

WOMEN'S STUDIES CELEBRATION

Women's History Month 2006

NOMINATION: Papers and projects done in completion of course work for Spring, Summer and Fall 2005 eligible for nomination. Students do not need to be enrolled Fall 2005 or Spring 2006 to be eligible.

(Students are encouraged to identify works they would like nominated and approach their professor to initiate the process.)

Instructor Jennifer Shaddock Dept. English

Course Number and Name English 459: British Lit.: the Brontes Semester completed Fall 2005

Title of Nominated Work "Exploring the Existence of 'Compulsory Heterosexuality' in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*"

Pick one-

CATEGORY:

xx

Sampson:

- ☒ Undergraduate Research Paper
☐ Undergraduate Project
☐ Graduate

- ☐ See
☐ Olson
☐ Kessler
☐ Turell
☐ Belter

(The judges retain the right to reassign categories for all nominated works.)

STUDENT INFORMATION:

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****WHY DO YOU, THE INSTRUCTOR, RECOMMEND THIS AS AN EXEMPLARY STUDENT PAPER/PROJECT? (Attach a separate sheet.)**

As the nominating instructor, please notify the student and ask them to turn in the paper, or attach to your nomination form.

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Awards are sponsored by the UW-Eau Claire Foundation, Helen X. Sampson Fund, and by private individuals. Research involving human subjects must conform to the guidelines given by the Institutional Research Board. Contact Research Services, 836-3405, with questions.

Submission deadline is February 13, 2006.



University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

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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 order ⁵. 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

heterosexuality *must* be questioned—even more than class constructs—in order for women to be able to pursue meaningful romantic friendships with one another. More than classism, heterosexism is to blame as the primary obstacle that inhibits woman-identified growth between women.

Another example of woman-identification in *Wuthering Heights* has less to do with the protagonist, Catherine, and more to do with her nemesis, Isabella. Nelly plays a critical role for both women as potential romantic friend. Just like for Cathy, Nelly is an intimate confidant for Isabella. She is often recipient of many deep, secret truths that Isabella doesn't tell to anyone else. Part of the reason both Isabella and Cathy rely so heavily on Nelly as intimate confidant is that the men in their lives fail to relieve them of their secrets and stresses. Heathcliff, in particular, is not receptive to either woman's secrets; neither woman even *tries* to approach him with her secret truths or her deep concerns. This speaks to his inadequacy as an intimate friend. Isabella alludes to this in her letter to Nelly:

Dear Ellen,

I came last night to Wuthering Heights, and heard, for the first time, that Catherine has been, and is yet, very ill. I must not write to her, I suppose, and my brother is either too angry or too distressed to answer what I send him. Still, I must write to somebody, and the only choice left me is you... The remainder of this letter is for yourself, alone. I want to ask you two questions: the first is,

How did you contrive to preserve the common sympathies of human nature when you resided here? I cannot recognize any sentiment which those around share with me.

The second question, I have great interest in; it is this—

Is Mr. Heathcliff a man? If so, is he mad? And if not, is he a devil?... You must call, Ellen, very soon. Don't write, but come. (136)

This letter is important, because it illustrates Isabella's isolation that she experiences once she is in a heterosexual marriage. She cannot count on her demonic husband with whom to share her intimate emotional feelings. Quite on the contrary, Heathcliff would potentially abuse her or denigrate her were she to share her secrets with him. This heterosexual coupling with Heathcliff

forces her to be isolated from others, as well. She cannot contact her brother, because she is alienated from him since her marriage to Heathcliff. Similarly, she cannot contact Catherine, because the two women share great animosity due to competition over Heathcliff. The one person she *can* count on is Nelly, her dear female friend and confidant. Both Catherine and Isabella have learned, through their reliance on Nelly, that women can only count on women in terrible times. The men in their lives prove to be insufficient as confidantes and as unconditional romantic friends. Of course, Catherine and Isabella cannot count on *each other* as romantic friends, because their heterosexual preoccupation with Heathcliff is too great a divisive problem, so they have to rely on Nelly as their primary outlet.

