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Introduction

THE TWENTIETH-CENTURY psychoanalyst W. R. Bion argues that “the only true thought is one that has never found an individual to ‘contain’ it.”¹ It cannot be contained by one person because, for Bion, thought is something that happens between two or more people—and so is feeling. In his strange, provocative, and often mystically inflected psychoanalytic writing, Bion uses the symbol “O” to designate the “truth” of any experience that transpires between two people: uncontainable and unknowable by either one of them alone, it resides somewhere between them, in the space where each person overflows into the other. In George Eliot’s novel *The Mill on the Floss*, written one hundred years before, the O of such self-exceeding contact is marked by vibrations: chords struck on the piano, erotic energy that charges the air between Maggie Tulliver and Stephen Guest, the “low voice” that seems to emanate from the pages of Maggie’s favorite book. Two things—two piano strings that sounded together make an octave, two voices harmonizing, two people in love, two people in dialogue in the psychoanalytic session, two writers speaking to each other across a century—resonate together in a way that brings out capacities of thought and feeling that neither could hold alone. *Novel Relations* begins from this insight to argue that we never read or write alone.

In Victorian studies, keeping pace with movements in contemporary critical thought, we say that we believe in relationality: in our profound interdependence with other people and their labor, in our inextricable connections to the natural world, in our merger with our technologies, and in our ongoing relations with our ancestors, who shape us and future generations. And yet I think these ideas are much easier to grasp intellectually than to really believe. Most of us continue to act, in our daily living and interacting and in our scholarship and daily institutional and pedagogical practice, from a place of deeply conditioned individualist assumption. We think we are reading and writing alone.²

Novel Relations tries for a deeper faith in relationality in the small but expansive sphere of novel reading. It shows how some aspects of our reading experience and critical practice might change if we actually believe in the forms of

relationality that novels propose and effect. In Victorian novel studies (itself the matrix for some of the most important methodological and theoretical interventions in literary studies in the last few decades),³ our work has to some extent resisted relationality—perhaps inevitably, and perhaps without our knowing. We have insisted on firm divides between characters, narrators, readers, and authors rather than theorizing their interrelation.⁴ We have for the most part confined Victorian novels, geographically and temporally, to the single historical context of their scenes of production. We have insisted that Victorian novels should be read only with one another or their direct predecessors, and not with twentieth- or twenty-first-century narratives from across the globe.⁵ And we have kept their impact to the printed page, not acknowledging how strongly novels—and novelistic form, in the particular argument of this book—shape both psyches and theories of the psyche, from the nineteenth century into the present day.

My book centers on four Victorian novels, two each by George Eliot and Thomas Hardy—two writers who have set the fundamental terms for contemporary critical conceptualizations of late nineteenth-century realism (Eliot and Hardy simultaneously insist on and problematize the notion of a steady reflection between representational and real worlds), domestic fiction (both writers at once emphasize and trouble the novel's reliance on the personal, the local, and romance, marriage, and family), and the psychological novel (both writers' works demonstrate an abiding interest in character and readerly interiority and in making overarching claims about social and psychic life).⁶ I am particularly interested in the practices of narration and characterization deployed by Eliot and Hardy, which I think are more fruitfully uneven and un-integrated than retrospective accounts that place these writers in a realist tradition have tended to imagine.⁷ *Novel Relations* reveals some of the ways in which the profound relationality of novel reading has been foreclosed and how we might open it back up for ourselves. My claim is that we have experienced this relationality even when we have not managed to reflect it in our literary criticism, scholarship, and novel theory. In an effort to draw out the relationality of these novels, I place them in conversation with a key theoretical discourse: British psychoanalysis, whose mid-twentieth-century theorists and practitioners developed “object relations” theory by building from the foundational writings of Sigmund Freud and Melanie Klein.⁸

Object Relations

The guiding insight of object relations psychoanalysis is that our psyches are built of internalized representations of other people—the objects of our love, need, desire, and affection, of our envy and our gratitude, of our hate, rage,

resentment, and ambivalence, and, always, the objects of our active fantasy.⁹ The world of social relations outside of us is reflected and mediated by a world of object relations within us, an “inner world” in which “every past or present relation either in thought or deed with any loved or hated person still exists and is still being carried on.”¹⁰ Joan Riviere’s formulation is striking in its reach: every single relation to another, past or present, real or imaginary, in thought or deed, with every single person, loved or hated, still exists and is actively being conducted inside of us. It is like when the sustain pedal of a piano has been depressed: inside the body, the dampers are lifted and each string goes on vibrating long after the key is released. Except that in the inner world, those strings never stop vibrating and their sounds never die out.

In the imagination of Riviere and other post-Kleinian theorists, the inner world is densely populated, and is so from the start: beginning from the internalization of representations of our earliest caregivers, object relations do not simply infiltrate the psyche, they shape it. For these thinkers, the subject is a record of its object relations. A key intervention of *Novel Relations* is to add fictional characters to that population count. In *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891), Hardy’s title character reflects that she is not “an existence, an experience, a passion, a structure of sensations” to anyone but herself (*T* 91). But I think she becomes “an existence” and “an experience” to us too. Any one of us who has read *Tess* has a relation to her (and to Hardy’s narrator) that is “still being carried on” in our psyches long after we have set aside the book.

