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*Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (review)

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text with a voice that does not belong to any single contributor—although the intersubjective and cross-cultural encounters that form the collaborative text may lead to tensions as well as harmonious blendings. Both Rebecca Carpenter’s essay, “Competing Versions of a Love Story: Mircea Eliade and Maitreyi Devi,” and York’s essay on lesbian collaborations underscore the way a shared text may be a place to acknowledge rather than elide differences. As York notes, collaborations, especially lesbian literary collaborations, are out of the closet yet still offer “an uneasy negotiation of shared textual space as utopian frontier” (p. 289).

For those of us interested in the collective fashioning of authority, *Literary Couplings* performs a great service by contextualizing writing partnerships and by convincingly advocating the “need for multiple theoretical models” of collaboration in essays that look back to the past and forward to the future (p. 315). Acknowledging the influence of the expanding world wide web, a digital space where both utopian practices of collaborative authorship and dystopian technologies of surveillance shape the landscape, the editors conclude, “the history of literary coupling and collaboration may yet offer up a more dynamic and heteromorphic prospect than we might initially have assumed” (p. 330). What’s next? One answer is more challenges to the paradigm of solitary authorship. *Literary Couplings* points the way.

Janice Doane, St. Mary’s College  
Devon Hodges, George Mason University

*BETWEEN WOMEN: FRIENDSHIP, DESIRE, AND MARRIAGE IN VICTORIAN ENGLAND*, by Sharon Marcus. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. 368 pp. \$65.00 cloth; \$19.95 paper.

*Between Women* is a compelling and innovative study that reveals the centrality of women’s relationships in mainstream Victorian life. Attentive to individual texts and to the tremendous archive of historical evidence that supports her readings of them, Marcus’s new book is a rich and exciting addition to scholarship on gender, sexuality, and relationships.

Overturing a number of critical commonplaces about women’s relationships between 1830-1880, Marcus argues persuasively that female intimacy—far from being a site of transgression—actually helped to constitute Victorian ideals of femininity. As she demonstrates through a series of smart readings, this same-sex intimacy existed in harmony with and indeed often promoted heterosexual relationships. Her explorations of friendship (part one of the study), eroticism (part two), and same-sex marriage (part three) investigate the nuances of these distinct affiliations, challenging not only the lesbian continuum model (as others have done before her) but also the idea that women’s relationships exist in tension with heterosexual relationships.

Each of the study's three parts uses wide-ranging materials deftly. Balancing survey with analysis, Marcus examines children's books, fashion magazines, pornography, and life writing (diaries, letters, biographies) as well as works by Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Charles Dickens, George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, and Anthony Trollope. Part two, for example, pairs known and unknown texts to show how dolls and fashion plates encouraged and naturalized women's desire for women rather than simply reflecting the passive postures of women eroticized by masculine desire. Offering an intriguing reading of *Great Expectations* through the lens of these less-canonical materials, Marcus illustrates how Pip's "desire for a woman is shaped by his identification with the desire between women woven into the fabric of the family, everyday life, and consumer culture" (p. 170).

Desire between women also formed the basis of the same-sex "female marriages" Marcus describes, which were not, by her account, the contentious subject that same-sex unions are today. Although these marriages were not legally binding, they were accepted within broader social networks. They even became models for challenging the legal definition of heterosexual marriage, replacing hierarchical and indissoluble bonds with more egalitarian ideas of marriage as a contract. In this way, part three shows that female intimacy had long-ranging familial, social, and political power.

Marcus's claim that female intimacy was "not only tolerated but promoted as necessary elements of middle-class femininity" (p. 259) offers an important corrective to dominant views that Victorian England found all same-sex relations shameful. At times, however, the portrayal of female intimacy as acceptable because it facilitated or reformed heterosexual marriage threatens to subsume that intimacy, making it as much a means as an end. This is partly because the examples Marcus chooses do not, finally, allow for sustained female intimacy or community *without* marriage, whether same-sex or heterosexual. In fiction by Gissing and Gaskell, however, and in religious sisterhoods, many such communities provided spaces where female intimacy served more than traditional marriage. These sisterhoods might have been a useful addition to Marcus's discussion of friendships infused by religious language (pp. 62-66). The responses such sisterhoods provoked were far more hostile than the reactions Marcus describes. While there were many reasons for these responses, they underscore a point implicit in Marcus's study: that same-sex relations were most attractive when they promoted heterosexual interests.

*Between Women* responds to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's seminal *Between Men* by insisting that forms of women's love are as various and complicated as those of men (p. 10). More strikingly, it revises Sedgwick's formulation of exchange by showing how women also traded in feminine objects (hair, dolls) and (more central to the study) made gifts of men to their most intimate friends. Marcus rightly suggests that these transactions were fundamen-

tal to ideas and practices of Victorian ideal femininity. I would add that the forms and objects of women's gift exchange—as various and complicated as love itself—were also crucial to ideas and practices of women's community. “What remains to the social,” she asks, “when relations of domination, oppression, status, discipline, and governmentality are set aside? . . . what theory of the social can be derived from relationships like those between women of the same class and nation—never free from power differentials, but never exhaustively defined by them” (pp. 259-60). Here, though Marcus recognizes the inequalities inherent to women's relationships, she wants to set aside “status” and “domination.” However, her own provocative discussion of punishment and style has already shown how crucial such terms are to women's intimate relationships. The gifts that women gave women, more than the “altruistic economy of reciprocity” Marcus identifies, also established alternative forms of rank and power and took their meaning from larger systems of giving (p. 86). Her book thus suggests how further attention to exchanges between women could promote new directions of study. Additional gift theories, such as Annette B. Weiner's work on the status afforded by objects withheld from circulation, might usefully extend Marcus's scholarship.

However, to speculate on these topics is to show the necessity of this ground-breaking book. It is also to take up the call for further inquiry in Marcus's powerful response to Virginia Woolf's famous discovery that “Chloe liked Olivia”: “whether they are lovers, friends, or coworkers, Chloe and Olivia are overworked, and we need more than two proper names and a verb to do justice to the variety and complexity of women's social alliances” (p. 258). *Between Women* goes a long way toward doing them that justice. It is significant scholarship and a very pleasurable read.

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FROM SENSATION TO SOCIETY: REPRESENTATIONS OF  
MARRIAGE IN THE FICTION OF MARY ELIZABETH BRADDON,  
1862-1866, by Natalie Schroeder and Ronald A. Schroeder. Newark:  
University of Delaware Press, 2006. 290 pp. \$52.50 cloth.

Marriage, no doubt about it, was a vexed question for Mary Elizabeth Braddon; it eluded her in life since the father of her children had a legal wife in a lunatic asylum, while it served as the mainspring of her best-selling plots. In *From Sensation to Society*, Natalie Schroeder and Ronald A. Schroeder have compiled an exhaustive survey of Braddon's “reservations about contemporary marriage” in six early novels, arguing that she therein “undertook a rigorous and unflinching examination of the state of mar-