



University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

105 Garfield Avenue • P.O. Box 4004 • Eau Claire, WI 54702-4004

February 13, 2006

To: Women's Studies Awards Judges

From: Jenny Shaddock, English *JS*

Re: Nomination of Katie Bowman for Undergraduate Research Award

It is my pleasure to nominate Katie Bowman for the Undergraduate Research Women's Studies Award for her work "Exploring the Existence of 'Compulsory Heterosexuality' in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*."

For me, a truly triumphant undergraduate research essay is one that offers a thesis that opens up a completely new way of viewing a text I've read and critically considered many times before. As all of us know, this is a rare achievement. But Bowman's thesis on *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* thoroughly meets this standard.

Bowman argues that despite contemporary critical consensus that "the Brontes were among the most progressive protofeminist voices in the literary world of the nineteenth century," the Brontes nonetheless fail to recognize social alternatives beyond heterosexual coupling for women constrained by patriarchy. Bowman makes the case that the Brontes, in not considering the ways that women's relationships with one another can liberate them from patriarchal oppression, subscribe to Adrienne Rich's practice of "compulsory heterosexuality."

My first reaction when Bowman laid her proposed thesis in front of me during an advising session was skepticism. The Brontes' novels, though widely read upon first publication, were often considered vulgar by their contemporaries. Just the idea that women themselves had souls (I'm speaking within the Christian context of the novel here) and therefore deserved respect beyond that allotted to their father or husbands was radical. In response to Bowman's thesis, it seemed to me that to criticize these women writers for not writing novels that acknowledged the power of women's relationships to fight patriarchy was perhaps asking too much of our nineteenth-century foremothers who struggled to be published at all in a free market economy.

But Bowman's research and subsequent paper convinced me that this is a line of criticism that deserves consideration. I can't say that her essay in its current form completely convinced me, but she gave me enough information about women's communities in mid-nineteenth-century Britain to persuade me that this is not only a worthwhile and legitimate project, but that with further research, it could have a significant impact on

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Bronte studies, a field that is exceedingly well established and thus quite competitive in the quality of work being done.

Bowman has the vision to offer a new paradigm in Bronte criticism. This is an exceptional level of work for an undergraduate student to achieve. It demonstrates just how thoroughly Bowman has synthesized her work in Women's Studies with her approaches to literary criticism.

I thank you for your serious consideration of her work.

Katie Bowman
English 459: The Brontes
Capstone Essay
Professor Shaddock
7 December 2005

Exploring the Existence of “Compulsory Heterosexuality” in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering*

Heights

Women and feminist-identified men appreciate the subversive qualities within the novels written by Charlotte and Emily Bronte, because they agree that they question patriarchal, capitalist, and oppressive institutions. Charlotte Bronte’s *Jane Eyre*, in particular, has been especially influential for progressive scholars. It is largely accepted by critics and readers that Jane Eyre, as a character, represents a proto-feminist. Progressive themes of woman-centered community, female autonomy and advanced feminine intellect flood the novel, creating an inspiring text that is relatable to many women and feminists. Emily Bronte’s *Wuthering Heights* has produced a similarly promising character, Catherine Linton, who—although less positively depicted than Charlotte’s Jane Eyre—possesses much self-assuredness (perhaps to the point of egocentrism), passion, and a knack for orienteering the moors with her beloved Heathcliff. Despite the promising protagonists, there are some subliminal heterosexist, anti-feminist themes in the novels that have hardly been addressed by scholars. Most significantly, although the characters develop relatively strong senses of self and of subliminal romantic friendship with some characters—Jane with Helen Burns and the Rivers sisters, and Catherine with Nelly—they do not fully expand on or follow through with their feminist desires or potential. Because of their preoccupations with men and heterosexual romantic relationships, neither Jane nor Catherine establishes or actualizes desires, strong relationships, or camaraderie with other women; as Adrienne Rich would suggest, in some ways, the authors project their own “compulsory heterosexuality” through these female characters.