Psychoanalysis has long been central to literary studies. And yet literary and cultural criticism has not kept pace with psychoanalysis itself, which displays a striking intellectual vitality in our present moment. While much existing psychoanalytic criticism relies exclusively on Freudian theory and its extensions in French thought (in the work of Jacques Lacan in particular, along with Julia Kristeva, Jean Laplanche, and André Green to a lesser extent), *Novel Relations* opens up an immensely generative archive for literary analysis by turning instead to post-Freudian British psychoanalysis. Specifically, I look to the generation of thinkers that came immediately after Melanie Klein and who developed, in several fascinating and sometimes conflicting directions, her abiding interest in object relations. Klein in turn reworked this strand of thought from Freud, drawing in particular from his work on mourning and melancholia and super-ego formations. The primary twentieth-century figures I engage are Donald W. Winnicott, Wilfred Bion, Michael Balint, Paula Heimann, Betty Joseph, and Masud Khan. And I look, too, to contemporary psychoanalysts and writers—especially Christopher Bollas, Thomas Ogden, Adam Phillips, Michael Eigen, Lucy LaFarge, and Edna O’Shaughnessy—who are bringing British object relations thought into the present day in eclectic and often surprisingly literary ways. Mid-century British theorists are beginning to gain visibility in

both popular culture and academic scholarship.¹¹ In literary studies, Mary Jacobus and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, two scholars I greatly admire and engage with throughout this book, have written especially compelling work on British object relations thinkers, contributing to their popularity and the accessibility of their ideas.¹² And yet there has been no extended study of the connections between Victorian fiction and object relations thought.¹³ *Novel Relations* sounds how deeply these connecting currents run. Object relations psychoanalysis allows us to read Victorian novels in new ways. And, just as crucially, it allows us to re-theorize how we read, in terms of both ordinary experience and literary critical practice. The intuition that founds this book includes a turn in the other direction as well: Victorian novels shape psyches and psychoanalytic theories in more interesting and thoroughgoing ways than we have previously understood.

The distinctive insights of British psychoanalysis, as they are taken up in this book, include the following:

- A picture of subjectivity as always and essentially relational
- The insight that it takes at least two people to think and to feel
- Belief in, and reliance on, the seemingly supernatural fact of unconscious communication
- Watching how group dynamics take on a (psychotic) life of their own
- Trust in the natural unfurling of maturational processes and the environments that make those unfurlings possible
- Respect for dependence and merger
- An emphasis on first objects
- Careful attention to the ongoing cycles of introjection and projection that make us who we are, and a focused elaboration of projective identification in particular
- Noticing how readily and unconsciously we enter into one another's psychic dramas and fantasies, which never stay contained in the inner world alone
- The understanding that interpersonal relations are enacted as much by atmosphere as by language
- Listening for tone of voice, and tone of feeling, in the consulting room
- Re-theorizing transference and countertransference dynamics
- An emphasis on affect over instinct, health over symptom, quiet moments of going-on-being over spectacular demonstrations of drive, and the primacy of objects in shaping our needs and desires (rather than merely satisfying them)
- A profound interest in describing the ineffable, the subtle, and the ordinary.

Relational Reading

A central claim of this book is that engaging with psychoanalytic theory beyond the usual suspects—Freud, Lacan, and Klein—engaged by literary and cultural criticism yields not only different readings of long-familiar novels, but also different *ways* of reading. Using the revisionary insights of British object relations thought means taking them seriously at the level of methodology as well as concept. Accordingly, *Novel Relations* is organized around “relational readings” that place Victorian novels and key works in object relations psychoanalysis side by side.¹⁴ My goal is not to “apply” psychoanalytic ideas to novels nor to make a one-way historical argument that proves that the novels had a direct impact on later psychoanalytic theory. Instead, I want to allow the novels and the psychoanalytic texts to mutually illuminate one another. Relational reading allows me to attend to both the theory in Victorian fiction (psychological, relational, sociopolitical, and affective) and the literary in psychoanalytic theory without reducing one to the other. The analysts that I focus on are skilled and compelling writers in their own right. And perhaps unsurprisingly, several of the present-day practitioners I cite and think with in the book double as writers—literary essayists or prolific authors of psychoanalytic articles—and are frequently invested in literary analysis. (For example, Adam Phillips is a popular essayist, Christopher Bollas received his PhD in English and wrote a dissertation on Melville, and Thomas Ogden has written a series of papers that perform explicitly literary readings of foundational psychoanalytic texts.)¹⁵ There is in fact a rich overlap between contemporary psychoanalytic writing and literary studies that merits further attention.

Relational reading requires deep immersion in both psychoanalytic and literary texts. And it requires a certain kind of belief or faith in relationality: that reading two texts together really does render something unprecedented and meaningful. To explain this, let me return to Bion’s concept of O, the powerful but ineffable reality of the in-the-moment meeting of two (or more) people. W. R. Bion (1897–1979), a central thinker in the British school, was born in colonial India to English parents and educated in England. He was a tank officer in World War I and military psychologist in World War II. He was also, briefly, the therapist of Samuel Beckett.¹⁶ Initially closely aligned with Klein, Bion later made major and far-reaching revisions to her theory. He is perhaps most famous for his work with groups and with psychotic patients. There, Bion argues that in any situation that includes two or more people, a “matrix of thought” evolves that is shared between the group members, but irreducible to any single subjectivity. *Novel Relations* argues that this picture of shared thought, affect, and psychic experience usefully illuminates the act of novel reading, with its own multiplicity of literary figures and subjectivities: reader, character, author, and

narrator, and the space that “vibrates,” as Eliot pictures it in *The Mill on the Floss*, around and between them.

The method of *Novel Relations* is to seek out something like the “O” of contact between Victorian novels and psychoanalytic texts. I argue that reading them together enlivens both, showing us what sings out for us in both the novel and the theory that we could not hear without bringing them into communication. My intention is to offer sustained literary readings, close and inquisitive, of both the fictional and theoretical texts I treat, and to experiment with methods for bringing the texts together. I hope my readings are both careful enough to stay faithful to the unique texture and specificity of each (rather than forcing the fictional and psychoanalytic texts to say or mean the same thing), and sensitive enough to capture the vibratory energy that, as Bion and Eliot insist, really does emanate from the striking together of two texts, like the prongs of a tuning fork set ringing.

