AMBIVALENT RECOGNITION: MAPPING INTIMACIES IN THE NOVELS
OF
GEORGE ELIOT, THOMAS HARDY, AND VIRGINIA WOOLF

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ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

What we now call “psychological realism” centers upon representations of intimacy as the genre’s authors strive toward “narrative realism and the mimesis of consciousness” (Cohn 8). According to Dorrit Cohn, psychological realism spans the years between 1850 and 1950, and its “inward turn” searches out the least accessible aspects of character. Intimate knowledge of characters in fiction make those characters “rounder,” more “realistic,” though this kind of intimate representation depends upon what Cohn calls “fabrication,” what authors imagine unknown inner lives are like (6). The multiplicity of intimate inner lives and intimate relationships represented in novels of psychological realism creates the impression that intimacy exceeds its contemporary social categories, both in novels and in life. Beginning with two late novels by George Eliot, Middlemarch (1871-2) and Daniel Deronda (1876), moving to the turn of the century with Thomas Hardy’s The Woodlanders (1887) and Jude the Obscure (1895), and finally into Virginia Woolf’s modernism with Mrs Dalloway (1926) and The Waves (1931), this project traces the mutual impact of psychological realism’s inward turn and the ways we understand intimacy. All three of these authors conceive of intimacy as not only emotional, but also spatial, and it is through this spatial dimension that the dense diversity of intimacies is made most clear.
for Tim
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Introduction: Ambivalent Recognition

What we now call "psychological realism" centers upon representations of intimacy as the genre’s authors strive toward "narrative realism and the mimesis of consciousness" (Cohn 8). According to Dorrit Cohn, psychological realism spans the years between 1850 and 1950, and its "inward turn" searches out the least accessible aspects of character. Intimate knowledge of characters in fiction make those characters “rounder,” more “realistic,” though this kind of intimate representation depends upon what Cohn calls "fabrication," what authors imagine unknown inner lives are like (6). The multiplicity of various inner lives and intimacies represented in novels of psychological realism creates the impression that intimate relations exceed their contemporary social categories, both in novels and in life. Beginning with two late novels by George Eliot, Middlemarch (1871-2) and Daniel Deronda (1876), moving to the turn of the century with Thomas Hardy’s The Woodlanders (1887) and Jude the Obscure (1895), and finally into Virginia Woolf’s Modernism with Mrs Dalloway (1926) and The Waves (1931), this project traces the mutual impact of psychological realism’s inward turn and the ways we understand intimacy.

"Intimacy" and its derivations can be used to mean a very long list of different things, as Lauren Berlant demonstrates in Intimacy, her foundational text of intimacy studies. The valences clustering around intimacy are emotional, epistemological, and spatial: both "Of knowledge or acquaintance," and "Of a relation between things: Involving very close connection or union; very close."¹ The intimate also means “the superlative of

¹ The noun form, “intimate” includes a broad cross-section of relationships, from “A person with whom one is intimate; very close friend or associate,” to family relations and friends. “Friend” is also a capacious term: “One joined to another in mutual benevolence and intimacy” (Johnson qtd. in OED), from Old English through the late nineteenth century; “A kinsman or near relation” within the same time frame; as well as a lover (citations from 1490 to 1671), a well-wisher (citations roughly 1200-1971), and anyone considered not to be an enemy, “One who is on good terms with another, not hostile or at variance; one who is on the same side in warfare, politics, etc.”
the internal” and “innermost,” which Julia Kristeva extends to the innermost of the psyche. These valences of intimacy were in use long before, during, and after the authors of this study were writing. The six novels here all demonstrate affective interaction and the cultivation of relationships with strangers, animals, objects, and ideals taking place at an innermost level of intimacy. I use the term “the intimacy matrix” to characterize the workings of numerous, often contesting intimacies. This structure is inspired by Adrienne Rich’s famous “lesbian continuum,” in which she includes “a range -- through each woman’s life and throughout history -- of woman-identified experience” expanded beyond sexual desire “to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support” (648–9). “The intimacy matrix” is also informed by Judith Butler’s theory of “the heterosexual matrix,” which functions as the disciplinary field across which dominant society measures “compulsory heterosexuality.” Butler argues that the “unthinkable” failures of that heterosexuality are still present upon the heterosexual matrix, and “these cultural configurations of gender confusion operate as sites for intervention, exposure, and displacement of these reifications” of discrete “heterosexuality,” “homosexuality,” and “bisexuality” (99, 42). While the heterosexual matrix is a disciplinary technology of identity, it also contains its own disruption, because “non” dominant cultural categories also lie within the heterosexual matrix. The intimacy matrix includes all

(citations from Old English to 1816). Historically, intimacies extend to include almost everyone.

Kristeva argues that psychoanalysis “scandalously rehabilitate[s]” older meanings of “intimacy” and “intimate,” though indeed her book Intimate Revolt is the first to polemically identify intimacy, the intimate, with the split subject and its inherent, ineffable struggles. Definitions very similar to Kristeva’s usage were in circulation at the time the authors studied here were writing, such as “Pertaining to the inmost thoughts or feelings; proceeding from, concerning, or affecting one’s inmost self; closely personal.”
intimacies, not the least of which being dominant social categories of intimacy, such as marriage and intense friendship among male elites. The tensions among the intimacies of this matrix, which psychological realism so painstakingly represents, emphasize the contingency of dominant social categories of intimacy. The sense of oneself in relation to the other and the psychic space between are fundamental to self-definition, and “Neither the self nor the object [other] are meaningful dynamic concepts without presupposing some sense of psychic space in which they interact, in which they do things with or to each other” (Mitchell 33). The psychic space Stephen A. Mitchell points to on his “relational matrix,” I argue, is the seat of the intimacy matrix, and the interactions unfolding there are just as slippery and ineffable as one’s constantly changing sense of self. Psychological realism’s representation of the intimacy matrix and its rich potential disseminates intimacy’s shifting qualities far and wide, therefore enabling alterations of dominant social categories of intelligible intimacy.

The ambivalence of intimacy emerges from our affective processing of recognition, indeed even the recognition that our ability to perceive indicates others can in turn perceive us, not as we perceive ourselves but as something else.\(^3\) These torturous failures of recognition are well represented in Victorian and modernist psychological realism, and critic Christopher Lane, focusing on what he calls “the burdens of intimacy,” situates these painful failures as external to intimacy, but if recognition is inherent in intimacy, I argue so are its failures. Ambivalent recognition is foundational to human existence because our disparate senses of self-definition only ever emerge after we recognize ourselves in contrast to others. And that always

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\(^3\) On recognition in the mirror stage and the split subject, see Elizabeth Grosz Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction. Also, Christopher Lane’s The Burdens of Intimacy explores the ambivalence attendant to intimacy, but casts that ambivalence as separate from intimacy, rather than a differently inflected intimacy, as I do here. His work directly informs my own construal of the “ambivalent recognition” inherent in intimacy.
happens inside an intimate relationship, which is intimate because the other we recognize and from whom we sense recognition is a parent, relative, or other guardian of our infantile well-being. Recognition is always ambivalent because of the always-implied potential failure of recognition, the failure of self-definition. The six novels studied here demonstrate the chaos intimacy wreaks, and they also paradoxically demonstrate the human need to order that chaos, which in turn emphasizes the particular seduction of dominant ideals of intimacy. These three authors of psychological realism devise their own narratives and ideals of intimacy while also demonstrating the ways in which intimacy continually exceeds the structures we try to place around it.

Queer studies of literature and culture offer key questions for the study of intimacy in Victorian and modernist psychological realism. The Victorian interest in the problem of other minds, as well as Eliot’s, Hardy’s, and Woolf’s interests in the impacts of the external life upon the internal and the problems of desire, resonate strongly with questions central to queer theory and studies of intimacy. Scholarly work preceding mine makes clear that the heterosexual couple in fiction has acted as a cynosure of

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4 Julia Kristeva’s reclamation of the Latin meaning of “intimate,” (i.e. “intimus”, the superlative of the internal, the absolute innermost) connects to this ambivalent recognition, and is a useful inner-most boundary of intimacy.

It should be noted here that scholars have been increasingly interested in intimacy, diachronically and synchronically, locally and globally, in numerous fields, since the 1990s. Anthony Giddens opened the study of intimacy for sociology, but in so doing reinforced the teleological view of intimacy with his arguments about “confluent love” inside of “pure relationships,” i.e. freely given, suffusive and sustaining love within relationships that last as long as both parties are interested in the relationship’s maintenance. Other sociologists such as the teams of Jeffery Weeks and Janet Holland, Davidoff et al, Lyn Jamieson, and Padilla et al have conducted more localized, less totalizing studies of intimacy in various contemporary contexts. Psychologists Robert W. Firestone, Robin Goodwin, and Deborah Anna Luepnitz have each worked for new ways of thinking about intimacy that can contribute to therapeutic work. John Armstrong, Bennet W. Helm, Ellen Dissanayake, Edward F. Mooney, and Lois Oppenheim in the humanities each consider intimacies of differing valences in culture. Social historian Viviana A.R. Zelizer provides useful histories of how the dominant narratives of intimacy have shifted through history. Giddens and Armstrong both offer their own telos of intimacy, “confluent love” in Giddens’ case and “mature love” in Armstrong’s case, but otherwise all of these scholars contribute in ways appropriate to their respective disciplines to the thickening of our conceptions of intimacy.
civic, domestic, and sexual identity and behavior, and has shown that the fixed, bright point of that couple in the ideological imagination requires multiple opposite, occluded categories of identity and behavior (or behavior that becomes identity) in order to exist at all, not the least of which is "homosexuality." Since Eve Sedgwick’s 1985 work Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire, scholarship analyzing representations of intimate relationships in the Victorian and modernist novel has explored dynamics between men, between women, and across gender lines, often in search of the various ways these relationships encounter the larger literary, sexual, and social structures around them.

Core paradigms of intimacy and relationships have always operated, though they have shifted over time. Often, contesting modes operate simultaneously, and through that conflict, new orders emerge. For instance, as derived from the Classical ideal that binds male friendship to democracy, upper-class and middle-class men were encouraged throughout the Victorian period to develop and maintain personal connections with each other, and according to this paradigm women were unfit to provide the depth of feeling and intellect necessary to maintain "true friendship." Yet, contemporaneous with this model, cross-gendered friendship was increasingly idealized in Comte’s philosophy and in the writings of John Stuart Mill, both of which became very popular among British intellectuals. Eliot, Hardy, and Woolf were

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5 On Victorians and the Classical friendship ideal, see Dellamora (20–2).
6 On the aesthetic representation homosocial friendship and attraction in Victorian conceptions of government, see Richard Dellamora (23). On the tense emergence of idioms of cross-sex friendship in the Victorian and modernist period, see Victor Luftig (2–7). On how Victorian women writers employ literary structures to carve spaces for female freedom, offering the woman writer a position from which to negotiate "with and between the dominant images of female identity," see Tess Coslett (4). On the "complexities and contradictions" of a "multiplicity of same-sex desires [that have] always existed," between women, and the metaphorical vocabulary these women employed to describe their intimate lives to themselves, see Martha Vicinus (xxiii). On the "history of sexuality and gender" present in Victorian material culture and literature that demonstrates the simultaneous operation of various kinds of "relationship between women […] work[ing] in tandem with heterosexual exchange and patriarchal gender norms," see Sharon Marcus (21).
all familiar with these texts. Victorians were particularly concerned with "the problem of other minds" and questions surrounding what it means to live the life one has and not some other life, questions of perception and positionality, what Andrew H. Miller calls the Victorian preoccupation with "moral perfectionism." Both Eliot’s and Hardy’s novels take these questions seriously, pursuing them through their representations of diverse and complex intimacies interacting with dominant social categories of intimacy. At the time of Woolf’s writing, the sympathetic concerns of novel writing “traded total knowledge for radical unknowing [...] omniscient ‘seeing into’ from some outside position g[ave] way to the ‘deep plunges of modern inside views’ (324)” (Booth qtd. in Greiner 291). We can see this when we compare the geographical representations between Eliot and Hardy on the one hand and on the other, the relationship in Woolf between the psyche and the external world. Eliot, Hardy, and Woolf all cultivate a narrative intimacy that connects readers to narrators and characters by repeatedly gesturing through narrative technique to a world behind the social where rules, boundaries, and topography fail to completely separate the varied walks of life.

Nineteenth and early twentieth-century views of intimacy employ the vocabulary of sensibility, sympathy, and sentimentality, and Eliot, Hardy, and Woolf all take these categories seriously as part of their aesthetic projects. Since its initial usage in the eighteenth century to designate, or differentiate from “sensibility,” the sentimental has continually been relegated to the side of the trivial and the feminine, and all three authors of this study held sentimentality in opprobrium while they simultaneously held sympathy, memory, and affect in high esteem. In “Natural History of German Life,” George Eliot argues that sentimental representations obstruct

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7 On the entwinement of the sentimental with “the historical conflicts of middle-class culture” which points to the over-determination of the sentimental as a category, see Suzanne Clark.
our capacities to extend sympathy: “We want to be taught to feel, not for the heroic artisan or the sentimental peasant, but for the peasant in all his coarse apathy, and the artisan in all his suspicious selfishness.” (Essays 271). If we only have sentimental characters exhibiting the best in humanity on whom to practice our sympathetic abilities, how can we ever succeed in feeling sympathy for any real person, who may have his good qualities, but surely also has his bad ones? Thomas Hardy’s “The Dorsetshire Laborer” concurs with Eliot’s argument in “Natural History,” and emphasizes the importance of character idiosyncrasy in representation:

The great change in [a visitor's] perception is that Hodge, the dull, unvarying, joyless [town], has become disintegrated into a number of dissimilar fellow-creatures, men of many minds, infinite in differences; [...] into men who have private views of each other; amuse or sadden themselves by the contemplation of each other's foibles or vices [...]" (40)

Here Hardy does not critique sentimentalism per se, but his argument about the diversity of common people concurs with Eliot’s call for unsentimental renderings of characters. Hardy emphasizes the importance of idiosyncrasy in character not just for the sake of the character itself, but also because of the idiosyncrasies of intimate interaction among characters. We see the tension of refusing the sentimental in order to better represent intimate, affective interactions.

Virginia Woolf abhorred the sentimental, which her biographer Hermione Lee tells us is a disposition she shared with her father, Leslie Stephen (72). On 18 March 1920 Woolf writes in her diary of a memoir she shared with her Bloomsbury friends, “I dont [sic] know when I've felt so chastened & out of humour with myself - a partner I generally respect & admire. ‘Oh but why did I read this egotistic sentimental trash!’ That was my cry, the result of my sharp sense of the silence succeeding my chapter” (Diary VII 28). Even a
memoir, a story about one’s memory, can be more than “subjective,” as she seems to argue earlier in the diary entry, comparing Leonard Woolf’s “objective & triumphant” offering with her own “subjective & most unpleasantly discomfited” performance (28). In her essay “Modern Fiction,” Woolf argues that novels need to take on a new perspective of life:

> Life is not a series of gig-lamps symmetrically arranged; life is a luminous halo, a semi-transparent envelope surrounding us from the beginning of consciousness to the end. Is it not the task of the novelist to convey this varying, this unknown and uncircumscribed spirit, whatever aberration or complexity it may display, with as little mixture of the alien and external as possible? (CE VII 106)

Woolf does not consider the representation of life’s halo to be a sentimental project even though the intimate interaction of feeling with experience comprises that halo, because for her it is only when one becomes focused entirely upon one’s personal feeling and experience one becomes sentimental.

Even as “sensibility” became central to much eighteenth-century thinking and work, its definition remained elusive. Both “sentimentality” and “sympathy” were (and still are) inextricably entwined with sensibility. The

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8 On the relevance of Adam Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments to realist fiction, and George Eliot particularly, see Greiner (293). “Now chiefly in derisive use,” definitions of “sentiment” at one time characterized aspects of one’s inner life: “personal experience, one’s own feeling”; “sensation, physical feeling”; “intellectual or emotional perception”; “a thought or reflection coloured by or proceeding from emotion”; “refined and tender emotion; exercise or manifestation of ‘sensibility’; emotional reflection or meditation” (OED). As “sentiment” increasingly became associated with “appeal[s] to the tender emotions in literature or art” it was also increasingly considered less than serious, “conveying an imputation of either insincerity or mawkishness” (OED). Apparently growing out of the older valences of “sentiment,” sensibility denotes the “power or faculty of feeling, capacity of sensation and emotion as distinguished from cognition and will”; “quickness and acuteness of apprehension or feeling; the quality of being easily and strongly affected by emotional influences; sensitiveness”; “capacity for refined emotion; delicate sensitiveness of taste; also, readiness to feel compassion for suffering, and to be moved by the pathetic in literature or art” (OED). “Sensibility” therefore carries a slight taint of sentimentality, though the ability to perceive complex feelings associated with the term situates it on the side of virtue. “Sensibility” allows one to enter into the feeling of another. Since the early twentieth century,
cult of sensibility that followed the success of Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* eventually denigrated such intense affective pleasure in pain as sentimentalism, yet the capacity to cultivate sympathy, to experience and understand a wide range of feeling was still regarded as a rare and admirable human ability (Greiner 293-7). George Eliot’s, Thomas Hardy’s, and Virginia Woolf’s representations of intimacy and feeling partake of that philosophical view of sympathy. Their works all occupy the tense position of avoiding their conceptions of sentimentality while pursuing their conceptions of sympathy and intimacy.

Eliot, Hardy, and Woolf all argue that the kind of realistic fictional representation of human life necessary for readers to connect with novels demands internal observation and reflection, what Eliot and Hardy call “sympathy,” in “Natural History of German Life” and “The Dorseshire Laborer,” respectively, and less accurate observation of the external world, the “getting on from lunch to dinner” that Woolf criticizes in “Modern Fiction.” All three authors of this study model sympathetic perspective-taking through narrative technique as well as the plots of their novels. In so doing they make clear the importance to their work of intimacy cultivated between the reader and the text.

Novels in the tradition of psychological realism continue to stimulate sympathy, and if novels offer some respite for readers from the uncertainties feeling with others has been called “empathy,” whereas sympathy denotes feeling for another. The Oxford English Dictionary records “empathy” as first being used in 1904, and each of the term’s early recorded usages firmly situate it as being derived from the German *Einfühlung*, which literally means “to feel oneself into” the state of something else, whether that is the emotional state of another person or a work of art. Empathy, at the beginning of the twentieth century was first used in reference to aesthetic emotions, but has since come to mean “The power of projecting one’s personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation.” Sympathy, on the other hand, has a much longer history than empathy; the first recorded usage being in 1567, to signify “Agreement, accord, harmony, consonance, concord; agreement in qualities, likeness, conformity, correspondence” (OED). However, its most prominent definition holds a great deal in common with what we now call empathy: “A (real or supposed) affinity between certain things, by virtue of which they are similarly or correspondingly affected by the same influence, affect or influence one another” (OED).
inherent to the behaviors and emotional states of other people in real life, then the “sentimental” and “sensibility,” at some level, have also continued to remain major aspects of writing fiction over time, even though numerous writers of fiction have struggled to demonstrate otherwise.\(^9\) Since the rise of the novel during the long-eighteenth century, fiction has been assumed to have the power to make “it easy to appropriate another’s point of view, to sympathize” (Gallagher 166). An important caveat to David Hume’s ideally virtuous extension of sympathy to strangers is the near impossibility of the completion of sympathy’s circuit from self to other, back to self. As fiction provides more realistic “nobodies,” to borrow from Catherine Gallagher, it enables not only sympathy but also a sense of readerly intimacy with characters and with the novels themselves, as well as opportunities for critical reflection upon how intimacy works. Kristeva emphasizes the intimate power of fiction to enable careful rethinking and questioning of the past in a wide audience, through its always-asymptotic attempts to represent ineffable intimate affect in words. She construes these attempts to communicate sensory intimacy as a powerful catalyst for revolt. As psychological realism turns deeper inward, from the Victorian period to the modernist period, such “tiny,” “intimate revolt[s]” emerge, as the coming chapters will show.

The “tiny revolts” against dominant social categories of intimacy that take place in these six novels are possible because of the elasticity inherent to ideology. Ideological systems contain an elastic capacity to incorporate aberrant behaviors and identities, and Sharon Marcus offers a revision of Roland Barthes’s notion of “the play of the system,” which

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\(^9\) Such disparate critics as E.M. Forster and Lisa Zunshine have argued that novels have and do stimulate sympathy that offers readers relief from the uncertainty inherent in relationships. Suzanne Clark shows the high-brow, particularly modernist authorial distaste for, even hatred of, the sentimental in Sentimental Modernism, 7.
accounts for “a degree of give built into social rules, offering those who lived by them flexibility, if not utter freedom” (26). While Barthes argues that “the play of the system” is “a utopian alternative to the oppressive, self-contained structure” of ideological systems, Marcus uses the phrase “to conceptualize the yield built into systems” (26-27). This ideological elasticity prevents the rupture of the system, and I argue that psychological realism plays upon this inherent give. None of the six novels here are responsible for either a feminist or queer revolution through their publication and popularity, though their representations of gender and marriage often created uproars of varying intensity in the press. These novels, and many others, have stretched our conceptions of ideologically possible desires and intimacies through their representations of the otherwise unknowable inner lives of people.

Chapter One argues that Eliot’s ideal of intimacy through sympathy is consistently undermined, in both Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda, by multiple other imperfect and self-interested intimacies. Middlemarch powerfully draws the intimacy matrix, which creates great tension with its professed intimate and sympathetic ideal. Eliot consciously uses this complex matrix to critique that ideal in Daniel Deronda. Chapter Two contends that for Hardy the retroactive creation of Wessex in all of his novels is the closest model approximating an “ideal” of intimacy. Hardy further demonstrates his belief in the power of nature and the land to offer sustaining, though ambivalent, intimacy in The Woodlanders, where the woods themselves figure as a force beyond social legibility. Both this novel and Jude the Obscure clearly show Hardy’s conception of intimate relationships with other people as inevitably destructive; the sad irony of Hardy’s conception of intimacy is that despite the unavoidable abjection inherent to personal relationships, they are the stuff of human existence. No one, not even those most dedicated to relationships with the land, can escape the simultaneously destructive yet
seductive power of intimate human relationships. Chapter Three argues that Virginia Woolf’s fiction presents a vision of ideal intimacy that eschews social scripting, and is cultivated through much solitary contemplation. For Woolf, solitude enables spontaneous moments of connection with other people that also connect with what lies behind the commonplaces of social life, and her novels urge us that such spontaneous intimacy is what we should strive toward.
Chapter One

Intimacy from a Distance in

George Eliot’s *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*

Two social worlds of Middlemarch converge from a distance at Peter Featherstone’s funeral. The upper class of Tipton and Freshitt gather at Lowick to gaze down upon the funeral parade in the churchyard, a gathering that Mrs. Cadwallader characterizes as a must-see collection “of strange animals” (305). Dorothea Casaubon feels completely impotent and alone at this watching party. The “rarefied social air” pervading her life and the lives of her friends disturbs her. No one gazing down upon the funeral knows what to make of the “thicker life below,” not even Dorothea, but her awareness of her friends’ class-bound and “imperfect discrimination,” and her own membership in the upper class redouble the chilly reflection of her own loneliness. The people gathering on both sides of the window are uncomfortable there. Those actually attending the funeral distinctly feel Mr. Featherstone’s joy in using his money to make others uncomfortable, even in death; no one of the Brooke-Chettam circle of friends enjoys visiting Lowick manor because of Mr. Casaubon’s unpleasantness and the group’s disapproval of his marrying Dorothea. This seems like a completely alienated scene, yet the passage also conveys a sense of intimate impact:

The dream-like association of something alien and ill-understood with the deepest secrets of her experience seemed to mirror that sense of loneliness which was due to the very ardor of Dorothea's nature. The country gentry of old time lived in a rarefied social air: dotted apart on their stations up the mountain they looked down with imperfect discrimination on the belts of thicker life below. And Dorothea was not at ease in the perspective and chilliness of that height. (306)
The apparent incommunicability between her party and the mourners below “mirror[s]” back to Dorothea the incommunicability between herself and her husband, and by extension the apparently insurmountable wall standing between her deepest desires (for positive action, for intense affection) and what she can feasibly do in her actual life.

The distance between the upper class and middle-class parties wrenches Dorothea with a painful closeness to her current despair, which first confronted her on her honeymoon in Rome, when her husband rebuked her for attempting to encourage his work. She feels in this scene a dissonant proximity that marks her memory. Compounding the closeness of the scene to her secret struggle is the chilly social distance, held in the high window, between her friends and the mourners below. Dorothea grapples with what Elizabeth Povinelli calls “thick life,” thickness denoting abundance and diversity, rather than dense uniformity. Though Eliot’s use of thickness connotes the density of middle-class people below, Mrs. Cadwallader’s inability to “class” the mourners underscores their diversity: “Your rich Lowick farmers are as curious as any buffaloes or bisons, and I dare say you don’t half see them at church. They are quite different from your uncle’s tenants or Sir James’s — monsters — farmers without landlords — one can’t tell how to class them” (306). To Mrs. Cadwallader’s mind, the working class and impoverished tenants present a classable and uniform set of people, and the lack of representation of the tenants in Middlemarch does little to

Arguing that intimacy occurs at the intersection of “social constraint” and “individual freedom,” which she also calls the “intimate event[‘s]” emergence from the intersection of the “genealogical society” and the “autological subject,” Povinelli’s goal in The Empire of Love: Toward a Theory of Intimacy, Genealogy, and Carnality (Public Planet Books. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006) “is that by understanding how these discourses work to shape social life, we can begin to formulate a positive political program—something I have begun to describe as a politics of ’thick life’—in which the density of social representation is increased to meet the density of actual social worlds. The goal is not to produce a hermeneutics of the Self and Other, but to shatter the foundations on which this supposedly simple relay of apprehension has historically established a differential of power as a differential of knowledge” (21). Thick life presents a view of dense but diverse “social representation[s]” of “actual social worlds.”
challenge Mrs. Cadwallader’s view. The novel does dig deeply into the lives of “rich Lowick farmers,” like Featherstone, as well as a variety of men of “business” like Mr. Vincy, Mr. Garth, Mr. Bulstrode and their families. The narrative characterizes these funeral-goers as “belts of thicker life,” thicker than the belt of life gazing down from the high window, and therefore more diverse. Mrs. Cadwallader’s dehumanization of the town’s middle-class pains Dorothea, who senses the value inherent in the diversity of lives below and feels helpless to ever reach them and know them because of her position at the top of the social ladder.

Dorothea cannot directly share her passion or her secret misery with either party at the funeral, yet the juxtaposition of the two worlds through that window has an intimate impact upon her. Frequently in both Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda, intimate relations and varying perceptions are portrayed through tropes that use glass as a reflective or refractive medium, like the window here or mirrors and jewels in other scenes. Windows frame a moment yet open it out to the wider world, and therefore allow others to permeate a character’s view. Mirrors similarly frame, and can allow another into the view of that frame, but the reflection inherent to a mirror blocks further considerations of broader context or unseen others. Jewels, most often necklaces in these novels, encircle a single character bodily, but also link that character to others. These tropes of glass provoke the intimate yet ambivalent recognition inherent to all visibility, seeing implying one’s ability to be seen and therefore defined by another’s gaze. Mirrors, windows, and jewels, all of which play with the light of perspective and understanding and act as conduits or symbols of intimate recognition, highlight Eliot’s work with position and perspective in diverse intimacies. These emphasize the unavoidability of human frailty and egoism even in Eliot’s most idealized characters, and the unsustainability of her sympathetic ideal.

Mapping the intimacies within Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda offers new
insight into Eliot’s hierarchies of vision and feeling, and contrasting geographical maps of these two consecutively published novels in particular, shows how Eliot’s attention to the diversity of intimacies, relationships, and their social and physical circumstances bring about her own critique of her sympathetic ideal. These novels also demonstrate what I call “the intimacy matrix,” and that capacity within that structure to tensely gesture toward both the social privileging of dominant modes of intimacy while simultaneously demonstrating intimacy’s multiplicity. Maps of imagined and actual places demonstrate Eliot’s commitment to crossing boundaries in order to undermine established gender and class hierarchies and situate new ways of thinking about personal relations, and the possibility of unity through difference. These maps also show the diffusive power of social and physical distance, and a narrative preference for smaller, more intimate and circumscribed geographies for their power to facilitate intimate relations. A focus upon individual filaments of relationship reveals the power of personal desire to affect and often control relationships. Eroticism therefore becomes insinuated within a wide range of intimacies. Eliot’s new skepticism about the power of sympathy in Daniel Deronda, her final novel, demonstrates the power of diverse intimacies to undermine dominant categories of intimacy. Despite the author’s famous commitment to her sympathetic ideal, analyses of intimacy through space and glass tropes prove that Eliot’s perspective of intimacy is ambivalent. Her novels insist upon the power of multiple intimacies to engage readers in sympathetic identification, or at least sustained consideration of difference, and that insistence presses upon intimacy’s dominant telos of procreative marriage, and therefore demonstrates the potential for other yet untold narratives of intimacy.

The centrality of sympathy in Eliot’s work is well established, and while not much Eliot scholarship to date specifically focuses upon intimacy’s
role in her fiction, works exploring positive, negative and ambivalent facets of sympathy uncover many complicated intimacies in the novels. J. Hillis Miller argues that Eliot strives toward a model of totalization in *Middlemarch*, a model of a world made whole through numerous diverse and moving elements, which can be extended beyond the world of the novel to the world at large across time (128). Miller’s totalization argument includes the omniscient viewpoint of the narrator, who sees all things great and small, both viewing the broad map of novel’s world and the microscopic elements that comprise it. He argues also that Eliot’s “battleground of metaphors,” a glimpse of which we can see in the funeral-watching passage quoted above, creates tensions within the narrative that undermine Eliot’s goal of totalization, pointing to the narrator’s inability to sustain its omniscience. While Eliot’s translation of Spinoza early in her career implies her espousal of his totalized view of existence, her mass of contesting metaphors in *Middlemarch* does support a view of a world made up of numerous diverse filaments constantly in flux, one that the narrator extends to the world at large. She renders a world that is one, but which is not monolithic or consistently uniform. Gillian Beer writes “[…] by whatever route we approach her writing, we shall find, always, a feeling for interconnection and yet a strong awareness of how difficult it is to keep different experiences simultaneously within meaning” (*George Eliot* 15). This tension between the multiplicity of experiences, intimate and otherwise, and the desire to meaningfully represent them, to see the whole, underscores the important role that the interplay of intimacies in Eliot’s fiction.

