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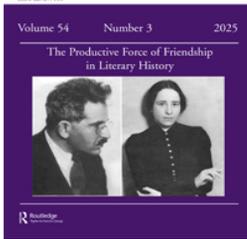
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# The Productive Force of Friendship in Literary History

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## INTRODUCTION

# THE PRODUCTIVE FORCE OF FRIENDSHIP IN LITERARY HISTORY

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‘[L]aß das Büchlein deinen Freund sein’<sup>1</sup> — Already in the preface to what would become the first international bestseller of German literature, the theme of friendship is foregrounded as a central concern of the text. *Die Leiden des jungen Werther* seeks to offer consolation and encouragement to readers who find themselves in a similarly desperate situation as Goethe’s protagonist Werther, thereby assuming the role of a supportive companion.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the novel’s epistolary structure — a series of letters written by Werther to his friend Wilhelm — emulates a correspondence between close friends. Readers are implicitly invited to adopt Wilhelm’s perspective and thereby assume his role as Werther’s confidant. Within the narrative itself, friendship emerges as a recurring motif, most notably in the context of the tragic love triangle involving Werther, Lotte, and Albert. The relationship between Werther and Albert is characterized by a complex dynamic in which friendship and rivalry become intricately intertwined.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Lotte proposes friendship as a potential alternative to the obsessive passion Werther develops for

<sup>1</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, ‘Die Leiden des jungen Werther’, in *Werke*, ed. by Erich Trunz (Munich: Beck, 1982–2008), VI: *Romane und Novellen I* (1996), pp. 7–124 (p. 7).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Katja Mellmann, ‘Das Buch als Freund — der Freund als Zeugnis. Zur Entstehung eines neuen Paradigmas für Literaturrezeption und persönliche Beziehungen, mit einer Hypothese zur Erstrezeption von Goethes Werther’, in *Bürgerlichkeit im 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. by Hans-Edwin Friedrich, Fotis Jannidis and Marianne Willems (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2006), pp. 201–40.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Eckhardt Meyer-Krentler, *Der Bürger als Freund: ein sozioethisches Problem und seine Kritik in der neueren deutschen Erzählliteratur* (Munich: Fink, 1984), pp. 75–80.

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her. Indeed, shortly before Werther's suicide, she urges him to redirect his love toward someone else, in order that Lotte and Werther might be free to enjoy 'die Seligkeit einer wahren Freundschaft'.<sup>4</sup>

The significance of friendship in the novel extends beyond its fictional framework to encompass its real-world inspirations: Goethe's friendships with Charlotte Buff, Johann Christian Kestner, and their mutual acquaintance Karl Wilhelm Jerusalem. At the same time, the literary movement of *Empfindsamkeit*, which both shaped *Werther* and became the object of Goethe's critical engagement within the novel, was deeply rooted in contemporary practices of friendship, literature and sociability — from the *Darmstädter Empfindsamer Kreis* and Johann Wilhelm Ludwig Gleim's *Freundschaftstempel* in Halberstadt to the *Göttinger Hainbund* and Sophie von La Roche's literary salon in Koblenz — to name just a few examples. Friendship and the practices associated with it had already left a profound mark on German literature prior to *Werther* and continued to do so well beyond it. *Werther* thus exemplifies the close interrelation between literary representations of friendship and the lived practice of friendship as a condition of literary production. Such portrayals not only serve to educate and inspire readers in the cultivation of friendship but also reflect the friendships among authors that often underpinned and enabled the creation of literature itself.

With this special issue, we would like to direct closer attention to the immense productivity of friendship in both regards: as a practice *preceding*, and *accompanying*, if not even conditioning the creation of literary text and as a practice *reflected in* literature as fiction. Friendship is here understood as a relationship between two or more<sup>5</sup> individuals who find a form of closeness that transcends biological kinship and cannot be (fully) subsumed under the category of romantic love. As several contributions to this issue demonstrate, however, the language of friendship may nonetheless draw on familial and romantic idioms, with friends at times addressed as brothers, sisters, or loved ones.

## RELATIONALITY

The question of how friendship manifests in literary texts is closely tied to a broader debate on relationality in literature and, more fundamentally, to a relational understanding of the human existence itself — as recently articulated, for instance, by Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove in their 'Manifesto for a Relational Turn'.<sup>6</sup> The relational perspective on the human and on cultural production seeks to offer a counterpoint to the Cartesian conception of the subject as an isolated, rational mind. In contrast, it foregrounds the mental, physical, and emotional bonds that connect us not only to other humans but also to the animate and inanimate non-human environment in which our lives are embedded. Fuchs and Cosgrove

<sup>4</sup> Goethe, *Die Leiden des jungen Werther*, p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> Geoffroy de Lagasnerie has recently argued that friendship should not be confined to the couple form, but can instead constitute a mode of life that transcends both familial structures and the binary framework of paired intimacy. See Geoffroy de Lagasnerie, 3. *Une aspiration au dehors* (Paris: Flammarion, 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove, 'Introduction: Manifesto for a Relational Turn', *Oxford German Studies*, 53.1 (2024), 1–12, <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00787191.2024.2315909>>.

propose a relational approach as a response to the multiple and interrelated crises currently confronting both humanity and the planet we inhabit.<sup>7</sup> The manifesto's central concern lies with the human-induced transformations of our habitat, which increasingly render life on Earth itself precarious.