Bion shares with the larger group of British psychoanalysts an abiding interest in reconceptualizing what takes place between two people in the psychoanalytic session and how it feels. Thinkers like Winnicott, Bion, Heimann, and Joseph form new ideas about the tasks of psychoanalysis and the mechanisms of psychic change. In particular, they update and refine standard conceptions of transference and countertransference dynamics, offering instead extended theories of projective identification, holding, containing, and moment-to-moment interpretation (all of which I explain in greater detail in this book’s pages). *Novel Relations* shows how these feelings and phenomena of shared experience are reproduced at the site of reading—and, indeed, may have originated there.

The relational readings in this book take time to unfold. My chapters are fairly long, especially chapter 2, which describes psychic and novelistic overflow along with a river’s flooding. And the order of the chapters is somewhat unconventional, in that the book does not move through the novels chronologically. Instead, I have arranged the chapters so that the book offers a systematic introduction (or, for readers already familiar with it, a deeper immersion) into British object relations thought, and into what I perceive to be its possibilities as and for literary theory, particularly studies of the novel. Each chapter introduces a new psychoanalytic thinker or concern, providing enough explication to make their ideas accessible to nonspecialists and enough quotation to make their particular writing styles come alive as well. Each chapter also treats a single novel with a similar degree of attention and granularity. Doing these things takes time and space but is essential to the project of this book. I am trying to evoke not only the content but also the *feel* of each side of the textual pairing: the author’s style, the text’s preoccupations, its form and textures. The chapters interweave

psychoanalytic material and the novel in question, letting the texts read each other, as it were. I am as interested in the process of staging these relations as I am in the result. I want the chapters to read somewhat essayistically, and to say and do things that exceed what any introduction could preview or chapter summary could recapitulate. I want to create what Bion calls “the O of the experience of reading” these chapters (*A&I* 28).

I have devised the pairings and constellations of novels and psychoanalytic theory by following intuitions about special fit: about the shared concerns—thematic and formal, intersubjective and literary—of the texts I bring together. *Tess* and Winnicott (chapter 1) are both concerned with how we learn to feel alone—that is to say, alone and sustained, rather than alone and persecuted, lost, adrift, untethered. *The Mill on the Floss* and Bion (chapter 2) both care about sympathy and render it as at once paramystical and real: as a kind of unconscious communication. *The Return of the Native* and Balint (chapter 3) both investigate how spaces are never simply themselves but instead are repeatedly figured through metaphor and allusion and atmospherically charged—with feeling, with racial politics, and with overlapping imperial geographies. *Middlemarch* and Joseph and Heimann (chapter 4) are concerned with how we fend off feelings of weariness in order to make the world, our closest relationships, and our long novels feel ardent, energized, and alive.

Mosses, Lichens, Touchstones

Before saying more about the book’s hoped-for contributions to Victorian, psychoanalytic, and novel studies, I want to offer a short example of the kind of relational reading that drives *Novel Relations*, highlighting from the start some of the book’s interests and methodologies. D. W. Winnicott once famously and provocatively argued that there is no such thing as a baby: “If you show me a baby you certainly show me also someone caring for a baby.”¹⁷ First objects are preeminently important for British School psychoanalysts, who focused on the role of mothers and other primary caregivers in unprecedented ways. They highlighted what they saw as underrecognized realities of human existence, especially the fundamental facts of early dependence and merger. Winnicott (1896–1971) was a pediatrician, a child psychoanalyst, a hospital worker, and a group-home consultant. These experiences put him into contact with thousands of babies, mothers, and families. In his paradigm-shifting reconceptualization of infancy, he argues that babies are merged with their mothers not only in the womb, but for many months after birth. Physical and psychological independence is not an existential baseline, but is instead slowly gained over time, making separation not a primary fact but rather a maturational achievement.

Repurposing Winnicott's phrase, I want to say: There is no such thing as a book. If you show me a book you certainly show me also someone reading that book—and, specifically, someone actively dreaming up and creating the book alongside the writer.¹⁸

In what is probably his best-known essay, "Transitional Objects and Transitional Phenomena," originally presented in 1951 and expanded over the next decades, Winnicott makes an argument for the value of "creative living"—for experience infused with a sense of vitality, of reality rather than futility, because it inhabits a "transitional" area between the subjective life of fantasy and the objective life of external reality. In retrospect it seems surprising that it hadn't been addressed, but Winnicott was the first theorist to recognize and make something of the fact that many children have a special object they interact with in their infancy and early childhood: a blanket, a doll, a stuffed animal that they carry around with them and to which they grow extremely attached. Winnicott notices that these so-called transitional objects are animated with a special kind of life for the child, emanating from the glint of a marble eye or the warmth of cotton batting. This real physical object is dreamed into new vitality and animated existence by the child's capacity for fantasy. It provides comfort not only because it is soft and soothing, but because it gives the child a break from the growing need to separate out fantasy and reality, subjective and objective perception, "me" from "not-me." The transitional object sits somewhere just between these categories, and even adults agree not to throw this into question for the child: Winnicott writes that it is a "matter of agreement" between the parent and the child that the parent will never ask, "did you find this object in the external world, or did you dream it up yourself?"¹⁹ Transitional objects are significant for Winnicott because they provide something that we will need throughout our lives: a space and mode to recur to when the "strain" of being firmly bordered is eased, a "resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet inter-related."²⁰ Winnicott argues that transitional experience is the basis for all later cultural experience: from thumb-sucking and soft toys and singing oneself to sleep, the "resting-place" of transitional experience grows with the child, "spreading out" out and becoming "diffused" over "the whole cultural field," including "the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work."²¹

Hardy too believes in the resting-place provided by aesthetic experience. In his essay "The Profitable Reading of Fiction" (1888), which predates Winnicott's paper by about sixty years, Hardy describes novel reading as itself a kind of transitional experience. Reading, Hardy writes, provides "relaxation and relief when the mind is overstrained or sick of itself." And yet, Hardy writes, reading requires creative labor too. Hardy's reader "wants to dream," and, indeed:

The aim [of novel reading] should be the exercise of a generous imaginative-ness, which shall find in a tale not only what was put there by the author, put he it never so awkwardly, but which shall find there what was never inserted by him, never foreseen, never contemplated. Sometimes these additions which are woven around a work of fiction by the intensitive power of the reader's own imagination are the finest parts of the scenery.²²

Hardy's reader is a maker: someone who shapes the text alongside the writer, someone who picks up the novel and adds to it, someone whose contributions just might form the most compelling part of the story.