Contemporary critics argue that the Brontes were among the most progressive proto-feminist voices in the literary world of the nineteenth century. Critics focus on the ways in which Charlotte Bronte and Emily Bronte challenge social norms in their respective texts, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. Andrew Abraham, author of “Emily Bronte’s Gendered Response to Law and Patriarchy,” discusses the ways in which Emily Bronte employs her own language and style along with a criticism of marriage, property, and religious law, in order to evaluate the pitfalls of patriarchal institutions¹. Similarly, other Bronte critics, like John G. Peters, in his essay “Inside and Outside *Jane Eyre* and Marginalization through Labeling,” illustrates ways in which Charlotte Bronte criticizes heterosexual coupling by pointing out ways in which Rochester animalizes and marginalizes Jane through language. Robyn R. Warhol, author of “Double Gender, Double Genre in *Jane Eyre* and *Villette*” argues that Charlotte Bronte refuses to identify herself with one particular literary movement; she points out that Bronte frequently employs powerful images of doubleness². For example, instead of wholly embracing the Gothic or realism, Warhol asserts that Bronte works within layers of both. In this way, Charlotte Bronte is able to refute the structure of patriarchal dualism (either/or constructs). In another influential article, “Girl Talk: *Jane Eyre* and the Romance of Women’s Narration,” Carla Kaplan discusses Jane’s relationships with other women in the novel, and begins to discuss the ways in which Jane’s relationships with women somewhat question heterosexual constructs³. While many critics praise both authors for living and writing outside of the gendered norms of their Victorian era, all critics fail to recognize that the authors do not address what Adrienne Rich calls “compulsory heterosexuality,” nor do they address alternatives to it, such as what Lillian Faderman calls female “romantic friendship.” Although it is crucial to acknowledge the Bronte’s progressive influence in challenging some social institutions, it is important to recognize that

they did not follow through with a critical analysis of the dangers of heterosexism and compulsory heterosexuality for women. Charlotte Bronte and Emily Bronte could have utilized their female protagonists in their novels as rhetorical embodiments of social alternatives to heterosexual coupling; they might have used Jane and Catherine as models to represent female empowered alternatives to heterosexist coupling. There was a precedence in the 1850's of other authors doing this, as well as a social uprising of other women activists in England who were interested in challenging the heterosexist status quo and exploring alternatives to it. The Brontes, then, could have had the potential to explore these alternatives in their texts. Their failure to do so implicates them as subscribers to compulsory heterosexuality.

Historical context indicates that the Bronte sisters would surely have been inundated with information on the pitfalls of compulsory heterosexual marriage. Martha Vicinus, author of the article, "Lesbian Perversity and Victorian Marriage: The 1864 Codrington Divorce Trial," asserts

In the 1850's Victorian England saw the beginning of the organized feminist movement, which concentrated on improving education as a necessary preamble to wider employment opportunities for respectable women. But legal reform, especially of the marriage laws, was also a fundamental tenet. The leaders in this movement were largely single women, often intensely involved with each other and determined to avoid the "slavery" of marriage. The increased visibility of unmarried women drew the public's attention to their so-called sexual redundancy. (73)

Clearly there was a large amount of proto-feminist activity protesting the heterosexism involved in the compulsory marriage institution. Vicinus implies that many of the women involved in the movement to expose the compulsory heterosexist nature of marriage may have, themselves, been involved in romantic friendships. These women were single, active, and working outside of the patriarchal, heterosexist norms together. Their behaviors and activism were very conducive to romantic friendship. This movement would have been largely visible in nineteenth century England, and it might have useful, in terms of critical feminist progress, for

the Bronte sisters to acknowledge such a movement in their texts. Looking retrospectively, the omission of such a woman-centered social movement in their texts reflects Charlotte and Emily Bronte's own heterosexism.

Although one of my aims is to expound upon the abovementioned argument that *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* are in need of more thorough examinations of compulsory heterosexuality, Jane Eyre, as a character, is indeed full of feminist promise. According to Adrienne Rich, in her influential feminist analysis, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Experience," women are pushed into heterosexuality by patriarchy and unquestioning impulse, not by conscious choice; Rich calls this unexamined institution "compulsory heterosexuality." She claims that women would be more woman-identified (anti-patriarchal, more centered around female relationships) if they were given the opportunity to embrace one another, rather than being persuaded to embrace men in monogamous heterosexual relationships. More specifically, Rich asserts:

I am concerned here with two...matters...first, how and why women's choice of women as passionate comrades, life partners, co-workers, lovers, community has been crushed, invalidated, forced into hiding and disguise; and second, the virtual or total neglect of lesbian existence in a wide range of writings, including feminist scholarship. (27)

Rich is rightfully convinced that women have been, to some extent, prohibited from pursuing meaningful relationships with other women due to patriarchy's insistence that women be perpetually and wholly available to men. However, Rich sees homosocial and/or homoerotic potential and desire in all women. Rich suggests that all women fit within the construct of a

“lesbian continuum,” which means, in her terms, “a range—through each woman’s life and throughout history—of woman-identified experience” (51). Rich goes on to contend that:

As we delineate a lesbian continuum, we begin to discover the erotic in female terms: as that which is unconfined to any single part of the body or solely to the body itself; as an energy not only diffuse but, as Audre Lorde has described it, omnipresent in ‘the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic,’ and in the sharing of work; as the empowering joy which ‘makes us less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial. (53-54)

Perhaps the most important aspect of the continuum is to “discover” oneself and one’s world “in female terms.” Female-oriented (woman-identified) discovery directly refutes the patriarchal status quo of male-centeredness and woman as secondary.

Having thus defined some crucial aspects of what constitutes “compulsory heterosexuality” and the “lesbian continuum,” it is interesting to consider to what extent Jane might fit on such a continuum. In the first section of the novel, where Jane is attending Lowood charity school, she meets Miss Temple and Helen Burns. She develops positive, woman-centered relationships with both Helen and Miss Temple. Helen serves as the first female friend to truly provide Jane with mutual, egalitarian love, caring, and companionship. Similarly, Miss Temple is Jane’s first female mentor who believes in Jane, nurtures her, and provides proto-feminist inspiration for Jane. Support from the novel indicates that Jane, Helen, and Miss Temple share a strong mutual affection, even love. Jane is somewhat infatuated with both of her new female companions; Jane fancifully recalls,

Resting my head on Helen’s shoulder, I put my arms round her waist; she drew me to her, and we reposed in silence. We had not sat long thus, when another person came in. Some heavy clouds, swept from the sky by a rising wind, had left the moon bare; and her light, streaming in through a window near, shone full both on us and on the approaching figure, which we at once recognized as Miss Temple. (Charlotte Bronte 82)

Later, similar affections form between Jane and the Rivers sisters, Diana and Mary. Jane romantically elaborates about her wonderful friendship with these women, asserting, “I liked to read what they liked to read: what they enjoyed, delighted me; what they approved, I revered. They loved their sequestered home. I, too, in the grey, small, antique structure...found a charm both potent and permanent...Thought fitted thought; opinion met opinion: we coincided, in short, perfectly” (Bronte 392). Throughout the novel, Jane seems to begin to achieve what feminist pioneer Lillian Faderman calls “romantic friendships” with several other female characters, like Helen Burns and the Rivers sisters. As Faderman⁴ puts it, “Romantic friendship...signified a [non-sexual, yet deeply intimate] relationship [between women] that was considered noble and virtuous in every way” (16). Faderman provides historical context for these important woman-centered relationships, asserting,

In America and England during the second half of the nineteenth century, as more women began to claim more of the world, the reasons for bonding together against men who wished to deny them a broader sphere became greater...Two...females [uplifted] each other morally...female relationships could sustain a woman intellectually and make her strong enough to engage in the battle for more of the world. (157)

Perhaps, then, Jane wants to develop strong relationships with women in her various life pursuits in order to work together towards a common goal of female intellectual uprising from their rigid, Victorian, domestic gender roles. It is, however, important to remember that, while Jane does indeed *begin* to form relationships with women in the novel, she eventually deserts those relationships in order to pursue heterosexual romance.

Cheryl A. Wilson argues that the bond that occurs between all these women has to do to women’s shared affection for pursuits of knowledge and reading, which results in an intellectual

rebellion against patriarchal order⁵. I argue that the bond between these women requires further scrutiny than Wilson offers. To me, the intimacy that develops between Jane, Miss Temple, and then later between Jane and the Rivers sisters is not so much an intellectual rebellion as it is a level of homosocial and, sometimes, homoerotic woman-identification. Woman-identification, in Rich's terms, means that all women can be placed on a continuum of lesbian experience, which can be homosocial (women enjoying each other's companionship, sharing each other's desires, as in the case of romantic friendship) and/or homoerotic (women overtly or subliminally enjoying each other's romantic company, touching one another, as in the case of many modern lesbian couplings).