In a complementary approach, scholarship on friendship seeks to offer responses to the complex social crises brought about by the pervasive neoliberalization of labour and economic structures,<sup>8</sup> as well as the growing mediatization of human relationships. One striking example is the so-called loneliness crisis, which has reached epidemic proportions in the United Kingdom.<sup>9</sup> Although the economic and technological developments of recent decades have led to increasing global interconnectedness and mutual dependency, we appear to be losing the ability to cultivate our interpersonal relationships as healthy, enriching and meaningful forms of human connection. Precisely for this reason, turning our attention to friendship — as a freely chosen form of social relation that offers both enduring belonging and a sense of emotional security — <sup>10</sup> seems more necessary than ever.

The example of Goethe's *Werther* and the manifold ways in which friendship both shapes and emerges from the text — how the text thematises friendship from various perspectives while also drawing, in its aesthetic impact, on the relational and empathetic potential of friendship — demonstrates the many forms in which literature and friendship correspond with one another. It also reveals the extent to which literary studies can make a vital contribution to the field of friendship research. Approaching friendship from a literary perspective — by examining, on the one hand, how texts aesthetically render constellations of friendship and, on the other, how they often emerge from an implicit or explicit dialogue between friends — offers a way of addressing the problem that within Cartesian thought, interpersonal relations have mostly been relegated to the private sphere.<sup>11</sup> As the literary text is, by definition, part of the public realm, literature can reframe friendship as a shared, publicly visible experience. The diverse ways in which literature makes ostensibly private constellations of friendship accessible, legible, and open to collective reflection form the focus of this special issue.

Its contributions explore friendship both as lived practice and as a reflective category — friendship as represented in literary texts, and friendship as a force that has, in turn, inspired the creation of literature.<sup>12</sup> The essays examine constellations of friendship across a range of historical periods and through diverse

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> See, among others, Cynthia Cruz, *The Melancholia of Class. A Manifesto for the Working Class* (London: Repeater, 2021).

<sup>9</sup> <<https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/The-State-of-Loneliness-2023-ONS-data-on-loneliness-in-Britain.pdf>> [accessed 30 July 2025].

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Axel Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit. Grundriß einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit* (Berlin: Suhrkamp 2011), pp. 237–52; also Werner Faulstich, 'Was heißt Freundschaft? Anatomie einer Beziehung aus kulturwissenschaftlicher Sicht', in *Beziehungskulturen*, ed. by Werner Faulstich (Munich: Fink, 2007), pp. 58–70.

<sup>11</sup> Fuchs and Cosgrove, 'Introduction', p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> Also see another recent volume focused on the social practices of friendship: *AMITY: The Journal of Friendship Studies* 8:1 (2024), *Special Issue: Doing Friendship, Thinking Friendship*, ed. by Andree Michaelis König and Philipp Lenhard <<https://amityjournal.leeds.ac.uk/issues/volume-81-2024/>> [accessed 30 July 2025].

methodological lenses. Andreas Krass in his contribution sets the diachronic frame of this issue. He traces the literary reception of the tragic bond between the Prussian Prince Frederick and his friend and lover Hans Hermann von Katte — moving from Theodor Fontane, through Heiner Müller, to its reimagining in contemporary literature by Michael Roes. Andree Michaelis-König, then, focuses on the relationship between Fanny Lewald and Therese von Bacheracht, which unfolded against the backdrop of the political upheavals of the 1840s. Anna Leyrer examines the intricate friendship between Anna Freud and Lou Andreas-Salomé as it developed in the 1910s. Eliah Bures follows the long and often fraught relationship between Ernst Jünger and Carl Schmitt, spanning from the early 1930s into the postwar period. Around the same time, the intellectual and personal connection between Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin took shape — a relationship whose philosophical and historical implications are analysed in Liliane Weissberg's contribution. Finally, Tobias Heinrich turns to the postwar literary scene, examining the troubled friendship between Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan.

In this introduction, we aim to outline several thematic strands that connect the contributions in this issue. We are particularly interested in the striking productivity of friendship — both as a generative force in the creation of literature and as a lens for its interpretation. This dual role has significant implications for how we understand and potentially reconfigure literary history. What does a focus on friendship reveal about literature that other approaches might obscure? What becomes visible through this lens — and what methodological tools are required to grasp it? In the following section, we consider how friendship is semanticized in the examples discussed, paying close attention to their historical situatedness and formal heterogeneity. How do friends address one another — especially in cases that move beyond or exist outside heteronormative frameworks? Finally, we turn to the narrative structures of friendship itself. What does it mean to represent a friendship within or as literature? Are there recurring elements or *topoi* that shape how friendship is told? And can we begin speaking of a narrative grammar — or even a narratology — of friendship?

