

Salve Regina University

**Classical-Christian Friendship Operating in Western Literature:
Oral Traditions to the Apex of Print Culture**

A Dissertation Submitted to
The Faculty of the Humanities
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by

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PREVIEW

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GRADUATE STUDIES

This dissertation of Marc G. LeVasseur entitled *Classical-Christian Friendship Operating in Western Literature: Oral Traditions to the Apex of Print Culture* submitted to the Ph.D. Program in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Salve Regina University has been read and approved by the following individuals:

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To Jeanne d'Arc Caouette LeVasseur 1927-2010

To Richard S. LeVasseur 1925-2005

To William E. LeVasseur 1920-2009

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Abstract

The classical-Christian model of friendship has operated for many centuries from oral traditions and through the age of print. However, technological developments in communication and media rearrange mindscapes. Consequently, values, or, those things that give meaning, can change, such as perceptions of friendship. If one accepts that communication is vital to human relationships, the paradigm for the classical-Christian friendship should operate according to the new vocabulary of expanding communication and media possibilities. This work examines literature and philosophical thought within their historical contexts in order to gauge the operation of the classical-Christian friendship model from the beginning of Western literature to Western literature at the apex of print culture.

PREVIEW

Introduction

Classical-Christian Friendship Operating in Western Literature: From Oral Traditions to the Apex of Print Culture

This project began as a question about how technological developments in communication had operated upon the essential human relationship that is friendship. To answer such a question is like trying to put the galaxy in a bottle. For one thing, people define friendship differently. For another, people have been writing about friendship and all its aspects for centuries. Therefore, it was decided to use a well-established friendship paradigm that the early theorists fashioned as the best possible, and that the inquiry would be limited to Western civilization. This model is named the classical-Christian friendship. The field of referential possibility is immense; so the spade is driven into the garden of Western fiction literature, for the first thinkers to be curious about friendship often refer to the narratives in their mythology and legends for the grandest friendship examples. An investigation of legendary, mythical or imagined friendships from the beginning to the present should be indicative of the manner in which the classical prototype of the best kind of friendship has operated as it has encountered changing modes of communication and new communication media. An examination of friendships starting with Gilgamesh and Enkidu into the 20th century with particular emphasis on friendship from the days of oral communication to the apex of print culture is the final reduction of this work. The question is formulated as follows: How has communication media operated on the classical-Christian concept of Western friendship both directly through personal communication and indirectly through the societal or cultural changes

agitated by new media? When speaking of friendship, one should again remember that, in answering this question, the classical-Christian paradigm serves as the friendship template that is laid across historical landscapes from the beginning of literature to the early 20th century.

It is necessary, first, to explain the framework of this extraordinary friendship. The discourse begins with Plato (1993) and ends with Montaigne (1965, 1993).

Significant additions are made to the model when the early Christian theologians begin handling it. The first chapter, therefore, is a familiar compilation of friendship rhetoric.

Brought into the foundational conversations are two other subtopics and an important juxtaposition. The topic of solitude has significance as a counterpoint to friendship.

Aelred's ideas (2010) about friendship between men and women receive some attention.

The classicists discounted women in their friendship possibilities and most tended to separate marriage from friendship without even a comparison. The other has to do with physical proximity. It is an important quality of the classical friendship, and it rates considerable attention because writing permits friends to communicate at greater distances. Aristotle (1980) thought that one ultimately wanted to always be with or near his friend in the best kind of friendship. The early Celtic Saints were exceptions, and in these early friendships written communication was unlikely. Although great friendships were established, as missionaries and evangelists the friends were often forced to travel great distances and to spend long periods of time away from each other. These special friendships, however, remained intact. The Celtic saint friends tried to be present when one or the other was dying in order to facilitate the transition from the physical to the

spiritual world. These friendships are very briefly discussed although they warrant greater attention.