Certainly, referring to the abovementioned examples from *Jane Eyre*, all the women mentioned can be placed in a framework of Rich's lesbian continuum. For example, Jane's relationship with Helen Burns is both homosocial and marginally homoerotic. When they hold one another and share intimate conversations, they fit within Rich's definition of being woman-identified. Jane's relationship with Diana Rivers and Mary Rivers shows more of a deep, intellectual, woman-centered intimacy. As Jane puts it, "We coincided, in short, perfectly" (392). This disclosure is very telling of the oneness Jane finds with Diana and Mary. The three of them essentially become one soul here—a trinity united. This female-centered intimacy subverts the patriarchal standard that all loving, private exchanges should be enjoyed between monogamous heterosexual couples.

Having identified several ways that Jane Eyre, as a character, works to subvert patriarchal heterosexual norms, there are some crucial ways in which Jane fails to acknowledge and challenge the institution of compulsory heterosexuality. In order to truly challenge compulsory heterosexuality, it is vital that women rethink their relationships with men, as well as with

women. Jane certainly does an excellent job asserting herself as an individual and connecting with other women within a context of female intimacy, but in her relationships with men, particularly with Edward Rochester, Jane leaves behind much of the autonomy and sovereignty she achieves within her female relationships. Jane seems unable or uninterested in maintaining meaningful relationships with women, because she is so preoccupied with Rochester. Therefore, when she is actively pursuing a relationship with Rochester, she neglects female friends—the same ones she identified previously as sharing one soul with her.

Because the novel is ultimately about Jane's quest to unite with Rochester, *not* so much a narrative of attaining and maintaining strong female relationships, it is likely that Charlotte Brontë, as the writer of the novel, places greater value on monogamous heterosexual romances than on woman-identified relationships. Brontë, like many others—especially in Victorian England—seems to *assume* that any narrative should be somehow focused on heterosexual romantic love. This assumption alludes to some of the author's own internalized heterosexism. She assumes heterosexuality to be the one, the only option for women's intimate expression. Her character, Jane, appears to be a manifestation of Brontë's internalized compulsory heterosexuality; Jane is meant ultimately to find, pursue, and live "happily ever after" with a man, *not* with a woman/in a community of women. Adrienne Rich makes a fair assumption that applies correctly to Brontë's position, when she claims, "I doubt that enough feminist scholars and theorists have taken the pains to acknowledge the societal forces which wrench women's emotional and erotic energies away from themselves and other women and from woman-identified values" (35). Nowhere in *Jane Eyre* does the author suggest that Jane's mission to attain Rochester's love should be questioned. In other words, Jane compulsorily pursues

heterosexual romance unquestioningly. Rich helps to articulate this common predicament in a quote of Kathleen Barry:

As a young girl becomes aware of her own increasing sexual feelings...she turns away from her heretofore primary relationships with girlfriends. As they become secondary to her, recede in importance in her life, her own identity also assumes a secondary role and she grows into male-identification [in her quest for heterosexual coupling]. (46)

This statement applies particularly well to Jane. For a time, she leaves Rochester, because she refuses to live under his immoral circumstances.

In a statement Warhol makes, “Jane Eyre, so ‘feminine’ in her meek submission to the lover she calls ‘Master,’ nevertheless leaves him when he asks her to compromise her moral principles” (875), it appears that Warhol enjoys thinking of *Jane Eyre* as the epitomic feminist narrative. However, Warhol does not paint a complete, accurate portrait of Jane. She chooses to withhold the fact that, although Jane does indeed leave Rochester and, meanwhile, attains autonomy and female camaraderie with the Rivers sisters, she ultimately comes back to Rochester. She loses herself—her autonomy, her intellectual pursuits, her intimate female friendships—because she chooses to give herself over to Rochester in a quite traditional, heterosexual romance. Rich is concerned about this kind of behavior—women turning their backs on women in order to pursue “more important,” male-centered, heterosexual relationships. She discusses her concerns in terms of “male identification;” according to Rich, male identification means:

internalizing the values of the colonizer and actively participating in carrying out the colonization of one’s self and one’s sex....Male identification is the act whereby women place men above women, including themselves, in credibility, status, and importance in most situations, regardless of the comparative quality the women may

bring to the situation...Interaction with women is seen as a lesser form of relating on every level. (48)