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11 For discussions of sympathy in Eliot’s work as an essentially positive or desirable force see Nazar (293-4); Argyos (1-2); Grainer (291, 300). For discussions that emphasize the difficulty of sympathy for Eliot’s characters, see Lane (135).
A focus upon the meaning of “intimate,” as in close proximity, and its opposite, distance, will demonstrate the pressure space can put upon personal relationships. The funeral-watching scene, with which I opened this chapter, is rich with multiple, shifting metaphors and intimate impacts, and when it is juxtaposed with a later scene of window-watching at Lowick, (see Fig. 1), the spatial impacts of intimacy upon Eliot’s sympathetic project become very clear. Eliot divides Lowick Manor into joyful and dour sides: Dorothea’s bow-window extends from “the happy side of the house,” whereas Mr. Casaubon’s window on the other side, through which the upper-class party watches the Featherstone funeral, is “rather melancholy even under the brightest morning” (67). Lowick Manor “was in the old English style, not ugly, but small-windowed and melancholy-looking: the sort of house that must have children, many flowers, open windows, and little vistas of bright things, to make it seem a joyous home” (67). The small windows of Lowick Manor metaphorically express Mr. Casaubon’s myopia about his work and his person, as well as Dorothea’s own tendency toward shortsightedness, which is first mentioned in the novel in the context of her being shortsighted about intimacy. Sir James,
in one of apparently many failed attempts to convey his romantic interest in Dorothea, offers her a small puppy; Dorothea brusquely declines, conveying distaste for such tiny canines and a fear of stepping on it, because of her shortsightedness. Life at Lowick, with everything as it should be and no work left for Dorothea to do on the estate, draws her vision and feeling inward, leaving nowhere for her affection and intensity to move but repeatedly after her husband, who cannot receive them. Will Ladislaw brings in some air and light, but Casaubon’s physical aversion to him keeps Dorothea’s gaze locked upon her relation to her husband and her friend, rather than their position in the surrounding world.

The funeral-gathering before the window suddenly shifts for Dorothea from a moment in which she considers the thick life of the broader world to a moment in which she becomes completely focused upon her own intimate drama. As the group watches the Featherstone funeral, Dorothea’s love triangle enacts itself through the window. Casaubon joins the group of gawkers,

12 Kathleen McCormack identifies Cadhay House as Eliot’s model for Lowick Manor in *George Eliot's English Travels: Composite Characters And Coded Communications.*
checking Dorothea’s talk about her feelings with his presence. Celia spots Will Ladislaw through the window, and her observation of him wrenches Dorothea even more: "Dorothea felt a shock of alarm: every one noticed her sudden paleness as she looked up immediately at her uncle, while Mr. Casaubon looked at her" (308). The long chain of observations, looks, and reactions disrupts the narrative’s smooth depiction of Dorothea and the funeral, jerking the focus into the room, creating a sense of proximal intimacy in which everyone is too close for comfort. As Dorothea’s friends express their joy at the sight of Ladislaw, the painful tension between the Casaubons pulls tighter:

Mr. Casaubon bowed with cold politeness, mastering his irritation, but only so far as to be silent. He remembered Will’s letter quite as well as Dorothea did; he had noticed that it was not among the letters which had been reserved for him on his recovery, and secretly concluding that Dorothea had sent word to Will not to come to Lowick, he had shrunk with proud sensiveness from ever recurring to the subject. He now inferred that she had asked her uncle to invite Will to the Grange; and she felt it impossible at that moment to enter into any explanation. (308).

Silently, Mr. Casaubon creates his own story of Dorothea and Will and thus increasingly alienates himself from his wife. The silent mutual misunderstanding creates an intimate, shared experience of tension between these two unhappy people. Dorothea is continuously aware of her husband’s discomfort, and takes personal responsibility for it:

She could not in the least make clear to herself the reasons for her husband’s dislike to his presence — a dislike painfully impressed on her by the scene in the library; but she felt the
unbecomingness of saying anything that might convey a notion of it to others. Mr. Casaubon, indeed, had not thoroughly represented those mixed reasons to himself; irritated feeling with him, as with all of us, seeking rather for justification than for self-knowledge. But he wished to repress outward signs, and only Dorothea could discern the changes in her husband's face [...]

Dorothea knows her husband's feeling, and has become terrified of its power to disable him; indeed Casaubon's general weakness and physical susceptibility to his feelings do not make him easier to handle, but rather collude to bind Dorothea to Casaubon more tightly, because of his obvious and intense need of her and her intense need to dutifully put her overflowing affection to use. Yet she receives nothing in return for her continuous care but paranoia, chilly formality, and accusations of martyrdom. Casaubon consistently distracts Dorothea from seeing her connection to the wider world, causing her to turn away from what she sees through the window.

The left-hand section of the map of Lowick (Fig. 1) depicts Dorothea looking down at the world and its people from her own bow-window at a later time in the novel, in contrast to the funeral-watching portion. In this moment, she feels acutely that she is an intimate part of that world. After her long, dark night of nursing her broken heart, when she believes that Will loves Rosamond Lydgate, Dorothea looks back upon her circumstances with new perspective, and looks through the bow-window (a window that reaches outward, rather than flatly reveals) at the world with which she shares a common lot:

She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond, outside the entrance-gates.

Lane argues that Dorothea's "earnest sacrifice results in accusations that she's displaying a 'fanaticism of sympathy,' as if submitting to Casaubon's repulsive egotism has perverse rewards of its own." (112). Nazar argues that Will’s accusation of her "fanaticism" puts constraints upon Dorothea’s conscience (296).
On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving—perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpitating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining.

What she would resolve to do that day did not yet seem quite clear, but something that she could achieve stirred her as with an approaching murmur which would soon gather distinctness. (741, emphasis added)

In this moment Dorothea recognizes the large, “palpitating” world and its inhabitants with their diverse labors. She stands removed, both recognizing the luxury of her position and feeling united with the men and women laboring outside. This is a paradoxical moment of distanced connection, a looking-glass version of the other Lowick window scene. The people she sees and feels a connection with are the laborers, the tenants about whom the novel tells us very little, and with whom we have almost no evidence of Dorothea’s commonality. These far-away laborers act only as figures for the thickness of life; we know nothing about their respective experiences. The novel insists that despite her privileged remove from the world beneath her window, Dorothea still sees the “palpitating” diversity and recognizes her connection to it. Dorothea bends to the intractable world because of her common lot within it, and with that acquiescence she achieves, for a moment, George

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14 Lane observes, “Eliot arguably could picture [community and compassion] only in abstract, impersonal forms” (xxvii).

15 On the power of critical distance to cultivate sympathy and the relation to George Eliot, see Amanda Anderson The Powers of Distance.
Eliot’s ideal of human perspective and perception. But the paradox inherent to her understanding renders this wide, unifying sympathy unsustainable. When Dorothea takes her new perspective to town, so she can soothe the fears of a woman who the day before had broken her heart, the all-encompassing quality of her sympathy becomes concentrated in the intimate moment, physically affecting both women deeply for their own private and opposing reasons.

Eliot’s work represents a wide range of lives and relationships with the purpose of demonstrating their reality, validity and complexity, and characters like Dorothea and Deronda are held up as better than the rest. Neither Dorothea nor Deronda can sustain their keenest sympathetic vision, and both characters often experience egoistic frustrations and satisfactions. Dorothea’s discomfort as she watches the funeral points to the narrative’s discomfort with its own established hierarchies. Why is Dorothea so much better? Why can only she attain such sympathetic perspective? As Eliot herself asks, “why always Dorothea?” (261) Dorothea’s ability to be disturbed by her rarefied distance from the mourners reveals a serious tension present in Middlemarch, a tension that becomes an earnest critique in Daniel Deronda, surrounding Eliot’s sympathetic ideal. The heights of sympathy either character reaches are enabled greatly by their wealth and status, their freedom to indulge in introspection, the ability to gaze from a wide, high

16 Bodenheimer argues that Eliot tells versions of the same narrative over and again in her work, “one George Eliot was never to cease telling: the story of a 'wide' idealistic mind coming into collision with the intractable prejudices around it and finding its heroism in bending to that narrowness in the name of common humanity” (66-7)
17 Barret argues that at no point in Middlemarch is the reader permitted to forget about Dorothea, yet the intervening sections of the novel establish “Dorothea’s problems and hopes […] as particular variations on universal issues” (123). A. Miller points to Eliot’s alignment with the nineteenth-century drive for moral perfectionism, which “provides a complex, relational understanding of selfhood, one that does not reduce human contact to forms of domination and subjection.” (15) For more scholarship on Eliot’s ideals of sympathy and action see Nazar, who argues that “Eliot asks us to make a focus on the participated life, in Feuerbach’s sense, the basis for ‘framing’ questions of knowledge, for putting a new perspective on questions of knowledge as provided by the lens of marriage and ethics.” (295); Barret, who argues that “looking for a moral center in the novel” is a mistake, and that ambivalence about ideal lives is more the focus. (123-4)
window, or to travel widely and cross numerous physical and social boundaries. Within the secret impacts of characters upon each other we find the power of diverse intimacies, but as we look to tensions within these moments we can also see the author’s critique of her own ideal system of sympathy.

Sympathetic identification of the kind Eliot most prizes is only possible through abstraction from a distance – either mental or physical distance, or both. Amanda Anderson argues, “despite her endorsement of situated knowledges, and despite her critique of abstract economic theory and statistics, Eliot both relies on and makes direct appeal to specific forms of distanced understanding” (12). Anderson uses the example of Daniel Deronda to point to Eliot’s conception of the sympathetic power of distance: “To achieve reflective distance, one must be capable of disengagement from cultural norms and given. But such an achieved distance should in turn promote not a sustained or absolute disengagement – for Eliot a destructive delusion – but rather a cultivated partiality, a reflective return to the cultural origins that one can no longer inhabit in any unthinking manner” (120-1). Indeed Deronda inhabits this tense position often in the novel, and Eliot does consistently present her advocacy of sympathy through critical distance that is informed by specific, concrete, personal experience. Yet the power of intimacies, and their inherent nearness, to propel lives inextricably into consequences (one consequence being a loss of faith in dearly held ideals), that in turn create more intimacies, more propulsions onward, and so forth, remains undeniable in Eliot’s fiction, and repeatedly disrupts the wide sympathy cultivated by Deronda or Dorothea, or other more or less idealized characters in her novels. These characters often falter when, up-close and personal, they put the lessons learned through critical distance to the test. Numerous shifting intimacies emphasize Eliot’s uncertainty about sympathy,
her sense that ideal sympathy is thoroughly unsustainable.

Physical space colludes with social boundaries and mores to affect intimacy’s intensity in both Middlemarch and Daniel Deronda. As Dorothea and her friends watch the funeral, the physical and social stratification of the scene diffuses intimacy; conversely, when Dorothea later visits Rosamond, armed with her new sense of union with the world, that sympathetic connection becomes concentrated in a scene of intense physical and emotional intimacy. In the first instance, Dorothea’s uncomfortable awareness of the distance between the mourners below and her group above, and the associations that such a distance brings for her, alienate her from the people closest to her. In the second instance, Dorothea’s seclusion, pain, and perhaps exhaustion allow her to transform alienation from the world around her, and from Rosamond, into sympathy. Intimacies across the intimacy matrix create tense spaces in flux, where what is far is brought near and what is close becomes alien. The group of watchers is represented as intimate in terms of proximity: the tight proximity of Mr. Casaubon’s room, the geographical proximity of their homes and lands, and their familial and social relations to each other. Dorothea and Rosamond are not at all close in this regard, indeed the two women hardly ever meet unless Dorothea stops by looking for Lydgate (both times finding Rosamond in compromised positions with Ladislaw). Proximity, therefore, is a useful category for thinking about how intimacy works in these novels.18

Physical and emotional proximity carry differing intimate valences. For

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18 Thinking about intimacy spatially, following Franco Moretti, opens questions of “the form of the novel and its internal relations” (Atlas 4). Internal relations of focus here are of course intimacies within relationships, and inherent in that, issues of closeness and distance. Moretti argues that literary maps like those I use here “highlight the ortegubunden, (place-bound nature of literary forms: each of them with its peculiar geometry, its boundaries, its spatial taboos and favorite routes)” (5). Bringing into focus “the internal logic of narrative: the semiotic domain around which a plot coalesces and self-organizes,” the maps used here show the spatial quality of intimacy, as well as the power of physical and social space to diffuse or concentrate intimacy (5). These maps highlight the ortegbunden of intimacies, which are indeed bound in place to circumstance and class, bound in place to certain relationships that allow different behaviors and utterances.
example, Mary Garth’s relationship with Mr. Featherstone in Middlemarch is intimate because their proximity is of the closest: she is responsible for his bodily comfort and must attend to him as he sleeps. This is intense proximal, physical intimacy, yet it fails to touch her. In a scene set in the very early hours of morning, in a bedroom where the windows are heavily curtained and therefore in contrast with Dorothea’s clear views from her boudoir, Featherstone asks Mary to help him destroy a will written up as a decoy. She is repulsed and refuses, nearly chanting, “I will not let the close of your life soil the beginning of mine. I will not touch your iron chest or your will” (297). Though this moment is an intimate one in terms of its claustrophobic proximity, Mary refuses to touch or be touched by Featherstone’s demand. She firmly denies any intimacy beyond the proximal. Her repulsion, however, is not what precludes further intimacy here, but rather her refusal to be touched and soiled spiritually by Featherstone’s wishes.

Repulsion can indeed pull one into intense emotional intimacy, as it does Gwendolen Harleth. She is repulsed when Mrs. Glasher tells her about Grandcourt’s long-term affair and fathering of illegitimate children with her. The repulsion makes it easy for Gwendolen to promise never to stand between Mrs. Glasher and Grandcourt, but once Gwendolen’s material circumstances become dire she breaks her promise to suit herself. In a scene full of mirrors, Gwendolen’s previously empowered sense of herself is completely shattered. The love triangle among Gwendolen, Grandcourt, and Lydia Glasher imposes itself violently, and intimately, upon Gwendolen on her honeymoon at Ryelands. Lydia Glasher, in absentia, situates herself and her children between Grandcourt and Gwendolen through the letter she includes with the Grandcourt diamonds:

These diamonds, which were once given with ardent love to Lydia
Glasher, she passes on to you. You have broken your word to her, that you might possess what was hers. Perhaps you think of being happy, as she once was, and of having beautiful children such as hers, who will thrust hers aside. God is too just for that. The man you have married has a withered heart. His best young love was mine: you could not take that from me when you took the rest. It is dead: but I am the grave in which your chance of happiness is buried as well as mine. You had your warning. [...]

Will you give him this letter to set him against me and ruin us more—me and my children? Shall you like to stand before your husband with these diamonds on you, and these words of mine in his thoughts and yours? Will he think you have any right to complain when he has made you miserable? You took him with your eyes open. The willing wrong you have done me will be your curse. (358-9)

With this letter, Mrs. Glasher claims and buries Grandcourt’s “best young love” and Gwendolen’s happiness. She curses Gwendolen, but situates that curse as one that Gwendolen has imposed upon herself through her selfish betrayal of her promise. Mrs. Glasher weaves a spell of paranoid silence around Gwendolen, “Will he think you have any right to complain when he has made you miserable?” (359). Through the gift/curse of diamonds, Mrs. Glasher and Grandcourt strangle Gwendolen’s ability to fight for herself and extinguish her ability to bear herself up through her own image.¹⁹ She knows that she has entered this life willingly with open eyes, and any complaint would only compound her shame: “She could not see the reflections of herself then; they were like so many women petrified white” (359). Gwendolen no

longer knows herself in her reflection, and that alien, petrified woman is reflected back to her repeatedly in the numerous panes of mirror before her. As her lost self is repeated to her, Mrs. Glasher’s words are repeated in her mind, poisoning her sense of herself and her relationship with her new husband. The many mirrors surrounding Gwendolen truncate her existence, so that it appears to hold only this terrifying and claustrophobic scene, and in so doing the scene enacts the intimate power of recognition, or misrecognition, over one’s existence. Mrs. Glasher is physically nowhere near the couple, and Gwendolen is thoroughly repulsed by her husband, yet a dark and paranoid intimacy, in which Gwendolen sees herself as a sinful wretch and feels condemned by the implied gaze of her husband and his lover, still binds them all tightly together through the figures of the diamonds and the many mirrors, and sets all subsequent actions of Gwendolen’s plot in motion.\(^20\) For Gwendolen, repulsion marks but does not preclude this triangulated intimacy, which enables the most important relationship of the novel, her strange but intimate friendship with Deronda. Her intimacy with Grandcourt and Glasher is marital but miserable, and her relations with her own family from this point onward become strained, nearly alienated, in order to maintain peace in her stultifying marriage. In intensely negative form, the intimacy matrix here shows its capacity to entwine itself, creating frustrating and unpredictable consequences.

**Eliot’s Geography and Intimacy**

The distances Gwendolen travels as she pursues various intimacies with (and away from) Grandcourt, and later with Daniel Deronda, appear to disperse or even corrupt intimacy’s strength. Looking at the maps below, Figures 3 and 4, we can see that the respective geographies of *Middlemarch* and Daniel Deronda contrast strikingly. The physical geography of *Middlemarch* is far

\(^{20}\) Bodenheimer discusses the killing power of paranoia in Eliot’s work (156).
simpler than that of *Daniel Deronda*, and conversely the relational terrain of
the former novel is far more complicated than the latter. There are more
vectors of relational influence at work in *Middlemarch*—for example, the
Garths are intimately affected by decisions made at Tipton and Freshitt,
whereas in *Deronda* the Meyricks, a similarly benevolent but marginal family,
remain unaffected overall despite the vicissitudes of Deronda’s relationships
and decisions. The relationships in both novels circle around families, and
it is the addition of Deronda to his family that enables the novel to spin
out plots across the globe.\(^{21}\) The thickness of intimacies within the more
circumscribed space of *Middlemarch* points to Eliot’s narrative belief that
tighter geography cultivates intimate relations.

\(^{21}\) Will Ladislaw plays a similarly expansive role, enabling the subplot in Rome—he is
tangentially referred to as both an Italian and a Jew, though there is little in the
novel to substantiate either characterization of him. Through Bulstrode’s story we
learn that Ladislaw’s grandfather was a wealthy evangelical Christian who owned
businesses that operated similarly to pawn shops. When Dorothea hears about this
aspect of Will’s family history, Will is called the grandson of Jewish pawnbroker.
This is the only overt reference to Jewish heritage in *Middlemarch*. He is of Eastern
European descent and a dependent upon one of the primary estates in *Middlemarch*, and
his foreignness and financial dependency, as well as his beauty and areole of curls,
situate him as a probable precursor to Deronda.
According to F.B. Pinion, in his *A George Eliot Companion: Literary Achievement and Modern Significance* (Towota, NJ: Barnes and Noble, 1981.), Eliot’s preliminary “sketch-map shows Lowick two miles north-west, and Freshitt and Tipton three miles south-east, of Middlemarch” (180). I have placed the Lydgate household inside the town, but toward Lowick because of its narrative situation on the Lowick Road. The Vincy household has been arbitrarily placed in the center of town because of Mr. Vincy’s role as mayor. The Bulstrode household is placed at random in the town.

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Despite the simplicity of the physical geography of *Middlemarch*, a wide-angled view of how relationships map out in the novel nearly simulates a map of the world. Scholarship on Eliot and sympathy well covers how Eliot’s omniscient narrators continually shift focus between views from a distance and particularized views. Eliot calls the wide view from a distance the “telescoping” view, but this metaphor would need to be spun on its head in order to characterize the distant narrative view she practices. Imagine George Eliot up in the ether, gazing back at the earth through her telescope. That view is also the map-view, the near-omniscient perspective anyone can take when he or she examines a geographical map. Eliot’s narrative use of the map-view, again, demands that attention be paid to the microscopic view, or to avoid a mixed metaphor, the magnified view of individual relationships and intimate moments. The whole novel rings with the intimate intensity of small and diverse encounters.

In *Deronda*, Eliot also demonstrates her moral preference for the intimacy of a stable home. While Sir Hugo Mallinger’s adoption offers him a firm and life-long geographic foundation, his unmistakable otherness dislodges him from his home, sending him across numerous borders.

Life was very delightful to the lad, with an uncle who was always indulgent and cheerful -- a fine man in the bright noon of life, whom Daniel thought absolutely perfect, and whose place was one of the finest in England, at once historical, romantic, and home-like: a picturesque architectural out-growth from an abbey,

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24 On wide and close view and its grounding in the scientific method, its relation to Lydgate’s systole and diastole, see Miller “Optic and Semiotic in *Middlemarch*” (129). Beer argues that the novel itself “works through explanation – passionate explanation which produces some of the same intensity as the gossip of lovers or of intimate friends, a sustained conversation which secures and surprises. But such explanation is not end-stopped, but endless. It is no wonder that she needs the focusing metaphors of microscope and telescope.” (191, original emphasis)
which had still remnants of the old monastic trunk. [...] The Mallingers had the grant of Monk's Topping under Henry the Eighth, and ages before had held the neighbouring lands of King's Topping, tracing indeed their origin to a certain Hugues le Malingre, who came in with the Conqueror [...] Two rows of [his] descendants, [...] looked down in the gallery over the cloisters on the nephew Daniel as he walked there: men in armour with pointed beards and arched eyebrows, pinched ladies in hoops and ruffs with no face to speak of; grave-looking men in black velvet and stuffed hips, and fair, frightened women holding little boys by the hand; smiling politicians in magnificent perruques, and ladies of the prize-animal kind, with rosebud mouths and full eyelids, according to Lely; then a generation whose faces were revised and embellished in the taste of Kneller; and so on through refined editions of the family types in the time of the Reynolds and Romney, till the line ended with Sir Hugo and his younger brother Henleigh.

[...] But in the nephew Daniel Deronda the family faces of various types, seen on the walls of the gallery, found no reflex. (165-6)

Daniel’s home is one of the very best possible in terms of class and privilege, with ties stretching back to the Battle of Hastings. Monk’s Topping has direct ties to Henry VIII’s dispossession of the Catholic clergy, and therefore nods to Daniel’s loss of his own religious heritage to dominant English society. The portraits gazing down upon him represent the pinnacle of Englishness, painted by the most fashionable artists, since the Middle Ages. But Daniel does not recognize himself as he does his uncle in the faces looking down upon him. In this childhood scene Daniel feels the failure of
recognition; in his inability to recognize himself in the Mallinger forebears he feels unrecognized in return. He does not know about his Jewish heritage or any specific details of his origin at this point, but he senses that his background differs greatly from his beloved uncle’s. Though given a home, which the narrator considers vital to cultivating sympathetic intimacy, Deronda does not belong to it, and the narrative sends him on a search for his home among the Jewish people.

Deronda can eventually leave his familiar life for that journey because of his privileged position at home in Monk’s Topping, whereas Eliot represents Gwendolen Harleth as being at a major developmental disadvantage for the lack of a stable home:

Pity that Offendene was not the home of Miss Harleth's childhood, or endeared to her by family memories! A human life, I think, should be well rooted in some spot of a native land, where it may get the love of tender kinship for the face of earth, for the labours men go forth to, for the sounds and accents that haunt it, for whatever will give that early home a familiar unmistakable difference amidst the future widening of knowledge: a spot where the definiteness of early memories may be inwrought with affection, and kindly acquaintance with all neighbors, even to the dogs and donkeys, may spread not by sentimental effort and reflection, but as a sweet habit of the blood. […] The best introduction to astronomy is to think of the nightly heavens as a little lot of stars belonging to one's own homestead. But this blessed persistence in which affection can take root had been wanting in Gwendolen’s life. (22)

This passage argues that intimacy with a stable home will enable the cultivation of intimacies with other people. Though Deronda’s home is not in his “native land,” having grown up at Monk’s Topping allows him to develop
“the love of tender kinship for the face of the earth, for the labours men go forth to [...]” (22). Gwendolen’s lack of a childhood home contributes to her being the eponymous “Spoiled Child” of the first book of the novel. Deronda’s sense that somewhere in the world lives a family he has never met also contributes to his habit of reserving judgment of others, a quality that enables his friendship with Gwendolen. In its description of what Gwendolen loses by not having a sense of home, the narrative presents Eliot’s implied preference for spatially intimate or circumscribed spaces as staging grounds for intimate relationships. Before her marriage, Gwendolen cannot view herself as anything other than the “little sun” around which the universe turns because she did not have any “introduction to astronomy” through the stars fixed above her “homestead.” In her earlier life, Gwendolen does not develop a sense of her position in relation to others, only others in relation to herself. The narrator claims here that the circumscribed space of a stable home enables one to imagine her life from a distance, to take on the map-view, and see the importance of others and her connection to them. The reality of her interconnection to others comes as a paralyzing shock to Gwendolen when she finally sees it in Mrs. Glasher’s letter. With Mrs. Glasher’s gift/curse, the only intimate connections that have impacted Gwendolen’s consciousness are those characterized by shame and fear. As Gwendolen pursues Deronda’s help, and becomes increasingly obsessed with him, she also pursues a more fulfilling intimacy capable of suffusing her with comfort. As she and Deronda travel separately around England and to Italy, that connection never solidifies because the wide geographical space diffuses their intimate connection. Any possibility of rekindling and intensifying their connection is ultimately foreclosed when Deronda marries Mirah and begins his Zionist mission.

The spatial-intimate relation in Deronda contrasts to that of
Middlemarch, wherein almost all interactions occur in Middlemarch. Dorothea’s grounding at Lowick, in spite of her painful marriage, enables her to become suffused with a sense of unity with the world. She draws strength from her rootedness in Middlemarch. When she leaves for her wedding-journey to Rome, she is agitated by the place’s strangeness, begins to feel alienated from her husband, and her sense of herself becomes unmoored. Chapter XX of the novel explores Dorothea’s emotional and mental state of being in Rome, and argues that her geographic placement there exacerbates her feelings of alienation and discontent with her husband. Eliot’s epigraph to the chapter casts Dorothea as “A child forsaken, waking suddenly”; she is forsaken in a foreign land, and its strangeness hastens her awakening to the reality of her marriage (180). Chapter XX opens with her “sobbing bitterly”; chapter XXI opens, “It was in that way Dorothea came to be sobbing as soon as she was securely alone. But she was presently roused by a knock at the door” (180, 191). The cause of her flood of tears is explained in flashback with narrative commentary throughout chapter XX, which spans only a few minutes of the novel’s diatetical time. Dorothea is only crying here, but the narrative descriptions of Rome give her momentary upset terrifying qualities, akin to a breakdown:

Ruins and basilicas, palaces and colossi, set in the midst of a sordid present, where all that was living and warm-blooded seemed sunk in the deep degeneracy of a superstition divorced from reverence; the chiller but yet eager Titanic life gazing and struggling on walls and ceilings; the long vistas of white forms whose marble eyes seemed to hold the monotonous light of an alien world: all this vast wreck of ambitious ideals, sensuous and spiritual, mixed confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation, at first jarred her as with an electric shock, and then urged themselves on her with that ache
belonging to a glut of confused ideas which check the flow of emotion. Forms both pale and glowing took possession of her young sense, and fixed themselves in her memory even when she was not thinking of them, preparing strange associations which remained through her after-years. Our moods are apt to bring with them images which succeed each other like the magic-lantern pictures of a doze; and in certain states of dull forlornness Dorothea all her life continued to see the vastness of St. Peter’s, the huge bronze canopy, the excited intention in the attitudes and garments of the prophets and evangelists in the mosaics above, and the red drapery which was being hung for Christmas spreading itself everywhere like a disease of the retina. (181-2

Like the young Daniel Deronda’s feelings of failed recognition in the gallery of Monk’s Topping, Dorothea faces pictures depicting a life she cannot recognize. Rome is too alien from her own life for her to feel comfortable; intimacy here is strained. The paradoxical juxtaposition of Classical Rome, Catholic Rome, and contemporary Rome terrifies Dorothea to near disassociation. On her honeymoon, she walks in a completely foreign land, wherein nothing is familiar, and a deep sense of degradation overwhelms her. Later on, her memories of Rome spread across her vision, we are told, “like a disease of the retina,” metaphorically blinding her (182). Instead of filling her “growing soul” with the air of ancient art and mystery, as the narrative tells us Rome would do for more cosmopolitan people able to recognize themselves in aspects of the city, the enormity, richness, and hectic overlapping of ancient art with arcane Christianity, and over again with Italian excess brings all of Dorothea’s already ardent feelings intensely to the surface (181). But Dorothea is not crying only because Rome frightens
The narrator calls Dorothea “a girl who had lately become a wife, and from the enthusiastic acceptance of untried duty found herself plunged in tumultuous preoccupation with her personal lot” (181). Once a girl, now a wife, never taking time outside of marriage to consider the consequences of laying herself open to whatever duties her husband might require of her. In Rome, in sustained and circumscribed proximity with Mr. Casaubon, those consequences and realities come crashing down upon her in a way they would not have done back in Middlemarch, or perhaps anywhere else given Rome’s particular capacity to combine the grandeurs and excesses of the fleshly, ancient, and religious worlds. Dorothea sees her situation in a new light, and,

whatever else remained the same, the light had changed, and you cannot find the pearly dawn at noonday. The fact is unalterable, that a fellow-mortal with whose nature you are acquainted solely through the brief entrances and exits of a few imaginative weeks called courtship, may, when seen in the continuity of married companionship, be disclosed as something better or worse than what you have preconceived, but will certainly not appear altogether the same” (183).

Despite the Eliot’s insistence that such disillusionment is inevitable once courtship ends, Dorothea feels great shame not only for doubting her husband’s capacity for greatness, but also for upsetting him through her rather passionate encouragement of his publication. Their geographical location and the social scripts written over their journey compound their pain:

Both were shocked at their mutual situation--that each should have betrayed anger towards the other. If they had been at home, settled at Lowick in ordinary life among their neighbors, the
clash would have been less embarrassing: but on a wedding journey, the express object of which is to isolate two people on the ground that they are all the world to each other, the sense of disagreement is, to say the least, confounding and stultifying. To have changed your longitude extensively, and placed yourselves in a moral solitude in order to have small explosions, to find conversation difficult and to hand a glass of water without looking, can hardly be regarded as satisfactory fulfillment even to the toughest minds. (189)

The great change in their longitude (and latitude), from Middlemarch to Rome, creates pressure to remain content despite the added realities of sustained close proximity. Mr. Casaubon feels shocked and betrayed by Dorothea’s presumption in discussing his progress with him, feeling she has “turned out to be capable of agitating him cruelly just where he most needed soothing. Instead of getting a soft fence against the cold, shadowy, unapplausible audience of his life, had he only given it a more substantial presence?” (190) Mr. Casaubon feels that Dorothea has failed to recognize him, or to mirror back to him his sense of himself. His feeling is not unlike Dorothea’s feeling of intense alienation from Rome, her feeling that the art, architecture, and culture fail to reconcile with themselves and certainly fail to mirror back to Dorothea her established sense of the world. Dorothea’s anger and frustration are born out of seeing her husband doing his archival work daily, which in Rome requires him to descend into the depths of the Vatican, the place that later overtakes her memory with such blinding violence.