## RETHINKING LITERARY HISTORY THROUGH FRIENDSHIP

To pay attention to friendship in literary history entails a methodological shift — one that, to a certain extent, dissolves the boundary between the literary text and the world in which it was created. Like literary history more broadly,<sup>13</sup> such an approach is often forced to defend itself against the charge of being overly psychological or esoteric. A longstanding, though far from obsolete, prejudice against this kind of inquiry was famously articulated during the heyday of poststructuralism by Paul de Man, who asserted:

the historical nature of literary discourse is by no means an a priori established fact, whereas all literature necessarily consists of linguistic and semantic elements. Yet students of literature seem to shy away from the analysis of

<sup>13</sup> See *New Directions in Literary History*, ed. by Ralph Cohen (London: Routledge, 1974); Miltos Pechlivanos, 'Literaturgeschichte(n)', in *Einführung in die Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. by Miltos Pechlivanos, Stefan Rieger et al. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1995), pp. 170–81.

semantic structures and feel more at home with problems of psychology or of historiography.<sup>14</sup>

From this perspective, any attempt to reconstruct what may have occurred in the mind or the life of an individual author — to explain what is happening in their work — appears methodologically suspect. It introduces an interpretive register external to the formal and linguistic training of literary scholarship: the author's psyche. And yet, psychoanalytic approaches to literature have generated influential and provocative models of literary development, most notably Harold Bloom's theory of the 'anxiety of influence'. In *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973), Bloom proposes that literary history unfolds as a sequence of agonistic encounters, in which strong poets must misread or 'swerve' from their predecessors in order to establish their own creative identity. However, Bloom's model brings its own set of limitations. First, it is grounded in a deeply masculinist conception of literary genealogy, one in which sons must overcome their poetic fathers in order to become great themselves. This framework not only marginalizes but structurally excludes women and other relational models of influence. Second, it relies on a linear, diachronic logic that presumes each text to follow from and respond to a predecessor in deterministic fashion. In doing so, it reduces the complexity of literary production to a singular trajectory of rebellion and succession.

And yet, paying close attention to the sociohistorical context in which literature is produced also opens up rich and nuanced interpretive possibilities — ones that go beyond psychological speculation or formal analysis alone. To consider texts as written out of specific personal, social, or historical experiences can inspire new ways of reading them today. Understanding that a work was written in reaction to, or in spite of, certain events — or in response to a particular person or relationship — can produce a deeper and more dialogical engagement with the text. Importantly, such insights need not rest on conjecture; they can emerge from documented exchanges and textual evidence. To read literature with an interest in its conditions of creation is, in this sense, to adopt a dialogical or relational perspective.

Productive theoretical inspiration for this has come from Jewish literary history, which represents a particularly complex and heterogeneous field. As Dan Miron has emphasized, there is not one Jewish literature, but rather a multitude of 'Jewish literatures in their mutual attractions, repulsions, and sheer indifference'.<sup>15</sup> To make sense of this diversity, Miron proposes a model of literary history that resists both linear continuity and genealogical causality. What matters, he argues, are not chains of influence but relations of contiguity. In his words, we need analytical concepts

<sup>14</sup> Paul de Man, *Allegories of Reading. Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke, and Proust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 79. — Also see Werner Hamacher, 'Über einige Unterschiede zwischen der Geschichte literarischer und der Geschichte phänomenaler Ereignisse', in *Historische und aktuelle Konzepte der Literaturgeschichtsschreibung. — Zwei Königskinder? Zum Verhältnis von Literatur und Literaturwissenschaft*, ed. by Wilhelm Voßkamp and Eberhard Lämmert (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> Dan Miron, *From Continuity to Contiguity. Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), pp. 412–13.

die losere, fluidere Berührungen zu beschreiben vermögen, Berührungen ohne gegenseitige Vereinnahmung oder Unterordnung, ohne gewaltsame Regulierung in gemeinsame Bahnen; die stattdessen ein System dauernder Berührungen zwischen unterschiedlichen zusammenhängenden Partikeln erklären können.<sup>16</sup>

Contiguity, for Miron, opens up a fresh perspective that makes dynamics visible which otherwise would be suppressed. From the beginning, these dynamics resemble what happens in relations of friendship in the social realm:

Kontiguität [...] rührt von einem permanenten dynamischen Spiel zwischen einer nicht vereinnahmenden Annäherung und einer nicht zur völligen Loslösung führenden Distanzierung. Es ist dies eine Dynamik von wechselseitiger Anziehung und Abstoßung, die in einem nichthierarchischen kulturellen System entsteht, das frei ist von apodiktischen kulturellen Werturteilen.<sup>17</sup>

We believe that friendship offers precisely such a perspective on the dynamic interplay inherent to literary production — not just in Jewish literature, but in literary history more broadly. Attending to the political, social, and personal entanglements connected to friendship and woven into the act of writing — through the lens of friendship — has several distinct advantages:

- (1) **It fosters intersubjectivity.** Investigating literary friendships contextualizes the process of writing by situating it within real exchanges. Letters and other forms of correspondence have long been used to analyze literary development. Reading friendships as part of this creative process highlights their function as both reflections of social life and as relay points connecting interpersonal experience with the literary world. In this way, attending to friendship does not mean, as de Man suggested, that we ‘shy away from the analysis of semantic structures’. On the contrary, it enables us to *integrate* contextual analysis with close attention to the semantics and structure of literary texts themselves.
- (2) **It preserves the dynamic of literary production.** A focus on friendship transcends narrow ideas of influence and instead emphasizes negotiation, exchange, and mutual reshaping — a model of ‘wechselseitiger Anziehung und Abstoßung’, echoing not only Miron but also Immanuel Kant’s reflections on friendship.<sup>18</sup>
- (3) **It remains grounded in textual evidence.** Because it draws on documented sources — letters, memoirs, dedications, and intertextual references — this approach avoids the pitfalls of unfounded psychological speculation while staying firmly within the domain of literary discourse.

