Pinny, Pussy & Pals: Friendship Revisited in Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary E. Wikins Freeman's Lives, Letters, and Fiction

Friendship was a key category of nineteenth-century sociability in the United States and beyond. From Margaret Fuller's transcendentalist feminist views on female friendships through what Carroll Smith-Rosenberg famously called "the female world of love and ritual" to the queer intimacies of the turn of the twentieth century, friendship has shaped a long tradition of scholarship on nineteenth-century women writers. Sarah Orne Jewett and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman are no exception. This panel invites contributors to view friendship in their lives and writings not only as a historical category of sociability but as a critical and analytical category.

"Some people have a genius for friendship," Jewett writes in an unpublished essay on long- and short-term friendships. Jewett herself, affectionately known as "Pinny" in intimate circles, was surely such a one. Her letters attest to vibrant relationships with childhood friends and horses and dogs and also trees and sprigs of fir and other more-than-human companions. She extended this fondness to her fictional companions: from Mrs. Todd to Betty Leicester, she saw her written characters as comrades and friends; and her fiction—from *Deephaven* to "The Queen's Twin" or "Martha's Lady"—is alive with "old friends and new." Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, or "Pussy," the nickname given to her by her close friend Mary Louise Booth after pussy willows (Kendrick), is perhaps better known for her rebellious and strong-willed women who would rather be "a guest to themselves" than endure unwelcome company. Yet female solidarity across class lines, complicated practices of neighborliness (Tigchelaar), and wider ecological attachments in Freeman's fiction have recently begun to complicate our vision of this writer, once characterized as "an infant sphinx."

In a moment where loneliness is a crisis of untold proportions, the Sarah Orne Jewett Society and Mary E. Wilkins Freeman Society join in soliciting papers that read Jewett and Freeman's oeuvres—essays, poems, fiction, but also correspondence, diaries and archival material—as a shared space for imagining alternative forms, practices, and grammars of friendship.

We welcome contributions that consider, among other possibilities:

- **new modalities of friendship**. How might friendship be reimagined as companionship, or companion-species relations (Haraway), as entanglement or mesh (Morton), as care, becoming-with, kinship or making kin? How might friendship offer a mode of resilience in a dying world, or embody forms of non-reproductive futurity (Ensor)? Friendship, we add, may also entail or connote rivalry, surveillance, and even forms of sweet violence. What might friendship have to do with auto-affection; eroticism, sexuality and asexuality?
- **new objects of friendship:** What happens when friendship extends beyond human relationships to encompass living places or dying places (Ensor), ghostly presences, vibrant matter such as books, even God themself as "the Friend"? How might these expanded objects of attachment challenge conventional understandings of reciprocity, intimacy and sociability?
- **friendship as literary form and style:** is there a grammar of friendship? A rhythm, "cadence" (Jewett), or syntax of friendship? How might literary forms and linguistic structures, such as suffixes, prefixes, conjunctions, repetitions, interruptions, enact friendship rather than simply represent it? What would it mean, in sum, to read their literary forms as (alternative) practices of friendship?

This panel seeks to foster a conversation that considers both Jewett and Freeman. While papers are encouraged to take a comparative approach, they are not required to do so. Please

send your proposals (250 words) and short bios (100 words) to H.J.E. Champion (hannah.champion@u-bordeaux-montaigne.fr) and Cécile Roudeau (cecile.roudeau@gmail.com) no later than January 10, 2027. Do not hesitate to send expressions of interest before that date.

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