Even though it seems clear that, for both Cathy and Isabella, Nelly serves as a better romantic friend, ally, and confidant than their so-called beloved Heathcliff, the women both nonetheless ultimately choose to pursue their arguably unhealthy heterosexual relationships—Cathy dwells on hers with Heathcliff and marries Edgar, while Isabella marries Heathcliff—rather than focusing on pursuing romantic female friendships. Similarly, in *Jane Eyre*, Jane chooses Rochester over her relationships with Mary and Diana Rivers, the same women who she formerly declared shared one soul with her. All of the female protagonists certainly show some potential for romantic friendship, but none of them successfully follow through with maintaining woman-identified romantic friendships. All the female protagonists in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* compulsorily choose heterosexual coupling over romantic friendship. What, then, makes heterosexual coupling so powerful? Why, for instance, are Catherine and Isabella so worried about Heathcliff's affections that they altogether fail to acknowledge the idea that the two of them could have a stronger relationship as romantic friends than either one of them could experience in a heterosexual coupling with Heathcliff? Andrew Abraham asserts that

[In *Wuthering Heights*,] we witness characters (female ones for that matter), who turn to the law [of marital rites] as an instrument of protection and comfort, and as a bastion of safety, ironically the very laws that have disadvantaged women, but portrayed them from their point of view as law to be revered and upheld. (97)

Not only do women have social obligations to heterosexual marriage that privilege motherhood, wifehood, and domesticity, Abraham argues that women—especially nineteenth century British women—are encouraged to believe that heterosexual coupling helps them to achieve personal, economic, social, and status-related security. In a sense, women are “duped” into believing that they need men in order to feel secure and “protected and comfortable.” It is also important to realize that, along with women being “duped” into subscribing to heterosexuality, women subscribe to it because they fail to scrutinize it as an institution, and they fail to identify other options and alternatives to it. This failure to critically inquire about the logic of heterosexuality is pervasive in *Wuthering Heights* as well as in *Jane Eyre*. In *Jane Eyre*, Rochester acts as the Heathcliff patriarch figure that divides the women. Jane’s nearly-romantic friends, Mary and Diana Rivers, act as competing interests against Rochester. At Moor House, Jane decides to choose Rochester over the Rivers sisters and ultimately leaves Mary and Diana to pursue a relationship with him—arguably a compulsorily heterosexist relationship.

The idea that women *need* men and that women *need* heterosexual relationships, according to Adrienne Rich, is a lie:

The lie is many-layered. In Western tradition, one layer—the romantic—asserts that women are inevitably, even if rashly and tragically [as in the cases of both Jane and Catherine] drawn to men; that even when that attraction is suicidal, it is still an organic imperative. In the tradition of the social sciences it asserts that primary love between the sexes is “normal” that women *need* men as social and economic protectors, for adult sexuality, and for psychological completion; that the heterosexually constituted family is the basic social unit; that women who do not attach their primary intensity to men must

be, in functional terms, condemned to an even more devastating outsiderhood than their outsiderhood as women. (64)

It is the responsibility of progressive authors, like Charlotte Bronte and Emily Bronte, to construct and to utilize progressive protagonists, like Jane Eyre and Catherine Linton, in order to refute this lie. In order to refute the compulsory lie that can exist in heterosexual “love,” it is important for women authors to illustrate alternatives to compulsory heterosexuality by illuminating options through their characters. Instead, then, of having the main prerogatives of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* revolve around women’s heterosexual pursuits of romantic coupling and marriage, authors Charlotte and Emily Bronte should, respectively, illustrate ways in which their female protagonists and secondary characters can build romantic friendships with one another in order to empower a proto-feminist community of happier, mentally healthier, more satisfied women.

Although the Victorian myth that marriage offers women protection, happiness, and comfort was (and is) pervasive, it would have been possible for progressive characters and authors to question these norms. Simply because the social norm of heterosexist marriage was highly accepted and disseminated does *not* mean that the Brontes were entirely obliged to unquestioningly, compulsorily accept it and reiterate it in *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*. Much to the contrary, Charlotte and Emily Bronte, as progressive, quite radical woman (womyn) authors would almost certainly have had the opportunity to recognize compulsory heterosexual marriage, identify its flaws, dismantle it, and offer alternatives to it, like romantic friendship. There is evidence that other authors of the time were doing just that. For instance, Lisa Moore writes an entire article summarizing and analyzing an 1801 text about romantic friendship in her article, “‘Something More Tender Still Than Friendship’: Romantic Friendship in Early-Nineteenth-Century England.” The 1801 literary fiction to which she directs her attention is

entitled *Belinda*, written by Maria Edgeworth. Moore discusses the text, asserting “[Edgeworth] provides a lesson to young ladies in the choice of female [romantic] friends...the novel [establishes] romantic friendship between ‘normal’ feminine women as an appropriate relationship within which the women can express romantic feeling” (8). Edgeworth’s depiction of *Belinda* indicates that it was, indeed, possible for two women characters to be united in a British Victorian text. *Belinda* (1801) was actually printed quite in advance of *Jane Eyre* (1874) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847), so it could have potentially acted as a model text or trailblazer for the Bronte sisters. Other nineteenth century non-fiction texts were also setting precedents for challenging compulsory heterosexism and introducing romantic friendship as a proto-feminist alternative. Faderman names an important non-fiction one:

William Alger in *The Friendships of Women* (1868) cites one historical example after another of love between women, which was characterized by...a love which largely constituted the richness, consolation, and joy of their lives.’ Typically the women wrote each other, ‘I feel so deeply the happiness of being loved by you, that you can never cease to love me,’ ‘I need to know all your thoughts, to follow all your motions, and can find no other occupation so sweet and so dear,’ [etc]. Alger encourages his unmarried women readers to form such relationships, and promises that passionate friendships bring to life ‘freshness, stimulant charm, noble truths and aspirations.’ (162)

Clearly, Alger views romantic friendship as an acceptable way for women to achieve intimacy outside of patriarchy. As a male writer, his text is particularly telling; it suggests that, perhaps, it was not taboo for women to love women in romantic friendships in nineteenth century England. For a man to condone and encourage female romantic friendship, Alger suggests that men of the era were not bothered by such relationships. Other nineteenth century writers in England—men and women alike, authors of both fiction and non-fiction—followed this tradition of depicting women characters engaged in romantic friendship. Thus, there was clearly a precedence of textual emphasis on romantic friendship. It is quite possible, then, that the Brontes would have had the opportunity to also write about romantic friendship alternatives to heterosexual marriage.

Many women readers may have been looking for a creative, safer, more satisfying alternative to heterosexual marriage. Perhaps some of Charlotte and Emily Brontë's readers were questioning compulsory heterosexuality. As influential, proto-feminist, social reformists, Charlotte and Emily Brontë could have been questioning such an institution, acting as social leaders of a reformist movement for feminist-minded women to follow. Knowing what we know about many Victorian marriages, in particular, for example, Abraham contends:

[In nineteenth century England] married women had the same legal status as minors, criminals, and the insane; a married woman had no legal identity, and all her real and personal property passed into the control of her husband upon marriage. The rules of marriage were based on the rules of exchange and property; the woman was the object being exchanged and not one of the partners making the exchange. (94)

Both authors, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, apparently recognize that heterosexual marriage can be, as Abraham contends, detrimental to women. The authors do, in some cases, offer some criticism of the oppressive nineteenth century status quo of heterosexual marriage. For instance, Emily Brontë illustrates wife battering that occurs in marriage when she describes Heathcliff abusing Isabella in their marriage. This illustration serves as a social critique of marriage itself; it seems to assert that marriage can, indeed, be *dangerous* for women. Charlotte Brontë also illustrates her criticism of heterosexual coupling when she exposes Rochester's animalistic, subhuman, derogatory language that he uses to describe Jane, like "Rochester's girl-bride," "little fairy," and "my pale, little elf." Charlotte Brontë seems to be using Rochester's language to critique one way that marginalize women in heterosexual coupling. Being that the Brontë sisters seem to understand that the institution of heterosexual coupling can be detrimental to women, it was their duty, as leaders in a literary movement of social criticism, to identify and

deconstruct the awful aspects of compulsory heterosexual coupling. The authors started making an argument against heterosexual coupling with which they failed to follow through. Both authors' characters, particularly Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre and Emily Bronte's Catherine Linton, might have been more influential for the proto-feminist movement if they had been more adept in networking with other women and critiquing heterosexual marriage. This is not to say that the function of a novel is to serve merely as a catalyst for social change, but it must be acknowledged that the Bronte sisters were certainly aware of social pressures and were interested in challenging the Victorian status quo; thus, their omission of issues regarding compulsory heterosexuality should be noted by modern critics. Critics seem to fail to mention the Brontes' internalized heterosexism; as critics, it is our responsibility to recognize that which is *absent* in texts—in this case a rich discussion of heterosexuality—as well as those important things that are present—like, in this case, a meaningful, proto-feminist discussion of women's place in Victorian spiritual and class systems.