<sup>16</sup> Dan Miron, *Verschränkungen. Über jüdische Literaturen. Aus dem Hebräischen von Liliane Granierer* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), p. 165. — These passages were not included in Miron’s English edition *From Continuity to Contiguity: Toward a New Jewish Literary Thinking* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 165–66.

<sup>18</sup> See Immanuel Kant, *Grundlegung zur Metaphysik der Sitten* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1990), p. 119: ‘Freundschaft (in ihrer Vollkommenheit betrachtet) ist die Vereinigung zweier Personen durch gleiche wechselseitige Liebe und Achtung’.

- (4) **It resonates with a transhistorical and transcultural experience.** Friendship is a widely recognized social bond with deep roots in intellectual traditions. From Aristotle and Cicero to Montaigne and Nietzsche, friendship has been theorized as a meaningful form of human connection across time and cultures.<sup>19</sup>
- (5) **It introduces a synchronic element into literary historiography.** By focusing on contemporaneous relationships and interactions, this approach adds a layer of horizontal analysis to the vertical, diachronic structure of traditional literary history.
- (6) **It contains its own mode of reflection.** Authors often reflect on the meaning and conditions of friendship within their own writings and correspondence, discussing its relation to other forms of attachment, its emotional and intellectual dimensions, and its gendered inflections.
- (7) **It acknowledges the dialogic nature of literature.** Much like the reciprocal bond that unites friends, literature emerges from an implicit dialogical relationship between writers and readers. As friendship entails recognising the other both in likeness and in difference, so too does the act of reading demand that the readers perceive traces of themselves in the text, while also remaining open to its alterity — its irreducible strangeness — and granting it the space to speak. Studying the ways in which writers navigate their lived friendships can therefore illuminate their modes of relating to texts — both in the creative act of writing and in the receptive act of reading.

Building on recent scholarship on the collective dimension of literary production in German literature<sup>20</sup> and the growing field of research into practices of life writing,<sup>21</sup> this approach provides a perspective on literary history as a dynamic history of constellations. It opens new avenues for understanding literary productivity and creativity. As nearly every contribution in this issue demonstrates, practices of friendship — such as the open exchange of ideas, manuscripts, and other materials — have been profoundly generative for writers, unlocking insights and ideas that might otherwise have remained inaccessible.

‘Du weißt, ich kann alleine nicht denken’,<sup>22</sup> wrote Anna Freud to Lou Andreas-Salomé. As Anna Leyrer shows in her contribution on these two female writers and intellectuals, friendship fosters not only reflection but also the very impulse to

<sup>19</sup> See *Conceptualising Friendship in Time and Place*, ed. by Carla Risseuw and Marlein van Raalte (Leiden: Brill, 2017); Alexander Nehamas, *On Friendship* (New York: Basic Books, 2016); *Freundschaft. Zur Aktualität eines traditionsreichen Begriffs*, ed. by Marco Hofheinz, Frank Mathwig, and Matthias Zeindler (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 2014); *Friendship. A History*, ed. by Barbara Caine (London: Equinox, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> E.g. *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 139/2 (2020), Special issue: *Kollaborative Autorschaft* (ed. by Erika Thomalla and Carlos Spoerhase); Daniel Ehrmann, *Kollektivität. Geteilte Autorschaften und kollaborative Praxisformen 1770–1840* (Vienna: Böhlau, 2022); *Kollektives Schreiben*, ed. by Daniel Ehrmann and Thomas Traupmann (Paderborn: Fink, 2022); *Plurale Autorschaft. Formen der Zusammenarbeit in Schriftkultur, Kunst und Literatur*, ed. by Nicola Glaubitz and Katharina Wesselmann (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2023).

<sup>21</sup> E.g. *Contested selves: life writing and German culture*, ed. by Katja Herges and Elisabeth Krimmer (Rochester: Camden House, 2021); Eva Blome, Philipp Lammers and Sarah Seidel, *Autosozio-biographie: Poetik und Politik* (Berlin: Springer, 2022); *Handbuch Biographie. Methoden, Traditionen, Theorien*, ed. by Christian Klein (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2022, 2nd edition), p. XII.

<sup>22</sup> ‘... als käm ich heim zu Vater und Schwester’. *Lou Andreas-Salomé Anna Freud Briefwechsel 1919–1937*, ed. by Daria A. Rothe and Inge Weber (Munich: dtv, 2004), p. 23.

write. A comparable dynamic is evident in the bond between the two key figures of the so-called ‘Conservative Revolution’, Carl Schmitt and Ernst Jünger. As Eliah Bures demonstrates, their relationship productive dialogue was shaped as much by rivalry as by collaboration — or, as Bures puts it, a ‘fusion [...] of agonism and cooperation’. Friendships in literary theory were often far from scenes of harmony or consensus. Rather, it was precisely the presence of tension and divergence that catalysed intellectual development and creative achievement. Fanny Lewald and Therese von Bacheracht, too, were ‘using each other’s difference to expand their perspectives’ (Michaelis-König).