25 On how this Roman honeymoon participates in the Victorian policing of marriage by attempting (and failing) to cement the Casaubons’ marriage by helping to assimilate Dorothea’s views to her husband’s, see Helena Michie’s *Victorian Honeymoons* chapter 2.
Mr. Casaubon, "fixed and unchangeable as bone," loses interest where the light shines in and the view is wide, and in Rome Dorothea realizes this and "gradually ceases to expect with her former delightful confidence that she should see any wide opening where she followed him" (185). Dorothea sees her husband excitedly moving through burrow-holes in a windowless, unmappable labyrinth of his academic project, and the lack of insight from the surrounding world, she increasingly understands, renders his project academic in the ineffectual sense of the word:

Poor Mr. Casaubon himself was lost among small closets and winding stairs, and in an agitated dimness about the Cabeiri, or in an exposure of other mythologists' ill-considered parallels, easily lost sight of any purpose which had prompted him to these labors. With his taper stuck before him he forgot the absence of windows, and in bitter manuscript remarks on other men's notions about the solar deities, he had become indifferent to the sunlight. (185)

With Casaubon's footnotes of footnotes referring back he knows not where, he walls off any potential for his project to make a difference in the world, even in such a sliver of the world as his scholarly field. In Rome Dorothea realizes that her husband's work will do nothing except grow larger and more ungainly all around him, blocking out any view to the wider world. As Dorothea strives toward the sense of unity with the world that the view from her bow-window eventually allows, Mr. Casaubon cloisters himself in a dark and disorienting maze.

Surrounded by people and things she cannot understand, Dorothea still feels the pull of connection between alien objects and her own disappointed ardor. In Rome the extent of Dorothea's disappointment is not yet evident, but in the funeral-watching scene with which this chapter opens she is inured to her limited role. "Aloof" as Featherstone's funeral may have been "from
the tenor of her life, always afterwards [it] came back to her at the touch of certain sensitive points in memory, just as the vision of St Peter's at Rome was inwoven with moods of despondency” (305-6). The settings of Rome and the funeral resound so strongly with Dorothea because their common “dream-like association of something alien and ill-understood with the deepest secrets of her experience seemed to mirror that sense of loneliness which was due to the very ardor of Dorothea's nature” (306). The major effect of her experience viewing the funeral is her recognition of the thickness of life; the primary effect of her Roman experience is the foreclosure of suffusive, satisfying intimacy between herself and her husband. In this novel, being in Middlemarch better enables intimate connection. For Eliot, circumscribed spaces have their limitations, but ultimately serve intimacy more.

Before their marriage and subsequent journey to Rome, Dorothea and Casaubon both hold idealized and self-serving views of each other; these views complement each other, in that Dorothea wishes to become “wise herself” through loving service to a brilliant husband, and Casaubon wishes to be served by his wife. He is not interested in opening intellectual doors for her, however. A metaphorical mirror is called upon to characterize Dorothea’s conception of her mental capacity against Mr. Casaubon’s, and the view allowed through such a tiny frame offers imperfect perspective. Dorothea is overwhelmed by Casaubon’s ability to listen to her ideas, a propensity none of her friends at Tipton or Freshitt share:

she found in Mr. Casaubon a listener who understood her at once, who could assure her of his own agreement with that view when duly tempered with wise conformity, and could mention historical examples before unknown to her.

“He thinks with me,” said Dorothea to herself, “or rather, he thinks a whole world of which my thought is but a poor
twopenny mirror. And his feelings too, his whole experience—what a lake compared with my little pool!” (23, emphasis added).

The narrator’s inclusion of Casaubon’s temperance of Dorothea’s ideas “with wise conformity” presages his future constriction of his wife’s ideas and desires. That Casaubon can even listen and respond to Dorothea causes her to believe he is thinking with her, intimately connecting with her and her mental excitement, but the narrative points out that “Signs are small measurable things, but interpretations are illimitable, and in girls of sweet, ardent nature, every sign is apt to conjure up wonder, hope, belief, vast as a sky, and colored by a diffused thimbleful of matter in the shape of knowledge” (23). At this stage of their story, the narrative is not yet ready to claim that Dorothea is trusting Casaubon too much, but Eliot does make clear that Dorothea’s youth and ardent nature combine here to expand Casaubon’s goodness and shrink her own intellectual and creative capacities. Put another way, her youthful ardor activates and diffuses the thimbleful concentrate of what Casaubon actually has to offer her, and instead of recognizing the grandeur her own qualities give to Casaubon’s, she perceives herself as less consequential. Dorothea corrects herself immediately after thinking that Casaubon thinks with her; compared to his mind, Dorothea thinks hers “is but a poor twopenny mirror,” just a “small pool” compared with his lake of knowledge (23). Around the metaphorical mirror, the pair’s minds combine to impress Dorothea with potential as “vast as a sky,” yet immediately upon marriage she begins to see that her “twopenny mirror” reflects only the “thimbleful of matter” that is Casaubon’s endless labyrinthine obsession with his “Key to All Mythologies.” The marriage lives up to neither partner’s expectations, but the pairing is an intensely intimate and intensely paranoid relationship.

Early on, Eliot emphasizes the commonality of skewed self-perception through the paralipsis of Mr. Casaubon’s destructive paranoia. Eliot
protests that we must extend our sympathy to Casaubon while she continues to render him as increasingly harmful to our heroine.

If to Dorothea Mr. Casaubon had been the mere occasion which had set alight the fine inflammable material of her youthful illusions, does it follow that he was fairly represented in the minds of those less impassioned personages who have hitherto delivered their judgments concerning him? I protest against any absolute conclusion, any prejudice derived from Mrs. Cadwallader's contempt for a neighboring clergyman's alleged greatness of soul, or Sir James Chettam's poor opinion of his rival's legs,—from Mr. Brooke's failure to elicit a companion's ideas, or from Celia's criticism of a middle-aged scholar's personal appearance. I am not sure that the greatest man of his age, if ever that solitary superlative existed, could escape these unfavorable reflections of himself in various small mirrors; and even Milton, looking for his portrait in a spoon, must submit to have the facial angle of a bumpkin. (77-8)

Eliot emphasizes the similarity between individual notions of others and the reflections of small mirrors, and even one's own impression of oneself is compared to a warped reflection, like Milton looking at himself in a spoon. This passage describes the always-incomplete, always-tenuous quality of identity formation, avant la lettre, what I call ambivalent recognition. Eliot begs us to consider Casaubon's own conception of himself "with keener interest" than we do the superficial impressions of others, "what fading of hopes, or what deeper fixity of self-delusion the years are marking off within him; and with what spirit he wrestles against universal pressure, which will one day be too heavy for him, and bring his heart to its final pause" (78). Mr. Casaubon's self-perception is warped, like a reflection in a
spoon, but the novel emphasizes his common lot with the rest of us: "Mr. Casaubon, too, was the centre of his own world; if he was liable to think that others were providentially made for him, and especially to consider them in the light of their fitness for the author of a ‘Key to all Mythologies,’ this trait is not quite alien to us, and, like the other mendicant hopes of mortals, claims some of our pity" (78). None of us is without some of Casaubon’s warped self-perception or self-centeredness.

Self-conscious characters like Mr. Casaubon, Mr. Bulstrode, Rosamond Vincy, even Will Ladislaw, fall lower upon Eliot’s hierarchy of perspective, sympathy, and intimacy. Eliot demonstrates the ubiquity of these human concerns with her famous image of the pier glass overlaid with scratches:

Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent—of Miss Vincy, for example.

(248)

Always it seems that the scratches conform to concentric circles around a central point of light, or that all events circle around one individual life, yet this is a trick of our vision, one that we cannot avoid as long as we rely upon mirrors for our perspectives. If everyone is his or her own light,

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26 On self-consciousness and self-centeredness and the outcomes of these characters, see Bodenheimer.
27 On the complex metaphor of the pier glass, see J. Hillis Miller (139-42)
events appear to conform around each yet in fact conform around none. Several characters in *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* could be extended similar descriptions of pitiable self-centeredness. Even Dorothea, with her shortsightedness about intimacy and the oppressive constriction of her marriage, is not immune from this egoism. Eliot’s ideal of sympathetic intimacy is richly complicated by what Catherine Gallagher calls “an erotics of particularization,” the diversity and interaction of intimacies and personal desires (70 original emphasis). The erotics of the particular here resonates with my notion of the intimacy matrix, the space across which diversely inflected intimacies occur in any given relationship; the specificity of these intimacies consistently undermines all ideals, those Eliot critiques as well as those Eliot herself upholds. Yet these diverse intimacies also combine to create an over-arching intimacy connecting everyone. Narrative intimacy’s reach across geographical and diageital borders presents the only upside of geographical movement and its inherent separation from familiar places and friends. We catch a glimpse of this the Roman section of *Middlemarch*: the entirety of Dorothea’s Roman experience could have been dealt with easily enough in an expository flashback, as Lydgate’s romantic history in Paris is covered in flashback. But because there is Will Ladislaw, with his unique perspective, experience, class position, and intense interest for Dorothea, the novel proceeds for a period in another country, crossing geographical boundaries and pointing to fractures inherent to the social lines of demarcation that leave Will out in the cold. In Rome, we see Will in his aesthetic and philosophical element, and we see Dorothea’s attraction to that element through friendly conversation and debate. In this novel and *Daniel Deronda* the narrative

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28 For more scholarship on Eliot’s emphasis upon sustained complexity and the value of the multiplicity of individuals and experiences, see Beer, 14 and 199; Barrett, Dorothea. *Vocation and Desire*. 28-9, 32-3, 123; Gallagher. “George Eliot” 69.
struggles to cross barriers that conventionally separate genders, classes, readers, and characters, and it also struggles to create an overarching narrative intimacy among narrator, characters, and readers. In these novels “we” are all included within a world where hierarchies of class, gender, and ethics are destabilized, destabilizable, through not only sympathetic identification and narrative intervention, but also through representations of numerous diverse and destabilizing intimacies across the map.

Interlude with Mr. Bulstrode

Eliot’s faith in her own ideal of sympathetic intimacy, so apparently strong in Middlemarch’s representation of it in Dorothea, transforms into open skepticism in Deronda’s representations of Daniel Deronda and Gwendolen Harleth in her next novel. Mr. Bulstrode’s self-righteous greed presents a seed of that skepticism in the earlier novel. He believes that he embodies ideal Christian compassion, yet uses every advantage to manipulate others and secure his own position. In Mr. Bulstrode we find a glimpse of Eliot’s sense of her own potential hypocrisy. Bulstrode finds himself in the role of mentor to Will Ladislaw’s grandmother, Mrs. Dunkirk after the death of her husband, who “had come to believe in Bulstrode, and innocently adore him as women often adore their priest or ‘man-made’ minister” (560). This relationship of adored minister and dependent parallels the relationship between Deronda and Gwendolen, and therefore highlights the insidious possibilities of such idealized, dependent relationships. Deronda avoids taking full advantage of Gwendolen’s reliance on him, because his perspective partakes more often of the wide-windowed, map-like perspective than Bulstrode’s self-centered view, and Deronda has many more deeply affecting issues to deal with in the form of

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29 On the narrative use of “we” to cultivate intimacy among narrator, characters, and readers, see Beer, George Eliot, 28.

30 Lane argues, “Deronda [...] extends this treachery [hidden in other people] to include the person judging it in others” (112). He argues that Eliot’s representations of this treachery “impede (without destroying) her characters aspirations to selflessness” (112-3).
his parentage, heritage, and his relationships with Mirah and Mordecai. Bulstrode finds his life’s path through Mrs. Dunkirk’s idolization of him, and feeling himself important enough to God to benefit from such circumstances, he continues to use various intimacies in business relationships to further bolster himself and his material situation. The narrative characterizes Bulstrode’s self-delusory outlook as both common and pitiable:

There may be coarse hypocrites, who consciously affect beliefs and emotions for the sake of gulling the world, but Bulstrode was not one of them. He was simply a man whose desires had been stronger than his theoretic beliefs, and who had gradually explained the gratification of his desires into satisfactory agreement with those beliefs. If this be hypocrisy, it is a process which shows itself occasionally in us all, to whatever confession we belong, and whether we believe in the future perfection of our race or in the nearest date fixed for the end of the world; whether we regard the earth as a putrefying nidus for a saved remnant, including ourselves, or have a passionate belief in the solidarity of mankind. (581-2)

As the narrative calls for some sympathy for Bulstrode it also indicts the novel’s own notion of ideal sympathetic intimacy, in so far as any believer in the potential “perfection of our race” and “the solidarity of mankind” can somehow also justify the satisfaction of personal desires through her beliefs. Even George Eliot, narrator of Middlemarch, has her moments of hypocrisy this seems to say, where her sense of life as circling around her distorts or completely disables the broad view of the world from a bow-window. Very subtly the alignment of the highest kind of perspective with Bulstrode, the most villainous character in the novel, offers a critique of
human sympathy’s built-in hubris. It underscores, for example, Dorothea’s continual fluctuation between her ideals and her desires, illustrated by her choice to marry Ladislaw rather than pursue a life of charity. It resonates with Deronda’s slow distancing of himself from Gwendolen in order to pursue Mordecai, and his decision to keep his discovery of the Cohens, who he believes make up Mirah’s long-lost family, a secret from her because of his upper-class anti-Semitism.

Daniel Deronda’s frequent boundary crossings, geographic and social, indicate Deronda’s emphasis upon the instability of these boundaries and the

categories they create. Because there is Deronda, relationships circling around familial affinities are jarred into a much larger pattern, connecting Jews and Christians, low and high classes, degraded and virtuous characters. The contrast of geography between Middlemarch and Deronda underscores the latter novel’s more complex view of intimacies. The usual domestic stories cannot work here.\[^{32}\] Middlemarch is far easier to map geographically since nearly all of the action takes place there. Most of the action in Deronda takes place in England, but the England of this novel is subdivided into separate geographical theaters, such as Diplow, Offendene, Ryelands, Monks Topping, Gadsmere, and London.\[^{33}\] London is then subdivided again, encompassing both English and Jewish plots, and the places where the two plots overlap (like the Meyrick’s and the Mallinger’s homes), the intimacies associated with each plot encounter and conflict with each other.

The vectors of relationship in Deronda are far fewer than those in Middlemarch, but each relationship contains more than one inflection, often numerous inflections of diverse intimacies, and the novel therefore enacts the intimacy matrix in a very complex way. Deronda and Gwendolen are friends, but first their connection is inflected by suspicion and coercion; soon, they enter into a mentor/student and confessor/dependent relationship, which is all the while inflected for both by the possibility of their becoming lovers.\[^{34}\] Characters’ roles within intimate moments operate independently of conventional gender and class structures, yet characters still experience

\[^{32}\] On the number of boundary crossings’ reflection of Eliot’s growing suspicion of her ideals for humanity and the recuperative role played by Jewish characters, see Barrett (160). On the characterization of the English plot by separation and the Jewish plot by community, and finding “Eliotic” ground in the “foreign” Jewish plot, see Rosenthal (777, 87).

\[^{33}\] The provincial locales are situated in “Wessex,” a fictional name for the southwest portion of England, which Eliot borrowed from Thomas Hardy, who resurrected the term from British history.

\[^{34}\] Beer describes Grandcourt and Lush’s relationship as “a sick parody” of Mordecai and Deronda’s, where “one acts as the agent and alter-ego of the other,” and also benefactor/dependent, and family (227).
external pressure from their dominant society. The numerous, boundary-
crossing inflections of the intimacies in Daniel Deronda contribute an aura
of strangeness to all relationships represented there, displaying Eliot’s
critique of her ideal of sympathetic intimacy and emphasizing the
constriction of dominant social expectations upon relationships.

Strange Intimacy

Daniel Deronda dissects intimacy through mirror and glass tropes, most
prominently through its representation of Gwendolen’s struggle and
development. As Daniel Deronda thinks the novel’s opening lines, we are
compelled to look and look again at Gwendolen, to see her reflected in the
gaze of others, in an effort to understand her:

Was she beautiful or not beautiful? and what was the secret of
form or expression which gave the dynamic quality to her glance?
Was the good or the evil genius dominant in those beams? Probably
the evil; else why was the effect that of unrest rather than
undisturbed charm? Why was the wish to look again felt as
coercion and not as a longing in which the whole being consents?
(7)

Gwendolen catches Deronda’s look and is similarly coerced by him; the irony
that he reflects back to her diminishes her confidence, and his interference
in her attempt to pawn her Etruscan necklace enrages her. Deronda’s unique
ability to shake her self-conception so much keeps him lodged within her
thoughts long after their first glimpses of each other.35 Coercion is a common
aspect of nearly every intimacy represented in the novel. Gwendolen is
coerced numerous times along the way to her marriage to Grandcourt: Mr. Lush
tricks her into meeting with Lydia Glasher, who foists unwelcome information
about Grandcourt upon her; her family’s financial situation forces Gwendolen

35 For more about coercion and blackmail in Daniel Deronda see Bodenheimer (258, 262)
and Alexander Welsh, George Eliot and Blackmail.
to take action that is distasteful to her, though she chooses the least abhorrent route in marrying Grandcourt; this marriage is comprised of a long string of coercions, domination being one of Grandcourt’s most treasured pastimes, which in turn drives Gwendolen to Deronda, thereby leading to their confessor-dependent relationship that eventually has the effect of emotional blackmail upon Deronda. Gwendolen’s enigmatic appearance first coerces Deronda’s attention and intervention, which in turn coerces Gwendolen’s thoughts about him and instigates their strange friendship. The string of coercive intimacies, experienced both from a distance and face to face, creates the strangeness of this friendship. Similarly, when confronted by Mirah’s attempted suicide, Deronda is more or less coerced into taking her under his wing. Deronda’s initial intimate encounter with Mirah offers a sharp contrast to intimate coercion of his first meeting with Gwendolen. The light is fading, neither Daniel nor Mirah can see the other very well, yet Deronda holds Mirah’s exhausted body in his arms, physically saving her life. His obligation to Mirah after this meeting sets him on his path to Mordecai, whose passion fascinates him and binds the two men together. The primary intimacies of the novel each contain elements of coercion, whether through fascination, desperation or obligation; only relationships with the Meyrick family lack such coerciveness, yet Deronda only begins his association with them through his feelings of obligation to Hans Meyrick, a friend (and bon vivant) from university. Eliot’s critique of ideal sympathetic intimacy is apparent in Daniel Deronda through the ever-presence of coercion in all relationships. Deronda’s unique empathetic perspective repeatedly obligates his involvement in various lives, and reveals the strange intensity of intimate care.

In Mordecai, Deronda experiences a reprieve from the pressures of sympathy, though their relationship is not free from coercion. Deronda and
Mordecai catch each other in a fascinated gaze upon their first meeting, mirroring the opening scene of the novel. As at Leubronn, where Deronda expected to find only degradation and ugliness and yet found the enigmatic face of Gwendolen Harleth, when he enters the second-hand bookshop near Ezra Cohen’s business he expects,

to see behind the counter a grimy personage showing that nonchalance about sales which seems to belong universally to the second-hand book-business[...]. But instead of the ordinary tradesman, he saw, on the dark background of books in the long narrow shop, a figure that was somewhat startling in its unusualness. [...W]hen he let the paper rest on his lap and looked at the incoming customer, the thought glanced through Deronda that precisely such a physiognomy as that might possibly have been seen in a prophet of the Exile, or in some New Hebrew poet of the mediæval time. It was a fine typical Jewish face, wrought into intensity of expression apparently by a strenuous eager experience in which all the satisfaction had been indirect and far off, and perhaps by some bodily suffering also, which involved that absence of ease in the present. [... A]nd now with its dark, far-off gaze, and yellow pallor in relief on the gloom of the backward shop, one might have imagined one's self coming upon it in some past prison of the Inquisition, which a mob had suddenly burst upon; while the look fixed on an incidental customer seemed eager and questioning enough to have been turned on one who might have been a messenger either of delivery or of death. The figure was probably familiar and unexciting enough to the inhabitants of this street; but to Deronda's mind it brought so strange a blending of the unwonted with the common, that there was a perceptible interval of mutual observation before he asked
his question; "What is the price of this book?" (385-6)

Deronda is struck by the drama and pathos of Mordecai’s face and bearing, which cuts deeply into Deronda’s previous feelings of disgust about the Jewish quarter of the city. Both men are transfixed by the other’s gaze, and we later learn that Deronda’s appearance in the shop indeed works upon Mordecai like a message of spiritual delivery. Mordecai is enlivened and Deronda is unsettled, though not unpleasantly, by this first meeting in the bookshop, framed to onlookers by the great shop window. The painful feelings that rush upon Deronda when Mordecai asks “You are perhaps of our race?” are surely due in part to the exposure of the two men in the snug bookshop by the large shop window (387). Mordecai utters aloud a possibility that Deronda has not yet learned to countenance, but has sensed for some time. Their encounter’s mutual permeation vibrates with erotic intimacy, which is sustained in all scenes between the two men. Mordecai repeats again and again that upon his death his spirit will enter into Deronda’s body, and Mordecai will continue his Zionist project through Deronda. However, in this first encounter Mordecai’s inadvertently cutting question violently separates the two men. Through the penetrative intimacy of that question Deronda is temporarily alienated. Paradoxically, as he departs he is surprised to discover that part of his humiliation stems from Mordecai’s immediate aloofness upon Deronda’s denial of his Jewishness. This intimate moment creates a coercive fascination with Mordecai for Deronda, similar to Gwendolen’s fascination with Deronda at Leubronn. The intense variety of emotions filling this scene momentarily narrows Deronda’s attention to focus only upon Mordecai’s unique ability to affect him so. Finding Mordecai eventually fulfills Deronda’s project of reuniting Mirah with her brother, but at this point in the story befriending Mordecai becomes a private project, for Deronda himself only. The unspoken intensity of this meeting
teases loose the self-centered impetus behind Deronda’s empathetic point of view. Mordecai pulls upon the mysterious thread of Deronda’s sense of self, and Deronda must put other concerns into the background, if only for a time, in order to learn more about that strange affinity.

Mordecai becomes so transfixed by Deronda’s potential as a vessel for Mordecai’s soul largely because of Deronda’s physical attractiveness. If the novel cannot say with certainty whether or not the captivating Gwendolen is in fact beautiful, its renderings of Deronda leave little question: he is beautiful indeed. But Deronda does not care about his appearance,

In fact, he objected very strongly to the notion, which others had not allowed him to escape, that his appearance was of a kind to draw attention; and hints of this, intended to be complimentary, found an angry resonance in him, coming from mingled experiences, to which a clue has already been given. His own face in the glass had during many years associated for him with thoughts of some one whom he must be like—one about whose character and lot he continually wondered, and never dared to ask. (186)

The mirror does not hold only Deronda himself, but rather people of the most intimate importance to him, yet whom he has never met and may never meet. When he does meet his mother, instead of reflecting back to him positive recognition, she remains indifferent to him, rejecting him as her son, and rejecting the ways he has defined himself. Any thought about himself throughout the novel leads Deronda to immediately think of others, and cultivates his tendency to think from as many perspectives as he can. This aspect of his character leads him to pursue friendship with Mordecai, despite his anti-Semitic aversion to Mordecai’s friends.36 He is so concerned with the

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36 Anti-Semitism (that of Deronda, his mother, and of Eliot herself) is richly complex in this novel. On Eliot and anti-Semitism, see Richard Dellamora. Friendship’s Bonds.
experiences and feelings of others that he risks paralysis for fear of taking a wrong action, such as when he withholds from Mirah his discovery of Ezra Cohen, and his new relationship with Mordecai.37

Eliot maintains her ideal of sympathetic intimacy in the Jewish plot of the novel, while she incisively critiques it in the English plot, especially where Daniel Deronda crosses between the two. Deronda and Gwendolen’s interactions and their effects present a field of varying intimate consequences, especially for Gwendolen’s developing sense of herself. Yet Deronda’s relationships with Mordecai, Mirah, and the Meyricks have no bearing whatsoever upon Gwendolen. Often Eliot reminds us that while Deronda is never out of Gwendolen’s thoughts, she is often absent from his, and that absence pains him when he recalls it in the face of her increasing reliance upon him. Gwendolen grows far more from knowing Deronda than he does from meeting her. She begins to aspire toward living less selfishly, while through experiences totally separate from Gwendolen, Deronda learns how to put his great concern for other people to great use. Deronda clearly possesses the highest, though still imperfect, level of perception and perspective in the novel, and it is clear how Gwendolen grows through her relationship with him. But what good does Gwendolen do for him? Rosemarie Bodenheimer argues that Gwendolen teaches Deronda, “This is what happens when you put yourself in a position of moral superiority and wisdom and someone takes you up on it” (259). Eliot emphasizes the insidious power inherent to relationships in which one person is dependent on the other’s sympathy. Bodenheimer argues that the strange and uncomfortably intimate relationship between Gwendolen and Deronda “challenges the religious ardor with which George Eliot had written about acts of confession and sympathy in earlier novels, replacing it

37 For more on the confusing power of Deronda’s consideration of others, see Miller (71).
with a keen and troubled scrutiny of the unexamined motives that lock confessor and dependant together in an unequal relation” (257). The narrative subtly shows that Gwendolen helps Deronda in negative and positive ways: through their relationship we see that Deronda is no saint, but erotically attracted to Gwendolen’s physical charms and emotional challenges. This attraction is mutual. What begins as flirtation so mild that Deronda can deny its occurrence, develops into an erotic confessor-dependent relationship, and the more desperately Gwendolen declares her dependence upon Deronda for survival, the less and less interested he becomes in her. The intrigue dissipates; her erotic charms are overshadowed by her need. Deronda desires what Gwendolen finds in him for himself, and he finds that wise mentor figure in Mordecai. As Gwendolen increasingly idolizes Deronda, Deronda becomes increasingly devoted to Mordecai.

Both Gwendolen and Deronda feel the impacts of their intimate conversations in memory, each conversation tied directly to the affair of the Etruscan necklace and the pawnshop that brought the pair into each other’s intimate orbit. This early episode foreshadows both Grandcourt and Mrs. Glasher’s gift/curse of diamonds to Gwendolen and Deronda’s first meeting of Mordecai and the Cohen’s. Throughout Gwendolen’s struggle about Grandcourt and her early days of marriage to him, she quizzes Deronda about his ironic expression, his judgment of her gambling, and through subterfuge gleans traces of his opinion of her choice to marry Grandcourt despite her promise to Mrs. Glasher. Though initially Deronda is surprised by the increasing intensity of his conversations with Gwendolen, he remains open to them and for a time is increasingly drawn to have more interesting and intense conversations with his troubled new friend. For most of their conversation at Monks Topping, Gwendolen is playfully aloof, parroting her husband’s usual

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38 On the erotics of Gwendolen and Deronda’s encounters, see Bodenheimer (260).
line that all aspects of life are rather dull; Deronda enjoys challenging these assertions with his own more equitable point of view. Still playful, but growing more serious, Gwendolen says:

"Confess you hate [people] when they stand in your way — when their gain is your loss? That is your own phrase, you know."

"We are often standing in each other’s way when we can’t help it. I think it is stupid to hate people on that ground."

"But if they injure you and could have helped it?" said Gwendolen with a hard intensity unaccountable in incidental talk like this. Deronda wondered at her choice of subjects. A painful impression arrested his answer a moment, but at last he said, with a graver, deeper intonation, "Why, then, after all, I prefer my place to theirs."

"There I believe you are right," said Gwendolen, with a sudden little laugh, and turned to join the group at the piano. (412)

Gwendolen implies numerous injuries here: she has injured Lydia Glasher through displacement by marrying Grandcourt, and through his omission of his relationship with Mrs. Glasher, Grandcourt has injured both Gwendolen and his former lover in this way. Gwendolen doesn’t know it, but Deronda worries that his mother has been injured through displacement, and wonders to what extent he has been injured this way by his uncle and by Grandcourt. In this novel, intimacy can be coextensive with the power to dominate through such injuries. Deronda attempts to demur by offering a philosophically vague answer, but Gwendolen’s intense response cuts through Deronda’s disinterested facade, insisting that he really think about himself and his own feelings when betrayed or displaced. Of course, since Deronda is unsure of his parentage, or whether he is really the illegitimate son of his guardian, the added pressure of her emotional intensity strikes Deronda speechless with pain.
This conversation stays with Deronda throughout the long night, and he struggles with conflicting desires to cut her loose completely and to remain nearby to help her. He does not know the extent of her troubles at this point, but he is no admirer of Grandcourt’s, and is sure that their married life is not happy. Here his own antipathetic feelings about Grandcourt shape his feelings about Gwendolen.

Though Gwendolen and Deronda are not overtly represented as potential lovers in the scenes of their conversations, the erotic tension is tangible and it creates a triangular relationship among Deronda, Gwendolen, and Grandcourt. The original Etruscan necklace, which Gwendolen wears around her wrist as a signal of affection for Deronda, elicits Grandcourt’s irritation and jealousy. The relationship between the men of this triangle pre-exists either man’s relationship with Gwendolen, and indeed the two men share an intense rivalry, which Grandcourt enjoys and Deronda tolerates.\(^{39}\) Deronda is aware that his emotional conversations with Gwendolen could be cause for jealous alarm, and his previous relations with Grandcourt confuse Deronda’s feelings about Gwendolen’s apparent trouble:

He did not conceive that he himself was a likely subject of jealousy, or that he should give any pretext for it; but the suspicion that a wife is not happy naturally leads one to speculate on the husband’s private deportment; and Deronda found himself after one o’clock in the morning in the rather ludicrous position of sitting up severely holding a Hebrew grammar in his hands (for somehow, in deference to Mordecai, he had begun to study Hebrew), with the consciousness that he had been in that attitude nearly an hour, and had thought of nothing but Gwendolen and her husband. To be an unusual young man means for the most part to get a difficult mastery over the usual, which is often

like the sprite of ill-luck you pack up your goods to escape from, and see grinning at you from the top of your luggage van. The peculiarities of Deronda's nature had been acutely touched by the brief incident and words which made the history of his intercourse with Gwendolen; and this evening's slight addition had given them an importunate recurrence. It was not vanity—it was ready sympathy that had made him alive to a certain appealingness in her behavior toward him; and the difficulty with which she had seemed to raise her eyes to bow to him, in the first instance, was to be interpreted now by that unmistakable look of involuntary confidence which she had afterward turned on him under the consciousness of his approach. (413)

Despite Deronda's intention to attend to nobler aims through learning Hebrew, and therefore bringing himself closer to his new friend Mordecai, the drama of Gwendolen and Grandcourt's lives gets between Deronda's intention and his ability. Deronda feels coerced in opposite directions by his "deference" to Mordecai and his fascination with Gwendolen and her marriage. The narrative protestation "It was not vanity—it was ready sympathy" drawing him to Gwendolen acts paralipetically, emphasizing the undercurrent of his attraction to her. He is drawn to her beauty, her wit, and her fire; he enjoys the energy of their conversations, and has been titillated as well as curious about her since the first time he saw her. In this late-night scene of aggravated reading and unwelcome thought, Deronda's nobler care for Mordecai and mundane care for Gwendolen clash with each other, and Deronda's distaste for Grandcourt acts as a ready excuse for him to wash his hands of his intimacy with Gwendolen altogether, so he can focus entirely upon his fascinated intimacy with Mordecai:

"What is the use of it all?" thought Deronda, as he threw down
his grammar, and began to undress. "I can't do anything to help her—nobody can, if she has found out her mistake already. And it seems to me that she has a dreary lack of the ideas that might help her. Strange and piteous to think what a centre of wretchedness a delicate piece of human flesh like that might be, wrapped round with fine raiment, her ears pierced for gems, her head held loftily, her mouth all smiling pretence, the poor soul within her sitting in sick distaste of all things! But what do I know of her? There may be a demon in her to match the worst husband, for what I can tell. She was clearly an ill-educated, worldly girl: perhaps she is a coquette."