In *The Return of the Native*, Charley, a young man long infatuated with the beautiful Eustacia Vye (and long resigned to the fact that she will never love him in return), looks after her devotedly when she returns to her uncle's house in despair following the breakup of her marriage to Clym Yeobright. Charley feeds her, soothes her, and locks away her uncle's pistols when he finds Eustacia gazing at them too long. And even more than this, Charley's gentle mode of caretaking comprehends her need for transitional experience. Assuming a "guardian's responsibility for her welfare,"

he busily endeavored to provide her with pleasant distractions, bringing home curious objects which he found in the heath, such as white trumpet-shaped mosses, red-headed lichens, stone arrow-heads used by the old tribes of Egdon, and faceted crystals from the hollows of flints. These he deposited on the premises in such positions that she should see them as if by accident. (RN 330)

Charley, letting Eustacia stumble across these heath objects "as if by accident," does not ask, "Did I find that or did you?" "Did you find that, or did you create it?" And in this way, Charley's method of care could easily describe Hardy's own artistic practice: objects drawn from the natural world are left for readers to rediscover. Mosses and lichens, rocks and stones, the enticing objects in this list—half natural and half crafted, like the arrow-heads that lie just on the border of the organic and the man-made—are noticed and handled by Charley, noticed and handled by Eustacia, and in turn noticed and reimagined into their material shapes by the reader who comes across them deposited in the passage of a novel. For Eustacia, the curious objects found on the heath, the "white trumpet-shaped mosses" and "red-headed lichens" that are the rudiments of plant life as well as the rudiments of color and shape, are a place to rest her eyes and her mind, affording "relaxation and relief" to a mind "overstrained and sick of itself." And for the reader too, the objects are resting-places, in both Hardy's and Winnicott's senses of the term. Coming across them in the novel, we do not have to decide whether they belong to inner or outer reality, whether we

found them or created them. The objects are indeed half perceived and half created, conjured up by our own “generous imaginativeness” wrapped around the words the author has left lying around.

Let these objects stand as touchstones: not only for reading as co-making, but also for the kinds of readings I am interested in pursuing in *Novel Relations*. I am less interested in the developmental claims of psychoanalytic thought than in their formal implications—that is to say, in the way British psychoanalysis imagines the structure of interpersonal relations, and in how this theory can in turn be used to reimagine the structure of literary relations. I am not interested in concrete applications or diagnostic readings, nor in tracing a character’s development, in seeking out and assessing parent-infant relationships in novels, in saying who has a good-enough mother and who does not. I am wary, in other words, of psychoanalytic approaches that reduce, as Shoshana Felman has famously and importantly pointed out, the textuality of the text.²³ Symptom-finding and diagnosis-making approaches reduce two dimensions of textuality in which this book is particularly interested: the richness of fictionality (which, as I hope to show, spreads over the psychic as well as the literary realm) and the richness of our own reading experience—which this book attempts to render in all of its metaleptic discontinuity (chapter 1); its force of direct address, far-reaching resonance, and unwieldy futurity (chapter 2); its atmospheric power and microclimatological variability (chapter 3); and its narrative multivocality (chapter 4). *Novel Relations* wonders, and attempts to answer, in both the content and style of its writing: how do we keep this richness alive in our criticism and academic writing? Rather than attending to development as such, then, my readings focus on matters like the ones identified in the relational reading of *Return*’s lichens, mosses, and faceted crystals: on aesthetic experience, on the phenomenology of reading, on the capacities of the novel as a genre and their social and political implications, and, as I will go on to discuss, on the psychodynamics of our literary critical investments.²⁴

The word “capacity” as the object relations thinkers deploy it (as in, for instance, Winnicott’s essay on “The Capacity to Be Alone”) has a double sense, pertaining both to ability, asking what a person is capable of, and to measure, asking what a person can contain, like a vase filled with water. Object relations theorists describe the unique capacities of psyches, highlighting what they can do and hold in health rather than focusing exclusively on their deficits and deficiencies in states of mental illness. Particular areas of interest for these analysts include the capacity for growth, the capacity to feel alive and real, the capacity to be creative, the capacity to hold others in mind in a way that sustains them and us, the capacity to experience unintegration, and the capacity to unconsciously dream more than can be directly interpreted and to feel beyond what can be conceptualized in language or in thought. And yet object

relations theory is not some kind of positive psychology. British theorists are interested in less sunny or “friendly” (in Balint’s phrase) capacities as well, including the capacity to feel empty, the capacity to hate reality, the capacity to attack links—the links between people, between ideas, or between words and their meanings—and one’s own capacity to make links, and the capacity to feel what Winnicott names the “unthinkable anxieties” or “agonies” (“anxiety,” he writes, “is not a strong enough word here”): falling to pieces, falling forever, having no orientation, feeling depersonalized or derealized, feeling unrelated to one’s body, and feeling unable to relate to objects.²⁵ Building from these insights, *Novel Relations* looks to explore and describe the unique capacities of novels. What can they do? What can they hold? What can they create? What do they enable us to think and feel—and for that matter, what do they *disable* us from thinking and feeling?