In other cases, the creative force of friendship did not stem from direct contemporaneous exchange but rather emerged from a legacy shaped by past friendships. Hannah Arendt’s thought, for example, was deeply marked by her intellectual relationship with Walter Benjamin during their Paris years in the 1930s, as Liliane Weissberg portrays in her contribution. After Benjamin’s death, Arendt’s mourning transformed into a committed curatorial and interpretive labour: she edited and published the landmark collection *Illuminations*, and she fiercely defended Benjamin’s legacy in disputes with Gershom Scholem and Theodor W. Adorno.

Andreas Krass explores a different kind of literary dedication to friendship, less personal but no less intense. He traces the powerful and enduring literary topos inspired by the tragically coded homoerotic friendship between Prince Frederick of Prussia and Lieutenant Hans Hermann von Katte. This narrative of loyalty and loss has echoed through the works of authors such as Theodor Fontane, Heiner Müller, and Michael Roes, who each reimagine it as a prism through which to explore friendship, sexuality, and love.

The tension between love and friendship also plays a central role in the relationship between Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan. Drawing on this complex constellation, Tobias Heinrich demonstrates how the literary text — especially poetry in their case — can open up a parallel discursive space within the communication of friendship, one that unfolds alongside and in dialogue with epistolary exchange. The lyrical mode not only complements their correspondence but also extends and deepens it, offering a medium through which what remains unspoken — or perhaps unspeakable — in letters may nonetheless find expression.

Taken together, the examples in this issue reveal the lasting productivity of friendship in literature — both synchronically, in the lives and collaborations of authors who find inspiration or support in one another, and diachronically, as a tradition, a lifelong dedication after a friend’s death, or even as a literary topos that outlives the friends themselves and continues to shape literary history.

## THE SHIFTING SEMANTICS OF FRIENDSHIP (AND OTHER SOCIAL FORMS OF KINSHIP)

Friendship is a social category with deep philosophical roots.<sup>23</sup> Conceptually, it was introduced by Plato and Aristotle as a means of understanding human relations as

<sup>23</sup> Neera Kapur Badhwar, *Friendship. A Philosophical Reader* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019); *Freundschaft. Von Aristoteles bis Facebook*, ed. by Dieter Koczak (Kröning: Asanger Verlag, 2018); *Philosophie der Freundschaft*, ed. by Klaus-Dieter Eichler (Leipzig: Reclam, 2000).

central to any act of self-understanding.<sup>24</sup> From antiquity to the present, philosophers have debated whether we think best in solitude — apart from human affairs — or whether genuine insight requires interaction with others. Friedrich Nietzsche arguably presents both positions in their most striking form. The figure of the ‘Einsiedler’, Nietzsche’s alter ego who seeks to flee the social world, recurs throughout his works, from *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* to *Also sprach Zarathustra*. Yet this solitary ideal is accompanied by a deep longing for relational closeness — what he calls ‘ein Ausruhen im Vertrauen der Freundschaft’, or ‘eine Unterhaltung mit dem Freunde’.<sup>25</sup> In *Zarathustra*, Nietzsche even insists on the necessity of agonistic confrontation in friendship: ‘Will man einen Freund haben, so muss man auch für ihn Krieg führen wollen: und um Krieg zu führen, muss man Feind sein können’.<sup>26</sup>

From the outset, then, the figure of the friend occupies multiple and often shifting roles within the realm of social interaction — a fluidity that reverberates both in the processes of literary production and in the texts themselves. The friend may easily become an enemy; but he or she may also take on the role of sibling, parent, colleague, neighbour, confidant, or lover. Siegfried Kracauer, in several of his essays, explored the many forms the friend can assume.<sup>27</sup> At first, he attempted to draw clear distinctions between friendship and other forms of social relations such as *Fachgenossenschaft* (professional association), *Bekanntschaft* (acquaintance), *Kameradschaft* (comradeship), and love.<sup>28</sup> But as his analysis progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that while rare instances of ideal friendship might exist — as ‘Gesinnungs- und Idealgemeinschaft freier, unabhängiger Menschen’<sup>29</sup> — real-life friendships often move fluidly between categories. Kracauer’s own relationships with Leo Löwenthal and Theodor W. Adorno serve as examples of such idealized friendship.<sup>30</sup> And yet, as he acknowledges, friendships can emerge from or transform into other forms of relation, just as they may dissolve or disintegrate over time. The phenomenology of their development — no less than the moments and modes of their breakdown — is rich and revealing.<sup>31</sup>

All of this points to a broader, evolving field of meaning: a shifting semantics of friendship, whose complexity many of the contributions in this issue seek to explore. The friendship between Anna Freud and Lou Andreas-Salomé, as analysed by Anna Leyrer, is closely linked to the role of the father. Their growing bond was accompanied by a symbolic displacement of the paternal figure: Andreas-Salomé, as a friend, came to occupy the space formerly held by the father. Yet the significance of this move for female writers has largely been overlooked. At the same time, this

<sup>24</sup> See Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, 1245a35.