With something of a rubric for friendship in hand, one must discuss the importance of communication in all human activity and therefore its impact on friendship. The discourse must, necessarily, emphasize language and how it works, for language is the fundamental platform upon which all communication media are based. Chomsky's work, as expressed by Pinker (1994) and others, in language construction and acquisition is comparable to important scientific breakthroughs in other areas by people like Newton and Einstein; however, there are also the more subtle and intangible elements of language, about which philosophers like Rorty (1989), Foucault (1970) and White (2014) can be helpful. Simply, it is emphasized that language is the vehicle by which the human being expresses his or her thoughts most profoundly. The cause and effect relationship between language and thought becomes a point of contention as some writers do not accept its linearity and believe that the connection can instead be dynamic, or circular. Language also represents culture. Cultural and social influence cannot be excluded from the friendship discussion, for to many thinkers they are the walls within which the superior kind of friendship must operate.

The influence of language and the growing ways in which it can be conveyed require reference points as one sails through the centuries analyzing friendship stories. Marshall Poe's Push Theory of Media Effects (2011) is a useful template that is applied to five specific media eras. This theory, however, is not the definitive answer and is only used as one instrument to analyze the potential influence of media on friendship. At this juncture, one should conclude that since media can determine the way that people use

their minds, media might also rearrange and alter the operation of the classical-Christian friendship.

Equipped with the classical-Christian friendship paradigm and to a lesser degree Poe's method of evaluating media effects, the first expedition travels through the relatively well-mapped trails in the park of classical friendship narrative and epic poetry to study how the friends fulfill the criteria as model friends. The context is oral communication, for the earliest tales are born out of oral traditions. Divine intervention, spirituality, solitude, virtue, the deficient friend, the friend as a catalyst for action; reciprocity, sacrifice, and subordination are some of the questions that are framed and examined. The friendship tales range from *Gilgamesh* (1999) to *the Song of Roland* (1999). The friendships within this range are often the original substance of the classical friendship model. Poe's system enables a workable connection to oral culture and tradition. Much emerges from this visit. For one thing, women are largely excluded from the early friendship narrative. For another, solitude is something to be abhorred. Finally, the friends themselves are invariably extraordinary people, mostly heroic; some are demigods, figure in God's or the gods' plans, and hear directly from God or the gods.

Without the manuscript era and the development of written language, this undertaking would be impossible, yet it is essential to review how radically written communication has restructured societies and perceptions of the world and also to be grateful that the marvelous friendships of the past, born from oral tradition, were recorded. The grand invention is, of course, the alphabet, but learning the abstract code is not a process that comes naturally to human beings while oral communication is like learning how to walk. The human brain, according to most language experts, is pre-wired

for speech communication. The human hardware, in other words, comes with preset programming that has hardly been modified through evolution. Stanislas Dehaene in, *Reading in the Brain: the New Science of How We Read* (2009) provides a thorough analysis of how the brain functions in this regard, and he explains the acquisition of literacy in simple neurological terms. This friendship study proposes that if there is hard wiring, or pre-programming, or memory in the organic sense, one could reason that, for instance, ethics and values might also, to a degree, be innately transferable. One could even suggest that there is a friendship instinct. Even if a pattern for abstract thinking or one for values of the heart, as it were, might seem improbable, the human brain and its storage possibilities still contain enigma. It can be claimed, however, that the human being, or the human brain, has a penchant for patterns, and the more times that certain patterns are traced, the more engrained those patterns are likely to become. This hypothesis could hold for the transfer of a friendship template through many generations; maybe a friendship paradigm owes its formation to the primordial need for survival. The lone individual, in a primitive setting, is almost surely doomed. Herein lays one of the reasons that this exploration also probes into the changing perceptions of solitude as part of the friendship discourse.