The Geopolitics of British Psychoanalysis

Mid-twentieth-century London became a seedbed for psychoanalytic thought for geopolitical as well as intellectual reasons. Beginning in the 1930s, “Britain became home both to native psychoanalysts and to many Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis and continental anti-Semitism,” explains historian Michal Shapira. “Out of the once-flourishing psychoanalytic societies in Europe, only London remained as a real hub and a center for a unique intellectual diaspora.”²⁶ Analysts from Vienna (home of the International Psychoanalytical Association, Freud, and his daughter Anna Freud), Berlin (where Karl Abraham had been a leading figure, and where Melanie Klein had trained but where her controversial ideas had garnered a mixed reception), and Budapest (home to Freud’s influential contemporary Sándor Ferenczi and his trainees) converged in London at the British Psycho-Analytical Society (BPAS). The BPAS had been founded by Ernest Jones in 1913 and already comprised a thriving community, made up of psychoanalysts, medical practitioners, so-called “lay-analysts” (practitioners with psychoanalytic training but no previous medical experience), and Bloomsbury writers and intellectuals.²⁷ I want to take a moment to imagine how charged the atmosphere in London must have felt at that time: so many brilliant minds gathered together in a single place, pursuing psychoanalytic ideas with such a concentrated passion—and under the strain of such enormous fear and upheaval, and the pressure of so much hate and loss.

Relationships between the men and women now gathered together in the BPAS were hardly entirely pacific, especially following the death of Freud in 1939, when the society was ideologically split between the warring factions of the Viennese group (also known as the Anna Freudians) and the resident Kleinians (Klein had been living in London, where her ideas had been more

enthusiastically received than in Berlin, since 1926). As debates rose to a heated pitch (and sometimes revolved around personality conflicts, private intrigues, and personal attacks) in the period 1941–45, giving rise to the so-called Controversial Discussions, bombs fell on London.²⁸ The blitzkrieg at “home” resounded in what was recognized as a “world” war of unprecedented scale and destructive force. Out of these discussions, and the settling dust of the conclusion of World War II in 1945, which brought with it efforts to redistribute imperial wealth and an upsurge of global decolonial struggle, grew not only a compromise in the BPAS (which developed three training and supervision tracks: Anna Freudian, Kleinian, and Independent), but a rich ferment of ideas, fundamentally transforming psychoanalytic theory and practice. In these years, and with the emergence of the “Independent” group in particular, psychoanalysis was given a distinctly “British” orientation and spin—distinct from classical Freudian technique, distinct from the ego psychology that became dominant (following the emigration of many German analysts) in the United States, and distinct from French theory.²⁹ The imbrication of psychoanalysis and modernist literature and culture, in England and on the Continent, is fascinating and has been well studied.³⁰ Equally significant, but less studied, is the impact of Victorian literature on psychoanalytic thought—and in particular, psychoanalytic thought as it developed and flourished in mid-twentieth-century Britain.

One of my aims is to show that this distinctive intellectual tradition is not located simply in England, but in the wider British Empire, even when this fact is not directly acknowledged. David Eng situates World War II, and the birth of psychoanalysis itself, within a longer history that includes the “string of colonial genocides in Africa, Asia, and the Americas” and “the Holocaust and its accelerated violence” to form the “racial century” of the years 1850–1950.³¹ Part of what compels me to put Victorian novels (circa 1850) and object relations psychoanalysis (circa 1950) into conversation is the fact that they bookend this “racial century.” It is not simply that British psychoanalysis and Victorian novels share concepts and areas of concern: subject formation, affect, interpersonal relations, the relationship between fantasy and reality, a focus on ordinary experience. More than this, these two moments and discourses are linked by the way they so clearly evoke the high-water marks of British colonization and decolonization—even in and through the ways both novels and psychoanalytic theory actively mute or avoid depicting that violence.

Indeed, I hope this can be one of the book’s central interventions: to show that British psychoanalysis need not be only friendly, benign, and sealed off in the supposedly insular worlds of the nursery or the consulting room. Instead, object relations thought can have a very real purchase on the political sphere, even in and through these personalizing and interpersonalizing gestures and

emphases—what we might call its insulating impulse. British psychoanalysis, with its emphasis on the infant, the self (including Winnicott’s “True Self”), internalization, and diffuse states of being, can lend itself to being read and used apolitically. So can Victorian fiction, with its emphasis on the domestic (in both senses of the word: the home and national versus global politics), the local, the interpersonal, on romance, on marriage and the marriage plot, and on the psychological. And yet I want to insist that putting canonical nineteenth-century British domestic fiction and British object relations thought together can serve to amplify the geopolitical stakes of both. Relational reading can make more salient the fact that each of these discourses is located squarely—and indeed, actively participated—in the history of British Empire and the racially demarcating logic that subtended it, and that subtends global divisions of labor still.

The Hungarian British medical doctor and psychoanalyst Michael Balint (1896–1970) coined the term “the basic fault” to describe very early life disturbances in object relating and their subtle but significant aftereffects. In *Novel Relations*, I take up this term to describe the constitutive fault line in Victorian novel studies: the false disciplinary division that splits Victorian and post-colonial studies, and our tendency within the field of Victorian studies, narrowly drawn and construed, to ignore the colonial contexts in which Victorian fiction was produced and first received, and in which it continues to be received in the context of present-day neo-imperialism. In the context of a similar fault in psychoanalytic theory, I think of Anne McClintock’s important clarification and call for scholarly reorientation in *Imperial Leather*, which bears repeating at length:

All too often, psychoanalysis has been relegated to the (conventionally universal) realm of private, domestic space while politics and economics are relegated to the (conventionally historical) realm of the public market. I argue that the disciplinary quarantine of psychoanalysis from history was germane to imperial modernity itself. Instead of genuflecting to this separation and opting theoretically for one side or the other, I call for a renewed and transformed investigation into the disavowed relations between psychoanalysis and socio-economic history . . . for it was precisely during the era of high imperialism that the disciplines of psychoanalysis and social history diverged.³²

I hope that I answer to this call in these pages, following the “private, domestic” interests of British psychoanalysis—and of Victorian fiction—while also being attentive to the socioeconomic and imperial histories they inscribe *without explicitly formulating*.