So, when Jane leaves the Rivers sisters (and St. John) to ultimately pursue a relationship with Rochester, not only is she forfeiting some of the autonomy she has gained in her newly independent living situation, so too is she subscribing to both compulsory heterosexuality and male identification. She places her relationship with Rochester *above* all of her very important, almost romantic relationships with Diana and Mary Rivers; thus, she is internalizing the (hetero)sexist notion that women's relationships with men are *better than* women's relationships with women.

John G. Peters gives evidence to the patriarchal nature of Jane's submission to Rochester. Peters discusses the many ways in which Rochester, knowingly or not, marginalizes Jane through non-human labeling. Jane is referred to as "it," "fairy" (276), "wild, frantic bird" (284), "my pale, little elf" (290), "Rochester's girl-bride" (290), "thing" (286), "my little wife" (286), "provoking puppet, malicious elf, sprite" (307), "witch" (314), "my treasure" (318), etc. As Peters puts it, "Rochester uses the majority of these eulogistic terms, and he also, like so many others, wishes to marginalize Jane. Even though he loves Jane, he clearly believes in the traditional role of women in the nineteenth-century social order" (63). Jane's failure to recognize these labels as patriarchally oppressive speaks to her submission to compulsory heterosexuality. She neither recognizes nor challenges the ways in which her relationship with Rochester—and heterosexual relationships, in general—help to further her subordination and to hinder her ability to form empowering romantic friendship alliances with other women.

Emily Bronte's female characters struggle with similar issues regarding their abilities to attain and maintain rich, meaningful woman-identified relationships. In *Wuthering Heights*, the women characters fail to achieve autonomy and female communal empowerment, because they

compulsorily submit to heterosexual romance without questioning it as a political, oppressive institution. Compulsory heterosexual romance preoccupies the women, deterring them from forming full, meaningful, intimate relationships with other women. The most overt example of the compulsory, heterosexist limitations placed on Victorian women in *Wuthering Heights* is illustrated throughout the novel in the coupling of Heathcliff and Catherine. The implications of this compulsory heterosexual romance are extensive, especially in terms of reducing the possibility of Catherine forming romantic friendships with other women. There is one woman, in particular, with whom Cathy could have enjoyed many commonalities and intimate potential had she not been so preoccupied with Heathcliff: Ellen Dean. With Nelly, Cathy shares many emotionally poignant, intimate moments of her life. However, the two women prohibit themselves from ever achieving true romantic friendship because they so heavily subscribe to heterosexist and classist ideologies.

Ellen “Nelly” is roughly Cathy’s age, and works as the family servant. Nelly is a loyal confidant to many of the characters in the novel; her role as intimate confidant is especially important to Catherine. Nelly is frequently the recipient of many of Cathy’s deepest secrets and disclosures of confidential feelings. For example, during the time in the novel when Cathy is deciding whether to marry Edgar or to pursue her passionate love for Heathcliff, she goes straight to Nelly for advice and counsel. Cathy secretly proclaims her most intimate secret to Nelly:

My love for Heathcliff resembles the eternal rocks beneath—a source of little visible delight, but necessary. Nelly, I *am* Heathcliff—he’s always, always in my mind—not as a pleasure, any more than I am always a pleasure to myself—but, as my own being. (82)

Nelly, apparently, is the one who Catherine trusts the most with such confidential information. Cathy seems to disclose the most private information and feelings to Nelly, not to Heathcliff. It even appears that Cathy is—either knowingly or unconsciously— striving to create the beginnings of a romantic friendship with Nelly; she wants to share intimate feelings of intimacy, sharing, and comfort with her dear confidant, Nelly. The two women never wholly form a romantic friendship; they experience too much distance, clash, and disorder to enjoy a romantic friendship. They are too preoccupied with taking care of the men and tending to their feelings regarding the male characters to be wholly invested in their feelings regarding one another. However, the two women do seem to occupy a space on Rich's lesbian continuum. They frequently experience homosocial intimacy that would certainly place them somewhere along the continuum of woman-identified experience.

