

Carolyn Oulton recovers the strategies nineteenth-century authors used to justify the ideal of same-sex romantic friendship and the anxieties these strategies reveal. Informed by recent insights into the erotic potential of such relationships, but focused on romantic friendship as an independent and fully formulated ideal, Oulton departs from other critics who view romantic friendship as either nebulous and culturally naive or an invocation of homoerotic responsiveness.

By considering both male and female friendships, Oulton uncovers surprising parallels between them in novels and poetry by authors such as Dickens, Tennyson, Disraeli, Charlotte Brontë, and Braddon. Oulton also examines conduct manuals, periodicals, and religious treatises, tracing developments from mid-century to the *fin de siècle*, when romantic friendship first came under serious attack. Her book is a persuasive challenge to those who view mid-Victorian England, existing in a state of blissful pre-Freudian innocence, as unproblematically accommodating of passionate same-sex relationships.