The British psychoanalysts that I study in this book do not directly theorize empire, war, racial and ethnic difference, or racialized violence. And yet these

matters touched many of their lives very deeply, in different colonial and expatriate contexts.³³ I think of Bion, born in colonial India, and well received in 1970s Brazil. I think of the Pakistani-British Masud Khan (1924–89), a student of Winnicott and an important figure in bridging the British and French psychoanalytic scenes, who was born in the Punjab, lived through Partition, and who theorized not imperial dislocation but rather the essential “privacy of the self.”³⁴ I think of Balint himself, who was a World War I veteran of German Jewish descent who was forced to leave his native Hungary in 1939, and whose parents, still in Budapest, committed suicide to escape the concentration camps. I think of Paula Heimann (1899–1982), a German analyst of Russian Jewish descent who, threatened under Nazism, emigrated to England in 1933 with her daughter while her husband fled to Switzerland. I know of only one reference to her refugee status in all of her work, and it appears in the dream of one of her patients, who imagines that she is someone who has had a “rough passage” across the English Channel. Heimann’s response is to resist the patient’s fantasy that she is somehow damaged.³⁵

So although these analysts and others in their circle were heavily impacted by the facts of British imperial practice and its aftermath, including especially its issue in struggles between European powers that led to World War II, their work almost never explicitly addresses these historical facts. However, what I want to argue here is that, despite immediate appearances, their theory embeds these facts in and as its very fabric: colonial and decolonial struggle form the material conditions of these texts’ very production, reproduction, and reception. *Novel Relations* argues that British psychoanalytic theory, despite its elliptical treatment of these matters, contains ideas and methods that can be turned to productive account in the analysis of, one, the conditions of coloniality, post-coloniality, and racialization and, two, the effects of these conditions on the production of subjectivity and intersubjectivity as well as on *theories* of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. In my treatment of British psychoanalysis, I want, like McClintock, to refuse the “disciplinary quarantine of psychoanalysis from history” and instead to affirm the “disavowed relations” between British psychoanalysis and its “socio-economic history.” And if “imperial modernity” (that is to say, modernity writ large) is made precisely by splitting metropole and periphery, the domestic and the political, the nation-state and the colony, psychoanalysis and social history, I want to show how central the Victorian novel is to the construction of this discursive split. The Victorian novel and British psychoanalysis have a special fit with each other, and this is not only due to their shared affective investments and views of a populated psyche, but also to their shared histories and complicities—avowed and disavowed alike. Indeed, the fact that both discourses treat British empire elliptically is part of what makes

them such fitting interlocutors, bringing to life in each other something that has been eclipsed in each.

Linking

Reading object relations psychoanalysis well means addressing both its capacities and its incapacities. I believe that British psychoanalytic thought has the capacity to open many important questions (pertaining to literary form, reading experience, and political stakes alike) that have been foreclosed in mainstream critical responses to Victorian fiction. And yet I do not expect British psychoanalysis to be capable of all things. Bion argues that we attack the links between ideas when we cannot cognitively and emotionally bear the reality of their actual connection. Taking this insight seriously, *Novel Relations* offers an approach guided by object relations thought that ultimately takes British psychoanalysis beyond itself and looks to build wider relational networks for the Victorian novel. Theorizing issues like gender conscription and resistance, racialization, colonial and anticolonial engagements, and political futurity, I turn to thinkers and critics like Muriel Dimen, Jordy Rosenberg, José Esteban Muñoz, adrienne maree brown, Amador Fernández-Savater by way of Dora Zhang, Audre Lorde, bell hooks, Jodi A. Byrd, Lisa Stevenson, and others: thinkers who may not directly study or write about Victorian literature, but who show us how much can be gained by widening the typical critical conversations and drawing on knowledges in fields like critical race theory; gender, sexuality, and queer studies; feminist and queer of color theory; and settler colonial and Indigenous studies. I use relational thinking to reflect on the need to keep forging, rather than attacking, links between Victorian studies, with its traditionally British objects, and other continents, periods, fields, approaches, and political exigencies.³⁶

Nor do I expect the Victorian novel to be capable of all things—to hold all of British psychoanalytic thought *avant la lettre* (although it does sometimes predict and help to form some of its key insights) or to stand outside of its historical moment. I treat the four novels at the center of each chapter both lovingly and critically, attending to their capacities and their incapacities alike. I want *Novel Relations* itself to be sensitive and capacious enough to mark a novel's profound powers, potentialities, and foresights, as well as its pronounced incapacities, failures, and oversights—including the ways in which novels can actively disempower people and even lead to enactments of discursive and real violence. One reason that I track critical responses to each novel as carefully as I do is that I am interested in what these novels have historically enabled and disabled in their readers and critics.

I want to clarify that even in and through its engagement with historical questions, *Novel Relations* remains at its base a work of literary theory and criticism. In offering new readings of four Victorian novels that may have come to seem overly familiar, my larger aim is to make British object relations psychoanalysis and its present-day incarnations available for novel theory and for novel criticism more generally. British psychoanalysis has much to teach us about our reading practices, both as ordinary readers and as, as some of us are, readers professionalized into academic literary study. There are several possible reasons why scholars of the Victorian novel have overlooked British psychoanalysis: the dominance of Freudian and Lacanian thought in literary theory, the dominance of historicist modes in Victorian studies that have turned attention to nineteenth-century physiology and psychology rather than to twentieth- and twenty-first-century psychoanalysis,³⁷ and, finally, the aspects of British psychoanalytic thought that make it seem unsophisticated and recalcitrant to use in literary studies, such as its attention to the maternal and to childhood development, its emphasis on affect and attachment rather than language, its popular-culture dissemination in the case of Winnicott, and its hyperspecialized technical vocabulary in the case of Bion. And yet it is for precisely these reasons that British psychoanalysis becomes compelling and renders surprising new readings. Object relations theory can make us better readers: more aware of the complexity of literary figures and their relations, more attuned to subtle workings of literary form, and more nuanced and more feeling in our responses to fiction and what it does to us.