This last reflection, not much believed in, was a self-administered dose of caution, prompted partly by Sir Hugo's much-contemned joking on the subject of flirtation. Deronda resolved not to volunteer any tete-à-tete with Gwendolen during the days of her stay at the Abbey; and he was capable of keeping a resolve in spite of much inclination to the contrary. (413-4)

By denigrating Gwendolen like this, Deronda lashes out at the "sprite of [ordinary] ill-luck" which he finds to be "grinning at [him] from the top of [his] luggage van," his attempt to remotely bond with Mordecai. Deronda wants to deny his desire to see and talk to Gwendolen because she is pretentious and privileged, because she is ignorant, because her inability to cope with her troubles gives her "distaste [for] all things," and lastly, because she is the kind of woman who would marry Grandcourt. He hearkens back to his initial suspicion that something evil lies within her, and tries very hard to beat down his natural sympathy for her because of her general failure to be admirable. But the narrative makes clear that he doesn’t mean any of this and cautions himself with it only partly because his guardian once suggested that she was a coquette, and he enjoyed flirting with her. Deronda does indeed
find pleasure in the rhythm and energy of their conversation at this point in
the novel, and so perhaps also sees an accusation of sexual impropriety, as
well as infidelity to Mordecai, in the grin of the sprite of ill-luck, and he
reproaches himself through denigrating his intimacy with Gwendolen.

Idealized, sympathetically intimate marriages end both Middlemarch and
Daniel Deronda, with Dorothea’s marriage to Will Ladislaw and Deronda’s
marriage to Mirah, which is compounded as ideal (and homoerotic) by his
spiritual communion with Mordecai. These happy endings leave complications
scattered all about them, however; Lydgate’s marriage manages to be
tolerable, but the level of communication that Dorothea facilitates between
the couple is never again achieved. Gwendolen must recover from her
depression alone and put her life back together according to what she has
learned from Deronda, but without his help. The particularities of various
lives and their attendant intimacies disable Dorothea’s and Deronda’s final
relationships from reaching the top of Eliot’s hierarchy of sympathetic
intimacy. These ideal pairs may be founded upon deep love that extends to the
surrounding social whole, but their intimacies decidedly exclude many of
their friends. These marriages also leave behind shadows of other possible,
and equally, though differently, positive matches; the possibility of Daniel
forsaking Mirah for the far more intensely erotic match with Gwendolen
remains until the very end of the novel. Palpable sexuality is exchanged for
the spiritual-erotic addition of Mordecai to Mirah’s and Deronda’s marriage.

Nazar argues that for Eliot, “sympathy” is the combination of love and insight. Beer
argues that Dorothea’s initial attraction to Casaubon derives from her need to leave
the safety of her role as a lady of privilege, “She needs risks as well as usefulness
and her enclosed environment has not taught her to recognise worse imprisonment. [...] She grows out of her belief that men father knowledge, are its origin and guardian” (173). Beer goes on to argue that Dorothea and Will’s relationship is a vast
improvement upon her relationship with Casaubon because of “the play of spirit and
learning between them: they teach each other. He frees her from desiring martyrdom;
she gives him a great project” (173-4). Miller argues that Eliot “dramatizes the
tension between a theory of morality that stresses the importance of perspective (a
theory furthered by the genre within which she is working) and an unflagging belief in
the duty of choice” (70).
Lydgate is established as the secondary protagonist of *Middlemarch*, and his character development mirrors Dorothea’s in many ways. The endings of both of these novels have faced continual critical disappointment since their publication. Critics have been particularly disappointed in Dorothea’s choice to marry Ladislaw, rather than the novel somehow arranging for Dorothea and Lydgate to pair up. The marriages that end these novels gesture toward the overt challenges of the institution of marriage that Thomas Hardy’s novels present. These endings certainly do not enclose the tumultuous intimacies of each novel in marital resolution; instead, these marriages underscore the complexities inherent to all intimate relationships.
Thomas Hardy first used the term “Wessex” to describe southwestern England in the manuscript of *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and his biographer Michael Millgate argues that it was with this novel that Hardy first began to recognize the financial expediency of “a regional or pastoral strategy” (162). Hardy later balked at his publishers’ stereotyping of his work as only regional, only displaying humorous rustics (Millgate 173). Still, Hardy considered “Wessex” to be his unique designation for his home region, almost his own personal brand, and complained to his publishers after George Eliot used the term to describe southwestern British settings in her 1876 novel.

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Daniel Deronda (181). Hardy decided to develop the Wessex region fully in all of his novels, past and future, as he wrote The Woodlanders in 1887. This revision project came out as the “Wessex Novels” edition of his works, published by Osgood, McIlvaine between 1895 and 1913. However, already by 1892 literary pilgrims were touring southwestern England on the look out for Casterbridge (Dorchester) and the author himself (249). Of the historical authenticity of his Wessex, Hardy wrote:

At the dates represented in the various narrations things were like that in Wessex: the inhabitants lived in certain ways, engaged in certain occupations, kept alive certain customs, just as they are shown doing in these pages. [...If any mistakes were made,] nobody would have discovered such errors to the end of Time. Yet I have instituted inquiries to correct tricks of memory, and striven against temptations to exaggerate, in order to preserve for my own satisfaction a fairly true record of the vanishing life. (qtd. in Millgate 252)

Hardy here promises accuracy, admits the impossibility of that accuracy’s verification, and then professes a personal need to create Wessex as truly to the life he lived and witnessed as possible, because that life was disappearing. Hardy’s tense relationship with his rural origins clearly plays out in these contrasts; for him, Wessex was not (and in the novels, is not) an uncomplicatedly serene and sustaining backdrop before which the vicissitudes of social life occur. Yet the natural world of Wessex presents characters with opportunities to experience positive and satisfying intimate connections, either with it or with others through it. Hardy’s decision to situate all of his works against that backdrop points to the power of his Wessex geography to satisfy urges for intimacy in ways that human relationships in the novels could not. Characters in Hardy’s novels often think about themselves as the centers of their universes when given to
solitary contemplation, much as characters in Eliot’s novels often fancy
themselves as “little suns” around which the universe turns. However Hardy’s
narratives also present the broader map-view, which emphasizes the relative
smallness of these characters’ respective dramas, as well as demonstrates
their connection to each other through that insignificance.42

While hope and disappointment are inherent to the geographical
movements in Hardy’s work, the author’s creation of the coherent geographical
landscape of Wessex itself does continuously hopeful work in terms of
intimacy. As critic Eve Sorum argues, Hardy’s meticulous retroactive
correspondence of the literary descriptions of Wessex with real-life Dorset
enables empathetic connection between his urbane readers and his bucolic
characters by offering them the “omniscient viewpoint” of the narrator,
allowing them to see their connection to the novels and their characters
through the land’s continuity. I add to this that Hardy’s emphasis upon
geography also highlights a map-like view of life, a perspective his work
holds in common with both George Eliot’s and Virginia Woolf’s, which
demonstrates intimate union through the land’s continuity, despite the
apparent barriers implied by its topography. The attention to geography and
the inclusion of Wessex maps, in addition to creating a geographic empathy of
readers for characters, also extends the intimacy of the novel to those
readers. Hardy’s creation of narrative empathy and intimacy through geography
emphasizes the importance of “the constant reorienting that must take place
when trying to understand others” (Sorum 182).43 Hardy’s narrators always
maintain this ability to reorient, empathize, and therefore extend intimate

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42 On Hardy’s use of optics and celestial metaphor to consider unseen inner lives of
others, see Henchman (37, 39).
43 Sorum argues that Hardy’s works point to the limits of “perspective-taking” by
“rooting [it] in geographic positioning and by exploring both the potential
impossibility of successfully standing in someone else’s shoes and the waning ability
to ‘know’ a space” (182). On the need for constant optic reorientation toward the
cultivation of empathy, see also Henchman (45).
connection among themselves, characters, and readers. But Hardy’s characters lack this power, and instead remain mired in their respective urges and sorrows, and the abjection that seems to always work in tandem with love. Many characters experience ample and satisfying intimate connection with their surrounding world, often in solitude, often taking comfort in the ideals they cultivate through their intimacies with the natural world, such as Jude early in Jude the Obscure, and Marty South and Giles Winterborne in The Woodlanders. However, when the diverse desires of characters encounter each other disappointment, alienation, and abjection result. Julia Kristeva writes about “contemporary” literature’s power to sublimate abjection (The Powers of Horror 26); Hardy’s creation of Wessex as the ever-present link among his work, novels and poetry, offers perhaps the only chance for sustained intimacy (in the abstract), and transcendence of abjection that the author could see. The abject body of a pig haunts Jude the Obscure, illustrating how the abjection cast upon all bodies by “the Law” haunts the intimacies of the novel. Abject bodies, like Arabella’s pig offal, the slaughtered pig, Jude and Sue’s children in their tiny room in Christminster, and Jude at the end of the novel slowly wasting away, “no longer match[] and therefore no longer signif[y] anything, [one] behold[s] the breaking down of a world that has erased its borders: fainting away” (Kristeva 3-4). The wished-for love, sex, security, and emotional sustenance of the intimacies represented in Jude are consistently linked to filth and death through repeated pig-figures. By contrast, the titular woodland of The Woodlanders provides the venue for numerous intimate scenes that pulse alternately with idealization and abjection. These two novels represent intimacies as

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44 Here Hardy’s view aligns with the coextensiveness of Eros and Thanatos. Here I should note that I could find no scholarship focusing upon Hardy’s work and “the abject” in the MLA bibliography. Given the ubiquitous scholarly point of view that Hardy is a pessimist, I find this lack rather surprising. Equally surprising is the dearth of scholarly work specifically considering idealization or intimacy.

45 On the “narrative empathy” created through geographic descriptions in Hardy’s novels, see Eve Sorum, “Hardy’s Geography and Narrative Empathy.” (180)
alternately, and sometimes simultaneously, ideal and abject. The abjection inherent to intimacy in Hardy depends upon the lines and rules that carve up existence: "the letter" of laws of government and society, which kill Jude and Sue’s spirits in the end; the lines demarcating social distance, which create aspirations and ideals that are doomed for disappointment; and topographical boundaries and distances, crossed by characters in search of rescue but only finding disappointment, such as Mr. Melbury’s trip to London in search of new divorce laws or Jude and Sue’s voyage to Christminster in search of a society that accepts their family. The characters of Hardy’s novels offer each other intimate connection, affirmation, and recognition, yet the diverse desires of these characters also repeatedly foil attempts at sustained intimate relationships. Often the clash and disappointment of individual desires is founded on idealizations of intimacy (figured most often by Shelleyan poetry in these novels), which when disappointed fill characters with shame, making them abject to themselves, or killing them altogether. Often, it is the desires of bodies that shatter characters’ ideal intimacies, not because Hardy considers bodies to be abject (quite the opposite,) but because Hardy perceives the intervention of what he calls “the Law.” These two novels demonstrate the contingency of intimacy and the unreliability of personal relationships in the face of social hierarchies and conflicting individual desires, the laws of the social and the overflow of abject human drives.

In Hardy’s Wessex, forces beyond the social hold sway, which he represents as the supernatural (The Return of the Native), Fate (The Woodlanders), and natural determinism (Jude the Obscure), which culminate as his theory of The Imminent Will (The Dynasts). In a world like Wessex, where desires are

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46 On the forces of the Imminent Will, see Miller, J Hillis. Thomas Hardy, Distance and Desire; Eagleton, Terry. “Flesh and Spirit in Thomas Hardy”; Struzziero, Maria Antonietta. “Degeneration/Regeneration Narrative, Gender and the Cosmic Perspective in
rarely satisfied in the long term, desires for all kinds of intimacy and recognition remain intense despite their ultimate futility.

Hardy describes his struggle with the tension between desire and society in his notebooks. After a bout of illness in 1881 Hardy began writing about this tension in his attempts to “reconcile a scientific view of life with the emotional and spiritual, so that they may not be interdestructing” (Life and Work 153). Hardy writes that the “Law” produces “in man a child who cannot but constantly reproach its parent for doing much and yet not all” (153). The “Law” here, like Lacan’s Law of the Father, stands for the rational lessons learned about reality, the “scientific view of life,” combined with actual laws and social mores. The parent whom the child reproaches is the man himself; because the emotional life cannot be rationalized away it reproaches the individual’s embrace of cold reality. This parent-and-child internal relation anticipates Lacan’s split subject.

The passage from Hardy’s notebook continues, “The emotions have no place in a world of defect, and it is a cruel injustice that they should have developed in it” (153). Here Hardy represents his realization that the “science” of life, through “Law” creates children within each man and woman like Little Father Time in Jude the Obscure, children who believe it better to never have been born at all than to suffer living in the world as it is. The child within has “no place in a world of defect,” the child should not be suffered to live.

These notebook passages crystallize Hardy’s defining bitter irony, and illustrate the dominant and paradoxical theme of his fictional oeuvre. In the face of the “Law,” a composite of rational views of the randomness of the universe, actual laws, social mores, and material conditions, emotions and desire are always disappointed; yet humanity continues, like lost little
children, to strive toward emotional and intimate connection. Society sets up a system of ideals that are doomed to failure, and therefore sets up abject individuals from the start. Kristeva identifies the rules of the superego as the origin of the abject: "To each ego its object, to each superego its abject" (2). The pressure to abide by the rules (in Kristeva’s psychoanalytic paradigm, to please the father), creates the "massive and sudden emergence of uncanniness, which, familiar as it might have been in an opaque and forgotten life," or a life before we begin to submit to a set of rules often represented by the Law of the Father, “now harries me as radically separate, loathsome. Not me. Not that” (2). The abject “does not seem to agree to [the superego’s] rules of the game,” always “challenging its master,” and therefore creating internal loathesomness, self-loathing. This characterization of the abject aligns with Hardy’s description of the internal child holding its “parent,” or the grown self, in contempt. Hardy’s novels repeatedly demonstrate the instantiation of the abject-within through culture, through the social. In life, people must repeatedly transcend the abjection inherent to culture, but in Hardy’s novels the consequences of culture’s inherent abjection are almost always impossible to transcend. When Jude identifies with the slaughtered pig, it is in the process of lying down to die himself. Jude has given up, given in to his illness, and embodies abjection. He recognizes that it is “the letter” that “killeth,” social rules and laws that both create his desires and ideals and allow them to be “pulverized” in abjection.

The crises that result from the confrontation of disparate desires for intimacy with surrounding social forces comprise the action of Hardy’s novels. The lack of social or gender parity inherent within the surrounding social milieu in The Woodlanders and Jude the Obscure creates idealization, either of womanhood and femininity, rustic versus cosmopolitan manliness, or
of longed-for social or intellectual opportunities and position. Both novels vividly demonstrate the tense confrontation of idealization and abjection within intimacies. The constant and un-resolvable tension between idealization and abjection, as well as the conflict between individual desires in Hardy’s fiction, propels his continual return to issues of intimacy in his works.

Only Marty South can sustain an intimate relationship in The Woodlanders, and only with her own ideal of the dead Giles Winterborne becoming part of the land the two of them worked together so lovingly. She is not free from the cycle of idealization and abjection, but once she cuts and sells her hair early in the novel she ceases her struggle against social law, in this case her attempts to attract Giles through the rules of female attractiveness. Marty still wants Giles, and she can have him only through the woods. In the end, in his grave, Giles becomes the woods, and Mary can have him always. In The Woodlanders, intimacy can only be attained through a total abandonment of the (social) Law, and therefore these intimacies are difficult to recognize.

In Jude the Obscure intimately held ideals cannot avoid the harsh disappointment brought about by physical needs. There is no possible escape through the abandonment of the Law. Hardy claims in his Preface to Jude the Obscure that his goal in its writing is to “tell, without a mincing of words, of a deadly war waged between flesh and spirit,” which is a tale both about the injustice of contemporary divorce laws as well as the unnecessary casualties who suffer for “the strongest passion known to humanity,” their own physical desire, or the demands of the abject body (xliii). The postscript to this preface, written over a decade after the novel’s publication, makes Hardy’s focus upon the injustice of marriage laws more clear in an attempt to address charges that he soiled the condition of marriage with the novel’s publication (xliv). However, from the outset Jude
the Obscure establishes the impossibility of friendship, or even peace, between men and women. The epigraph to the novel’s Part the First, from Esdras’ The Apocrypha, establishes clearly that historically (and according to the Law,) women are the scourges of men: "Yea, many there be that have run out of their wits for women, and become servants for their sakes. Many also have perished, have erred, and sinned, for women.... O ye men, how can it be but women should be strong, seeing they do this?" This passage from Esdras demonstrates the lack of parity between men and women, which Hardy thinks precludes their lasting intimacy or friendship, and here cites the common historical view of women as the monstrous source of the abject.

Idealization versus Abject Bodies in Jude the Obscure

In Jude the Obscure, a scene of pig slaughter early in the novel demonstrates intensely negative intimacies between Jude and Arabella, as well as among Jude, Arabella and even the pig itself. As the pair works together, the scene ironically frames the disintegration of a marriage, as well as the disintegration of Jude’s notions about his place in the world. The abject creature, the pig, as it dies, figures as a kind of anti-consummation of marriage, issuing grisly death instead of offspring, and presages the deaths of Jude and Sue’s children at the hands of Little Father Time, Jude and Arabella’s unintended child. Little Father Time revokes Jude’s and Sue’s attempt to consummate their ideal marriage, and through his suicide also revokes his own conception. Near the novel’s end, when Jude and Arabella are married for a second time, Jude darkly proclaims his affinity with that unlucky pig: "I have been thinking of my foolish feeling about the pig you and I killed during our first marriage. I feel now that the greatest mercy that could be vouchsafed to me would be that something should serve me as I served that animal" (373). Broken and dying at the end of the novel, Jude recognizes the futility of his past ideals. At the novel’s end, Jude wishes
to revoke his conception, feeling himself the cursed, bloody and tortured issue of his own parents’ marriage.

However, our first vision of Jude is of an intensely sensitive child filled with wonder and empathy for everything around him. Though he is continually disappointed, everything that interests Jude seems to have the potential to erupt into idealized obsession, toward which he throws his whole self, and with which he cultivates intensely intimate, if idealized, relationships. This is the case until Jude meets the fleshy and lusty Arabella. As she greets Jude by playfully tossing to him a piece of pig offal, she not only presages the slaughter of their marriage but introduces the physical manifestation of the abjection of intimacy to the novel.

Women make men abject in Hardy’s novels, though characters of both genders are susceptible to abjection. Jude’s sexual desire for Arabella divides him from his ideal future self; the intense longing for Phillotson’s friendship and the brilliance of the life of the mind becomes redirected into intense physical longing. Jude’s sexuality awakens the moment Arabella hits him with the piece of pig offal. One moment Jude is fantasizing about his academic plans and imagining himself as a great don of the university, when suddenly linear thought is wiped from his mind as he contemplates the bloody filth that just struck him. A pig penis-as-cupid’s arrow encapsulates Hardy’s frank perspective on courtship and sex, as well as his ironic rendering of coupling and marriage. This animal incarnation of love also underscores Jude’s desire to revel in his own animalism. Jude is completely taken with Arabella’s physicality, and quickly loses his intellectual focus; yet Jude is aware almost from the beginning that Arabella “was a complete and substantial female animal – no more, no less” (33-34). Though he is overmastered by the novelty of sexual desire and his attraction to Arabella, Jude remains aware “in the secret centre of his brain, that Arabella was not worth a great deal
as a specimen of womankind” (51). Still, his detached appraisal of Arabella’s animalism cannot compete with Jude’s sexual desire, his wish to do what animals do.

The promise, or threat, of the fleshly issue of Jude and Arabella’s sexual desire brings down the final curtain on Jude’s intellectual aims. Their physical intimacy therefore destroys Jude’s ideal self, love issuing abjection through sex. When Arabella tells Jude that she is pregnant, Jude immediately recognizes that a marriage to her will not bring him anything remotely similar to the satisfactions he imagines university study would bring. The native empathy Jude has felt for all living creatures extends to Arabella in her supposed pregnancy, and Jude resolves to honor his responsibility. Hardy tells us that Jude imposes a certain amount of self-delusion in order to make the marriage easier to bear: “For his own soothing he kept up a factitious belief in her. His idea of her was the thing of most consequence, not Arabella herself, he sometimes said laconically” (51-52). This self-conscious objectification ironically idealizes Arabella, which underlines the fragility of ideals. Neither Jude nor Arabella is interested in the other beyond physical and financial concerns; from their first meeting, through their marriage, any kind of intimacy other than the physical and proximal is foreclosed for them. Bearing Esdras in mind here, Hardy seems to argue that a feminine tendency toward selfishness bears most of the blame for this failure to connect. Upon their wedding night, in a gender-reversed version of Dorothea and Mr. Casaubon on their wedding journey in Middlemarch, Jude’s idea of Arabella begins to crumble as the reality of Arabella herself emerges. She wears false hair because as a barmaid the affectation prompts more gratuities; soon Jude learns that her pregnancy is at best mistaken, and at worst a conscious fabrication. The house-of-cards of Jude’s self-delusions about his wife falls to the ground, and as it does Jude realizes he has
betrayed himself, looking back upon his actions with shame because he was abject all the while, enslaved by his body.

The scene of pig slaughter presents a grisly and ironic version of Jude and Arabella’s marital consummation, issuing bloody abjection rather than children. More in hate than in love with each other, Jude and Arabella slaughter the pig they were given on their wedding day:

Arabella opened the sty-door, and together they hoisted the victim on to the stool, legs upward, and while Jude held him Arabella bound him down, looping the cord over his legs to keep him from struggling. The animal's note changed its quality. It was not now rage, but the cry of despair; long-drawn, slow and hopeless. [...] The blood flowed out in a torrent instead of in the trickling stream she had desired. The dying animal's cry assumed its third and final tone, the shriek of agony; his glazing eyes riveting themselves on Arabella with the eloquently keen reproach of a creature recognizing at last the treachery of those who had seemed his only friends. [...] The animal heaved in a final convulsion, and, despite the rope, kicked out with all his last strength. A tablespoonful of black clot came forth, the trickling of red blood having ceased for some seconds. [...] The last plunge had come so unexpectedly as to make Jude stagger, and in recovering himself he kicked over the vessel in which the blood had been caught. [...] "Thank God!" Jude said. "He's dead." "What'd God got to do with such a messy job as a pig-killing, I should like to know!" she said scornfully. "Poor folks must live."
Hardy vividly represents the pig’s horrific experience of its own slaughter while he represents Jude and Arabella going through the motions of it together. As the pig’s eyes meet Arabella’s, the novel assigns emotional life to the pig, as Jude does, and through the pig’s gaze of reproach, Jude, the pig, and Hardy all accuse Arabella of treachery. As the pig dies, Jude recoils, “’It is a hateful business!’ said he. ‘Pigs must be killed’” Arabella responds flatly (59). Intimacy here is completely abject.

This pig-figure of the abject returns in different guises as the novel comes to a close: as we know, the Fawley-Bridehead children, including Little Father Time, hang dead in their windowless Christminster room; and Jude declares his affinity with the pig as he awaits death. Sue Bridehead also embodies the abjection of the pig, after her renunciation of Jude and her previous notions about marriage and freedom. Sue resolves to adhere to the letter of religious propriety in an attempt to nullify the lives of the children so painfully torn from her. Kristeva notes, “An unshakable adherence to Prohibition and Law is necessary if that perverse interspace of abjection is to be hemmed in and thrust aside. Religion, Morality, Law. Obviously always arbitrary, more or less; unfailingly oppressive, rather more than less; laboriously prevailing, more and more so” (16). Though the abject is born from culture’s imposition of rules, or in Hardy’s terms, though the “Law” creates “in man a child who cannot but constantly reproach its parent for doing much and yet not all,” it is to those very rules, laws, orthodoxies that people cling to quell abjection (Life and Work 153). Sue desperately clings to orthodoxy to neutralize (or perhaps paradoxically also to escalate), the abjection she feels as she mourns her children; yet as she metes out the letter of those rules, she comes to most fully embody the abject figure of the pig. Sue is nearly as desperate to escape Phillotson’s
touch as the pig is to escape its slaughter: she tries to lock herself inside a coat closet full of spiders to avoid sleeping with him (213); she jumps out of a window half-asleep when he accidentally enters her bedroom; the thought of his coming near is a nightmare to her, and she admits as much to him (218-9); once remarried to him, she resolves to subjugate herself completely to him but hopes that the cessation of his snoring, as she approaches his bedroom, means that he’s suddenly died (384). Still, Sue “beg[s] to be admitted” to Phillotson’s bed, tremulously acknowledging to him that she knows what it means:

“I have thought—I wish this!”

“That’s a complaisant spirit—and perhaps you are right. With a lover hanging about, a half-marriage should be completed. But I repeat my reminder this third and last time.”

“It is my wish!...O God!”

“What did you say O God for?”

“I don’t know!”

“Yes you do! But...” He gloomily considered her thin and fragile form a moment longer as she crouched before him in her night-clothes. “Well, I thought it might end like this,” he said presently. “I owe you nothing, after these signs; but I’ll take you in at your word, and forgive you.”

He put his arm round her to lift her up. Sue started back.

“What’s the matter?” he asked, speaking for the first time sternly. “You shrink from me again?—just as formerly!”

“No, Richard—I—I—was not thinking—”

“You wish to come in here?”

“Yes.”

“You still bear in mind what it means?”

“Yes. It is my duty!”
Placing the candlestick on the chest of drawers he led her through the doorway, and lifting her bodily, kissed her. A quick look of aversion passed over her face, but clenching her teeth she uttered no cry.

[...]

The widow [Mrs. Edlin, family friend and helper] went out on the landing, and saw that Sue had disappeared. “Ah! Poor soul! Weddings be funerals ‘a b’lieve nowadays.” (384-6)

The lengths Sue undergoes to avoid sex with her husband, even the kisses of her husband, parallel the increasing levels of terror experienced by the pig, registered through the changing tones of its screams and whines. She clenches her teeth and cows herself before a man she does not love, and before her shame and pain, at the feet of religious and social mandates of marriage. Sue lives; we do not know if the Phillotsons have any offspring. But we are to understand, through her self-flagellating renunciation of Jude and subjugation to Phillotson, this marriage has all but killed her. Marriage in Jude the Obscure is a kind of intimacy bound to issue abjection because of the “Law’s” suffocating structures around it.

If Sue is another manifestation of the pig-figure of abjection, we can see certain ways in which Phillotson mirrors Jude in his relationship to the dying pig. After Sue leaves Phillotson, he attempts to resume an old friendship with a former classmate, Gillingham. This friendship is based in the conventional idealization of male friendships in the service of higher understanding and the reinforcement of British values. Neither Jude, nor Giles Winterbourne in The Woodlanders, nor Hardy himself ever had this kind of all-male, education-based intimacy available to them. Phillotson seeks this manly kinship in an effort to feel some control over his circumstances. Though he and Gillingham disagree about the course Phillotson should take,
their dialogues reinforce Phillotson’s sense of power over his situation. Phillotson can admit to a male friend, but not to Sue, that Sue’s arguments for leaving are intellectually compelling, but also somewhat beyond him: “‘Her intellect sparkles like diamonds, while mine smolders like brown paper...She’s one too many for me!’” (221). Phillotson admires and respects Sue’s sparkling intellect, and that quality is the only hindrance upon Phillotson’s inclination to refuse her request without discussion, “‘and put her virtuously under lock and key and murder her lover perhaps’” (222). Put another way, because Phillotson values intellect, his perception of it in Sue creates an empathetic and intimate connection between them in his mind; if she lacked this glimmer of intellect Phillotson could have locked her up like an inhuman piece of property. Because of his respect for his wife, which he does not extend to all women, Phillotson is given pause enough to wonder, “‘But is that essentially right, and proper, and honourable, or is it contemptibly mean and selfish? I don’t profess to decide’” (222). Phillotson presents his reasoning to his friend (who is shocked and disagrees adamantly), in order to establish for himself that his decision to let his wife go is based upon his own consideration, and not a circumstance over which he has no control. Gillingham’s protests mirror Arabella’s chiding Jude for his tender heart; according to Gillingham wives are to be kept, just as pigs are to be eaten. Gillingham’s arguments enable Phillotson both to allow his wife to leave him and to maintain his general views of wives as possessions, which when taken with Philloton’s reconciliation with Sue, mirrors Jude’s reluctant and inept slaughter of the pig.

Phillotson’s conversation with Gillingham reinforces both sides of his position. The maintenance of uncertainty about the justice of current laws and conventions about marriage and a wife’s right to divorce enables Phillotson to later take Sue back in good conscience. He discusses this decision with Gillginham also: “‘I can see her views on the indissolubility
of marriage well enough, and I know where she got them. They are not mine; but I shall make use of them to further mine’” (347). Sue’s recently acquired belief in the indissolubility of marriage, and her belief in her divine punishment for flouting that mandate, indeed are not Phillotson’s beliefs, but he has laid no staunch claim to any particular view of marriage. Her return to him mends his reputation, which is what he believes in most. Gillingham as sounding-board here supports Phillotson’s sense of his masculine superiority and entitlement. These dialogues between Phillotson and Gillingham ultimately play out is to underscore the imbalance of power according to gender, as well as Sue’s total abjection through her marriage to Phillotson. Sue is a counterpoint to Esdras’ accusation that women are the downfall of man, the source of abjection. The marriage laws, social and religious, cast Sue into abjection. Indeed, as she and Phillotson at last consummate their marriage, we see an intimacy overwhelmingly defined by abjection.

The abundance of spouses in these Hardy novels, both legal and spiritual, emphasizes that marriage fails to sustain, or even initially provide, intimacy. In these two novels Hardy shows the contingency of marital status, or I should say the quality of being either a husband or a wife. Law, both religious and statutory, contends against sexual consummation or love for the right to dictate marriage. In Jude the Obscure, Arabella and Sue are both Jude’s wives, and Jude and Phillotson are both Sue’s husbands. Sue reads the murder-suicide of her children as both an indictment of her choice to follow the physical definition of marriage as opposed to the religious one, and a directive to revert to her prior marriage to Phillotson:

“Going back? How can you go—”

“He is going to marry me again. That is for form’s sake, and to satisfy the world, which does not see things as they are. But of
course I am his wife already. Nothing has changed that.”

He turned upon her with an anguish that was well-nigh fierce.