<sup>25</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches I und II*. Kritische Studienausgabe (Munich: dtv, 2009), pp. 14, 166.

<sup>26</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra*, p. 71 (‘Vom Freunde’). — Also see Jacques Derrida, *Politique de l’amitié* (Paris: Galilée, 1994), pp. 48–66.

<sup>27</sup> Collected in Siegfried Kracauer, *Über die Freundschaft. Essays* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1971).

<sup>28</sup> See *Ibid.*, pp. 11–30.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>30</sup> See on this Philipp Lenhard, *Wahlverwandtschaften. Kulturgeschichte der Freundschaft im deutschen Judentum, 1888–1938* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2023), pp. 179–97.

<sup>31</sup> See Kracauer, *Über die Freundschaft*, pp. 55–82.

dynamic introduces an important shift within psychoanalytic theory itself, where the figure of the friend has traditionally played only a marginal role. As in the case of Fanny Lewald and Therese von Bacheracht, examined by Andree Michaelis-König, this act of displacement and decentering of patriarchal discourse is achieved through the notion of sisterhood — a relation that is, in Donna Haraway's words, 'more and less than kinship'.<sup>32</sup> This strategic reconfiguration of relational terms for friendship serves as a way to subvert male-dominated theoretical discourses about friendship. Rather than rejecting familial metaphors outright, female practices of friendship often reclaim and reconfigure them, reshaping especially the roles of sisterhood and siblinghood. As Leyrer puts it, 'thinking sisterhood can be a way of conceptualizing friendship that is not absorbed into the family system, but does not have to erase it either'.

Moreover, as Philipp Lenhard has shown, the attempt to move beyond the authority of the father — often cast as the authoritarian head of the bourgeois family — was a central function of friendship for many male intellectuals after 1900.<sup>33</sup> These thinkers sought to escape the normative constraints of dominant familial structures and to establish new, horizontal forms of relationality. A similar dynamic can be observed in the case of Ernst Jünger and Carl Schmitt. As highly elitist, right-wing intellectuals in the 1910s and 1920s, both perceived friendship as a response to the experience of *soziale Vereinsamung* — a profound sense of social isolation and disaffection from the prevailing cultural currents of their time. The notion of a 'brotherhood in spirit' (*Brüderschaft im Geiste*), which Jünger pursued — as discussed in Elisha Bures' contribution — represents yet another variation of this discourse. Equally telling is Jünger's repeated attempt to cultivate friendships not only with individuals, but also with books: a form of literary companionship that sought to replace or supplement human relationships.

A similar reworking occurs in the realm of male homosexual friendship, as illustrated in Andreas Krass's analysis of the relationship between Prince Frederick of Prussia and Hans Hermann von Katte. Here, homosexual love likewise negotiates between intimacy and kinship, revealing friendship as a category that both mirrors and transgresses familial norms as it stands in direct — and deadly — conflict with the father-dominated family model. Drawing on the catastrophic impact of the Shoah on the lives, thought, and emotional worlds of its survivors, Tobias Heinrich highlights the limits of familial metaphors within discourses of friendship. Examining the friendship between Ilse Aichinger and Ingeborg Bachmann — which he reads in parallel with Bachmann's relationship to Paul Celan — he shows how their mutual conceptualisation as 'sisters' risks effacing Aichinger's historical experience as someone who lived through the Shoah.

Relations of friendship are frequently marked by a struggle to distinguish themselves from romantic or erotic love. The competitive and overlapping dynamics between these two forms of intimacy have long been a topic of critical inquiry — perhaps most notably in the work of Niklas Luhmann, who analysed the transformation of friendship and love in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European

<sup>32</sup> See Donna Haraway, 'Race: Universal Donors in a Vampire Culture: It's All in the Family: Biological Kinship Categories in the Twentieth-Century United States', in *The Haraway Reader* (Routledge, 2004), pp. 251–93, p. 285 as discussed in the contribution by Anna Leyrer.

<sup>33</sup> Lenhard, *Wahlverwandtschaften*, pp. 45–48.

culture as two symbolic codes in a state of constant mutual exchange and redefinition.<sup>34</sup> This interplay — sometimes complementary, often competing — continues to resonate throughout literary history. For women seeking recognition as friends within a discourse of friendship historically dominated by male, often homoerotic, exemplars, the boundaries between love and friendship proved especially fraught. Fanny Lewald and Therese von Bacheracht, for instance, were compelled to negotiate the meaning of their bond not only in relation to each other, but also vis-à-vis the men in their lives — Adolf Stahr and Karl Gutzkow — in an effort to define what a female friendship could be. A similarly charged ambiguity arises in the diary entries of Carl Schmitt, whose reflections on his relationship with Ernst Jünger often blur the line between admiration, emotional dependency, and desire. And in the case of Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan, the entanglement of friendship and love emerges as a recurring motif in both their correspondence and poetry, as they grapple with how to articulate what endures between them when romantic love falters and friendship endures — transformed, but not effaced.