Would Charlotte and Emily Bronte have had access to information about romantic friendship between women? Would such information have been far too radical to write about in a Victorian novel? Lillian Faderman provides an interesting historical analysis of the nineteenth century, which applies—she infers—both to the United States and England:

Throughout much of the nineteenth century, women moved still farther from men as both continued to develop their own even more distinct sets of values... [Women] internalized the only values they were permitted to have, and they developed what has been called the Cult of True Womanhood...But with whom could they share these values? (157).

Faderman argues, then, that women certainly did have historical context that encouraged romantic friendship between women. Certainly the rise of the Cult of Domesticity/True

Womanhood/Republican Motherhood gave rise to the isolation of women from men. When she asks “But with whom could they share these values?” she begs the question of the reader; Faderman acknowledges that men were not available to share these values, nor did they *care* to share these values with women. So, as Faderman implies, women, by default, shared values of domesticity with other women, not with men. Certainly the Brontes would have recognized this. With a great deal of imagery focused on issues of femininity, domesticity, and womanhood, both authors frequently dwell on the alienation of women characters from men in their daily concerns. The authors also acknowledge that the women in their novels do not have male characters to act as their intimate friends or confidantes, so they have to turn to women. So, the authors make a preliminary acknowledgement of romantic friendship, but they fail to follow it through by creating a thorough social alternative to heterosexist coupling and marriage. Their failure to complete their own critiques of heterosexuality speaks to their own vulnerability to compulsory heterosexuality.

In continuing the discussion of whether the Brontes would have been able to initiate critiques of compulsory heterosexism, it is also helpful to recall Martha Vicinus’s historical framework; the 1850’s in England were a time of overt proto-feminist revolution. Single women were gathering together, forming an uprising against the institution of oppressive marriage rites. This activist movement was particularly influential and would surely have helped to validate authors’ attempts to expose the pitfalls of patriarchal, heterosexual marriage. Vicinus brings up another important argument to consider here; not only was it becoming largely acknowledged in Victorian England that heterosexual marriage was detrimental to women, and that single women/romantic friendships were on the rise, it was interestingly more of a sin to be a “loose” heterosexual woman than it was to be a woman involved in romantic friendship with other

women. Vicinus asserts, “In the nineteenth century the most stigmatized figure was the ultrafeminine heterosexual flirt” (97). So, then, it would have been more preposterous for the Brontes to incorporate inappropriate female heterosexual innuendo into their novels than it would have been to introduce female romantic relationships. It would have been possible, then, for them to have offered more alternative, romantic friendship opportunities between their female protagonists than they did in their novels. It would have been, arguably, less radical to integrate romantic friendship into their narratives than it would have been to discuss adultery. Since they both *did* discuss adultery—Emily discussed Catherine’s yearning for Heathcliff while married to Edgar; Charlotte discussed Rochester’s attempt to marry Jane while still married to Bertha—why were they so afraid to include stories of female romantic friendship? I argue that the reasons for the authors’ omissions of such discussions can be attributed to the authors’ own internalized heterosexism.

In nineteenth century England, the Brontes were living within a rigid society that proved to be dangerous to women, especially within heterosexual institutions of courtship and marriage. However, Charlotte Bronte and Emily Bronte had predecessors and peers involved in the social, activist, and literary movements that were working to critique heterosexuality, compulsory vulnerability to heterosexism, and marriage. There were texts disseminating ideals of romantic friendship for women; there were even authors encouraging women to empower themselves by pursuing intimate relationships with other women. There were women activists working to deconstruct a main facet of patriarchal control: marriage laws—the very laws that allotted women the same status as criminals, children, and the insane. The Brontes have been largely idolized as leaders in the social-literary movement towards justice, especially for women, but this idolization is not based on a whole vision of social justice. Although contemporary critics

praise Charlotte and Emily Bronte for their proto-feminist, progressive reform messages professed in their texts, the authors' failure to address Rich's concept of "compulsory heterosexuality" and Faderman's alternative "romantic friendship" solution, postulates that these women were, themselves, engrossed in the oppressive institutions of compulsory heterosexuality and male-identification. Their negligence of this topic perhaps hindered what activists and other authors were trying to do in the 1850's; progressive authors and activists who attempted to challenge heterosexism may have been partially thwarted in their endeavors by so-called progressive authors, like the Brontes. Being that the Brontes have been so influential and that their novels have been catalysts for some proto-feminist dialogue, if Charlotte Bronte and Emily Bronte more wholly and thoroughly addressed compulsory heterosexuality and romantic friendship alternatives in their respective texts, *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights*, it is possible that more radical social progress exposing the inequity of heterosexuality in late nineteenth century England could have been made.