“But you are my wife! Yes, you are. You know it. I have always
regretted that feint of ours in going away and pretending to come
back legally married, to save appearances. I loved you, and you
loved me; and we closed with each other; and that made the
marriage. We still love—you as well as I—I know it, Sue.
Therefore our marriage is not cancelled.”

“Yes; I know how you see it,” she answered with despairing self-
suppression. “But I am going to marry him again, as it would be
called by you. Strictly speaking you, too,—don’t mind my saying
it, Jude!—you should take back—Arabella.” (348)

The issue of who is married to whom is only undertaken through dialogue
between characters in Jude. The narrator does not weigh in, and this
demonstrates the seeming irresolvability of the marriage-and-sex problem.

Jude initially marries Arabella because their sexual union seemed to have
produced marriage as an imperative: Jude thinks he has gotten Arabella
pregnant, and the physical evidence of sexual union demands religious and
legal marriage. To Sue’s mind, that Arabella and Jude were once married means
that they are married for all time, divorce or not, just as she and
Phillotson are married for all time, despite Sue’s intense physical aversion
to him, and her physical consummation of love with Jude. The two pairings are
not parallel; Jude and Arabella never had any problems with consummation,
even after their separation. Their physical compatibility forced marriage
upon them. Sue’s determination to return to Phillotson, and her advice to
Jude about his own marriage, show once again how marriage issues abject
intimacy.

Jude counters the abjection he feels after the failure of his marriage
to Arabella early in the novel, and his recognition that he has totally
betrayed his ideal vision of himself, with the idealization of Sue. Before they ever meet, Jude designates his cousin Sue as his “kindly star, an elevating power”; he positions her this way in an attempt to foreclose his sexual desire for her, which he begins to cultivate in spite of himself from his first sight of Sue’s portrait (84). Jude understands well his Aunt Drusilla’s warnings that nothing good comes from Fawley marriages, and he considers that because both he and Sue were related through the Fawley side, “marriage with a blood-relation would duplicate the adverse conditions, and a tragic sadness might be intensified to a tragic horror” (84). This moment in the text foreshadows the deaths of Jude and Sue’s children, which are brought about through a combination of Jude’s relationship choices: Little Father Time was the child of his first marriage to Arabella, as far as can be told. The rift between Jude and Arabella spurred Arabella to emigrate with her parents to Australia, where she attempted to live as a single woman, unmarried and childless. Pushing her son, whom she never named, into the care of her parents so that she could find a new husband and a new situation for herself, Arabella set up the conditions that culminated in Little Father Time’s bleak worldview. Little Father Time must live with Jude and Sue, and is forced to leave this new home once news of his guardians’ arrangement out of wedlock spreads through the community; Sue’s failure to make him understand the family’s marginal situation in Christminster layers hopelessness upon a boy whose world view was dour to begin with. The coupling of Jude and Sue does not evoke “tragic horror,” but unjust marriage laws and rigid social rules set up a chain of events that transform their beautiful visions of freedom in coupling into abjection, as we have seen.

In his attempt to save himself and Sue from what he believes is his family’s cursed marital fate, Jude tries to maintain a view of Sue that is linked to his ideal of Christminster and of his future self. This
glorification of Sue causes Jude to sexually desire her even more, and the closer they become the stronger his desire grows, idealization leading to lust, which in this novel always ends in abjection. Conversely, the more he learns about his idealized Christminster, the more demoralized Jude becomes; he seeks his meaning and the potential realization of his ideal self through his pursuit of friendship and love with Sue. Because Sue is obviously “exceptionally bright,” Jude believes that he is attracted to her because he wishes for “intellectual sympathy and a craving for loving-kindness in my solitude” as opposed to the fully physical and animalistic intimacy he had with Arabella (92). Jude and Sue try to create the ideal friendship the narrator of The Woodlanders suggests might help Fitzpiers. The narrator in Jude points out that his rationalization allows Jude to continue “adoring her” and desiring her, while believing that he avoids “human perversity,” the abjection of compounding the sin of intermarriage upon the curse of his parents (92).

Jude’s idealization of Sue is an attempted cure for abjection, and this strategy is a frequent one of characters in Hardy’s novels. Hardy often uses Shelley’s poetry, especially the poems Laon and Cythna and Epipsychidion, to gesture toward ideal relations between the sexes throughout his novelistic oeuvre. Laon and Cythna are brother and sister, divided by war who yet fight on the same side against tyranny and die martyrs. Epipsychidion is written for a young girl imprisoned in a convent by her strict father, and heralds the ideal of a disembodied beloved, ethereal because physically distant and untouchable. Laon and Cythna displays obvious parallels to Jude and Sue’s relationship, which is stained before it ever begins by their family’s marriage curse; Jude and Sue fight to create a different kind of life, but end as martyrs for their obscure cause. Of these two poems, Sue likely prefers Epipsychidion because it explicitly removes sexual and reproductive imperatives from ideals of womanhood. Victor Luftig argues that in Jude the
Obscure Hardy fully combines the dominant, and opposed, Victorian associations of “sin and salvation” with heterosexual relationships through his invocation of Shelley (66). He continues that late-Victorians considered Shelley an advocate of both the “ethereal sublimation” of sexual desire and “sexual revolution” (66). Luftig asserts that Jude and Sue’s relationship, which is founded upon intense etherealization of Sue’s body but ends in fleshly abjection, presents palpable physical evidence of the clashing of Victorian notions about relationships between men and women.

Phillotson is able to condone Sue’s leaving him only because he considers her relationship with Jude to be one founded upon spiritual affinity rather than carnality:

“She has not distinctly implied living with him as wife, though I think she means to. ...And to the best of my understanding it is not ignoble, merely animal, feeling between the two...I found from their manner that an extraordinary affinity, or sympathy, entered into their attachment, which somehow took away all flavour of grossness. Their supreme desire is to be together – to share each other’s emotions, and fancies, and dreams.”

“Platonic!”

“Well no. Shelleyan would be nearer to it. They remind me of – what are their names – Laon and Cythna. Also of Paul and Virginia a little. The more I reflect, the more entirely I am on their side!” (223)

As we will see with Fitzpiers in The Woodlanders, Phillotson falls back upon Shelley and the poet’s idealization of women when uncertain about his power over romantic situations. In the face of the potential abjection of bodies, their own and those of their women, Phillotson and Fitzpiers idealize to

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47 On Hardy’s parsing of idealism between Shelley and Plato, see Luftig (109-10).
reassert the power of their gaze. Phillotson can countenance Sue and Jude’s relationship, despite his conviction that they will live together as husband and wife, because of their obvious spiritual connection.  

Identifying with Shelley’s *Epipsychidion* as she does, Sue works very hard to hold herself away from men, to maintain an air of ethereality and untouchability. Both her and Jude’s fascination with Sue’s idealized being works just as much toward the pair’s abjection as does Jude’s sexual appetite. Though he believes that the abjection of the body and its desires will forever be his undoing, sex alone is not what stands between Jude and his spiritual aspirations. After finally kissing Sue, Jude decides that he is too enveloped in his “unlicensed tenderness” toward “that aerial being” to be the kind of “soldier and servant of a religion in which sexual love was regarded as at its best a frailty, and at its worst damnation” (208). Jude’s sexual and emotional obsession with an idealized, etherealized woman brings him to this conclusion. His idea of her, not his actual relationship with her, nor Sue as she perceives herself, make a life devoted to anything but her seem impossible, because that idealization further feeds the fire of his lust for her, entering into a cycle of idealization and abjection. Once Jude and Sue have run away together, and Sue reveals that she will not stay with Jude after dark, Jude declares to Sue after much frustrated discussion that though he’d rather sleep with her, what closeness she offers will do:

So that I am near you, I am comparatively happy. It is more than this earthly wretch called Me deserves – you spirit, you disembodied creature, you dear, sweet, tantalizing phantom – hardly flesh at all; so that when I put my arms round you I almost expect them to pass through you as through air! Forgive me for being gross, as you call it! Remember that our calling

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48 They are Shelleyan and not Platonic because they are people with actual feelings for each other, like those described in Shelley’s poems, rather than philosophers theorizing about ideal love.
cousins when really strangers was a snare. The enmity of our parents gave a piquancy to you in my eyes that was intenser even than the novelty of ordinary new acquaintance. (236)

Jude emphasizes Sue’s lack of flesh, and therefore her freedom from abjection, as well as her power to enthrall, which ironically thrills her physically and erotically. Jude’s speech arouses Sue’s desire to be further idealized and disembodied: “Say those pretty lines, then, from Shelley’s ‘Epipsychidion’ as if they meant me!” (236). Jude not knowing the lines, Sue rhapsodizes herself, cutting off “O it is too flattering, so I won’t go on! But say it’s me! — Say it’s me!” (236). Jude immediately agrees, and as a reward he is permitted one brief kiss “just there” (236). Both Jude and Sue are aroused and enlivened by the disembodied idealization of one for the other. Jude’s desperation to sleep with Sue leads to their erotic banter and emotionally infused arguments, which define a large portion of the latter part of the novel, and which for these two replace sexual intimacy. A major vein of Jude and Sue’s new relationship is their mutual embrace of Jude’s idealization of Sue.

Both Jude and Sue make a concerted effort toward realizing ideal friendship, but on both sides the erotic seeps into the relationship, demonstrating the unavoidability, in Hardy’s work, of abjection in love. From Jude and Sue’s first meeting, Sue treats Jude “with the freedom of a friend” (94). Though they never knew each other growing up, Jude’s Aunt Drusilla clearly remembers the way both children resembled each other, such as their mutual ability “of seeming to see things in the air,” possessing an unknown affinity much like that between Laon and Cythna (105). The friendship the two cousins nurture intensifies Jude’s physical desire for Sue while she remains apparently unaware of any sexual component to their relationship. The novel represents Sue’s inclination toward physical intimacy as subtly ebbing and
flowing; she touches Jude easily when not expected, such as when the pair travel to the countryside surrounding Melchester: “When they had sat and eaten, Jude impulsively placed his hand upon hers; she looked up dividing his fingers and coolly examining them, as if they were the fingers of a glove she was purchasing” (127). Sue is cool as she handles Jude’s fingers, but were Jude’s hand a glove, Sue could slip her hand inside his, and feel the things that Jude feels. This scene is characteristic not only of the friends’ ability to understand each other’s inner selves better than anyone else, but also of their physical pull toward each other. Jude is consciously aware of his physical desire for Sue, but Sue prefers to remain relatively equal to the men she befriends and denies having interest in sex because of the bodily abjection she senses to be inherent to it (143).

The emotional and erotic intimacy represented by Sue’s examination of Jude’s hand is expressed more fully when she dresses in Jude’s clothing and reveals her unconventional life story; the paradoxical juxtaposition of a near reflection of himself in Sue with a tale totally alien and unexpected alienates Jude from her and throws him into confused abjection. She is like a mirror, but the reflection Jude sees he cannot recognize; in fact, its near-recognizability further disconnects Jude from Sue than if there were no likeness between them. Sue’s sharpness of intellect is compounded by her androgynous appearance, and the effect depresses Jude: “she seemed to get further and further away from him with her strange ways and curious unconsciousness of gender” (143). The intimacy Jude feels with Sue during their day-trip to the country seems to dissolve before the fire as Sue confesses her unconventional perspective. But Sue is not so unconventional that she can say such shocking things, even to a friend like Jude, without feeling a certain amount of shame: “‘Aren’t you really vexed with me, dear Jude?’ she suddenly asked, in a voice of such extraordinary tenderness that it hardly seemed to come from the same woman who had just told her story so
lightly” (143). Having sensed Jude’s displeasure, not realizing that its source was his feeling of disconnection from Sue and not the scandalous story she told, Sue shifts her persona into one of girlish flirtation. Sue leaves the topic of her intellectual development and her theories about gender and sex, and begins to profess her deep regard for Jude, a frequent habit of hers when she feels uncomfortable in asserting herself: “I would rather offend anybody in the world than you, I think! [...] I care as much for you as for anybody I ever met” (143). Despite Sue’s attempts to soothe Jude, “He felt that she was treating him cruelly, though he could not quite say in what way” (143). The uncanny quality of their conversation, with secret confessions draped in shadow and firelight, frightens Jude and makes him feel isolated in strangeness. Sue’s new story unsettles the ideas about her he had been nurturing; their relationship loses its definition for him, and he feels abjection. Adding to the confusion, Sue mixes her attempts to assuage Jude’s discomfort with a challenge to his intellect, promising she “won’t disturb [his] convictions – I really won’t!” while stating that she had believed Jude would be her hoped-for comrade who she could “ennoble [...] to high aims,” and his taking “so much tradition on trust” makes her think that perhaps he is not her ideal kind of friend (146). This manipulative mixture of tenderness and challenge is “too harrowing” for Jude, and he silently wonders if her ability to confuse him will not be his undoing, as he suspects it was for “the poor leaderwriter” with whom Sue previously cohabitated (147). Jude thinks to himself, “If he could only get over the sense of her sex, as she seemed to be able to do so easily for his, what a comrade she would make” (147). Their intellectual disagreements about tradition “only drew them closer together on matters of daily human experience” (147). His sexual

49 On Sue’s use of girlishness for manipulation, see Penny Boumehla, Thomas Hardy and Women: Sexual Ideology and Narrative Form; Rosemarie Morgan, Women and Sexuality in the Novels of Thomas Hardy; and Margaret Elvy, Sexing Hardy: Thomas Hardy and Feminism.
desire for her disrupts his sense of their intimacy. Because Jude cannot get over his sexual desire for Sue, he cannot enjoy the intimacy they do have. Neither of them can reconcile the multiple inflections of their intimate relationship; the ambivalence inherent to the intimacy matrix invokes abjection in this scene.

Jude’s and Sue’s friendship and romance, for lack of a better word, are driven by a continuous fort-da game of affections and intimacy. Sue repeatedly reveals and removes her affections, and Jude by turns criticizes and pleads with her. The game, created through both Jude’s and Sue’s hesitancy to break all social rules, causes excessive sexual tension and frustration in the friendship, and indeed acts as their substitute for sex. Once Sue realizes how Jude really feels about her, the day after her unnerving confession, she is distressed because though they have never had sex, his desire for her delegitimizes their relationship in her mind. To the Victorian mind, sexual impropriety is assumed when a man and woman are alone together, and Sue declares, “Your attitude to me has become known: and naturally they think we’ve been doing wrong! I’ll never trust you again!” (151). The narrator tells us, despite Sue’s distress over Jude’s feelings for her, “By every law of nature and sex a kiss was the only rejoinder that fitted the mood and the moment, under the suasion of which Sue’s undemonstrative regard of him might not inconceivably have changed its temperature” (151). According to these natural laws, Hardy declares that “Some men would have cast scruples to the winds, and ventured it, oblivious both of Sue’s declaration of her neutral feelings, and of the pair of autographs in the vestry chest of Arabella’s parish church. Jude did not” (151). Not kissing Sue at this moment is characterized as Jude’s failure to take a chance offered him; Hardy argues that marriage laws and social judgments are invalid barriers to nature, and Jude cannot free himself from

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50 On the Victorian assumption of sexual behavior between men and women, see Elvy.
these unreasonable rules. To do so would destroy important defining lines for Jude, and would invoke abjction. Hardy also seems to argue here that what Sue claims to feel can be changed by a kiss, which devalues her point of view, emphasizing its changeability. Sue has proven to be so changeable, but at this moment her resolve is clearer than almost anywhere in the novel. The novel implies that if this is a love story, then of course Sue does not really mean what she says, and her continual vacillation of opinion reinforces the untruth of what she says. In this way the novel objectifies Sue and revokes her agency in the service of free love, which the novel here considers to be the law of nature. Despite Hardy’s failure in feminism in this scene, his broader point about the fraught nature of intimacies in the battle between nature and society is clear. It isn’t imperative that sex and the body are abject; following what Hardy here calls “natural” law, flesh and lust, between two kindred spirits like Jude and Sue, can be a sort of enfleshed ideal. It is the Law of the Father, legal and social demands, which pervert the body and sex into abjction. Jude adheres to the letter of the law, but later in the novel, he asks Sue’s permission for a kiss, which Sue gives on the condition that the kiss will be “given in the spirit of a cousin and a friend” (208). Jude is honest and refuses to promise such a chaste kiss, and so the friends go “their several ways; till at a distance of twenty or thirty yards both had looked round simultaneously” (208). The reserve of both Sue and Jude is broken with that backward glance, and they run to each other’s arms and embrace and kiss “close and long” (208). The laws of nature are momentarily satisfied by this kiss, and the pair eventually agrees to be together, but the frustrating fort-da game continues for years, propelled by the social’s perversion of the natural, ending in abjct tragedy.

This much-anticipated, passionate kiss occurs on the street in Alfredson near the train station; Jude and Sue are somewhat estranged since
Sue’s marriage to Phillotson, but the two reunite to mourn the passing of their Aunt Drusilla. The station at Alfredson marks an important point on the map of *Jude the Obscure*, since it is a major junction on route from Marygreen to Christminster, the road Jude journeys, and is frequently distracted from, to find his ideal self. The plot of the novel depends upon geography, much like the plot of *The Woodlanders*, but movement rather than isolation define the impact of geography in *Jude*.

The Road to Christminster is not Straight

Jude needs to venture forth in pursuit of intimacy and his ideals, to cross the map of Wessex repeatedly, in search of friendship and love, as well as the intellectual achievement he believes is necessary to be lovable. *Jude the Obscure* offers no such richly supportive community as we see in *The Woodlanders*’ Little Hintock, but Jude does connect intimately with the natural world. No one comes to divine the pain and loneliness that Jude feels while growing up at Marygreen, though “Somebody might have come along that way who would have asked him his trouble[...] But nobody did come, because nobody does” (25). Totally friendless, Jude imagines friendship with the birds he has been hired to frighten away: “They seemed, like himself, to be living in a world which did not want them [...] They took upon them more and more the aspect of gentle friends and pensioners – the only friends he could claim as being in the least degree interested in him” (9). Jude identifies with the birds whose “Puny and sorry” lives “much resembled his own”, and suffers a beating from Farmer Troutham to protect them (9). This early representation of Jude’s extreme sense of empathy and emotional sensitivity ordains that later on he would “ache a good deal before the fall of the curtain upon his unnecessary life [...]” (11). Jude’s tenderness and ease with empathy allow him to create intimate, often idealized, 

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51 On the contrast between Jude and Sue’s friendship and “Darwinian” friendship, see Deresiewicz, William. “Thomas Hardy and the History of Friendship Between the Sexes.”
relationships with numerous non-human beings.

Jude sustains himself in his youth with aspirations of joining Mr. Phillotson in Christminster, traveling the road to find a new home, becoming a university student and later a don. The city of Christminster fascinates Jude, and he pines for it as he later pines for his lover, Sue. Jude imagines Christminster to be “the New Jerusalem,” and his fascination with it develops “a hold on his life, mainly from the one nucleus of the fact that the man for whose knowledge and purposes he had so much reverence was actually living there” (16). Jude’s imagined Christminster, his deep admiration for Phillotson, and his mistaken belief that Phillotson actively considers Jude to be his friend, culminate to create a life-ideal that obsesses Jude. Within this obsession, Jude experiences intimate connection not only with his ideals of Phillotson and the city of Christminster, but with an ideal version of his future self, all drawn in the air with the same tenderness as his later idealization of Sue. Inhaling the breeze as he gazes at the city, Jude talks softly to it: “You […] were in Christminster city between one and two hours ago: floating along the streets, pulling round the weathercocks, touching Mr. Phillotson’s face, being breathed by him; and now you are here, breathed by me; you, the very same” (17). Jude speaks to the breeze, imagines that it is a conduit connecting him to his beloved friend and his idealized future life, and he imagines that his ideal speaks to him in kind, “We are happy here” (18). When happened upon by a group of travelers Jude expresses the embarrassment of a lover caught kissing his sweetheart (18).

Jude’s intimacy with his ideals and his intimacy with the natural world combine with his obsession with learning when he is sixteen and voraciously studying the Classics. He always studies as he drives his bread cart along the byways of Marygreen; while at this task, his reading of Horace’s "Carmen Sæculare" at moonrise inspires Jude with “impulsive emotion.” Kneeling with
his book, Jude "turned first to the shiny goddess, who seemed to look so softly and critically at his doings, then to the disappearing luminary on the other hand, as he began: 'Phœbe silvarumque potens Diana!'" (28). Jude is immediately struck by his eruption into "polytheistic fancy," and he decides that "the strange forgetfulness which had led to such a lapse from common sense and custom" is not acceptable if he wishes to become a serious scholar and a "Christian divine" (28). When Jude’s dreams of Christminster confront his intense feelings of intimacy with the natural world and his deep pleasure in reading, he becomes critical of his apparently contradictory desires and resolves to adopt much stricter discipline in his reading and behavior, similar to when he later realizes that his love and lust for Sue unfit him for work as a "spiritual soldier." His pleasure signifies as abject, at odds with the letter of religious doctrine, and he feels he must suppress it. As he attempts to become his ideal future self, Jude is alienated from the pleasures that dream first gave him.

As Jude matures physically, his idealization extends to women and women’s bodies. Years after his communion with Phoebe, living in Christminster but failing to find work and therefore lay down his own roots in the city, Jude recalls the portrait of his cousin Sue, and that she is living in the same city. The two have never met, but her presence "somewhere at hand he seemed to feel in wavelets of interest, if not emotion" (79). Sue’s portrait becomes an avatar of Christminster for Jude: “At last he wrote to his aunt to send it. […] Jude, a ridiculously affectionate fellow […], put the photograph on the mantlepiece, kissed it -- he did not know why -- and felt more at home” (79). Jude feels a connection to this photograph similar to the connection he had felt to the rooks in the field, the breeze from Christminster, and the rising moon, and these connections enable Jude to feel an intimacy with the strange city to which all of his hopes and dreams are tied: "She seemed to look down and preside over his tea. It was cheering --
the one thing uniting him to the emotions of the living city” (79).

From the novel’s opening, the road away from Marygreen toward a better life dominates Jude’s thoughts and actions; the road figures as the futility of Jude’s obscure existence. As he grows up, he re-situates himself at different points on the eastern half of the Wessex map: he courts Arabella back and forth upon the roads and fields between Marygreen and Alfredson; the pair live together in a house on the road to Alfredson; abject after Arabella leaves him, Jude ventures to Christminster and befriends Sue. Jude follows her far to the south to Melchester, then abjectly returns to Christminster to try it alone again. He meets Arabella there, and they travel to Aldbrickham and make love; returning to Christminster the next day he meets Sue, and taking the same train car in which he sat with Arabella, the cousins travel back to Jude’s first home in Marygreen to bury Aunt Drusilla. As we know, they kiss at the Alfredson train station and soon agree to travel the road together; Sue and Jude live in Aldbrickham, and later Christminster, and from there they return to their previous homes with Phillotson and Arabella, ending the novel both in abjection. Hardy’s last novel conveys a sense of the Wessex map as immensely frustrating, where neither the road nor the hearth allows for sustainable intimacy or satisfaction.

In the absence of other people, with their own plans and ideas, the intimate connection between an individual, his ideals, and his surroundings provides great comfort, even when the intimacy is shared with the dead. Even in as abject a relationship as Marty South’s with the grave of Giles Winterborne, the absence of other people’s prying eyes and conflicting desires allows these connections to remain ideal. When the characters in Hardy’s novels cannot be satisfied by the offerings of the land, and therefore must interact to find intimacy, frustration, disappointment, abjection, and death are the results.
The Intimacy of Geography

_The Woodlanders_, as a title, implies an occluded “not-woodland,” occupied by townsfolk, city dwellers, and other varieties of “not-woodlanders.” Its plot depends upon the physical geography of only one place, Little Hintock and its immediate surroundings, and the intimate relation between life and land. The novel emphasizes the solitude of every day life in a place the rest of us “not-woodlanders” would find morose and alien. The novel opens deep in the wood that comprises and surrounds Little Hintock, where the “tomb-like stillness” resounds with “The contrast of what is with what might be,” or the contrast of actual existence with individual hopefulness and desire. Hardy offers the perspective of a “rambler” who finds himself within the Hintock woods, “amidst [the] emptiness” where “human companionship” is exchanged for “an incubus of the forlorn” (5).\(^{52}\) The rambler establishes the novel’s theme of natives and strangers, and outsiders trying to live in the woodland, like Grace Melbury after her education abroad, Dr. Fizpiers, and Mrs. Charmond. All three of these outsider characters struggle against the mood of the woodland, and all must eventually leave it, and leave their lovers dead behind them. In these woods, the comparatively easy social life of the town disappears, and is replaced by an oppressive and forlorn stillness, in the midst of which the residents of Hintock must learn to live. The narrative characterizes the woodlands of Hintock as “sequestered […] outside the gates of the world […] yet where, from time to time, no less than in other places, dramas of a grandeur and unity truly Sophoclean are enacted in the real, by virtue of the concentrate of passions and closely knit interdependence of the lives therein” (7-8). Passions are concentrated and lives are interrelated because Little Hintock is both small and sequestered.

\(^{52}\) At the time of Hardy’s writing, an incubus is defined as “A person or thing that weighs upon and oppresses like a nightmare” (OED).
The intimacies of the woodland echo those of Eliot’s Middlemarch in this way, circumscribed space allowing deeper connections. The tragedies of the woodlands emerge out of the clash of emotions and desires with the extreme solitude of the place. But woodlanders are brought up within this forlorn solitude where their pleasures, contentment, connections, and intimacies strive against the loneliness of their home. The paradox of the novel is that this isolated woodland, for all of the opening passages’ dark description of it, offers the only model of sustainable and fulfilling intimacy.

The land and trees of Little Hintock enable the most intense moment of intimacy between women in either The Woodlanders or Jude the Obsure, that between Felice Charmond and Grace in the woods. Mrs. Charmond’s affair with Fitzpiers draws her far closer to the residents of Hintock than she could ever find palatable as a wealthy outsider. She finds herself faced with the accusations of the timber merchant, feels called upon to explain herself to people who previously registered to her as little more than a village of industrious ants. On a walk in the woods with Grace, Mrs. Charmond attempts to resolve the effects of her affair without lowering herself, Mrs. Charmond instead reveals all:

"Mrs. Fitzpiers, your husband —" The moment that the speaker's tongue touched the dangerous subject a vivid look of self-consciousness flashed over her; in which her heart revealed, as by a lightening gleam, what filled it to overflowing. [...] "Then you do love him!" she exclaimed in a tone of much surprise. "What do you mean, my young friend?"

"Why, " cried Grace, "I thought till now that you had only been

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53 On Little Hintock as a microcosm of absurd existence, see Bennett, Brandon B. "Hardy’s Noble Melancholics."

54 Both Tess Cosslett and Sharon Marcus argue that female friendship enables the action of Victorian novels. In the novels of Thomas Hardy, I argue, relationships between men also serve this function.
cruelly flirting with my husband, to amuse your idle moments -- a rich lady with a poor professional gentleman whom in her heart she despised not much less than her who belongs to him. But I guess from your manner that you love him desperately; and I don't hate you as I did before.” (214)

Grace can read Mrs. Charmond’s expression, and regardless of the other woman’s persistent denials, she is assured of Mrs. Charmond’s love for Fitzpiers; this knowledge simultaneously eases Grace’s feelings about the affair and cultivates within her a sense of power. Mrs. Charmond feels abjection in this scene, as she has felt among the pangs of desire for her married lover when alone at Hintock House. Her earlier confrontation with Grace’s father shamed her deeply, and her feelings of abjection drove her from her house in search of relief, through confrontation with Grace. But Mrs. Charmond’s failure to reassert her class superiority in this encounter sinks her even more deeply into abjection. She possesses none of her accoutrements of social and economic power here, aside from the furs she wears, and she has nowhere to hide from Grace’s recognition of her abject desire for Fitzpiers. As Mrs. Charmond is “writhing with little agonies” as she realizes that gentle Grace is made “of tougher fibre than” she is (not least because of her early affinity with the woods,) she runs from Grace. Soon both women become lost, and in their mutual need for comfort and shelter, end their power play: “They consequently crept up to one another and being in the dark, lonely, and weary, did what neither had dreamed of doing beforehand, clasped each other closely” (218). The geography of this scene demands that the women find solace through intimacy with each other.

Throughout the scene between Grace and Mrs. Charmond in the woods, the narrative and the characters carry on with drawing-room civility. Hardy calls the women “Mrs. Fitzpiers” and “Mrs. Charmond” during this episode, when throughout the novel “Mrs. Fitzpiers” has been called “Grace.” This
ironically casts the women’s intimate conversation in the middle of the woods as formal, at least in the eyes of the women themselves, as well as emphasizes the simultaneous and paradoxical meaning and emptiness of their married names. Mrs. Charmond no longer has a husband, and through the social stature imparted to her by her late husband, she seduces Fitzpiers away from Grace, who herself has little interest in restoring their marriage. The contrast of the very private and sensitive words being said with this nominal formality in the midst of the wintry woodland also underscores Mrs. Charmond’s futile attempts to maintain the power balance to which she is accustomed. Once the women part ways, realize they are lost, and find each other again, “Mrs. Fitzpiers” reverts to “Grace,” and “Mrs. Charmond” is interchanged here and there with her full name, “Felice Charmond.” Bringing back Grace’s Christian name indicates a relaxation of the previous combatants, which dissolves into a hot and tearful physical intimacy: “Mrs. Charmond’s furs consoled Grace’s cold face, and each one’s body as she breathed alternately heaved against that of her companion, while the funereal trees rocked and chanted dirges unceasingly” (218). Hardy maintains “Mrs. Charmond” in this intimate embrace, and this formality taken with her rich furs that console Grace’s naked face demonstrate Mrs. Charmond’s social superiority and status as an outsider of the woodland. And as “the funereal trees” sing “dirges unceasingly,” these women find intimate comfort. The woods not only enable, but in fact demand that they reconcile and embrace.