#### FRIENDSHIP-TELLING: TOWARD A NARRATOLOGY OF FRIENDSHIP

Friendships give rise to stories. Whether examined in literary history, broader historical frameworks, or personal contexts, they reveal themselves above all as narratives. Moreover, they seem to call for retelling — as if only through narration can their meaning and coherence be grasped. This impulse to narrate friendship has produced its own repertoire of topoi and narrative structures. One might even say that friendship has generated a genre of storytelling in its own right. The examples collected in this issue offer valuable insight into the core elements of this genre and point toward the possibility of developing a narratology — or topology — of friendship-telling, marked by the following recurring features:

- (1) **After the Fact:** Great friendships are often remembered and retold after the death of one of the friends — as stories of passion (*Passionsgeschichten*)<sup>35</sup> that combine lament with the desire to preserve the relationship in memory and grant it a form of permanence. Michel de Montaigne's reflections on his friendship with Étienne de La Boétie stand amidst a long tradition of such narratives — most of them male and often homosexually coded — that span from antiquity to the modern era.<sup>36</sup> These stories of friendship are frequently written *ex post facto*, as part of an autobiographical account by the surviving friend. Fanny Lewald gave her most detailed account of her bond with Therese von Bacheracht in the final volumes of her autobiography *Meine Lebensgeschichte* (1861–62). Similarly, as Liliane Weissberg shows, Hannah Arendt's friendship with Walter Benjamin seemed to intensify after his death, when she took on the task of preserving and disseminating his intellectual legacy — editing *Illuminations* and defending his work in the face of criticism. For Arendt, Benjamin

<sup>34</sup> See Niklas Luhmann, *Liebe als Passion. Zur Codierung von Intimität* (Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1982); Andreas Krass, *Ein Herz und eine Seele. Geschichte der Männerfreundschaft* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 2016), pp. 32–33.

<sup>35</sup> Krass, *Ein Herz und eine Seele*, pp. 48–52.

<sup>36</sup> See generally Krass, *Ein Herz und eine Seele*.

would later become one among many friends in writing, as her anthology *Men in Dark Times* suggests. The friendship between Hans Hermann von Katte and Frederick of Prussia likewise gained notoriety through its successive retellings by Fontane, Müller and Roes, each one contributing to the mythos of their bond. The relationship between Bachmann and Celan found perhaps its most striking literary expression in the figures of the *Fremde* and the *Prinzessin von Kagran*, whom Bachmann introduced into *Malina* after learning of Celan's death and only shortly before the novel went to press.

- (2) **Beginnings:** The stories we tell about friendship often centre on their origins. These are tales of recognition — of first encounters, glances, letters, or conversations in which a mutual affinity is revealed. How Arendt and Benjamin first met, where Fanny Lewald caught her first glimpse of Bacheracht, how Sigmund Freud encouraged his daughter Anna to share her writings with Lou Andreas-Salomé — these moments are cherished as the sparks that ignited something lasting. We are equally drawn to the prehistories of friendships: to the professional and personal circumstances of Ernst Jünger and Carl Schmitt before their fateful meeting in 1930, or to the setting of Paul Celan and Ingeborg Bachmann's first encounter in postwar Vienna. To understand why two individuals became friends, we seek to understand how they met and what unfolded during those initial moments of contact — the scenes in which the friends 'recognized' one another as such.
- (3) **Practices:** As outlined earlier, friendship can serve as a site of remarkable intellectual productivity, particularly among authors, theorists, and philosophers. In the stories we tell about such friendships, a central question arises on the typical *scene of friendship* between those two individuals: what did the friends *do* together during those periods of intense dialogue and mutual engagement? Was their relationship marked by perfect agreement, or did it thrive on constructive disagreement? Were the two friends able to inspire one another creatively, or did they maintain distinct voices and styles while benefiting from shared proximity and exchange? These friendships often manifest not only in personal correspondence but also in collaborative or parallel intellectual work. Ingeborg Bachmann and Paul Celan, for example, expressed their evolving relationship — first as lovers, then as increasingly estranged friends — through poetry. Their writings reveal both emotional entanglement and a search for mutual recognition. At the same time these writings keep their friendship *readable*. They allow us to engage with understanding them as working friendships. Fanny Lewald and Therese von Bacheracht frequently lived and worked side by side, yet pursued different literary idioms and styles. Their intellectual companionship nonetheless shaped their reflections on politics, gender, and personal autonomy. Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin famously exchanged ideas over games of chess in Paris; later, their friendship deepened into an intellectual partnership, evidenced by their exchange of manuscripts, including Arendt's *Rahel Varnhagen* and Benjamin's *Theses on the Concept of History*. Similarly, the dialogue between Anna Freud and Lou Andreas-Salomé provided a vital forum for theoretical development. In their close, continuous exchange, they contributed to shaping some of the psychoanalytic concepts that emerged in the later phases of Freud's work. These examples suggest that literary and theoretical productivity in friendship rarely stems from homogeneity of thought; rather, it often arises from a space of negotiated difference — where contrast becomes a catalyst for creation.