Notes

¹Specifically, Abraham points out that “Marriage meant a loss of legal identity for women, and this is reflected symbolically through Cathy I’s inability to recognize herself after her marriage to Edgar Linton. She sees a vision in her mirror which she is incapable of comprehending as her own” (96). Abraham dwells on the idea that Emily Bronte has a critical consciousness of marriage’s detrimental impacts on Victorian women.

²In addition to Jane’s ability to occasionally subvert heterosexual coupling norms through having intimate connections with women, her doubleness—her resistance to subscribe to strict dualistic roles of gender, class, and heterosexual partner—throughout the novel also serves as a means of defying patriarchy. Robyn R. Warhol observes Jane’s ability to challenge patriarchal dualism. She discusses Jane’s character to be in “continuous oscillation” (859). Specifically, Warhol suggests that

the novel [refuses] to allow characters to settle into stable roles of masculinity or femininity. 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... Ultimately, I am hypothesizing that the refusal to be either realistic or Gothic, to write from the position of either a narrator or a character, is linked to a subversive impulse against a Victorian insistence on being either masculine or feminine, either male-identified or female-identified in life and in writing (875-876).

Warhol’s suggestion that Jane is constantly in flux, or “continuous oscillation,” fits well into the framework of what Rich calls the lesbian continuum. Rich’s continuum privileges flux and “continuous oscillation.” It encourages women to find themselves in a changeable position within a limitless, infinite spectrum of female sensuality, sexuality, camaraderie, and autonomy. So then, Warhol’s recognition of Jane’s doubleness helps to cinch further the notion that Jane is constantly finding ways to embrace, at some level, the lesbian continuum.

³Kaplan astutely asserts, “For Jane to find... ‘delicious pleasure,’ ‘genial affections,’ ‘mutual happiness,’ ‘intimacy,’ and ‘full satisfaction’ not with her lover but with her symbolic sisters instead seems to question or at least complicate the (hetero)sexual contract underlying romantic fiction” (19). However, Kaplan reduces Jane’s relationships with these women to “girl talk,” rather than to romantic friendships. Nowhere does Kaplan allude to the idea of “compulsory heterosexuality” or any kind of unchallenged heterosexism. Kaplan’s article is useful and articulate, but still offers gaps that need to be explored through application of Adrienne Rich’s feminist theoretical approach.

⁴Admittedly, Lillian Faderman’s 1981 assertions have since been reevaluated, to some extent, by contemporary scholars interested in exploring women’s intimate connections in Victorian England. Some critics argue that Faderman’s definition of “romantic friendship” obscures the sexual aspect that surely existed between some Victorian women and dwells too heavily on the homosocial, intimate, non-sexual aspects of women’s romantic friendship in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Lisa Moore argues, in her article, “‘Something More Tender Still than Friendship’: Romantic Friendship in Early-Nineteenth Century England,” “Although I find [Faderman’s] term useful, my account of...romantic friendship...differs markedly from Faderman’s. She claims that romantic friendships were widely approved of and idealized and therefore were never conceived of as sexual, even by romantic friends themselves” (25). Moore criticizes Faderman for failing to incorporate issues of women’s sexuality into her definition of “romantic friendship.” While Moore makes an important observation—it certainly is important to explore the ways in which women were sexual with one another in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—there is a distinct place for an analysis of non-sexual relationships between

women, separate from the study of sexual ones. Faderman's critical analysis of romantic friendships, or non-sexual intimate relationships, between women is as important as the study of sexual bonds between women. Since my analysis focuses on Jane Eyre, Catherine Linton, and their networks of non-sexual, but intimate, female friends, I will be utilizing Faderman's definition of "romantic friendship."

⁵In Cheryl A. Wilson's article on the subject, "Female Reading Communities in *Jane Eyre*," the author dwells on the one thing that, she believes, binds Miss Temple, Jane, and Helen together: reading. As Wilson puts it, "When Jane and Helen are invited to have tea with Miss Temple, Jane experiences the positive community-building elements of feminine reading....[It is at this moment that] Jane and Helen experience rare physical and emotional comfort" (135).

Wilson infers that intellectual pursuits that are shared between women help to strengthen bonds and, in turn, to defy patriarchal limits of traditional femininity. The acts of reading and attaining wisdom were certainly not encouraged activities for Victorian women. When Jane comes together with her female friends both intimately and intellectually, the resulting proto-romantic friendship and oneness that occurs becomes a rebellion against patriarchal standards of womanhood.

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