Not only does Cathy express interest in approaching Nelly as a potential romantic friend and confidant, Nelly seems to reciprocate feelings of warmth and intimacy towards Cathy. Nelly calmly advises and consoles Cathy, even when Catherine is behaving maliciously, selfishly, or out of control. One specific scene where Nelly shows Cathy how much she cares for her is when Cathy is apparently delusional from sickness in her bedroom. Cathy worriedly exclaims, upon seeing her own reflection in a mirror, "Nelly, the room is haunted! I'm afraid of being alone!" Nelly reflects, then, "I took her hand in mine, and bid her be composed, for a succession of shudders convulsed her frame, and she *would* keep straining her gaze towards the glass [mirror]." Nelly explains to Cathy, "Why, what *is* the matter?...Wake up! That is the glass—the mirror, Mrs. Linton; and you see yourself in it, and there am I too by your side" (124). This scene is very powerful for several reasons. Nelly acts as the deferrer of Cathy's unease and restlessness. Nelly recognizes Cathy's self better than Cathy recognizes her own self; this is a prime

indication of Nelly and Cathy's intimacy and oneness. Nelly finally convinces Catherine to settle down. Cathy complies, apparently comforted by Nelly's presence and by her encouraging, kind words. So, then, Nelly reciprocates Cathy's intimate feelings, but in different ways than how Cathy shows intimacy. Whereas Cathy acts intimate with Nelly by sharing deep, secret truths, Nelly behaves intimate with Cathy by nurturing her, literally holding her hand and whispering special comforts to her. The women seem to mutually strive for the beginning of what Faderman calls romantic friendship. To recall Faderman's assertions, the two women "uplift each other morally," thus coming together to form the rough beginnings of a romantic friendship.

Assuming we trust Nelly as a legitimate narrator of these events, Cathy chooses to discuss her more personal thoughts with a woman, Nelly, not with her so-called beloved man, Heathcliff. Of course, Cathy is keeping secrets from Heathcliff supposedly for his own good; she claims that she wants to marry Edgar for the secret purpose of financially benefiting Heathcliff. Nonetheless, in a truly *intimate*, loving coupling, wouldn't a matter like this merit a discussion between the involved man and woman regarding their future together (or their lack of future)? Wouldn't one suppose that, if Cathy were so comfortable with Heathcliff, she would choose to unveil all truths to him, rather than to a female confidant? I argue that Cathy's choice to involve Nelly in nearly all of her secret, most intimate thoughts is a way of exposing the institution of heterosexual romance as flawed. Cathy obviously needs something from Nelly that she cannot achieve with Heathcliff. Her decision to disclose her secret truths to Nelly also hints at her inner desire to develop a romantic friendship with Nelly. Catherine may recognize a void that occurs for her in her heterosexual endeavors, thus she yearns—whether unconsciously or knowingly—for homosocial comfort and/or love with a woman to fill that void.

In this way, it could be said that Cathy and Nelly are engaged in homosocial, woman-identified correspondence within Rich's lesbian continuum. In some ways, the two women's intimate alliance works to reject patriarchal norms. Emily Bronte's illustrations of these characters implies that neither woman recognizes that their shared intimacy defies male identification, nor do they probably understand that their willingness to seek intimacy outside of heterosexual coupling actually somewhat questions heterosexism as a political, sexist, and oppressive institution. Nonetheless, both women are loosely participating in a simple, pedestrian social uprising against compulsory heterosexuality.

Nelly plays a crucial role in illustrating that the *possibility* of a romantic friendship between herself and Cathy might exist. However, it is important to recognize that this *possibility* of a romantic relationship is not realized in full. Just as with Jane in *Jane Eyre*, Catherine in *Wuthering Heights* fails to fully identify, organize, and rightfully acknowledge her need to follow through with romantic female relationships, namely in her relationship with Nelly. Instead, she uses her love, passion, and heterosexual relationships with Heathcliff and Edgar as crutches to stunt her potential for creating empowering romantic friendships with Nelly and other women. As Rich implies, her female relationships are "invalidated and crushed," but by Cathy's own doing; she invalidates them herself due to her male-identification and her own ingrained sexism and heterosexism. She chooses relationships with men *above* relationships with women, thus hinting that she places a higher value on male-identified, heterosexual relationships (and men) than she does on woman-identified, homosocial relationships (and women).

