that this importance has a long history in the West.

The volume is organised chronologically, beginning in the philosophical nursery of Classical Greece. The first chapter – 'The Classical Ideals of Friendship' by Dirk Baltzly and Nick Eliopoulos – delves into the complex history of the term *philia* and the philosophical works on friendship; at 51 pages (not including notes), it is an excellent overview of the most relevant themes that would go on to play such a significant role in friendship theory for the next two thousand years. The entire (albeit very short 7 page) second chapter is devoted, not surprisingly, to Cicero, whose work has had the most lasting impact on the concept of friendship. In the third chapter, 'The Latin West', Constant J. Mews and Neville Chiavaroli address the manner in which Christianity began to shape and form new conceptions of friendship, based on the Classical philosophies, but adapted to fit the burgeoning Christian theology of the medieval period. One of friendship's functions seems to have been to forge ties between men of power – this is evident in the Classical literature as much as in the medieval discourse, although the medieval discourse, according to Mews and Chiavaroli, also showed friendship being used to define feudal obligations. Of particular interest in the following chapter – 'Renaissance Friendships: Traditional Truths, New and Dissenting Voices' by Carolyn James and Bill Kent – is the emergence of women's opinions on friendship, beginning, according to James and Kent, in the later fifteenth century. The dominant view was still that true friendship could only be experienced by men, a belief that would not shift until the eighteenth century. In the fifth chapter, 'From Christian Friendship to Secular Sentimentality: Enlightenment Re-evaluations', David Garrioch argues that friendship began to be viewed through a more secular lens, with a focus on sentimentality that was previously absent from friendship discussions. In 'Taking up the Pen: Women and the Writing of Friendship', Barbara Caine argues that the late eighteenth century saw friendship being increasingly discussed in a fictional, rather than a philosophical, context. Caine argues that women's roles in the friendship discourse began to shift, bringing female friendships into sharper focus. In the seventh chapter, 'Class, Sex, and Friendship: The Long Nineteenth Century', Marc Brodie and Barbara Caine note continuity from the eighteenth century in how friendship was seen to mean a relationship with someone on whom one could rely in trying times, a relationship based on shared interests and activities. The rise of urbanization and industrialisation, however, saw significant political and social changes, which resulted in changes to how friendship was

discussed, as well as the purpose that it served. While the nineteenth century saw political agendas and friendship become closely intertwined, the period also saw the literary discussion of women's friendship outstrip that of men, particularly in America and Britain.

Of particular interest to scholars of friendship and masculinity is how changing perceptions of sexuality impacted on male friendships. Brodie and Caine note how Freud's discussion on unconscious desires (specifically sexuality) altered perceptions of male friendship, a relationship previously seen as the ultimate bond between men. The impact of this is noted again in the last chapter, when discussing the twenty-first century concept of *bromance*, a term which initially connoted a homosexual relationship but has since become representative of intimate, non-sexual friendships between straight men. The twenty-first century saw the rise of a specifically threatening male sexuality in the context of friendship, which, for the first time since its intellectual inception, saw intimate friendship become the purview of women.

Tracing the intellectual discussion of friendship as the book does elides many nuances of experienced friendship – particularly for women and minorities. This is a problem, however, that cannot be avoided if one focuses on intellectual friendship discourse, as, for most of history, this was the purview of the dominant male elite.

One of the main values of this work rests in its thorough overview of the friendship debate, drawing on consistencies and differences all the way from the Classical period to the twenty-first century. There is a great deal of literature on friendship from nearly every era since it was brought to the intellectual table by Pythagoras – yet this volume tames the topic as much as is possible, allowing the reader to experience a structured glimpse without losing sight of the complexity of the relationship. Each chapter stands well on its own, delving into available primary sources, yet at the same time, the collaborative writing process (between all twelve authors) mentioned in the preface, has resulted in an edited collection that reads nearly as seamlessly as a single-authored book. It's a useful text for students and scholars of history, gender, friendship, and politics. The bibliography is comprehensive at over forty pages, a valuable resource of students and scholars alike. A necessary addition to the libraries of many humanities scholars.

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