The novel’s paradoxically frank and embarrassed characterization of sex points to the dissonant relationship between sex (or desires emerging from “natural” laws,) and man-made society (or “the Law,”) which Hardy considers to be the root of abjection. The natural environment, which both women find hostile, forces them to take shelter in each other, despite their formal pretensions. Indeed, the woodland backdrop of this episode underscores the
The two women embrace to fight the cold, and under the sway of the woodland Mrs. Charmond tearfully admits that she is unable to give up Fitzpiers. In a moment of friendly solidarity Grace replies, "'Why? Because you love him, you mean. [...] I knew I was right,' said Grace exaltedly. 'But that should not deter you,' she added in a moral tone. 'O do struggle against it, and you will conquer!'" (218-219). Grace finds the prospect of her husband’s engagement in a playful friendship with another woman quite scandalous enough, and she is “thunderstruck at a revelation transcending her utmost suspicion” (219). As a married woman, Grace is surely no virgin, especially considering the unnerving intensity of her physical desire for Fitzpiers; it is startling that Grace is taken aback by Felice’s whispered confession of sexual intimacy. The sexual nature of Fitzpiers’ and Mrs. Charmond’s affair is clearly revealed through Fitzpiers’ repeated overnight visits to Mrs. Charmond in Middleton, and if these events were not clear enough, Fitzpiers’ erotic stripping of the glove from Felice’s hand and his kissing of her palm, witnessed by Mr. Melbury, surely drive home the sexual dynamic of their affair. Fitzpiers’ trips to Middleton convince Grace of his infidelity, yet Mrs. Charmond must “tell verbatim” the reason why she cannot call an end to the relationship. Mrs. Charmond’s confession and Grace’s reaction to it compound the ironic use of their formal titles and dissect social pretensions about scandal. Whether or not Fitzpiers and Mrs. Charmond had sex, their relationship would be considered scandalously adulterous to the society of Hintock, though perhaps not to more urbane society. Mrs. Charmond’s frustrated and embarrassed confession to Grace therefore criticizes the hypocritical cultural tendency always to assume sexual misconduct between a man and woman, and simultaneously to assume a morally censorious position of shock when sex is confirmed. Hardy views sex and desire as unavoidable and natural facts of life, and one major reason for his repeated focus on heterosexual relationships in his novels is to
highlight repeatedly the wrong-headed futility of both marriage laws and the cultural hypocrisy about sex, the culture’s simultaneous pruriency and prudery. The contrast of prudery and pruriency takes form in naive Grace’s coarse exclamation, “He’s had you! Can it be — can it be!” (219). She uses the explicit vernacular for sex in almost the same breath as she expresses wondering disbelief. Grace both knows sexual passion well and is ignorant of its logical outcome.

Still, The Woodlanders offers glimpses of intimate recognition transcending abjection. While Grace is lost in the woods, Fitzpiers is struck and left in the night by Mr. Melbury; the whole town abuzz with the news, both Mrs. Charmond and Suke Damson come begging to see their lover. The three women, each situated upon a different social rung, experience a momentary intimate connection through their relationships with Fitzpiers; however, the man himself is not a finite fulcrum of this bond. It is rather each woman’s frustrated emotions, focused upon Fitzpiers’ empty nightshirt laid expectantly upon the bed, that establish the intimate event. Grace receives the two lovers with sardonic pride, saying “Indeed, you have a perfect right to go into his bedroom; who can have a better than either of you? [...] Wives all, let’s enter together!” (233). Suke’s and Felice’s overwhelming fear for their lover deafens them to the “sting” Grace had put into her words, and as she perceives this “A tenderness spread over Grace like a dew” (233-34). She realizes the insignificance of her “virtuous sarcasm” and wounded pride because this moment is not exclusively about her experience. Hardy comments “But life, what was it, after all,” and thereby contrasts Grace’s unpleasant experience with the broader picture, the map view, which also contains the lives of these stricken women (234). The three women stand together “round

55 “He’s had you!” did not appear in MS-87b, the 1887 single-volume edition from Macmillan. However, the line did appear in all other editions and serials. (The Woodlanders, Textual notes)
the empty bed [...​] staring at it and at his nightshirt lying on the pillow,“ only Grace taking notice of the other two (233-34). While their mutual sexual entwinement with Fitzpiers does not precisely bind the three women together, their momentary and simultaneous expression of deep feeling connect them to each other and to the larger web encircling existence, creating momentary intimacy. Grace momentarily obtains something like the map view of existence, which is made of diverse intimacies, and feels her intimate bond not only with these two women but with the wide world as well. Grace’s complex intimacy with Mrs. Charmond, Suke Damson, and Fitzpiers is an example of how the intimacy matrix works in _The Woodlanders_.

Thomas Hardy’s choice to continually write about relationships reveals an awareness of the intimacy matrix. The literary love triangles in _The Woodlanders_ are multiplied and tangled together, structuring and driving the plot, and also revealing numerous varied intimacies. Relationships between men in Hardy’s novels all hinge upon the love triangle. It seems that without women there is no reason for men to ever interact outside of their working lives. Victor Luftig argues that before writing _Jude the Obscure_, Hardy often uses Shelley’s poetry to convey one thing, regardless of the original intent of the quoted words: the adoration of women through the words of one Hardy considered to be the authority on such praise (107-8). Luftig finds that Hardy’s use of Shelley up to _Jude_ unironically invokes “conventional Victorian spiritual relations” and mystification of womanhood (109). However, Hardy’s use of Shelley in _The Woodlanders_, a novel published eight years before _Jude_, shows more cynicism than pure idealism. On a late-night ride together, Giles and Fitzpiers contemplate love and idealism as the doctor recites Shelley’s _Laon and Cythna_:

> The charm of the lines seemed to Winterborne to be somehow the result of his lost love’s charms upon Fitzpiers.

> “You seem to be mightily in love with her, sir,” he said, with a
sensation of heart-sickness, and more than ever resolved not to mention Grace by name.

“Oh no – I am not that, Winterborne.” (105)

Fitzpiers’ recitation of *Laon and Cythna* in *The Woodlanders* gestures toward the author’s self-critique, not, as Luftig argues, Hardy’s earnest idealization of femininity. Because Fitzpiers makes the cynical point about only loving his own idea of a woman Hardy can maintain some distance from that point of view. Fitzpiers is one of the novel’s least sympathetic characters. But Fitzpiers’ recitation of Shelley’s *Laon and Cythna* therefore also sullies the purity of such idealization. It points out the author’s awareness of problems with idealizing women rather than knowing them.

Hardy’s situation of the Shelley poem in conversation between Giles, earnest man of the woods, and the urbane Fitzpiers also establishes a contrast between the characters of the two men. Fitzpiers knows that his lonely existence in the woods, as a stranger to the people of Hintock and a man out of his preferred element, is what fills him with yearning: “people living insulated, as I do by the solitude of this place, get charged with emotive fluid like a Leyden jar with electric, for want of some conductor to disperse it” (105). He freely admits that his feelings for Grace are completely about himself: “So that if any other young lady had appeared instead of the one who did appear, I should have felt just the same interest in her [...] Such miserable creatures of circumstance are we all!” (106).

Giles challenges Fitzpiers, stating that such a thing is called being in love in Hintock, which spurs Fitzpiers to admit “that I am in love with something in my own head, and no thing-in-itself outside it at all” (106). For Fitzpiers, we see over and again throughout the novel, intimacy has mostly to do with his own desires.

Fitzpiers, Grace, and Mrs. Charmond find life in Hintock difficult,
though since she was born in the woodland, Grace has a slightly easier time. She cannot be satisfied with a marriage to Giles Winterbourne, though, because she wishes for a marriage inflected with eroticism and intellectualism as well as friendship, and Giles seems suited only to give her the latter. Her ideal relationship will allow her cultural education to flourish, and the arrival of Fitzpiers in Little Hintock offers Grace an outlet for her desire. Both Fitzpiers and Grace become fascinated with the other, idealizing potential relationships and pleasures found with the other, and attraction created by this mutual fascination draws the pair into an intimacy draped in the promise of sexual fulfillment. Fitzpiers is attracted to Grace’s visible cultivation: “All the others he had seen in Hintock as yet oppressed him with their crude rusticity; the contrast offered by this suggested that she hailed from elsewhere,” like a spirit rather than a woman (103). Initially, Fitzpiers’ lust combines with his sense of personal grandeur, and his belief that Grace is in fact the wealthy Mrs. Charmond kindles his attraction to her. The novel parses Fitzpiers’ longing for a cultivated lover, supposing that were Fitzpiers an older man, his solitary working life would instigate in him “dreams of an ideal friend,” and while “A young man may dream of an ideal friend likewise [...] some humour of the blood will probably lead him to think rather of an ideal mistress” (112). Hardy suggests that what Fitzpiers needs while he is sequestered in the woods is an ideal friend, someone to talk with and with whom an intellectual and emotional intimacy can be cultivated. Yet Hardy recognizes the sexual imperative, at least in the young; the pleasures of an ideal mistress do not include the mutual recognition found through sincere conversation, but rather they focus on the physical charms of the beloved, and the physical pleasures experienced by the lover. When Fitzpiers sees Grace, he is primed to become

56 J. Hillis Miller discusses fascination in Hardy’s work in depth in Distance and Desire (118).
fascinated: “the rustle of a woman’s dress, the sound of her voice, or the transit of her form across the field of his vision will enkindle his soul with a flame that blinds his eyes” (112). The doctor longs for the sensuous pleasure of feminine company, and searches the women of Hintock daily for a woman fit to bear his desire. We first see, through Giles, Fitzpiers peeping at Grace, which emphasizes his near-voyeuristic sense of himself in relation to women:

[Giles] suddenly became aware of the presence of another man, who was looking over the hedge on the opposite side of the way upon the figure of the unconscious Grace. He appeared as a handsome and gentlemanly personage of six or eight and twenty, and was quizzing her through an eye-glass. Seeing that Winterborne was noticing him, he let his glass drop with a click upon the rail which protected the hedge, and walked away in the opposite direction. Giles knew in a moment that this must be Mr. Fitzpiers. (60)

Through a magnifying piece of visual technology (an artifact from outside the woodland), Fitzpiers “quizz[es]” the bodies of the town’s women. From this distance he is free to let his imagination be charged by untried possibilities, and to become attached to no particular woman. This ocular intimacy is truly about Fitzpiers alone, as is his interest in both Grace and Mrs. Charmond.

The solitude and rusticity of Little Hintock clashes with the life to which both Fitzpiers and Grace are accustomed; just as Fitzpiers’s is primed for intense attraction to a woman (preferably beautiful, graceful, and well-bred), so is Grace primed to become attracted to a cosmopolitan and worldly man. After Grace and Fitzpiers become engaged, the novel describes Grace’s personal interest in Fitzpiers as being beyond money and social status, but
necessarily tied to them:

Grace had been so trained socially, and educated intellectually, as to see clearly enough a pleasure in the position of wife to such a man as Fitzpiers.

His material standing itself, either present or future, had little in it to fire her ambition, but the possibilities of a refined and cultivated inner life, of subtle psychological intercourse, had their charm. (148)

Grace desires just the kind of relationship with her husband as Hardy suggests an older man would find in an ideal friend. Though she has a friend more than ready to marry her in Giles, she could not be satisfied by such a marriage at this point in her development because she nurtures an intellectual and erotic attachment to the subtle intrigue of cosmopolitanism. Ideal intimacy for Grace takes the form of an ideal friendship within marriage, and Grace believes she has found her ideal in Fitzpiers.

Both Grace’s and Fitzpiers’s initial impressions of each other inadvertently become cloaked in mystery and fascination when she accidently happens upon the doctor sleeping, and glimpses him looking at her in the mirror:

she looked round the room, and started at perceiving a handsome man snugly ensconced on the couch, like a recumbent figure within some canopied mural tomb of the fifteenth century, except that his hands were not exactly clasped in prayer. She had no doubt that this was the surgeon. Awaken him herself she could not, and her immediate impulse was to go and pull the broad riband with the brass rosette which hung at one side of the fireplace. But expecting the landlady to re-enter in a moment she abandoned this intention, and stood gazing in great embarrassment at the reclining philosopher.

The windows of Fitzpiers’s soul being at present shuttered he
probably appeared less impressive than in his hours of animation; but the light abstracted from his material features by sleep was more than counterbalanced by the mysterious influence of that state, in a stranger, upon the consciousness of a beholder so sensitive. So far as she could criticize at all she became aware that she had encountered a specimen of creation altogether unusual in that locality. [...] 

She nervously wondered why the woman had not discovered her mistake and returned; and went again towards the bell-pull. Approaching the chimney her back was to Fitzpiers, but she could see him in the glass. An indescribable thrill passed through her as she perceived that the eyes of the reflected image were open, gazing wonderingly at her. Under the curious unexpectedness of the sight she became as if spell-bound, almost powerless to turn her head and regard the original. However by an effort she did turn, when there he lay asleep the same as before. [...] 

In the meantime her departure from the room, stealthy as it had been, had roused Fitzpiers; and he sat up. [...] That somebody had just left the room he was certain, and that the lovely form which seemed to have visited him in a dream was no less than the real presentation of the person departed he could hardly doubt. Looking out of the window a few minutes later, down the box-edged gravel-path which led to the bottom, he saw the garden-door open and through it enter the young girl of his thoughts, Grace having just at this juncture determined to return and attempt the interview a second time. That he saw her coming instead of going made him ask himself if his first impression of her were not a dream indeed. (114-5)
I quote this farcical first encounter between Grace and Fitzpiers at such length because it is indeed a farcical, ocular fort-da game, a bout of erotic peek-a-boo, every new layer of which draws the pair further into fascination with the other. The social and sexual impropriety of finding the surgeon asleep virtually paralyzes Grace. Fitzpiers is already imbued with mystery and power in her mind; he can buy a woman’s skull while she still lives and he somehow can fill his late-night windows with beautiful glowing colors (44). Once Grace can move, the uncanny sight of Fitzpiers’s open eyes in the mirror grips her with fascination, both frightful and exciting. She has the power of the gaze, as Fitzpiers once had when he “quiz[ed]” her with his “eye-glass”; she stands over the doctor, but the position is dissonant to her; she doesn’t know what to do. She does not draw the pleasure that Fitzpiers does from studying the bodies of others. Unsettled already to find that the doctor can gaze back at her through an object associated with self-regard and recognition, Grace is riveted and almost unnerved. She is frozen once again momentarily, then flees, then brings herself up short in consternation; it was probably nothing, after all. Should she stay or should she go? The result of Grace’s internal battle reinforces Fitzpiers’s idealized perception of her: she is not only the loveliest creature in town that he’s seen so far, but she is also his dream idol, come to him in life. As Grace is discomfited by the social embarrassment of Fitzpiers’ available body, Fitzpiers’ Shelleyan idealization of her grows in intensity.

Once the two confront each other face to face, Fitzpiers’s physical intensity compounds upon Grace’s apprehension in her purpose of begging Fitzpiers to relinquish his claim upon Grammer Oliver’s head. Standing close together on the terrace, rain dripping down upon them, Grace offers Fitzpiers

57 Fitzpiers had previously met Grammer Oliver and suggested that should she wish to donate her head to science, he would pay her for it. Grammer Oliver takes Fitzpiers up on this offer, but later changes her mind. She asks Grace to beg the doctor to cancel the arrangement.
payment for her servant’s head:

“The rain is wetting your dress: please do come in,” he said.

“It really makes my heart ache to let you stay here.”

Immediately inside the front door was the door of his sitting room; he flung it open, and stood in a coaxing attitude. Try how she would Grace could not resist the supplicatory mandate written in the face and manner of this man, and distressful resignation sat on her as she glided past him into the room – brushing his coat with her elbow because of the narrowness. (117)

The confluence of odd circumstances of Grace’s visit, her position under Fitzpiers’s power of decision, the seemingly uncanny circumstances of their initial glimpses of each other, and the close proximity of their face to face encounter, infused as it is with Grace’s confusion and Fitzpiers’ intense physical and emotional desire for her, has an intensely erotic effect upon Grace which she will feel repeatedly in Fitzpiers’s presence, until she eventually agrees to marry him.⁵⁸ During this first meeting, Fitzpiers not only unsets Grace with his physical closeness and intensity, but through these circumstances manages to control and direct her movements – an oppressive and also erotic physical maneuver. Grace is persuaded in spite of herself by Fitzpiers’s sophisticated balance of domination and supplication. Fitzpiers is increasingly attracted to Grace in her rustling, wet dress. Each character increasingly manifests the other’s ideal in this scene, therefore increasing the other’s fascination, and culminating in an erotic intimacy grown out of disparate desires that prove eventually to be at odds with each other.

⁵⁸ Boumehla construes desire in The Woodlanders as representing “an arbitrary but compelling irruption of the irrational into the area of choice and decision, producing in male and female characters alike a response of will-less acquiescence” (108). Fitzpiers and Grace both experience this will-lessness upon their first in-person meeting, which against any rational consideration of either party, begins a sequence of attraction and quick decision that leads to their marriage. Similarly, Giles almost will-lessly gives Grace the kiss she requests even though he knows she will be unable to end her marriage to Fitzpiers.
Because neither of these characters can find solace in the woodland and the intimacies it offers, their intimate relationship ends in disappointment, and worse.

Physical attraction notwithstanding, the lack of respect that Fitzpiers has for Grace, considering her to be socially unequal with him, eventually leads not only to his affair with Mrs. Charmond, but also to Grace’s lack of emotional attachment to him as her husband. What physical and proximal intimacy Fitzpiers and Grace manage depends completely upon their mutual fascination and the allure of physical delights; once married, the allure dissipates, leaving bitter proximity. Fitzpiers’s inability to see beyond Grace’s social inferiority to him disables their relationship from developing beyond its foundation of “strangeness – the mystery of his past, of his knowledge, of his professional skill, of his beliefs” (183). Grace “was amazed at the mildness of the anger which the suspicion engendered in her” (183) upon discovering Fitzpiers’ unfaithfulness. Through what the narrative calls “the intimacy of common life,” or the day to day motions of waking, dressing, eating, and sleeping, Grace’s sense of awe for her husband “was demolished […] and she found him as merely human as the Hintock people themselves” (183). The Hintock people share silent intimacy with Grace, like that between Grace and Giles, and between Giles and Marty. Fitzpiers’s inability to see his wife as an equally valuable human being to himself, to begin to partake of the silent, human intimacy of Hintock, blocks the development of “a new foundation […] for an enduring and staunch affection” (183). Though they are married, the novel represents this pair as near-strangers after their marriage, and if we contrast their relationship with that of Giles and Marty, we can see how the complete lack of any common aim creates a chasm between Grace and Fitzpiers. Grace and her husband never establish any kind of friendship, or what the novel calls “a sympathetic interdependence, wherein mutual weaknesses are made the grounds of a
defensive alliance” (183). Grace simply is not attached to her husband, so that his betrayal irks her only through the stress it places upon her social position. That Fitzpiers prefers another woman to her does not hurt Grace very much at all.

The interdependence of the lives of the woodlanders within their environment of solitude creates a community that offers companionship within the pervasive loneliness. For some, like Giles and Marty, the solitude of the woods itself offers companionship, and silently brings people together. Giles “had a marvelous power of making trees grow. [...] there was a sort of sympathy between himself and the fir, oak, or beech that he was operating on,” whereas other journeymen would have nowhere near such success (58). However, when Giles intervenes with the woods by cutting down the great elm that is mystically tied to Mr. South, the course of life in the woodland becomes directly subject to property and inheritance laws. That monstrous tree figures well for the indifference of the woodland for human laws: “As the tree waved, South waved his head, making it his fugelman with abject obedience” (84).59 Winterbourne attempts to solve everyone’s problems, most prominently his own, but removing the tree. But the psychic grip of the tree upon Mr. South kills him, and houses and marriage suits are lost along with him.

Winterborne often works alone with the trees, especially once he loses all chance of ever marrying Grace Melbury. Regardless of his disappointments, “Winterborne subdued his feelings [...] whatever they were, kept them entirely to himself,” yet the narrative conveys the ease with which his neighbors can read his “taciturnity” (97). The nature of the woodlanders, who are “obliged to judge the time of day from changes in external nature” and can see “a thousand successive tints and traits in the landscape which are never

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59 A fugelman is “a trained soldier placed in front of other soldiers as a model” (“Explanatory Notes” The Woodlanders 347)
discerned by him who hears the regular chime of a clock,” enables them to read Winterborne’s expression, behavior, and bearing “till virtually the whole surrounding circle of familiars is charged with the reserved one’s moods and meanings” (97–98). These unnamed denizens of Little Hintock not only understand Giles’ feelings, but themselves feel along with Giles in silence. Though a lonely and forlorn woodland surrounds Little Hintock, the community encircles itself and its citizens in a perpetually unspoken intimacy. Individuals are paradoxically both alone and together in these woods. Contrasted with the geography’s frustrating power over human intimacies in Jude the Obscure, these forlorn woods are ample with nurturance and love. The Woodlanders offers a view of intimacy in life as deeply ambivalent, no matter the shape it takes, though also potentially sustaining.

Friendship grows between Giles and Marty South out of their mutual closeness to the lonely woods, and this relationship demonstrates how individual relationships with a common environment can create a dyadic intimacy between people. Very early in The Woodlanders Marty South’s and Giles Winterborne’s lives are represented as “isolated” and “self-contained” while simultaneously united: “their lonely courses formed no detached design at all, but were part of the pattern in the great web of human doings then weaving in both hemispheres, from the White Sea to Cape Horn” (20). Hardy begins by magnifying these two characters, then widens out broadly, decentralizing the pair and emphasizing their connection to the larger world in a broad map view, and the reader, by extension. Their mutual affinity with the natural world, and the ease and effectiveness of their cooperation in work tie the pair to the wider world and to each other.

When planting trees together one day, Marty notes to Giles, “How they sigh directly we put ’em upright, though while they are lying down they don’t sigh at all” (59). As Marty demonstrates, Giles can hear the saplings whisper: “the soft musical breathing instantly set in, which was not to cease
night or day till the grown tree should be felled” (59). The intimacy of their cooperation enriches and replenishes the woodland, and swells with their individual and mutual connections to the natural world.

Marty and Giles literally conduct their relationship through the land at the end of the novel, with Giles’ body in the earth, becoming a part of it. Marty makes her vigil at Giles’ grave alone, touching “sublimity at points” for how she “looked almost like a being who had rejected with indifference the attribute of sex for the loftier quality of abstract humanism” (331). This quality is demonstrated by her androgynous, “straight slim figure [...] the contours of womanhood so undeveloped as to be scarcely perceptible,” and her obvious commitment to hard work “the marks of poverty and toil” (331.) Similar to the way Sue’s ethereally thin body marks her disinterest in the flesh, Marty’s “sublime” androgynous and careworn body proclaims her commitment only to continue to work the land, which she made in earnest once she sold her hair to the barber at the opening of the novel. As she clears away “the withered flowers that Grace and herself had laid there the previous week, and put[s] her fresh ones in their place,” she clears away Grace’s previous commitment to Giles’ grave and memory, and freshly situates herself there alone. Marty speaks to Giles,

“Now, my own, own love,” she whispered, “you are mine, and on'y mine; for she has forgot 'ee at last, although for her you died. But I—whenever I get up I'll think of 'ee, and whenever I lie down I'll think of 'ee. Whenever I plant the young larches I'll think that none can plant as you planted; and whenever I split a gad, and whenever I turn the cider-wring, I'll say none could do it like you. If ever I forget your name, let me forget home and Heaven! — But no, no, my love, I never can forget 'ee; for you was a good man, and did good things!” (331)
Marty reminds Giles, in his grave, of the moment when they planted the young, sighing trees together and were united in silent work, and she suggests that through all of her working hours represented in the novel she has felt Giles with her, despite their separateness and his ignorance of her love. Through her relationship with her environment, and through the work she does there, Marty feels connected not only to her memories of Giles, but also literally to his body, which will slowly become part of the trees he cared for in life.

Thomas Hardy’s Jude the Obscure and The Woodlanders demonstrate the abject consequences of “the Law”’s interaction with the human desire for intimacies of various kinds. “The Law” in fact creates desires for intimacies of its own image, idealizations of impossible intimacies that leave characters like Jude and Sue, or Giles and Marty, in various states of abjection. Marty South can rise above this abjection, however, through her intimacy with the woodland, and by extension with Wessex. The empathy and intimacy Hardy’s Wessex creates not only among his novels but between readers and the contents of his works is the most positive shape intimacy can take for Hardy.
Chapter Three

“(we are not single, we are one)”: Intimacy in Solitude in Virginia Woolf’s Mrs Dalloway and The Waves

The typography of this chapter’s eponymous quotation figures nicely the ever-present paradox of intimacy in Virginia Woolf’s novels. The quotation marks and parentheses separate the phrase “(we are not single, we are one)” from Bernard’s surrounding soliloquy in The Waves and the larger narrative, as well as encircle the idea expressed within like an embrace. The punctuation underscores the paradox inherent in the phrase itself: one thing is a single thing, but Bernard’s idea is that all these single things together make one larger, single thing. This view resonates well with Eliot’s magnifiable map view of existence, which is inspired by Spinoza’s view of the organic wholeness of all existence, wherein the closer and closer we look into something, the more constitutive parts we find, all necessary for the operation of the larger edifice. All the people and things in the world work together to make up the broad view of existence. On the train, on his way to school, Bernard thinks this titular quotation as he considers his relation to others, his companion in the train compartment in particular:

“Now I feel by imperceptible signs, which I cannot yet interpret but will later, that his defiance is about to thaw. His solitude shows signs of cracking. He has passed a remark about a country house. A smoke ring issues from my lips (about crops) and circles him, bringing him into contact. The human voice has a disarming quality—(we are not single, we are one). As we exchange these few but amiable remarks, about country houses, I furbish him up and make him concrete.” (68)

Bernard extends a filament of recognition to his travel companion, which the man accepts, opening himself, out of his solitary self-containment, to the
proximal intimacy of the train compartment. Bernard thinks, perhaps in the very back of his mind given the distance implied by the dash and the parentheses, that this extension and acceptance demonstrates the two men’s preexisting connection to something larger. If we think about his parenthetical thought in the context of psychological realism, the smoke-ring is impossible, unreal, a metaphor interrupting the interior monologue and in doing so representing the “literally” unrepresentable sense of connection Bernard feels. Because “we are not single, we are one” is not a part of his conscious thought, nor are the smoke-rings, Bernard doesn’t dwell on what larger “thing” is of which the two men are a part. We can find more evidence of it, and its emergence in narrative through metaphor, elsewhere in Woolf’s work. In Woolf’s first novel, *The Voyage Out*, Terrence Hewet and Rachel Vinrace agree that the larger thing lies in silence, behind the things people don’t say (237-8); in *Mrs. Dalloway*, the other novel of focus for this chapter, Mrs. Dalloway senses that she is part of the living city, that she is connected to everyone and everything (9); and in *The Waves*, as we see, Bernard believes that he is one with his travel companion, and one with his five friends, Jinny, Susan, Louis, Rhoda, and Neville, and by this logic, he is one with everyone. The novel’s title and structure implicitly compare this to a wave among waves in a great sea.

Yet solitude sits at the table of group fellowship in Woolf’s novels. *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Waves* offer contrasting depictions of how being alone, or feeling alone, impacts intimacies, forestalling or cultivating them. In both of these novels Woolf experiments with space and movement in narrative, as well as disruptive metaphor, to demonstrate the deep connectivity between singular people, not only to each other, as she does with Septimus Warren Smith and Mrs. Dalloway, or the six friends of *The Waves*, but to the world at large, what Woolf calls the “real thing behind appearances,” that creates a kind of intimacy among all people (“A Sketch of the Past” 72). Social scripts
and dominant categories of intimacy, intended not only to create the intimate setting (like Mrs. Dalloway’s party, or the reunion dinners in The Waves) but to lend propriety to the intimacy being enacted, make up the “appearances” that Woolf strives to reach behind in her fiction. Ironically, in order to get behind these appearances, and in order to cultivate the narrative intimacy required to convince her readers to follow her there, Woolf creates new scripts (i.e. categories, rules, “appearances,”) according to which she hopes readers will open themselves to her work. Spontaneous intimacy is not simply intimacy without any rules. Spontaneous intimacy requires its own rules, rules of solitude and unfettered time for intellectual work. These new rules fly in the face of dominant social scripts for women. Woolf also uses formal techniques to demonstrate the gendered oppression inherent in conventional intimacies; this oppression is represented as affecting both men and women, because the male assumption not only of superiority to women, but also that women oversee the private sphere wherein emotions considered unseemly to share among men can be expressed, draws conventions and rules across male homosocial intimacies. Though men taking part in the homosocial male friendship ideal may believe that together they are free to explore the life of the mind and so forth, the scripts implicit to this gender-segregated model block access to the pattern that lies behind the “cotton wool” of daily life (“A Sketch of the Past” 72). Intimate scenes between and among women, however, have access to the brilliance that Woolf sees behind conventions, surely both because of Woolf’s own lesbian desire as well as the veil of mystery she sees overhanging the dominant (male) perception of relationships

60 Woolf differs from Thomas Hardy in her anticipation of Lacan only slightly: for both authors social scripts, what Hardy calls “the Law,” intensely complicate intimacies. But for Woolf the moment of jouissance found in spontaneous intimacy is enough, it is not the failure of intimacy which Hardy perceives as interpersonal intimacy’s inevitable abjection. The pain of jouissance in Woolf is perceived to be just as momentary as the pleasure, and indeed worth having for its closeness to what Woolf considers to be “real.”
between women. In these representations of intimacies between women, Woolf writes what Lacan considered un-writable, and what Kristeva and Iriguray have therefore called revolutionary. Woolf writes non-phallic jouissance, which most frequently finds representation in scenes depicting intimacy between women in these two novels. Other contexts, with differently gendered combinations of characters, show similar libidinal intensities, but if a scene contemplates the feeling of one woman for another, this intense state of pleasure and fear is always invoked. Mrs. Dalloway and The Waves offer sustained representations of the tensions evoked by the inner life’s confrontation of social life, and through different formal means, both novels present a vision of intimate connection uniting everyone, to each other and to the world, even for characters who seem thoroughly alienated from their surroundings.

Intimacy is likely the most important object of literary representation for Woolf, and study of her works shows that the intimacies she represents as mattering more are those that occur spontaneously because of the freedom of solitude, not those that are constructed by conventional social scripts. Her work suggests that the understanding of human relations is an asymptotic journey that can only be undertaken with the time and space for contemplation, both the contemplation of one’s own aspirations and the

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61 For more of Woolf’s writing about male perceptions of women’s relationships as mysterious, see A Room of One’s Own and Orlando.
62 On Kristevan themes in The Waves see Chloë Taylor.
63 On the ways in which Woolf pulls back the veil of externality, see Alison Booth (102).
64 Because intimacy is so fundamental to Woolf’s work, much scholarship considers the impacts of affect on the self, as well as the tense relations between the individual and the group. Scholarship clusters around Woolf’s own relationships, with Bloomsbury (e.g. in Jesse Wolfe, Simon Joyce, and Christine Froula), with women (e.g. in Martha Vicinus, Katherine Sroles, and Barrett and Cramer’s collection Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings), and with “the Victorians,” (e.g. in Simon Joyce and Steve Ellis. Much scholarship also focuses upon the tensions between the individual and the group in Woolf’s work, such as Gabrielle McIntire, Julia Briggs, Anna Snaith, and Martha Nussbaum. Gillian Beer’s work most directly aligns with my own arguments about Woolf and intimacy, as does her work on Eliot. Beer’s readings identify moments of narrative intimacy in Mrs. Dalloway and The Waves, as well as identify moments of communion among groups of people in both novels.
contemplation of one’s relation to others. This tense need of solitude resonates with both George Eliot’s and Thomas Hardy’s views of human relationships; in the case of the former, to cultivate sympathetic intimacy with the world, one must pull away from the thick of life, and in the latter, intimate fulfillment can only be sustained within an absence of others. All intimate scenes in Woolf’s work contain tension between the individual mind and the ethos of the group. Woolf’s representation of consciousness demonstrates intense solitary contemplation, which reaches deep into sub-verbal states represented through metaphor, even when that consciousness is bombarded by socially intimate demands. Intimate group scenes in her novels, like the engagement party in The Voyage Out, Mrs. Dalloway’s party in her eponymous novel, the family dinner where Lily Briscoe realizes how to complete her painting in To the Lighthouse, and all of the reunion scenes in The Waves, demonstrate the inherent ambivalence of intimate gatherings in Woolf’s work. The formality of the dance in The Voyage Out melts away as Rachel Vinrace takes over the music and the guests all spontaneously erupt in dances of their own making; this group of ostensible strangers unites as Woolf’s highest form of intimate connection bursts out of social convention. As dawn breaks and the guests head to bed, Rachel, Terrence, and St. John feel a closer connection, but they also again feel singular (176-9). Lily Briscoe reminds herself that she must move the tree in her painting, to improve it, with the salt cellar on the dinner table, and while considering her project she still manages to “be nice” to Charles Tansley: “She had done the usual trick—been nice. She would never know him. He would never know her. Human relations were all like that, she thought, and the worst (if it had not been for Mr. Bankes) were between men and women. Inevitably these were extremely insincere she thought” (93). Though Mr. Bankes and Lily have managed to connect in a moment of spontaneous intimacy, she thinks that
scripted moments of intimacy, like dinners, are never genuine, with the most insincerity occurring between men and women. Woolf’s novels generally represent men dominating women in conventionally scripted intimate settings like this one; the egotistical need to be heard and appreciated often forces it’s way through a woman’s solitude, interrupting her thoughts. This social tendency is why Woolf deems solitude absolutely necessary for her ideal of intimacy, and why that intimacy must be spontaneous. People must be free of the inherent expectations of conventionally scripted intimacies in order to maintain their solitude.