The deep investigation of reading and the manuscript era are also for the purpose of showing that the brain has to adjust in order to acquire literacy. The learning process is artificial. Reading and writing take years to master. One has to work at it. Thus, the question arises of whether the organic adaptations coincide with changing views about friendship. Certainly, from the print era forward there is a new kind of truth based upon real experience, growing scientific knowledge, and technical progress that can all be

easily documented and widely disseminated. The world has become more cynical and practical although churches and monarchies at first remain elite and powerful entities. Between 1500 and 1700, new friendship narratives and arguments are steadily emerging from a growing educated class, and these new writings are handily multiplied by the use of the printing press. The heroic idealism of the past hero friendship encounters the practical notion of being pragmatic. Alceste, in Molière's *Le Misanthrope* (2006) is made to look the fool for his dogmatism. Although Philinte seems to be well intentioned and regards himself as Alceste's friend, Alceste refuses his friendship. Alemán, a Spanish novelist, in his story *Guzmán de Alfarach* (1987) develops a main character who yearns for a superior friendship but who finds it impossible to attain. Both stories, however, highlight the importance of communication between friends. Women enter the friendship forum as well, leading to a profitable discourse about friendship between women, marriage, and the Platonic friendship. Katherine Philips (Llewellyn 2002) stands in center ring with her poetry and letters.

The possibility of the best kind of friendship with key elements of the classical friendship model is seemingly reintroduced in the eighteenth century as the door is opened to outstanding friendships between people of different origins and classes. Surprising contributors to the friendship narratives are Voltaire (1972) and Diderot (1936). Candide becomes best friends with his valet Cacambo who is of mixed origin. Diderot in “*Les deux amis de Bourbonnes*” reminds the reader that in a material age, the superior friendship as one where the friendship itself is the greatest fortune that each friend can possess. With literacy and the print era, however, comes a new kind of isolation and solitude. Jean-Jacques Rousseau (2012) withdraws from society, and Mary

Shelley (1976) suggests that science and technology can create sentient creatures that are no longer human. She probes into what it is to be utterly and totally friendless. The story of Goethe's *Werther* (1962) is largely told through Werther's writing to his friend, William. A discussion of physical proximity in friendship ensues; and potential difficulties of friendship between the sexes becomes part of the story perhaps without the author's realizing it, when one or the other is drawn to his friend beyond the Platonic sense in a desire for absolute completeness. The question of nature, too, as solace for the lonely and solitary, receives attention as Rousseau presents ideas about the goodness of nature and the natural good in humanity. Although Rousseau is not specific about friendship with God, there is the thought that one through nature can experience God's presence and consequently not feel alone. Labor and action are also part of friendship. The best kinds of friendship occur when friends are engaged together in some labor or activity just as the classical hero friends might be fighting together in war or on a journey to slay some mythical monster.

The 19th and early 20th centuries are extensions of the print era. The 19th century in particular takes firm hold of many of the concepts that sprout from the 18th century. Emerson (1993) and C. S. Lewis (2012) restore and expand the classical-Christian friendship in the belief that such an outstanding relationship between two people can still exist by keeping the principal parts of the original model intact, such as the need for individual integrity and right thinking but without the naivety of an *Alceste* or *Candide*. In the new world, Huck, an adolescent boy, can develop a friendship with an adult slave, Jim (Twain 1993), but it is society that perhaps corrupts this friendship and prevents it from enduring. Ishmael and his "bosom friend" Queequeg, born a cannibal in the South

