

HNRS 2030 Spring 2019
Female Friendship: Fictional and Critical Perspectives
TTh 3-4:20
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Women have often been told that we are terrible at being friends because we are unkind and competitive in relation to each other. It is commonly assumed, moreover, that we will abandon our women friends for romantic relationships. "Female Friendship: Fictional and Critical Perspectives" will address these issues by engaging students in detailed readings of primary and secondary sources portraying friendships between two girls or women and requiring that they think analytically about the ways the authors studied characterize female friendships.

We will first examine how six novels and one memoir, taking place in various time periods and racial and cultural milieus, portray female friendship. In each portrayal, we will study how the friendship between the two female characters begins and how it changes over time as the characters age. We will ask such questions as: How do the time period and social milieu influence the friendship between the girls/women? How and why does this friendship change over time? Are there conflicts that threaten the friendship, and if so what are they? Are the characters depicted as able to work through those conflicts or do they break up the friendship? How do the women friends negotiate each other's romantic relationships and motherhood, including geographical separation? How do they contend with the situation in which only one of them marries and has children, while the other one pursues other ambitions?

In the second part of the course, we will read three recent studies, each seeking to define the specificity of friendships between women. In discussing these readings, we will consider to what extent these studies, including their interviews conducted with women about female friendship, relate to the fictional portrayals of these friendships. Do these studies corroborate those fictional portrayals, and if so, in what cases? or, if they offer a distinctly different understanding of female friendship, how do we explain this discrepancy?

