



# Manly Love: Romantic Friendship in American Fiction

*Axel Nissen*

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The modern idea of Victorians is that they were emotionless prudes, imprisoned by sexual repression and suffocating social constraints; they expressed love and affection only within the bounds of matrimony—if at all. And yet, a wealth of evidence contradicting this idea has been hiding in plain sight for close to a century. In *Manly Love*, Axel Nissen turns to the novels and short stories of Victorian America to uncover the widely overlooked phenomenon of passionate friendships between men.

Nissen's examination of the literature of the period brings to light a forgotten genre: the fiction of romantic friendship. Delving into works by Mark Twain, Henry James, William Dean Howells, and others, Nissen identifies the genre's unique features and explores the connections between romantic friendships in literature and in real life. Situating love between men at the heart of Victorian culture, Nissen radically alters our understanding of the American literary canon. And with its deep insights into the emotional and intellectual life of the period, *Manly Love* also offers a fresh perspective on nineteenth-century America's attitudes toward love, friendship, marriage, and sex.

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