Seas, exhibit the best kind of friendship devotion (Melville 1993). While Thoreau (1960, 1991) relishes nature and solitude without excluding friendship, Bartleby experiences utter aloneness (Melville 2015). Set in the 19th century but written in the 20th, Willa Cather (1990) writes the story of the missionary priest Father Latour and his boyhood friend Father Vaillant who together are sent to restore the Catholic Church in the New Mexico territory after it is annexed by the United States. Latour is to become the territorial bishop, and Vaillant is indeed Latour's right hand and comfort. There is no less a story of friendship and challenge than that of Ishmael and Queequeg in *Moby Dick* (Melville 1993). In the friendship stories there is a return of the spiritual element. At times, an invisible hand seems to help and guide the characters and allows the friends their opportunities to serve each other. There is a question of whether the capacity for the best kind of friendship can exist without faith and Sartre's solitary Roquentin in *La nausée* (1938) struggles without purpose and meaning. Finally, Carver's short story "Cathedral" (2015) includes friendship communication media without print, in fact, almost without sight. It links this work to the next step, which would be to examine the effects of audiovisual media on friendship. Audiocassette tapes, two-way amateur radio, and television are all part of the friendship experience, and a Platonic friendship between two friends of the opposite sex is portrayed as a long standing, potentially lifelong bond. The sightlessness of one friend is an important consideration in the analysis of this story.

The investigation includes Merton's concise point-by-point enumeration and explanation of the revised classical-Christian friendship model as it has emerged in the 20th century (1955). One discovers that the rules have not fundamentally changed as humanity confronts new communication media. The conclusion introduces possible

avenues in the friendship discourse as they might be reflected in contemporary fiction, particularly in film and contemporary drama. The conversation ends hopefully, for friendship and its possibilities have progressed positively through the print era.

Friendship has become far less discriminatory in the sense that it can develop between the most unlikely pair and without social criticism; yet the essential arches established by the ancients and the early Christian writers are still operating.

Review of Literature

There are many friendship treatises, and several researchers probe the area of the connection between friendship and communication. Few, however, look at how communication technologies could have altered friendship throughout history or used specific devices for studying the effects. Furthermore, there is little attempt to identify friendship as it is depicted in literature in connection to the prevalent media of specific historical periods although Ronald Sharp's *Friendship and Literature: Spirit and Form* (1968) is referenced in the some contemporary works on friendship that regard literature but is not reviewed here. Two of the more recent books that parallel the interests of this investigation are Sandra Lynch's *Philosophy and Friendship* (2005) and A. C. Grayling's *Friendship* (2013). These two works, however, have not and shall not be consulted for the purpose of this research project. The analyses of the philosophical perspectives that are conveyed in this project shall rely heavily on the original works and most of the analysis that attempts to define the nature of friendship is that of this author. Although the reader will quip that the wheel may have been reinvented, it is also hoped that some new insight might emerge from fresh analyses of the original texts without the encumbrances

and prejudices of other scholarly inferences. Nevertheless, these two works, *Philosophy and Friendship* (2005) and Grayling's *Friendship* (2013) appear to be excellent texts and demand review. A third book, Gregory Jusdanis's *A Tremendous Thing: Friendship from the Iliad to the Internet* (2014), must be reviewed, for it is an outstanding work that most closely resembles the friendship examination that follows this review.

One of the first things Lynch (2005) claims in her preface is that, "The mobility, urban dislocation, time constraints, transience and heterogeneity that characterise modern life might be expected to disrupt conceptions of friendship constructed within the context of life in more homogeneous societies" (ix). Lynch will anchor her work upon the Aristotelian view of friendship and how it has been processed by other friendship philosophers both past and modern such as Cicero and Derrida. Lynch, in *Philosophy and Friendship* (2005) attempts to present the changing philosophical viewpoints of friendship and to thus arrive at a more realistic than idealistic definition that better encompasses a contemporary scenario. Essentially, Lynch (2005) strives to convince the reader that the friendship model is not and should not be a fixed one: "If we acknowledge friendship as a dynamic relation between individuals we can apply the force of these comments to friends" (xi). Lynch (2005) includes many of the most important friendship themes which she labels "self-understanding," the "ethical relationship" after she builds an understanding of what she calls "the Aristotelian Taxonomy" and "the Kantian Taxonomy" (v-vi).