Taking the interventions of object relations psychoanalysis seriously also means considering alternative pictures of temporality and historicity. Bion argues that psychoanalysis before Freud was a “thought without a thinker.”³⁸ This insight helps us see how productive it can be to picture thoughts that are generated in the relation of two distinct historical moments. While there is a historical trajectory to be traced here, the heart of this book is not a concrete historicist claim tracking how Victorian novels informed later psychological theory. I do not set out to show what Winnicott read when, or which books were on the syllabus for Bion in his English public school or at Oxford, or on Khan’s at the University of Punjab³⁹—although we do know that many of these analysts read and studied Victorian fiction.⁴⁰ Nor is my interest in constructing a cultural history, although that too could be done: as I have mentioned, notable literary and cultural figures in Bloomsbury London (such as Lytton Strachey and Leonard and Virginia Woolf) had direct connections to Freud, Ernest Jones, and other thinkers in their circles and in the BPAS, including James and Alix Strachey.⁴¹ Instead, *Novel Relations* is interested in the looser ways that the Victorian novel, as a dominant cultural form, has shaped the possibilities for thinking about human subjectivity. It is interested in how the forms of

Victorian fiction—the representational practices of narration, characterization, and depictions of conscious and unconscious thought and feeling—infiltrate theories of the psyche that were developed in the same geographic context and in a cultural milieu shaped by Victorian thought and cultural practices.⁴² And finally, although this book shows that there is indeed a special fit between British fiction of the nineteenth century and British psychoanalysis of the twentieth, its larger objective is to make object relations thought available for novel studies more widely.⁴³

Form and Feeling

Each of the four body chapters of *Novel Relations* is named for a particular “feeling of reading,” to borrow Rachel Ablow’s phrase. Loneliness, wishfulness, restlessness, and aliveness describe how and why we read.⁴⁴ They are feelings that are depicted in the novels and produced in the reader—as an emotional capacity that is generated, at least aspirationally, by novel reading. Theorizing these four particular structures of feeling in conjunction with British psychoanalysis, I want to show that feeling is not simply produced in and by individual subjectivity, but instead in and through literary form.⁴⁵ In keeping with this aim, each chapter that follows also offers a revisionary theorization, in conversation with existing literary critical accounts, of one of the basic formal elements of the novel: character, plot, setting, and narrative voice. My relational readings show that the unique emphases that distinguish British psychoanalysis from classical Freudian and Lacanian theory—discontinuity rather than self-consolidation, diffuse feeling-states rather than drives, the preverbal rather than our birth into language,⁴⁶ co-presence rather than dialogue, quiet states of “going-on-being” (Winnicott) or “lying fallow” (Khan) rather than dramatic demonstrations of need, having enough rather than being deprived—not only draw out underremarked phenomenologies of reading, but also offer a different formal imagination of Victorian fiction. I hope these chapters reveal sides of Eliot’s and Hardy’s fiction that we have experienced but have not previously had the terms to acknowledge.

Chapter 1, on loneliness and character in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891), speaks to the way we internalize novelistic structures and come to feel like literary characters. Like Tess, we imagine that others are with us, narrating and experiencing our lives alongside us, even when we are alone. Tess thinks that she is not “an existence, an experience, a passion, a structure of sensations” to anyone but herself. And yet Tess, a literary character, can *only* come into being in relation to others—not just to other characters in the book, but also to the novel’s author, narrator, and readers. Alone with others, Tess introduces us to a notion of paradoxical solitude that D. W. Winnicott would explicitly theorize,

more than half a century later, as a fact of psychic life in his essay “The Capacity to Be Alone” (1958). Winnicott describes the ability to be alone as a positive developmental achievement built on a paradoxical foundation: we learn to be alone by internalizing the presence of another. The chapter shows how Hardy anticipates Winnicott’s theory of relational solitude by making and unmaking his character Tess, who becomes “an existence, an experience, a passion, a structure of sensations”—an internalized presence—to her readers as much as to herself, and who seems to likewise sense the presence of the narrator and the reader in the world of the story. Engaging with theories both of literary character (Gallagher, Lynch, Woloch) and of psychoanalytic reading (Silverman, D. A. Miller, Sedgwick, Bollas), I show how Hardy and Winnicott together help to solidify modern notions of personality and of solitude. And finally, I explore how this new take on character and personality formation through unintegration gives us new ways of thinking about novel reading and gender interpellation.

Chapter 2, on wishfulness and plot in *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), describes more than just Maggie Tulliver’s perpetual states of dreaminess and longing. It points to fantasies of breaking novelistic, provincial, and subjective frames and reveals wishful thinking as the disavowed basis of George Eliot’s theory of social realism. In *The Mill on the Floss*, books and subjectivities overflow like rivers. The key psychoanalytic interlocutor in this chapter is Wilfred Bion, whose unconventional ideas fundamentally altered modern psychoanalysis in the 1960s and 1970s, and yet remain opaque to nonspecialists—perhaps for the reason that Bion’s prose, laden with Greek letters and mathematical symbols, is notoriously difficult to read. Concentrating on the novel’s famously strange ending and on moments of unlikely, paramystical communion throughout the novel, I argue that *The Mill on the Floss* constructs an intersubjective model of mind that helps to shape Bion’s later theories of unconscious communication. In turn, Bion’s work (and its later explication by thinkers like Ogden and Jacobus) helps to uncover Eliot’s deeper aim in the novel: not necessarily to strengthen social sympathies, but to animate psychic processes in generative, unpredictable ways. *The Mill on the Floss* teaches us to wish for other ways of being a woman, other ways of being gendered, other ways of being embodied, other forms of romance and family making, and other experiences of ethnic identity (briefly hinted at in the famous gypsy scene) than it can fully picture in its pages. The relational reading I frame between the novel and Bion also leads me to a critical redescription of plot: one that sees the future of this novel in feminist and queer of color theory (Lorde, brown, Muñoz, Ahmed) rather than in the flood that drowns Maggie in the novel’s final scenes.