To demonstrate spontaneous intimacy I will turn to the scene of Peter Walsh’s and Mrs. Dalloway’s reunion. This scene demonstrates intensely ambivalent intimacy. The former lovers outwardly behave as two old friends, but internally feeling the sting of old wounds. Peter Walsh surprises Mrs. Dalloway with a visit, creating a spontaneous moment of intimacy that must quickly be reconciled within dominant social scripts. The task irritates the hostess, who was busy with her personal chores. The oddness of the moment evokes numerous feelings and memories, and impresses them both: “She looked at Peter Walsh; her look, passing through all that time and that emotion, reached him doubtfully; settled on him tearfully; and rose and fluttered away, as a bird touches a branch and flutters away. Quite simply she wiped her eyes” (43). With a passing glance Woolf demonstrates the emotional history of this friendship. Though brief, the look incites Peter: "Stop! Stop! he wanted to cry" (44). The tension of the reunion breaks Peter’s defenses, and he finds himself dissolved into tears:

suddenly thrown by those uncontrollable forces thrown through the air, he burst into tears; wept and wept without the least shame, sitting on the sofa, the tears running down his cheeks.

And Clarissa had leant forward, taken his hand, drawn him to her,
kissed him, -- actually had felt his face on hers before she could down the brandishing of silver flashing-plumes like pampas grass in a tropic gale in her breast, which, subsiding, left her holding his hand, patting his knee and, feeling as she sat back extraordinarily at her ease with him and light-hearted, all in a clap it came over her, If I had married him, this gaiety would have been mine all day! (46-47).

This is intense spontaneous intimacy, complete with soft cheeks pressing against hot tears, coming completely without warning. When the two collide, also without warning comes an onslaught of metaphor so out of context, it must represent the sub-verbal experience: "actually had felt his face on hers before she could down the brandishing of silver flashing-plumes like pampas grass in a tropic gale in her breast, which, subsiding, left her holding his hand" (47) The embrace deeply affects them both in spite of their conscious intention. The "flashing-plumes like pampas grass in a tropic gale" connote deep psychological intensity. Yet the shadow of intimate oppression is cast across this spontaneous scene; had she married Peter, Mrs. Dalloway would need to buoy him up daily so that he would not dissolve in his emotions. The reunion scene is one of spontaneous intimacy because it is unexpected and affectively rich, yet it also demonstrates the novel’s contemporary imperative that women give men sympathetic attention.

Conventionally scripted intimacies are very important to Mrs. Dalloway, yet she also finds them disappointing. She maintains her solitude, even as she "kindle[s] and illuminate[s]" at her party (5). Grinning and greeting her guests, Mrs. Dalloway feels apart from the proceedings:

And yet for her own part, it was too much of an effort. She was not enjoying it. It was too much of an effort. [...] Every time she gave a party she had this feeling of being something not herself,
and that every one was unreal in one way; much more real in another. It was, she thought, partly their clothes, partly being taken out of their ordinary ways, partly the background, it was possible to say things you couldn’t say anyhow else, things that needed an effort; possible to go much deeper. But not for her; not yet anyhow. (170-1)

Though once Peter, Sally, and the Prime Minister all arrive at her party Mrs. Dalloway enjoys her hostess duties a bit more, she continues to feel separate from the party and her guests. “[P]artly their clothes, partly being taken out of their ordinary ways, partly the background,” the necessary scripts of such a formal party make people and Mrs. Dalloway herself seem less real. Meeting Peter, then Sally, Mrs. Dalloway is momentarily surprised back into herself as Sally declares her recognition with a shout, “Clarissa!” (171). But this Sally is far less stunning than the Sally of the past. Mrs. Dalloway still feels at a distance, even from those who were once her most intimate friends: “these triumphs (dear old Peter, for example, thinking her so brilliant), had a hollowness; at arm’s length they were, not in the heart” (175). Mrs. Dalloway’s finds her party rife with tense ambivalence as her desire to “kindle and illuminate,” and therefore somehow intimately touch her guests through the gift of her glorious party, conflicts with her awareness of the emptiness of such ornately scripted shows of intimacy.

Being Nice

The opposite of spontaneous intimacy is intimacy that is circumscribed by social, and therefore gendered, conventions. Conventionally scripted intimate moments always contain gendered guidelines, especially at the time of Woolf’s writing. As in a dance where the man leads and the woman follows, sitting together for tea, eating at a supper party, even simply going outside carry with them gendered and classed codes of appropriateness. All of Woolf’s work shows that the gendered codes are oppressive to both men and women,
though especially women. In A Room of One’s Own Woolf plainly states her perspective on the intimate dependence of men upon women, and its relation to the functioning of society: “Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still be swamp and jungle” (35). In “Reminiscences,” a memoir she wrote for her nephew Julian Bell about his mother Vanessa, Woolf gives a far darker account of this looking-glass relationship, and its power to drain the vitality out of women:

We remembered how he had tasked Stella's strength, embittered her few months of joy, and now when he should be penitent [because Stella had just died], he showed less grief than anyone. On the contrary none was more vigorous, and there were signs at once which woke us to a sort of frenzy, that he was quite prepared to take Vanessa for his next victim. When he was sad, he explained, she should be sad; when he was angry, as he was periodically when she asked him for a cheque, she should weep; instead she stood before him like a stone. (“Reminiscenses” 56)

Vanessa refuses to bend to Leslie Stephen’s irrational will, she refuses to lose her life to her father the way her half-sister did. She stands like a stone, saying nothing, reclaiming her singularity by force, imposing her own solitude even as he harangues her. Still, her father arrests her ability to think about or do anything else but attend, even stonily, to his intimate, in this case emotional, demands. We know from works by such scholars as Louise DeSalvo and others that the intimate demands upon the Stephen girls went much darker and deeper, their half-brothers Gerald and George Duckworth treating Vanessa and Virginia’s bodies as their intimate playthings. The male entitlement to female intimate attention, from “being nice” to giving
sympathy, to crying on cue, to giving embraces, is a major flaw of the intimacy matrix for Woolf. She would likely not acknowledge that these gendered and oppressive kinds of intimacy are in fact intimacy at all.

Woolf repeatedly gestures toward the irony of this gendered intimate dependence throughout her fiction. She underscores the capacity of male intimate dependence upon women to permit men to divorce themselves from their less rational or sublime emotions: because men experience more sentiment and sentimentality with women, women must therefore be more sentimental; women must be less rational if emotions live with them in the private sphere; and since these things are true, women are too delicate, too childlike, to be expected to function in the public sphere, let alone be asked to make important decisions about country and Empire. Men’s intimate dependence on women creates a self-perpetuating argument for the disenfranchisement of women. Women must be ever ready to offer sympathy, to give up their own concerns for those of the men they know. Woolf’s position in this case contrasts sharply with the sympathetic ideal that Dorothea embodies in Eliot’s *Middlemarch*; Dorothea’s desire is to enter into an intimate circuit of sympathy and intellect, whereas Woolf’s women wish to explore their ideas and their impressions without the interruptions inherent in sociality. This is why women need a room of their own to create art; and this is why women need to be left alone, as Clarissa Dalloway is left alone in her attic room, in order to have their own intimate perspective, rather than continuously giving intimate succor to their male friends and partners. In *To the Lighthouse*, because she must do her work outside Lily Briscoe is continually open to male demands for attention. In the first section of the novel, Charles Tansley chirps at her “Women can’t write. Women can’t paint,” frustrating Lily, making her insecure and angry. When William Bankes stops by to comment on her work, her memory of Tansley’s ignorant taunt echoes for her, but fortunately Bankes offers his attention in return for hers, and
instead of feeling invaded, Lily feels connected to Bankes as well as the world around them (17–21). Still, her work is interrupted, and she doesn’t pick this painting up again for years. In the third section of the novel, Lily’s solitude is invaded again by Mr. Ramsay, who does not offer her anything back:

You can't touch your canvas, he seemed to say, bearing down on her, till you've given me what I want of you. Here he was, close upon her again, greedy, distraught. Well, thought Lily in despair, letting her right hand fall at her side, it would be simpler then to have it over. Surely, she could imitate from recollection the glow, the rhapsody, the self-surrender, she had seen on so many women's faces (on Mrs. Ramsay's, for instance) when on some occasion like this they blazed up--she could remember the look on Mrs. Ramsay's face--into a rapture of sympathy, of delight in the reward they had, which, though the reason of it escaped her, evidently conferred on them the most supreme bliss of which human nature was capable. Here he was, stopped by her side. She would give him what she could. (TTLH 150)

Woolf frames this silent exchange with the physical intensity of a sexual proposition, and its tone resonates with that of the passage from “Reminiscences.” The man bears down upon the woman, his desire unable to be denied, and though the woman has no interest in the man at all, it is easier to get it over with, to be nice and to pretend that offering succor is an intense pleasure, than to fight the man off. Lily wishes she could stand before him like a stone, but her relationship to Mr. Ramsay is not of a daughter to her father. She is his guest, and in this place, at this time, he is entitled to her attention.
The Difficult Business of Intimacy

As Woolf clearly demonstrates in her memoir essay “A Sketch of the Past,” all of her novels seek to represent the reality behind everyday life, behind oppressive social scripts that block intimacy with that deeper reality (71-72). She wants to show this reality to her readers, and therefore cultivate intimacy with it for her readers. Like George Eliot’s continual use of “we” in her work and Thomas Hardy’s meticulous mapping of Wessex, Woolf creates narrative intimacy in her novels. Paradoxically, though conventional social scripts create what Woolf considers unequally oppressive intimacies, she highly values formal experimentation’s capacity to create new scripts for narrative intimacy. Her fiction establishes new rules by which she intimately connects her readers to her vision of existence. Spontaneous intimacy, as her novels show, needs to be more or less free from any scripting; the codes create gendered expectations and entitlements, overlay the intimacy with more of the mundane that blocks access to the reality Woolf sees behind the everyday. In “Modern Fiction,” Woolf compares literary conventions to the rules of etiquette practiced by Victorian hostesses:

Both in life and in literature it is necessary to have some means of bridging the gulf between the hostess and her unknown guest on the one hand, the writer and his unknown reader on the other. [...] The writer must get into touch with his reader by putting before him something which he recognizes, which therefore stimulates his imagination, and makes him willing to cooperate in the far more difficult business of intimacy. (CE I 331)

For Woolf in this case, intimacy is created between writer and reader when the writer is able to effectively communicate “the truth” to the reader (CE I 335). Generally, Woolf’s view of the state of her chosen artistic genre

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65 On cultivating intimacy between the narrator and the reader, see Beer Virginia Woolf (2).
contrasts sharply with her view of how people relate to each other. In “The Art of Fiction,” Woolf writes,

> if fiction is, as we suggest, in difficulties, it may be because nobody grasps her firmly and defines her severely. She has had no rules drawn up for her, very little thinking done on her behalf. And though rules may be wrong and must be broken, they have this advantage--they confer dignity and order upon their subject; they admit her to a place in civilized society; they prove that she is worthy of consideration. (CE II 52)

Woolf personifies fiction, more or less, as a trollop; writers need to make an honest woman of her by imposing more rules upon her. “Rules,” she admits, “are wrong and must be broken,” yet in the context of fiction they are absolutely of the essence. And really, this should work because fortunately fiction is not a woman or a human at all, and we cannot oppress and disenfranchise fiction. We can, and should, Woolf argues, work hard to invent and reinvent strong definitions of what fiction is as we write it. Woolf’s demand here is paradoxical; we cannot take a genre in hand, define it severely, yet be continuously open to abandoning, breaking, or remaking these definitions. She characterizes a goal that is literally unachievable, yet if writers strive toward it, can transform fiction. In order to cultivate a more intimate fiction, Woolf rewrites its rules, one of them being the need to continually rewrite the rules of fiction. Marking sensations, associations, and memories in words, Woolf’s narrative intimacy strives asymptotically toward describing the *jouissance* attendant to an existence comprised almost entirely of intimacies.

Woolf’s formal experiments are many; her representations of intimacies tend to cluster around both her representations of inner life and her representations of space, movement, and dispersal. In *Mrs. Dalloway*
representations of intimacies employ cinematographic narrative movement that, once even momentarily focused on a character, evokes an intense inner experience, such as in the novel’s opening pages. A series of moving objects connect with characters, both major and minor, and spark intense internal associations. The first moving object is the dispersing sound waves of Big Ben’s bells; the sound recurs as a linking motif, signifying time, empire, as well as a series of “leaden circles” joining London’s denizens together. Big Ben is succeeded by Mrs. Dalloway herself, who shuttles among commercial, military, aristocratic, political, and emotional figures as she makes her way to the vibrant shopping district of Bond Street at Oxford Street. She is succeeded by an auspicious motorcar, which in turn succeeded by a sky-writing “aeroplane” (5). (See Figure 1.)

The crowd of Londoners acts as one body, “rippling,” murmuring, following the car and then the sky-writer with its collective gaze:

There it was coming over the trees, letting out white smoke from behind, which curled and twisted, actually writing something!
Making letters in the sky! Every one looked up. [...] All down the Mall people were standing and looking up into the sky. As they looked the whole world became perfectly silent, and a flight of gulls crossed the sky, [...] and in this extraordinary silence and peace, in this pallor, in this purity, bells struck eleven times, the sound fading up there among the gulls. (21)

The effect of this passage is cinematographic: first individuals notice the sky-writer, then the focus shifts, revealing a broad scene of the crowd looking up, as if each chin were tied to the same puppeteer’s cross bar, moving, seeing, and feeling in concert. Then Big Ben rings out, an aural

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66 On Woolf’s concern with relations between the individual and the group, see Briggs (133) and Snaith (65).
reminder that this moment of communal intimacy is of a piece with Mrs. Dalloway’s experience of walking earlier in the novel.

Woolf conceived Mrs. Dalloway first as a story in which two strangers come closer and closer together, almost meet each other, then pass each other by and continue on. These strangers become Mrs. Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, though in the end Mrs. Dalloway at least learns that a Septimus Warren Smith once existed. From beginning to end, Mrs. Dalloway employs cinematographic narrative movement, as well as aural allusions (barking dogs and ringing bells) to demonstrate the kind of intimacy that Woolf thinks exists between strangers, even among all strangers.

67 "I'm going to have a man and a woman [...]--showing them growing up--never meeting--not knowing each other--but all the time you'll feel them come nearer and nearer. This will be the real exciting part (as you see)--but when they almost meet--only a door between--you see how they just miss--and go off at a tangent, and never come anywhere near again" (qtd. in Luftig 192).
The cinematographic narrative shifting of perspective begins once Mrs. Dalloway is startled by the sound of a motorcar. Shortly the narrative exchanges its focus on her for a focus on the wondering crowd outside, of which Septimus is a member:

Edgar J. Watkiss, with his roll of lead piping round his arm, said audibly, humourously of course: 'The Proime Minister’s kyar.'

68 The map of Figure 1 calls the readers’ own geographic situation to mind, therefore including readers in Woolf’s vision of the intimate connectedness among strangers. Figure 1 uses “Mapping Mrs. Dalloway,” a project from COMMA, Center for Modern Literature, Materialism, and Aesthetics at U.C. Santa Barbara. Location names and quotations added by Thorndike-Breeze.
Septimus Warren Smith, who found himself unable to pass, heard him.

[...] Everything had come to a standstill. The throb of the motor engines sounded like a pulse irregularly drumming through an entire body. [..]

Mrs. Dalloway, coming to the window with her arms full of sweet peas, looked out with her little pink face pursed in enquiry. Every one looked at the motor car. Septimus looked. [...] It is I who am blocking the way, he thought. Was he not being looked at and pointed at; was he not weighted there, rooted to the pavement, for a purpose?” (13-15)

This scene contains both Septimus and Mrs. Dalloway, and it gives the impression that Septimus spots the pursed, pink face of Mrs. Dalloway and her armload of sweet peas. Edgar J. Watkiss passes the narrative focus from the crowd to Septimus, whose experience of the mysterious motorcar presents the dark side of Mrs. Dalloway’s sense of connection to London. Septimus is surrounded by the thick life of London, but feels himself to be the focal point of that life; the pressure of humanity feeds Septimus’ paranoia, whereas it enlivens Mrs. Dalloway.69 However, as she is enlivened by her sense that she and her old friend Peter “lived in each other” and that she “[was] part, she was positive, of the trees at home [Bourton]; of the house there [...],” she is affected by other people in ways not unlike Septimus. Through her “gift” of “knowing people almost by instinct,” where upon meeting someone either “up went her back like a cat’s; or she purred,” Mrs. Dalloway is deeply affected by the thickness of human life around her (9). Throughout the novel it seems that there is nowhere to turn that does not contain an associative spark for some instinct or memory. Mrs. Dalloway is not immune

69 For more on “thick life” see my treatment of Elizabeth Povinelli’s notion in the Introduction; see also her Empire of Love.
from the dark side of human connectedness: “Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely?” (9) She senses the death inherent to the life that surrounds her; her memories and instincts combine with the narrative to convey the ambivalent exhilaration that attends intimate connection so filled with an overabundance of affect. The feeling is an ambivalent one because exhilaration risks tipping into panic, as pleasure risks tipping into disgust in jouissance.

The affective chaos of life that Mrs. Dalloway strongly senses continuously torments Septimus, who deeply loves his existence in the world but is terrified of the humans who inhabit it with him. He has a brief moment of joy when he sees the sky-writer:

“they are signaling to me. Not indeed in actual words […] but it was plain enough, this beauty, this exquisite beauty, and tears filled his eyes as he looked at the smoke words languishing and melting in the sky and bestowing upon him in their inexhaustible charity and laughing goodness one shape after another of

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70 Twice in her diary, during her period of fleshing out the “tunneling method” that eventually developed her experimental style, Woolf specifically professes distrust for, and disbelief in, other people. In March of 1922, during her convalescence from one of her repeated bouts of influenza which brought numerous visitors to her bedside on a near-constant basis, she writes: “Betty Potter loves me; is in despair; & I have to see her rehearse in order to keep her from suicide. How can anyone be such a fool as to believe in anyone?” (DII 173). Four years later, after having finished and published Jacob’s Room and Mrs. Dalloway, she records her impressions upon hearing the Prime Minister’s radio address: “Impressive as it is to hear the very voice of the Prime Minister, descendant of Pitt & Chatham, still I can’t heat up my reverence to the right pitch. […] He becomes megalomaniac. No I don’t trust him: I don’t trust any human being, however loud they bellow & roll their rs” (DIII 81). Woolf doesn’t limit her distrust to politicians but rather claims to distrust all human beings. These passages underscore much of the day-to-day description in her diary, which presents the writer as especially critical of the other people in her life, and those passages that express her longing for solitude and peace, so that she can think and work.
unimaginable beauty and signaling their intention to provide him, for nothing, for ever, for looking merely, with beauty, more beauty!” (22).

Shortly after this moment, Septimus spies Evans and his intense pleasure melts into panic. He shows us, again, the darker side of Mrs. Dalloway’s sense of her relation to the world and the people in it. The trauma he suffers situates him in an intimate but violent relationship to the social world; if Septimus could live in the reality behind appearances perhaps he could cope, but of course he would also be obliterated as “Septimus.” He inhabits the razor’s edge of jouissance between joy and horror, pleasure and abjection.

The formal gestures toward the intimacy between strangers and the intimacy inherent to existence crystallize late in the novel during one of Peter Walsh’s memories of Clarissa Dalloway:

Clarissa had a theory in those days—they had heaps of theories, always theories, as young people have. It was to explain the feeling they had of dissatisfaction; not knowing people; not being known. For how could they know each other? You met every day; then not for six months, or years. It was unsatisfactory, they agreed, how little one knew people.

But she said, sitting on the bus going up Shaftesbury Avenue, she felt herself everywhere; not ‘here, here, here’; and she tapped the back of the seat; but everywhere. She waved her hand, going up Shaftesbury Avenue. She was all that. So that to know her, or any one, one must seek out the people who completed them; even the places. […]

Looking back over that long friendship of almost thirty years her theory worked to this extent. Brief, broken, often
painful as their actual meetings had been what with his absences and interruptions [...] the effect of them on his life was immeasurable. There was a mystery about it. You were given a sharp, acute, uncomfortable grain—the actual meeting; horribly painful as often as not: yet in absence, in the most unlikely places, it would flower out, open, shed its scent, let you touch, taste, look about you, get the whole feel of it and understanding, after years of lying lost. [...] She had influenced him more than any person he had ever known. (152-153)

Peter’s memory of the omnibus demonstrates Woolf’s view of the ever-present intimacy of strangers, as well as the power of memory and separation to intensify intimacies between friends. There is something hollow about socially scripted, day-to-day modes of intimacy that stays with both Peter and Clarissa. Neither of them feels actually known, or recognized, by any one. And friends come and go; intimacies in friendship cannot be sustained when friends must disperse to various points on the map. Peter now thinks he understands part of what Clarissa was saying, because when they meet it is painful, yet the sense of Clarissa that he keeps with him when they part accesses a sweetness of reality that resonates with the jouissance Mrs. Dalloway feels when in intimate conversation with women. Peter feels suffused by his memory of Clarissa, and therefore feels that he is still intimately connected to her, regardless of the awkwardness or aggravation of their actual meetings. Indeed, these long-distance memories of intimate impact offer more solace and pleasure than nearly any of the in-person encounters in either Mrs Dalloway or The Waves. One’s confrontation with actual persons complicates the pleasure of intimacies felt from a distance, and in this way Woolf’s view of intimacy here resonates with Hardy’s view that the best and most sustainable of intimacies occur with nature, land, and geography.
This omnibus philosophy extends beyond Peter’s relationship with Mrs. Dalloway. As Clarissa and Peter move rapidly through space, and I always imagine them sitting on the top level of a two-deck omnibus, Clarissa says that because Shaftesbury Avenue holds meaning for her that she is a part of it. To know her, one must also come to know Shaftesbury Avenue on one’s own. But when we consider her youthful theory here alongside her feelings about walking in London in June, the narrative intimacy between her and Septimus, and her recognition of the old woman across the street at the novel’s end, Clarissa’s intimacy with Shaftesbury Avenue gains another dimension. She is part of Shaftesbury Avenue because she is part of the world, as it is. She is also a part of Peter, as he is a part of her. Septimus becomes a part of her, as does the old woman across the street. The omnibus scene drives home Woolf’s notion of the intimacy of strangers, an intimacy that has no social scripts and is always spontaneously felt.

Alone Together

In Mrs Dalloway, Richard Dalloway feels a thin “spider’s thread” of connection to his wife, and this thin strand presents a strong metaphor for the connection one feels to one’s friends when away from them (114). For Woolf this thread holds people together while allowing them to maintain privacy and solitude. The spider’s thread also hearkens back to George Eliot’s “web of affinities,” which I have associated with the intimacy matrix. Peter Walsh surely feels the tug of this gossamer filament when he acknowledges the great influence Mrs. Dalloway has had upon him, most intensely during their times apart. Dorothea feels a similar tug as she surveys the horizon and the working people in the fields at the end of Middlemarch. Mrs. Dalloway gives more of a voice to the little working people, the loudest voice being that of Septimus; still, Dalloway centrally focuses on a privileged woman who has the leisure to commune with her
memories in her boudoir high at the top of the house. And because of his illness, Septimus does not work; one hesitates to call convalescence "leisure," but it affords him time alone that other people of his class would not have. Redeeming this shortcoming is the cinematographic narrative technique, which emphasizes the continuous solitude of one’s inner life, the ever-present external world and its people, and the mostly unarticulated, all encompassing pattern, or web, which connects it all. We receive glimpses into the inner lives of common people, but there are no sustained representations of such people in solitude, with the possible exception of Miss Kilman. Her job is to spend time alone with Elizabeth Dalloway, and as Mrs. Dalloway’s enemy her perspective is vital.

From start to finish it clear that Mrs. Dalloway paradoxically loves to immerse herself in the social world while closely treasuring her right to unlimited solitude. Not only does she feel that “in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house” (7-8), but also that a great many people would intrude upon that license and independence, as she knows Peter Walsh would have had she married him (8), and like Sir William Bradshaw, who she suspects may have prodded the unfortunate Septimus Smith over the edge to suicide:

Suppose he [Septimus] had had that passion [of a poet or an artist], and had gone to Sir William Bradshaw, a great doctor yet to her obscurely evil, without sex or lust, extremely polite to women, but capable of some indescribable outrage—forcing your soul, that was it—if this young man had gone to him, and Sir William had impressed him, like that, with his power, might he not have then said (indeed she felt it now), Life is made intolerable; they make life intolerable, men like that. (185)
Mrs. Dalloway’s gift is to sense the core of people upon meeting them, and her sense of Bradshaw’s sinister agenda of oppressing the souls of his patients grips her intensely. She assumes his patients must be able to feel it too, especially if they are sensitive, as we know Septimus was. Bradshaw’s oppression extends beyond the typical entitlement of men for intimate attention; Mrs. Dalloway senses perverse power in him. Indeed, his internal monologue recounting his forcing of patients to gain a better sense of proportion reveals his capacity to dispassionately inflict psychic pain on a patient, on Septimus. Bradshaw and Septimus present an extremely negative kind of intimacy, similar perhaps to the intimacy of torture but lacking the component of physical touch. Their relationship also resonates with the passage from “Reminiscences” in which Woolf describes Leslie Stephen’s attempt to force the affect of his daughters. Bradshaw touches Septimus’ psyche, perhaps even his soul, and Mrs. Dalloway’s reaction stands in for Woolf’s own position on the oppressive imposition of such unequal intimacies.

At the novel’s end, Mrs. Dalloway vividly, viscerally, experiences the intimacy of strangers, far more strongly than she did as she walked through London feeling herself a part of the people there. She is shaken into an intense moment of spontaneous intimacy when Lady Bradshaw mentions death at her party, and Mrs. Dalloway, without explanation, darts into another room:

Perhaps there was somebody there. But there was nobody. [...] The party’s splendour fell to the floor, so strange it was to come in alone in her finery.

What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party? A young man had killed himself. And they talked of it at her party—the Bradshaws, talked of death. He had killed himself—but how? Always her body went through it first, when she was told, suddenly, of an accident; her dress flamed, her body burnt.
He had thrown himself from a window. Up had flashed the ground; through him, blundering, bruising, went the rusty spikes. There he lay with a thud, thud, thud in his brain, and then a suffocation of blackness. (185)

Mrs. Dalloway drops all the ornate social scripting she has worked hard to erect when Lady Bradshaw breaches decorum and mentions suicide. The hostess says nothing, but turns, enters an empty room, and drops the party from her as she would a heavy wrap, “The party’s splendour fell to the floor” (185). She feels his death first before she begins to question it, feels the rusty spikes impale the body. She is alone in a side room, upset, and in this moment, as it wrenches away from the choreographed intimacy of the party, Mrs. Dalloway experiences intense, spontaneous intimacy with both her awareness of Septimus’s life and death, and with the broad pattern of existence that connects them.

Women Together

Before Mrs. Dalloway returns to the party, just before the novel ends, she spies the old woman who lives across the street making ready for bed; this one-sided intimate moment underscores the novel’s idea of the intimacy of strangers, and it reminds Mrs. Dalloway of her feelings earlier in the day, before Peter came, when she thought of Sally Seton as she changed clothes in her attic room. In this way, the narrative ties this moment of watching someone external to one of the novel’s most intense representations of the inner life.

Mrs. Dalloway would rather read than sleep with her husband, yet she is not at peace with her preference, feeling she lacks something the world considers vital: “It was something central which permeated; something warm which broke up surfaces and rippled the cold contact of man and woman, or of women together. For that she could dimly perceive” (32). By and large, Mrs. Dalloway is not particularly interested in passionately romantic or physical
intimacy. She particularly is uninterested in sexual intimacy with men. As she explores her memories and associations alone in her room, Mrs. Dalloway re-experiences how she felt the “central [thing] which permeated” warmly and “broke up surfaces and rippled” only dimly, and only when talking intimately with other women, sharing confessions and advice (32). What little sexual pleasure Mrs. Dalloway feels she certainly feels with great intensity, as it is represented as a momentary permeation spreading, blushing, orgasmically, “rushed to the farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture” (32). This momentary description, coupled with Mrs. Dalloway’s memory of Sally Seton kissing her at Bourton, offers dramatic, intense, suffusive pleasure, jouissance.

Woolf makes her point of view on women’s relationships with each other, and the position of these relationships in the dominant consciousness, very clear in her non-fiction and in the novel Orlando: according to dominant culture, women do not have relationships with each other at all. Before she dare speak the lines, “Chloe liked Olivia...” in A Room of One’s Own, Woolf begs for assurances: “I am sorry to break off so abruptly. Are there no men present?” (82).71 In Orlando, the scene wherein the hero/ine makes love to a sitting room full of prostitutes is written over by the “biographer” with male denials:

“It is well known,” says Mr. S.W., “that when they lack the stimulus of the other sex, women can find nothing to say to each other. When they are alone, they do not talk; they scratch.”