Grayling's effort towards defining and understanding friendship entitled, simply, *Friendship* (2013), builds an extensive yet highly accessible summary of early friendship ideas from Plato through the enlightenment. Accordingly, he lays the groundwork for

parts titled “Legends” and “Experiences.” In “Legends” many of the most familiar friendship narratives, such as those of Achilles and Patroclus, and David and Jonathan are contextualized. Grayling (2013) grounds his discussion almost entirely on classical definitions and examples in these first two parts (“Ideas” and “Legends”) of his work. In other words, he stays largely within the parameters of philosophical thought and friendship narratives beginning with Plato’s *Lysis* and *Symposium* and ending with the Enlightenment, which he suggests is a return to the friendship models of the Roman Republic (95). Grayling’s part III, “Experiences,” is briefest and presents much of Grayling’s perspective on friendship. One of the main points that Grayling wishes to emphasize about the nature of friendship is that it knows no boundaries as regards gender, age, or family bond; and people will be happy if they are able to achieve it:

In the end, though, it is a personal friendship which is the central point of this discussion. I repeat what I said at the outset: we regard it as a success if we become friends with our parents when we grow up, our children when they grow up, or lovers, spouses and workmates—for in every case a bond comes to exist, and can be relied on, which transcends the other reasons we entered into association with the people in question. (Grayling 2013, 202)

Grayling’s perspective follows a more classical bent. He is less pragmatic than Lynch and seems to approach the concept of friendship as something more static than dynamic although the idea of with whom one might become a friend is broadened into contemporary terms.

This work and research concurs with Grayling’s in much of his analysis; but this investigation will scrutinize a version of the classical model of friendship through the lenses of technological innovation, particularly in the way that human beings are able to

communicate with each other and in the way that they communicate culture to one another through media.

Jusdanis's *A Tremendous Thing: Friendship from the Iliad to the Internet* (2014), which is not consulted for this work, is remarkably similar, nevertheless, in its use of philosophical references and particularly in its analyses of the great narratives like *Gilgamesh* (1999) *The Song of Roland* (1999) and even *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1993) to name a handful. It is a highly integrated work that does not strictly label friendship, for instance, as classical, although a paradigm emerges thematically according to chapter: "The Politics of Friendship," "Mourning Becomes Friendship," "Duty and Desire," and "Friends and Lovers." In other words, the structure of Jusdanis's book is not so much historical or chronological as it is thematic. One will also find a balanced, reliance on secondary sources for theoretical verification and literary analysis.

Jusdanis ventures past the printing press. For instance, he examines audiovisual friendships in films such as *Zorba the Greek* (1964). He also treads into the arena of erotic love and friendship, confronting classical thinking through an analysis of Plato's and of Aristotle's friendship ideas while touching briefly upon Christian concepts. This author, however, disagrees with some of Jusdanis's speculation, particularly when he suggests that Ishmael and Queequeg may have shared more than an acceptable male intimacy according to classical-Christian standards (Jusdanis 2014, 135-139). Jusdanis also gives less attention to the idea of solitude as juxtaposition to friendship than one shall find in this examination. Finally, Jusdanis broaches "Digital Friendship" in an afterword, which well exceeds the range of this endeavor.

In short, Jusdanis's book is a much better synthesis of friendship from the beginning of Western civilization to the present than this investigator has seen, particularly in regards to a paradigm that compares greatly to the classical-Christian model framed by in this writing. *A Tremendous Thing: Friendship from the Iliad to the Internet* (2014) is not, however, a direct focus on the media element of friendship so much as it is an effort to connect philosophical thinking to the friendship narratives and even to their authors. Jusdanis also shows more interest in the biographies of the friendship authors themselves to make his assertions. Frankly, if Jusdanis's text had come into this author's hands sooner, it would have forced considerable reevaluation and revision of the investigation that follows this review. However, a closer scrutiny of Jusdanis's work might show areas of real disagreement, particularly in places where Jusdanis accepts contemporary historical analysis as factual.