Chapter 3, on restlessness and setting in *The Return of the Native* (1878), turns from the ways reading Hardy’s fiction can afford us opportunities for rest and

unintegration to the “unrest” that undergirds Hardy’s picture of life and, I show, the geographic restlessness of his figurative practice. As I describe in this introduction and in chapter 1, the long lyrical passages in Hardy’s prose punctuate the feeling of doom that suffuses his fiction and offer us a respite from his shocking plots. And yet, Hardy’s descriptions of place move us through allusions, historical references, and “similes and metaphors” at a breathless rate, taking us from Egdon Heath to India, from Hardyan Wessex to Byronic Judah, and from ancient Rome to the nineteenth-century Caribbean, in a few quick words. *The Return of the Native* has long been considered a hyperlocal novel with a striking, quasi-dramatic, unity of place. But by reading the novel in conversation with Balint, who makes the spatial metaphors of object relations explicit in his writings on medium, environment, and atmosphere, and with work in colonial history and postcolonial theory (McClintock, Stoler, Chatterjee, Wynter), I show how multiply worlded Hardy’s hyperlocal setting really is, embedding on the spot the overlapping histories of the Roman, Ottoman, and British empires. The bright red and rusty brown hands and bodies that are blanched white at the end of the novel betray a “white mythology” that founds nineteenth-century English middle-class domestic life. Drawing on Balint’s signal phrase, this chapter interrogates the complicities of the domestic Victorian novel and British psychoanalysis alike in obscuring colonial violence and exploitation as a basic fault at the center of these disciplines—but draws out too the capacities of relational reading to help articulate a more just and searching critical practice: what Balint calls a “new beginning.”

Chapter 4, on aliveness and narrative voice in *Middlemarch* (1871–72), begins by highlighting the shift in the novel from the ardor of a Saint Teresa to the weariness of her modern counterparts. The novel uses weariness, most strikingly embodied in the aging scholar Casaubon, to describe the exhausting task of understanding others as well as the difficulty of reading the novel itself. While “weary experience” threatens to suffuse the entire novel, from syntax to structure, ardor and a second affective term, aliveness, describe the feelings created by the paired activities of metaphor-making and idealization in the novel. The narrative voice highlights both the capacity of life to feel empty, dull, deadened, and meaningless and its own power to reanimate it. This chapter synthesizes ideas introduced in earlier chapters: the rubric of deadness/aliveness, popular in current psychoanalytic thinking as a description of the feel of the analytic session, draws its theoretical grounding from a wide range of thinkers in the British tradition, including Klein, Riviere, Bion, and Winnicott. I highlight in particular the work of analysts Paula Heimann (1899–1982) and Betty Joseph (1917–2013), whose understandings of the multisubjectivity and the *multivocality* of the analytic session allow us to see afresh the multiplicity of moods, tones, and rhetorical postures embedded in George Eliot’s own narrative voice.

The chapter engages with literary critical accounts of omniscience (Jaffe, Freedgood) and of the neutrality of narrative voice (Barthes, Blanchot) to offer a defamiliarizing reading of Eliot in particular and of novelistic narration more generally. Finally, the paired terms of weary and ardent experience, of deadness and aliveness, can also be seen to illuminate which aspects of the novel have received attention in critical discourse (sympathy, marriage, even weariness itself) and which have been neglected (communitarian living, colonial space, and brown skin).

Generativity

Throughout its chapters, *Novel Relations* explores feelings of reading that are shaped, like the relational solitude I begin with, through the mediation of literary experience. The “novel” in my book’s title therefore refers to both novelty and the novelistic. *Novel Relations* illuminates the way narrative and characterological structures make their way into modern theories of the psyche, shaping the ways we understand and experience our own subjectivity. The coda that closes the book gathers together threads from the chapters’ relational readings, meditating in particular on the curious new conceptualization of presence and absence that object relations theory suggests and its stakes for politicized readings of Victorian fiction.

We might imagine loneliness, wishfulness, restlessness, and aliveness to be profoundly solitary emotions. But what my relational readings reveal is that we are never more intensely related to others than when we feel these ways. Although we might think of novel reading as a solitary activity as well, *Novel Relations* shows how intensely, if paradoxically, we are related to others while we read: to narrators, authors, characters, and other readers, and also to ourselves, in the new forms of self-relation evolved by Victorian novels and consolidated by British object relations psychoanalysis. Bringing these discourses together will, I hope, help us not only to feel but to understand our essential relationality more deeply.

The contemporary psychoanalyst Christopher Bollas has invented a new term to designate the opposite of trauma: “genera.” Trauma, as Freud remarks, is an open wound. It draws in energy and psychic pain, pooling them “into an internal psychic area which is intended to bind and limit the damage to the self.” But psychic genera, in Bollas’s theory, sponsors a “very different kind of unconscious work.” Rather than an open wound, it is a site of “psychic incubation,” an inner place to gather resources so that one may turn outward, to “novel experiences” that bring the self “into renewing contact with [its] ideational and affective states, often within an enriching interpersonal environment.” While trauma leads to repetition and acting out, genera lead to continual symbolic

elaborations that “create intensified re-envisionings of reality.”⁴⁷ This book views Victorian novels as sites for trauma and genera alike: for both the open internal wounds of repressed class-based and colonial violence and the possibility for opening up into new relations, resonances, and futures. In emphasizing the generative in Victorian fiction, *Novel Relations* looks for ways to renovate critical practice into pressing “re-envisionings of reality” even while taking historical trauma into account, and to take fuller measure of the wide relational possibilities—and realities—of novel reading.

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