- (4) **Ruptures and endings:** Friendship stories often begin with recognition and resonance — but many end in rupture, silence, or unresolved loss. Just as they offer narratives of closeness and collaboration, friendships frequently carry within them the seeds of disappointment, withdrawal, or disintegration. These endings are often marked not by dramatic conflict but by gaps, silences, and the unspoken — elements that haunt the retrospective telling of friendship. Some friendships fade without resolution, as in the case of Ilse Aichinger and Ingeborg Bachmann, whose close connection slowly dissolved into silence. Others remain suspended in emotional and interpretive tension, like the friendship between Bachmann and Paul Celan, which was marked by mutual admiration and deep trauma, but also by periods of estrangement and painful ambiguity. In still other cases, friendship ends abruptly — without closure — through death or displacement. Fanny Lewald and Therese von Bacheracht were separated by distance and fate when Bacheracht died unexpectedly in Java. Hannah Arendt, likewise, was left behind when Walter Benjamin took his own life while fleeing the Nazis; her mourning was coupled with the burden of preserving and interpreting his legacy. Some friendships defy clear categorization, continuing in ambiguous or politically fraught terms. The long and complex relationship between Ernst Jünger and Carl Schmitt, for instance, evolved from early mutual respect into ideological distance. As Eliah Bures shows, their bond oscillated between strategic alliance and subtle rivalry, culminating not in a clean break but in a lingering tension — a friendship both marked and strained by the political currents of the twentieth century. Endings, then, are not always conclusions. They are often moments of fracture or silence — narrative interruptions that resist resolution and invite reinterpretation. As such, they are central to the poetics and politics of friendship-telling.
- (5) **Self-reflexivity:** Friends often talk about being friends — about what makes *this* friendship singular. In doing so, they frequently invoke earlier ‘great friendships’, writing themselves into a long history of exemplary bonds stretching back to antiquity. Hence we find implicit reflections on friendship in many of Ingeborg Bachmann’s writings. Hannah Arendt, too, returned repeatedly to the question of what it means to be a friend throughout her oeuvre.<sup>37</sup> The same is true for Theodor Fontane, Heiner Müller, and Michael Roes, who all, in their literary reworkings of the Katte tragedy, try to explain what bound Frederick and Katte together — and why the story had to end so tragically. Fanny Lewald and Therese von Bacheracht, likewise, repeatedly reflected on the shifting boundary between friendship and the love that tied them to their respective male partners, Adolf Stahr and Karl Gutzkow. And in psychoanalysis, Anna Freud and Lou Andreas-Salomé collaboratively introduced a previously under-theorized notion of friendship into the field’s conceptual vocabulary. This self-reflective labour is also a work of language: how do friends address one another — *in particular women* — within a tradition whose grammar of friendship is male-coded? The contributions by Anna Leyrer and Andree Michaelis-König show what is at stake when women

<sup>37</sup> See on this: Jon Nixon, *Hannah Arendt and the Politics of Friendship* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

name, negotiate, and resemanticize their bonds (e.g. through figures of sisterhood). Finally, writing about friendship is also a matter of genre. While most modern friendships are articulated through prose narratives and correspondence, poetry — so central to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reflections on friendship — continues to serve as a vital medium for authors like Bachmann, Celan, and others to this day.

Authors build on and extend this catalogue of elements when they write about friendship — whether in honour of their friends, or in opposition to them. They reflect on what friendship has meant in their lives, how it is experienced, and how it connects to broader intellectual, emotional, and literary traditions. They also write fictional stories of friendship, adding yet another reflective layer to how they perceive and renegotiate this fundamental way of relating to others. By reading and analysing these diverse articulations of friendship — with all their complexities, tensions, and possibilities — we, too, may discover new ways of being friends and of cultivating meaningful connections. Perhaps, in doing so, we can begin to rebuild a realm of relationality and familiarity that, for many, was deeply fractured during the years of the Covid-19 pandemic. Looking back into the literary history of friendship — as complicated, uneven, and at times tragic as it may be — can also serve as a source of confidence and self-certainty. Hannah Arendt reflected on this very idea in late 1957 in relation to her friendship with the philosopher Karl Jaspers. In the 1920s, Jaspers had been her doctoral advisor; after 1945, soon residing in Basel, he became one of her closest intellectual companions — although it would take another twenty years before their correspondence moved from the formal *Sie* to the intimate *Du*. Now, in 1957, looking back on their shared journey, Arendt writes:

Als ich Sie nach dem Krieg als erwachsener Mensch wiederfand und eine Freundschaft zwischen uns entstand, haben Sie mir die Garantie für die Kontinuität meines Lebens gegeben. Und heute ist es so, daß ich an das Haus in Basel wie an die Heimat denke.<sup>38</sup>

A *guarantee for the continuity of her life*, and a *sense of Heimat* — that, Arendt suggests, is what friendship can offer. Yet such a promise is not given in advance; friendship must first be lived — it must be practised, and it must be experienced in all its vulnerability and contingency. Literature, in turn, offers a space in which the complexities of this practice can be rendered, reflected upon, and made intelligible.

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<sup>38</sup> Hannah Arendt, letter to Karl Jaspers, 18 November 1957, in *Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers, Briefwechsel 1926–1969*, ed. by Lotte Köhler and Hans Saner (Munich: Piper, 1993), p. 368.