It is critical, here, to pause and recognize that, in all fairness to the characters and to the author of the text, it may have been difficult for Cathy and Nelly to be romantic friends due to class limitations. Cathy, being of the upper class/gentry, and Nelly, being of the lower

class/servants, certainly have overt class clashes. It might have been difficult for the author to incorporate an egalitarian romantic friendship between these two highly class differentiated characters into the plot. It would have been comparably challenging for the characters, Catherine and Nelly, to wholly embrace one another in an egalitarian manner. However, Cathy demonstrates at one specific, poignant moment in the novel that she has a keen understanding of class mobility and empathy, which signifies her ability and willingness to live outside of inflexible class paradigms. At the point in the novel where she especially expresses her class consciousness, she and Edgar are surprised to see Heathcliff at Thrushcross Grange, and the couple are receiving Heathcliff for dinner. Cathy pulls Nelly aside and says, "I cannot sit in the kitchen. Set two tables here, Ellen; one for your master and Miss Isabella, being gentry; the other for Heathcliff and myself, being of the lower orders" (95). Although she is speaking of herself in jest here—poking fun of Edgar in this scene, needling him for thinking he is socially better than Heathcliff—Catherine demonstrates her ability to examine class constructs, to make fun of and trivialize them, and to play different roles within the status quo of class. She pretends to be of the "lower order" as a means of getting closer to Heathcliff. All of these abilities of Catherine's illustrate her willingness to work outside of rigid institutions. However, in this case, it is all for the sake of loving and empathizing with Heathcliff. I argue that if she were to discard her heterosexist preoccupation with Heathcliff, invest her energy into channeling class deconstruction into several romantic friendships with women—like Nelly, for instance—she could potentially be freed of some of the Heathcliff-related neuroses that frequently haunt her. As it is, her insistence on focusing on Heathcliff makes her beside herself with lovesickness and near-madness. If she were to challenge the rigid class and heterosexist status quo, even a little bit, on the other hand—as she has indicated she might effectively be able to do—she could work

outside of the class system to form a more intimate bond with Nelly and other women, therefore forming a system of empowerment to fill the void created by the failed, incomplete love shared with Heathcliff.

To further cinch the point that Cathy's and Nelly's differing class positions should not hinder their abilities to achieve romantic friendship, it is interesting to note the interactions between Cathy and women who *do* share similar class status, like Isabella Linton. Just because Catherine and Isabella share gentry distinction of class does not mean that they are more compatible as friends than Cathy and Nelly. In fact, Isabella and Cathy deal with even more obstacles that absolutely prohibit friendship than do Nelly and Cathy. For example, Isabella and Cathy experience significant animosity regarding Heathcliff. Both women battle one another for Heathcliff's affections. At one point, Cathy gives Isabella an angry sermon, asserting,

[Heathcliff would] crush you, like a sparrow's egg, Isabella, if he found you a troublesome charge. I know he couldn't love a Linton; and yet, he'd be quite capable of marrying your fortune, and expectations. Avarice is growing with him a besetting sin. There's my picture; and I'm his friend—so much so, that had he thought seriously to catch you, I should, perhaps, have held my tongue, and let you fall into his trap. (103)

These two women are further at odds with each other due to a central, heterosexual feud over a man than are Cathy and Nelly due to class clash. Interestingly, during the quarrel between Isabella and Cathy, Cathy calls upon Nelly for assistance; Cathy proposes, "Nelly, help me to convince [Isabella] of her madness. Tell her what Heathcliff is—an unreclaimed creature" (102). Here, still, Cathy relies on Nelly for assurance and support, thus hinting that their class difference is not as important as their character's cohesiveness. It seems here that heterosexual coupling can be more divisive for women than constructs of class. A man can come between women more than any other social or intimate factor in order to inhibit the growth of a female, woman-identified, romantic (or *any* kind of) friendship. For this reason, compulsory