And since they cannot talk together and scratching cannot

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71 On lesbian desire in Woolf’s fiction and its relation to her own relationships with women, see Vicinus (236-7); Sproles; Barrett and Cramer’s Virginia Woolf: Lesbian Readings; Cervetti;
continue without interruption and it is well known (Mr. T. R. has proved it) “that women are incapable of any feeling of affection for their own sex and hold each other in the greatest aversion,” what can we suppose that women do when they seek out each other’s society? (Orlando 219)

In addition to enjoying her own exaggeration of the culture’s willful blindness toward women’s relationships with each other, Woolf’s representations of female intimacies offer a sense of liberty in the shadows, which contrasts in tone with her ironic critiques of dominant male ignorance. Mrs. Dalloway explores different aspects of intimacies among women. Woolf’s representations of lesbian intimacies are less circumscribed than intimacies between men, or men and women. Representations of intimacies in various gender configurations, include spontaneous intimacy that accesses the reality behind appearances, jouissance; however, representations of lesbian intimacies do so much more frequently. These representations of intimacy are more intensely rendered, evoking love, hatred, pleasure, and terror.

From her later-life perspective, Mrs. Dalloway ponders her feeling for Sally, its “purity” and “integrity” “which could only exist between women, between women just grown up” (34). Clarissa and Sally’s friendship was mischievous and playful, springing “from a sense of being in league together” against “something that was bound to part them,” namely growing up, becoming wives and mothers, and focusing their emotional energies upon husbands and children never other women (34). The relationship for Clarissa was both a staunch comradeship against the “catastrophe” of marriage and an

72 I use the phrase “lesbian desire” in the sense of Adrienne Rich’s lesbian continuum; representations of women characters thinking about and feeling for other women characters without the intervention of male characters. Chloe likes Olivia, and they work together, and therefore have thoughts about each other into which no husband, brother, or son enters; their intimacy is a kind of lesbian intimacy, as scholars like Barrett and Cramer show. Mrs. Dalloway likes to be with women, once was in love with Sally Seton, and intensely both loves and hates her daughter’s tutor, Miss Kilman; all of these are lesbian intimacies.
“overpowering” connection, rich with desire that would cause Clarissa to spontaneously call out, “standing in her bedroom at the top of the house holding the hot water bottle in her hands […], ‘She is beneath this roof! … She is beneath this roof!’ ” (34). Clarissa and Sally’s intense friendship reaches its greatest intensity when Sally impulsively kisses Clarissa on the mouth: “The whole world might have turned upside down!” (35). Indeed, in this expression of lesbian desire, the world momentarily does turn upside down; Clarissa receives a momentary jolt of intense satisfaction, “And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it – a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling!” (35-36). The religious feeling is a momentary access of Woolf’s conception of the deeper reality, spontaneously achieved. But then it is over. As Peter Walsh interrupts their intimate reverie, the blaze is put out by the imperatives of the social world. Women must pay attention to men, they must be courted, they must perform the numerous scripted intimacies of heterosexuality: “It was like running one’s face against a granite wall in the darkness! It was shocking; it was horrible!” (36).

Mrs. Dalloway’s feelings for Sally Seton are well in the past, but Dolores Kilman is very much a present part of her life, and Mrs. Dalloway’s feelings for her cut deeper than any she has had for any other woman. To nudge herself out of ennui as she hosts her party, Mrs. Dalloway thinks of Miss Kilman:

And suddenly as she saw the Prime Minister go down the stairs, the gilt rim of the Sir Joshua picture of the little girl with a muff brought back Kilman with a rush; Kilman her enemy. That was satisfying; that was real. Ah, how she hated her—hot,
hypocritical, corrupt; with all that power; Elizabeth’s seducer; the woman who had crept in to steal and defile (Richard would say, What nonsense!). She hated her: she loved her. It was enemies one wanted, not friends [...] (175-6)

Mrs. Dalloway recognizes that her intense hatred “had gathered in to itself a great deal that was not Miss Kilman; had become one of those specters with which one battles in the night; one of those spectres who stand astride us and suck up half our life-blood, dominators and tyrants” (11). Her hatred “stand[s] astride” her like an incubus, draining her and “rasp[ing] her”;
this is the complex hatred of the abject. Miss Kilman is not abject, but Mrs. Dalloway feels her own abjection when she sees Miss Kilman, and senses as much: “for no doubt with another throw of the dice, had the black been uppermost and not the white, she would have loved Miss Kilman! But not in this world. No” (11). The love of women is surely part of what Mrs. Dalloway despises in Miss Kilman; she “had a scruple picked up Heaven knows where, or, as she felt sent by Nature (who is invariably wise); yet she could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of a woman” (32). Miss Kilman lacks charm, loves her daughter (who likes Miss Kilman back), and refuses to play by any of the social rules that Mrs. Dalloway navigates herself with such aplomb. Miss Kilman personifies Mrs. Dalloway’s lesbian desire, and therefore Mrs. Dalloway sets Miss Kilman up as an enemy to fight. Her feelings for Miss Kilman are more intense than those she once had for Sally Seton, and they “had power to make her feel scraped, hurt in her spine; gave her physical pain, and made all pleasure in beauty, in friendship, in being well, in being loved and making her home delightful rock, quiver, and bend as if indeed there were a monster grubbing at the roots, as if the whole panoply of content were nothing but self love! this hatred!” (12). Miss Kilman not only represents lesbian desire, but also the power of lesbian desire, as an invisible, impossible desire, to disrupt that which Mrs. Dalloway employs to
define herself. Miss Kilman evokes Mrs. Dalloway’s sense of abjection, and she therefore uses Miss Kilman as the dispensary for her own abjection. As she grapples with these feelings in the London streets, the super ego, the Law, her social scripts kick in, “Nonsense, nonsense! she cried to herself, pushing through the swing doors of Mulberry’s the florists.” (11-2) Still, as we see in the passage at the party, Mrs. Dalloway is grateful to Miss Kilman for the deep intimacy she provides.

To Miss Kilman, Mrs. Dalloway’s “small pink face, her delicate body, her air of freshness and fashion” convey foolishness, vanity, and ignorance: “You who have known neither sorrow nor pleasure. Who have trifled your life away! […] If she could have felled her it would have eased her” (125). Miss Kilman’s perspective in the narrative indicts Mrs. Dalloway’s privilege and reminds us how much money, youth, beauty, and Englishness can affect the intimacies one feels, the love one has access to: “She could not help being ugly; she could not afford to buy pretty clothes” (125). Youth and beauty torment Miss Kilman, as well as inspire her to deeply love her pupil, Elizabeth Dalloway. Elizabeth respects Miss Kilman as a strong woman and capable teacher, but Miss Kilman’s deep regard for her makes Elizabeth uncomfortable. As Elizabeth makes her exit from their shared tea, Miss Kilman is devastated: “She was about to split asunder, she felt. The agony was so terrific. If she could grasp her, if she could clasp her, if she could make her hers absolutely and forever and then die; that was all she wanted. […] to see Elizabeth turning against her; to be felt repulsive even by her – it was too much; she could not stand it” (132). To Miss Kilman, her loss of Elizabeth, and with her also the loss of youth and beauty, is not just her own loss, but Mrs. Dalloway’s victory (132-133). Yet a successful intimate

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73 This is an instance of what Lee Edelman would call the queer as the death drive of the dominant symbolic order. Mrs. Dalloway cannot help but thrust her sense of abjection upon what she perceives to be the queer body of Miss Kilman.
pairing of two women who care tremendously for each other would perhaps also have been a victory for Mrs. Dalloway, had the dice landed differently.

Mrs. Dalloway centers in the city of London, and upon the eponymous character, and through cinematographic narrative movement and representations of inner lives, illustrates the intimacy of strangers, and the ever-present “real thing behind appearances” to which all people are connected. The Waves also partially takes place in London, but it centers on Elvedon, the six friends’ childhood home, which crops up repeatedly in each friend’s evocation of shared memories. Elvedon travels with the friends as they disperse across the map, first in gendered clumps to primary school, then to University (Bernard and Neville), society (Jinny and the reluctant Rhoda), the professions (Louis), and domesticity (Susan, who reigns supreme at her farm, raising her children. In her case, domesticity is thoroughly empowered).
The Paradox of Love

The Waves argues that common experiences intimately bind people together; the narrative framing of the friends’ stories to the natural world in its italicized prologues to each section extends this intimacy to Woolf’s “real thing behind appearances.” That larger pattern enables the six friends to feel connected despite their dispersal as they grow up. The memories join them specifically to Elvedon and to each other, but the “real thing behind appearances” is what enables this kind of intimacy at a distance at all. The Waves focuses on the intimacy of friends, not strangers like Mrs. Dalloway does, but it also underscores the intimacy inherent to existence.

74 Inspired by COMMA’s “Mapping Mrs. Dalloway,” Figure 3 was created by Thorndike-Breeze using Google Maps and photo-editing software. Note there are two locations for Elvedon: In Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life Julia Briggs points out that Woolf and her sister Vanessa Bell stayed at a cottage called Elvedon in the woods near Thetford, Suffolk. I moved the location to a nearby coast, at random, because the sound of the sea is so important to the narrative of The Waves.
Much of Virginia Woolf’s diary contemplates friendship and solitude, and on January 22, 1922, Woolf began to theorize a view of how long friendships are sustained:

Suppose I visualise them [her friends] as a group of marbles with myself in the midst?—& now one drawing near, & then another rolling off into a corner. [...] 

The machinery for seeing friends is too primitive: one should be able to see them by telephone—ring up, & be in the same room. Only there is loneliness to be considered too—this exacting brain—this spirit which won’t [sic] entirely accommodate itself to company. One person one must have, like air to breathe; but -- as for the rest? (157)

Here we see Woolf contemplating the tension between solitude and fellowship that pervades her work. As her friends, like marbles, roll closer to her, or further away, they maintain a connection, and though time passes, though she would draw inward for the sake of her “exacting brain,” those thin strands continue to tug her mind toward her friends. 

The Waves is written from a mature perspective; Woolf is quite famous at the time of this novel’s writing, and must field demands for her attention continuously. The novel demonstrates how friendships mature, how friends inevitably must leave each other, exchanging the intimacy of constant companionship for intimacies of memory. The initial image of intimacy in the novel is one that expands away from the main site of connectivity, while remembering that site, and maintaining its connection to it over time and

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This diary entry supports the vision in Mrs Dalloway of the richness of intimacy in separation from one’s friends. Alas, today this diary passage instantly brings social network sites, instant messaging, and video chat to mind. The Waves makes very persuasive arguments about the power of memory to infuse individuals with an affectively rich sense of intimacy. Social networking, on the other hand, seems emotionally deadening by contrast. This diary passages opens questions about the role of social networking in our contemporary cultivations of selfhood and intimacy.
through numerous and tumultuous experiences. The waves that begin to form in
the first paragraphs of the novel correspond to the represented definitions
of consciousness of each of the six friends.\textsuperscript{76} Susan, Louis, Bernard, Rhoda,
Jinny, and Neville each narrate what they see, hear, and feel, marking these
sensations with words, creating together the narrative of their lives, which
will act as an anchor for each in adulthood. This first section of the novel
presents a continuous, polyphonic conversation, and as it unfolds, we cannot
be certain whether or not these declarations are made aloud or silently.
Indeed, as the friends age, these soliloquies could be spoken aloud or
silently. Friendship in The Waves begins as tightly integrated and physically
intimate, and ignorant of the wider social world outside of Elvedon and its
garden. The early intimacy of the novel closely resembles the intimacy of
mother and child, even babies together in the same womb. Elvedon and the
garden, like the garden of Eden, represent the innocence and idealism of
childhood; these six friends remain in each other’s company, and experience
every discovery together.

This womblike experience stays with each of the friends, contributing
to their otherwise quite disparate self-definitions. When reunited with his
five childhood friends at Hampton Court, Neville says:

“We are in that passive and exhausted frame of mind when we only
wish to rejoin the body of our mother from whom we have been
severed. All else is distasteful, forced and fatiguing. [...] And
sadness tinges our content, that we should have left you, torn
the fabric; yielded to the desire to press out, alone, some
bitterer, some blacker juice, which was sweet too.” (233)

The group of friends and their idyllic childhood together works like “the
body of [their] mother.” This passage describes the great ease inherent to

\textsuperscript{76} On the ways in which the friends’ language represents both individual consciousness
and connectedness to a group, see Hild (69).
intimacies rooted in such close familial proximity. These friends all come from different parents, but Neville seems to say that they really gave birth to each other, through their early influential physical intimacy. Through the necessity of self-definition mandated by the social world, each friend must tear him or herself away, and taste the black, bitter-sweet juice of individual identity and physical maturity. Evocative of the pleasure and pain of jouissance, this passage gestures toward the deep ambivalence of intimacies of all kinds.

The intimacy of the garden disseminates as it presses against the culture’s dominant paradigms of appropriate intimacy, such as the Hellenistic homosocial privilege of the university, the heterosexual imperative of marriage, or the expectation that women will naturally become nurturing wives, mothers, and sisters. By the end of the novel, as Bernard walks along the streets of London, brandishing his long walking-stick and contemplating his great literary inheritance, he realizes that his embodiment of the “literary man” has not been himself, but rather only a guise he assumes as he plays by the rules of society. In his final monologue, Bernard wonders if he is instead Jinny, Neville, Louis, Rhoda, and Susan—all of them, not separate. The persistent framing of the six friends’ soliloquies by the movements of the day and the crashing of the waves reaffirms the novel’s argument that these six characters are parts of one whole, connected to Woolf’s “real thing behind appearances,” the sea that embodies each passing wave.

Jouissance pervades the intimacy of this group of friends. Louis describes to Rhoda the dynamic confluence of energies that their group of friends evokes when together: "Pain and jealousy, envy and desire, and something deeper than they are, stronger than love and more subterranean. The voice of action speaks" (142). Louis sees their group friendship as a fierce and passionate creature, flooded with such intense affect and intimacy that the individuals temporarily merge: "They speak now without troubling to
finish their sentences. They talk a little language such as lovers use. An imperious brute possesses them. The nerves thrill their thighs. Their hearts pound and churn in their sides" (143).

This intensity of intimacy irritates the friends as much as it soothes them, because *jouissance* is frightening. The reunion scenes in the novel, even Percival’s farewell party, demonstrate the reliance each character has upon his or her early experiences in the garden by the sea for each of their dominant senses of themselves. Bernard needs others to feel properly alive; Neville needs his friends to test himself and his ideas; Louis claims to be “very vain, very confident” and enjoys evoking female sympathy, starving himself so they will admonish him to eat. While Louis feels a pull toward his friends, he hates them because “it is for them that I do these antics, smoothing my hair, concealing my accent” (127). Louis' experience with his friends pulses with pleasure and shame, causing him to rear up and feel grandiose: “I am fiercer and stronger than you are” (128). These revelations are painful to various degrees, arousing rivalry, and sometimes hate, because the richness of this group’s intimacy threatens to undo each member’s self-definition. Jinny says, “But our hatred is almost indistinguishable from our love” (138). Neville says, “There is always somebody, when we come together, and the edges of meeting are still sharp, who refuses to be submerged; whose identity therefore one wishes to make crouch beneath one's own. For me now, it is Susan” (212). Susan says, “Now we have clashed our antlers. This is the necessary prelude; the salute of old friends” (215).

Though the six friends in *The Waves* grow apart from one another, they remain connected through their continual contemplation of the death under the apple trees, which Neville first describes, and the maid kissing the groom among the laundry, which Susan first describes. These primal memories
resurface in each friend’s narrative, pulling their separate streams of thought back to the garden, like waves flowing back into the sea.

Heroes

In Britain, especially at the time of Woolf’s writing, the social networks and bosom friends acquired by upper and upper middle class boys and young men were (and remain) greatly valued for their power to influence governance of home and Empire. Only women of title and power can partake in such political friendships, and even then, as with Lady Bruton in Mrs. Dalloway, men of stature are required in order to funnel the woman’s political intention into the larger world. Mrs. Dalloway does not overtly take on the homosocial friendship ideal as a mechanism of politics, though it does complicate intimate male friendship through its representation of Septimus’ abjection, which is chiefly driven by the trauma of war combined with his intense guilt about what he sees as his perverse feelings about his lost friend, Evans. The Waves, however, offers a personification of imperial male supremacy in Percival, the mutual friend of the six speakers, who incorporates into the chain of memories that create the intimate link for the group. Named for the knight of the round table chosen by God as the purest embodiment of goodness, Percival embodies the dominant contemporary ideal of privileged Edwardian masculinity, and his ignominious death, falling from his horse during a routine ride, demonstrates the tenuousness and hypocrisy of that manly ideal, and indeed hierarchical, gendered social scripts like the sanctity of upper class schoolboy friendships.

The six speakers of the novel gather around Percival to see him off to India:

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77 On the ideal of male friendship’s role in Empire, see Dellamora.

78 As in Mrs. Dalloway’s feelings about Miss Kilman, Septimus’ sense that his feelings for Evans were perverse, or queer, causes him to suffer an onslaught of abjection; this is another instance of Edelman’s queer as death drive.
“Now,” said Neville, “my tree flowers. My heart rises. All oppression is relieved. All impediment is removed. The reign of chaos is over. He has imposed order. [...]"

“Here is Percival,” said Bernard, “smoothing his hair, not from vanity (he does not look in the glass), but to propitiate the god of decency. He is conventional; he is a hero. The little boys trooped after him across the playing-fields. They blew their noses as he blew his nose, but unsuccessfully, for he is Percival. [...] He is a hero.” (122-3)

Neville and Bernard, schoolmates with Percival since the initial dispersal of the six, are the only friends who actually idolize or desire Percival, Neville with more conscious eroticism than Bernard. Rhoda feels intensely for Percival at intervals, though the majority of her thoughts remain concerned with the definition of herself, contrasted with a world she despises. Rhoda needs Percival to function for her as the figure of what is not-her. Outwardly, gathered around Percival at the table, the friends appear to take part in proper social scripts of intimacy but at a more intimate level, in their thoughts, the friends demonstrate the contingency and tension of those modes. Bernard and Neville’s exultation of “the hero” in Percival, as well as their mutual need to position themselves within the “great tradition” of empire and masculine achievement, demonstrates barriers to intimacy implicit within Britain’s dominant paradigms of friendship, education, socialization, and professionalization.

Bernard believes that together they create a flower with seven petals, organically united; Bernard is wrong. The farewell dinner scene is long and complex, not clearly organized in any way other than their mutually linked childhoods, as my earlier discussion of this scene’s demonstration of the
group’s intimate union shows. Bernard’s perspective on the dinner demonstrates the conventional social scripting inherent to this reunion: the handsomest, most dashing, strongest, and bravest among them is going off to secure India for the Empire. But the intimate impact of being with this group creates an affective stew bubbling beneath the surface of this externally lovely, well-organized homage to the imperial man of action. And since Percival never speaks, whatever intimate impact the group of six friends has upon him remains unknown. Entering the restaurant one by one, watching each new comer as he or she arrives, each friend thinks about each of the others in a much more sustained way than in other parts of the novel. Once Percival arrives, the soliloquies continue to look inward and outward at intervals, and the effect is cacophonous.

In her diary Woolf calls The Waves an autobiography, a play-poem, and a mosaic, not a novel (Writer’s Diary 140, 153, Briggs 253). Therefore, we can imagine the soliloquies of each of the six friends being performed in a few different ways: the more conventionally novelistic scene, in which the friends outwardly have normal, appropriate dinner conversation and their soliloquies take place in internal monologue; less conventionally, the characters speak their soliloquies in conversational tone, which can account for the occasional appearance of one friend responding to another’s soliloquy with his or her own; and then, in the style of experimental drama, wherein each character speaks his or her lines to the fourth wall while the rest of the party remains a tableau in the background. All of these different ways of reading the dinner scene layer the inner life over the social scene. The social scene is tangled among the continuous exchange of speeches, which hinders the reader from viewing the lovely flower that Bernard sees, with his writer’s tendency to create pleasing tableaux. Bernard scripts the scene for us and gives it a recognizable structure; but the actual narrative of the novel refuses Bernard’s attempt to sum up this good-bye dinner as a
celebration of imperial heroism, refusing conventional scripts and replacing them with new scripts. Woolf’s narrative communicates a far richer intimate experience through the minds of each of the six friends than the socially scripted intimate scene.

Private, though often conventionally scripted intimacies take place at school and university, and the longest one-on-one conversation to take place in the novel occurs between Bernard and Neville at Cambridge. This and Bernard’s closing monologue work together to skew attention toward the male half of the characters, and toward economically privileged Neville and Bernard most specifically. The female soliloquies remain more inscrutable because the women do not obviously enter into conversation directly with anyone, as Bernard and Neville do at Cambridge. As Gillian Beer makes clear, *The Waves* offers incredibly rich renderings of women’s sexuality and their pleasure in their bodies. These are moments of solitary intimacy; the lack of interpersonal conversation among the women casts a shadow over their intimate experience, whereas the male experience is more conventionally legible.

**Mirror on the Stairs**

Rhoda, Susan, and Jinny’s gendered scripts of friendship center upon their senses of self in contrast to others, and are enacted daily as they walk to and from lessons past the mirror on the stairs. There is no cultural fantasy of the great power for good within intimate female friendships, however. The novel’s overarching argument that the six friends, three boys and three girls, are parts of a larger whole, like waves in the sea, intimately binds all the characters, even though the socially enforced imperative of gender-separatist education cuts them off from each other. Indeed, once at school, the three girls seem almost completely concerned with only themselves, occasionally despising each other. But as the moments before the mirror show, they are dependent upon each other.
Simply being in the physical presence of her friends gives Rhoda succor and a certain amount of calm in her regular turmoil, but the mirror on the stairs jars that solace as it demands that Rhoda recognize herself. Pretending to be just like Susan or Jinny, doing what they do, offers some peace, though she never feels herself settle into a unified person: “But since I wish above all things to have lodgement, I pretend, as I go upstairs lagging behind Jinny and Susan, to have an end in view” (131). The rules of social life fail to make sense for Rhoda, and her continual imaginary narrative leaves her exposed to the terrors of *jouissance*. Rhoda fears the mirror, and though she can recognize Susan in it, she cannot recognize herself. She doesn’t understand herself, or life around her, as being whole. There is no continuity for her, “One moment does not lead to another” (130).

As a child Rhoda would pretend her way through daily rituals, searching for a place to anchor: “But I will stretch my toes so that they touch the rail at the end of the bed; I will assure myself, touching the rail, of something hard” (27). The closest Rhoda comes to comfort is at bed time, where “now I spread my body on this frail mattress and hang suspended. I am above the earth now. I am no longer upright, to be knocked against and damaged” (27).

In the day, when she cannot privately assure herself that the world is solid, Rhoda relies on Susan’s and Jinny’s behaviors to guide her steps through the social scripts that seem so unreal to her.

As a young girl, Rhoda says: “That is my face, [...] in the looking glass behind Susan’s shoulder – that face is my face. But I will duck behind her to hide it, for I am not here. I have no face” (43). Rhoda is most comfortable in her imaginary guise, playing among her fantasies, and the mirror demands that Rhoda recognize her distinct reality and limitations. Still, Rhoda determines to continue to try to pretend to be like Susan, Jinny, and the other schoolgirls, in order to feel some kind of anchorage, though this attempt continually fails and Rhoda is continually singled out and
humiliated: "Both [Susan and Jinny] despise me for copying what they do; but Susan sometimes teaches me, for instance, how to tie a bow, while Jinny has her own knowledge but keeps it to herself" (43). At the mirror, and while the school-girls change clothes together, Rhoda contemplates her relationships, or the lack of them; her reflection reminds her of her actual face: "Therefore I hate looking-glasses which show me my real face. Alone, I often fall down into nothingness. I must push my foot stealthily lest I should fall off the edge of the world into nothingness. \(^7^9\) I have to bang my hand against some hard door to call myself back to my body" (44).

Jinny loves the large mirror, in which she can see her whole body together, but hates the one on the stairs, in which she can only see her face. The difference in perspective each mirror shows Jinny also shows her how she stands in comparison to Susan and Rhoda. In the larger mirror, Jinny feels superior to the other two, more distinct, but in the smaller mirror Jinny feels odd and overshadowed by Susan and Rhoda:

"It shows our heads only; it cuts off our heads. And my lips are too wide, and my eyes are too close together; I show my gums too much when I laugh. Susan’s head, with its fell look, with its grass-green eyes which poets will love, Bernard said, because they fall upon close white stitching, put mine out; even Rhoda’s face mooning, vacant, is completed, like those white petals she used to swim in her bowl." (42)

In the large mirror, further up the stairs, Jinny sees herself in her full glory, whole “for even in this serge frock they are one, my body and my head” (42). Tipping her head, Jinny watches herself ripple “all down my narrow body; even my thin legs ripple like a stalk in the wind. I flicker between the set face of Susan and Rhoda’s vagueness” (42). Seeing her full animation

\(^7^9\) On Rhoda and lesbian desire in *The Waves* see Barrett and Cramer.
in contrast to Susan and Rhoda’s apparent passivity reassures and
reinvigorates Jinny, in a manner not unlike Gwendolen Harleth enlivened by
her reflection in George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda*.

The mirror on the stairs enacts stereotypical female competition, but
of course operates far more deeply than that; recognition through the mirror
evokes numerous intense feelings in the viewers. Only Susan seems
uninterested in the mirror on the stairs, but we know she looks into it
because it is over Susan’s shoulder that Rhoda glimpses her own face. Walking
up the stairs, past the mirror, to change for tennis, Susan reflects upon her
home, imagining bucolic pleasure: “All this I see, I always see, as I pass
the looking-glass on the landing, with Jinny in front and Rhoda lagging
behind” (41). Not directly contemplating her reflection or comparing it to
Rhoda’s or Jinny’s, still Susan compares herself and judges. Darkly, Susan
says:

> “Jinny always dances in the hall on the ugly, the encaustic
tiles; she turns cartwheels in the playground; she picks some
flower forbiddenly, and sticks it behind her ear so that Miss
Perry’s dark eyes smoulder with admiration, for Jinny, not me.
Miss Perry loves Jinny; and I could have loved her, but now love
no one, except my father, my doves and the squirrel whom I left
in the cage at home for the boy to look after.” (41)

Susan bitterly rejects her school, her teacher, and her friend and fixates
upon her desire for her home, her family, and the wild creatures she cares
for seemingly because Jinny has won admiration and she has not. Susan could
have loved “her,” ambiguously either Jinny or Miss Perry, or both, but
because they do not appear to love her, Susan rejects them, as emotionally
decisive (and ambivalent) as she has been since she was a very small child:

> “‘I love,’ said Susan ‘and I hate’” (15).
At school, Susan’s and Jinny’s soliloquies emphasize their difference from the others and from each other, whereas Rhoda’s emphasizes her inherent strangeness, her refusal to define herself, and her wish to be given shape primarily by her friends. Being in their company allows Rhoda to feel anchored; her interpellation by her friends has no effect upon her sense of self as it does the others in the group.

Using Our Friends

Throughout the novel, it is made clear that without "the stimulus of other people" Bernard feels his stories running thin: "Everything becomes impervious. I cease to invent" (80). Neville, however, is self-sufficient except in his desire for someone to love: "I see it all, I feel it all. I am inspired. My eyes fill with tears. Yet even as I feel this, I lash my frenzy higher and higher. It foams. It becomes artificial, insincere" (82). Neville feels alive in solitude, feeling that he accesses the beauty beneath the artifice, but his "frenzy" needs another man to find satisfaction. Neville's overwhelming sexual desire finally drives him to talk to another person, though without the desire he could keep his own council:

"Something now leaves me; something goes from me to meet that figure who is coming, and assures me I know him before I see who it is. How curiously one is changed by the addition, even at a distance, of a friend. How useful an office one's friends perform when they recall us. Yet how painful to be recalled, to be mitigated, to have one's self adulterated, mixed up, become part of another. As he approaches I become not myself but Neville, mixed with somebody--with whom?--with Bernard? Yes, it is Bernard, and it is to Bernard that I shall put the question, Who am I?" (82-3)
Neville’s speech here expresses anxiety and the frustrating impossibility of satisfaction. He seems befuddled by his need of recognition from a friend in addition to his need for sexual satisfaction. The passage anticipates Althusser’s notion of the societal interpellation of the subject. As he feels himself recognized by Bernard, and as he recognizes Bernard in turn, Neville undergoes a dizzying shift in his sense of who he is. Neville is being remade in Bernard’s recognition of him as Neville himself remakes Bernard. The vertigo he feels presses the paradoxical, apparently unanswerable question: “Who am I?” Part of the painful ambivalence of intimacy is the unsettling effect other minds have upon our self-definition.

The give and take inherent in this intimate creation of one’s friends continuously settles and disrupts. In search of recognition and resolution Neville shows Bernard a poem he has written that represents the secret of his homosexuality, and his frustration. Bernard understands the meaning of Neville’s poem, and feels the special weight of this intimate exchange, but Bernard immediately lyricizes and sentimentalizes the moment, situating it within the great tradition of homosocial love and comradeship, echoing Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*, and using it to aggrandize himself as a poet, rather than to offer succor to his friend:

“O friendship, I too will press flowers between the pages of Shakespeare's sonnets!

O friendship, how piercing are your darts--there, there, again there. He looked at me, turning to face me; he gave me his poem. All mists curl off the roof of my being. That confidence I shall keep to my dying day.” (88-9)

This performance tremendously disappoints Neville, who abandons Bernard to his sensitive musings. The abrupt departure startles Bernard into more earnest contemplation of the broken intimacy with Neville; here Neville’s problem affects Bernard’s perception of himself, and he is simultaneously
reminded that he is more than what Neville sees: "For I am more selves than Neville thinks. We are not simple as our friends would have us to meet their needs. Yet love is simple" (89). But Bernard does not seem to understand that he is more than he himself can understand as well. This exchange is ambivalent indeed; it demonstrates the psychically nauseating experience of interpellation, or self-definition through a complex system of recognition.

With the return of Bernard’s so-called “intimates,” Bernard begins to forget and to cover over the alteration Neville’s need has left upon him. He instead views the impact as “the rent in my defenses that Neville made with his astonishing fine rapier,” and manages to repair it with his perception of his mates’ recognition of him as one who more seamlessly fits into Cantabridgian scripts (90). Forgetting that Neville could alter Bernard, he still notes, parenthetically and very much to himself, “(We use our friends to measure our own stature)” (90). The scope of Bernard’s vision, he consoles himself, exceeds Neville’s, regardless of the degree to which Neville’s revelatory poem may have impacted him. With his mates, Bernard can imagine that he remains himself and the same. He uses them to increase his stature. The culture of Cambridge offers Bernard a ready escape from a moment of spontaneous intimacy with Neville.

Virginia Woolf does not represent her ideal of spontaneous intimacy as an intimacy without bounds, nor does she represent spontaneous intimacy even as wholly pleasant. The dark side of jouissance is the abject, and when characters like Septimus or Rhoda feel themselves so intimately connected with that which lies behind appearances, they do not feel pleasure, they are afraid. But the intimacies, both conventional and ideally spontaneous, represented in these two novels underscore the variety and the ambivalence of intimacy.
References

Works Cited

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