This project must also consider the efforts of other theorists and scientists who wish to discover the extent to which communication technologies and media operate on friendship. Much of the current social and psychological analysis of friendship communication seems to have omitted philosophy and literature or, at minimum, failed to establish an adequate definition of that which is friendship. In this century, there have been several areas of interest in friendship and communication, and this dissertation will make limited use of them, especially the empirical work, which, because of its sheer volume as well as its specialization, does not easily align itself to fiction literature. Although some of these studies are narrow in focus, they might help verify some of the theories on friendship communication that may develop. Some in-depth social research into this question involves the study of adolescents with language impairments referred to

as “significant language impairments” or “SLI” (Wadman, Durkin and Conti-Ramsden 2011, 42). These studies generally acknowledge that, “Children and adolescents without friends, or with poor friendship quality, are at risk of loneliness, stress, and concomitant developmental psychopathologies” (Durkin and Conti-Ramsden 2007, 1441). Although most of the research concerns adolescents, other studies have reported that adults with significant language impairments, or SLI, have issues “in respect to forming and maintaining close relationships” (Wadman, Durkin and Conti-Ramsden 2011, 43).

There have also been studies conducted in the relatively new field of cyberpsychology to measure, “the effects of text, audio, video, and in-person communication on bonding between friends” (Sherman, Michikyan and Greenfield 2013). The particular study in question, however, has a rather limited sample size “of 58 female university students aged 18-21 years” (Ibid.). The findings are, nevertheless, relevant to today and include the use of the latest communication technologies.

A most interesting problem is raised in regards to language and cultural differences, suggesting that those differences can foster a different communication dynamic between friends and in that which might constitute a superior friendship. Again, the sample size of the research is quite small and gender specific, having to do only with Finnish men (Virtanen and Isotalus 2013, 133).

One of the more theoretical works, and one that is closer to this dissertation, is reflected in an attempt to link “the phenomenology of friendship” to a socio-historical analysis (Dreher 2010, 401). Dreher calls his piece a “parallel action” to the friendship phenomena in which “the perspective of social science focuses on concrete socio-historical constructions of friendship in different time periods” (Ibid.). Dreher’s effort

seems particularly relevant, for he is performing an historical study, and he uses the philosophical base in what he describes as “subjective ‘constitution processes’” (2010, 402). The sociological aspect is this “parallel action” is referred to as the “socio-historic ‘construction’ of the phenomenon” (Ibid.). The inquiry into current research has not been an exhaustive one, and further findings that bear significantly on this project are highly probable.

PREVIEW

Chapter 1

Fundamentals of the Classical-Christian Friendship

“If they are friends of ours, invite them in,” [Agathon] said, “but if not, say that the drinking is over.”

—Plato, *Symposium*

The earliest recorded friendship in Western Literature, the story of Gilgamesh and Enkidu (1999), predates the early philosophers; however, discussions of friendship theory in Western thought begin with the Greeks and their friendship stories. There is the famous friendship of Achilles and Patroclus in Homer’s *Iliad* (1993, 1999) and later that of Aeschylus’s trilogy, *Oresteia*, between Orestes and Pylades. The Greek philosophers will draw on these stories and others in their mythology and legends to help them make their cases for what friendship is and ought to be, and their theoretical discourse shall undergo little modification despite the infusion of Judeo-Christian doctrine during the Dark Ages. In fact, one might propose that friendship theory comes full circle prior to the printing press as love is always from the beginning a central theme in that which comprises friendship, and the best, truest kind of love, even the capacity for love, is highly dependent on the virtuousness of the lovers. Love and virtue, then, are at the core of the friendship discussion, but these concepts are of themselves two extremely complex things. Aristotle (1980) simplifies through synthesis by calling love a virtue as it regards friendship:

Now since friendship depends more on loving, and it is those who love their friends that are praised, loving seems to be the characteristic virtue of friends, so