



A Reflective Investigation for ENG 451 - Topic in Lit. to 1900: Staying Single

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- Professor Sarah Ensor

OED: ADJ.

1.

a. Inmost, most inward, deep-seated; hence, Pertaining to or connected with the inmost nature or fundamental character of a thing; essential; intrinsic. Now chiefly in scientific use.

b. Entering deeply or closely into a matter.

2. Pertaining to the inmost thoughts or feelings; proceeding from, concerning, or affecting one's inmost self; closely personal.

3.

a. Close in acquaintance or association; closely connected by friendship or personal knowledge; characterized by familiarity (with a person or thing); very familiar. Said of persons, and personal relations or attributes. Also transf. of things, Pertaining to or dealing with such close personal relations.

b. euphem. of sexual intercourse.

c. Familiarly associated; closely personal.

d. Used allusively of women's underclothing.

e. Of a theatrical performance, esp. a revue: that aims at establishing familiar and friendly relations with the audience. Also of a theatre itself.

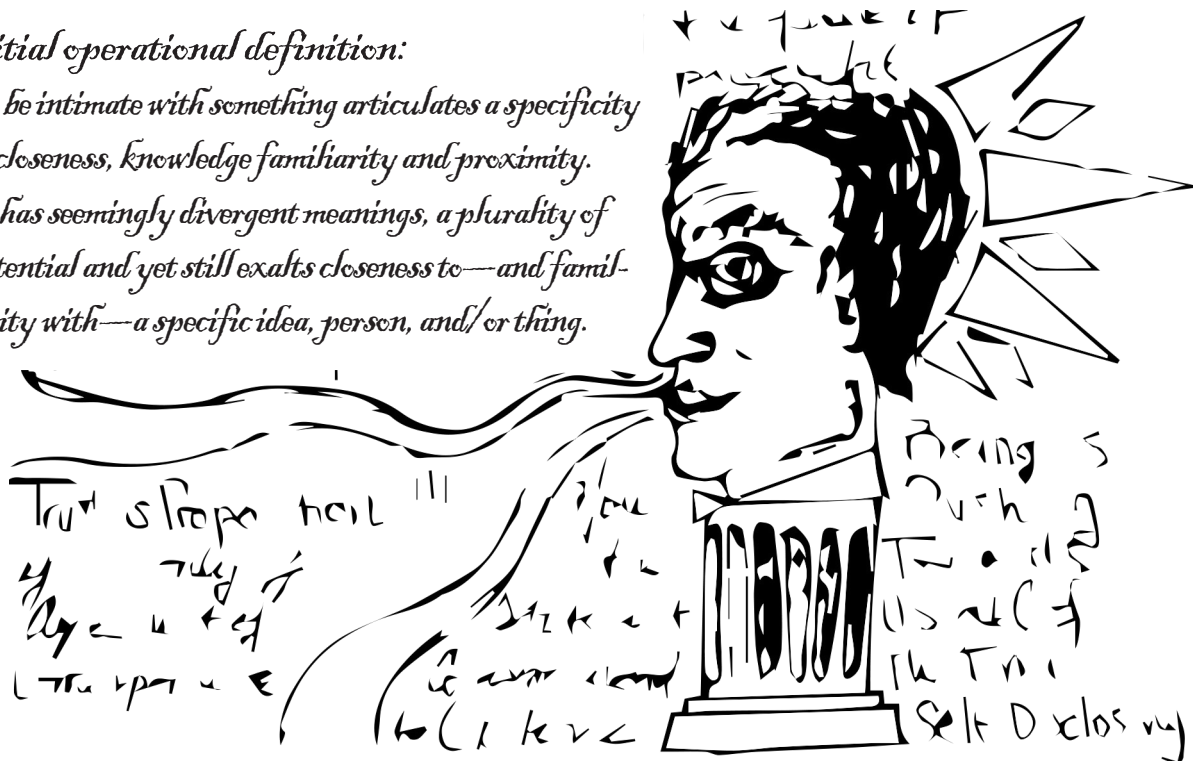
4. Of knowledge or acquaintance: Involving or resulting from close familiarity; close.

5. Of a relation between things: Involving very close connection or union; very close.

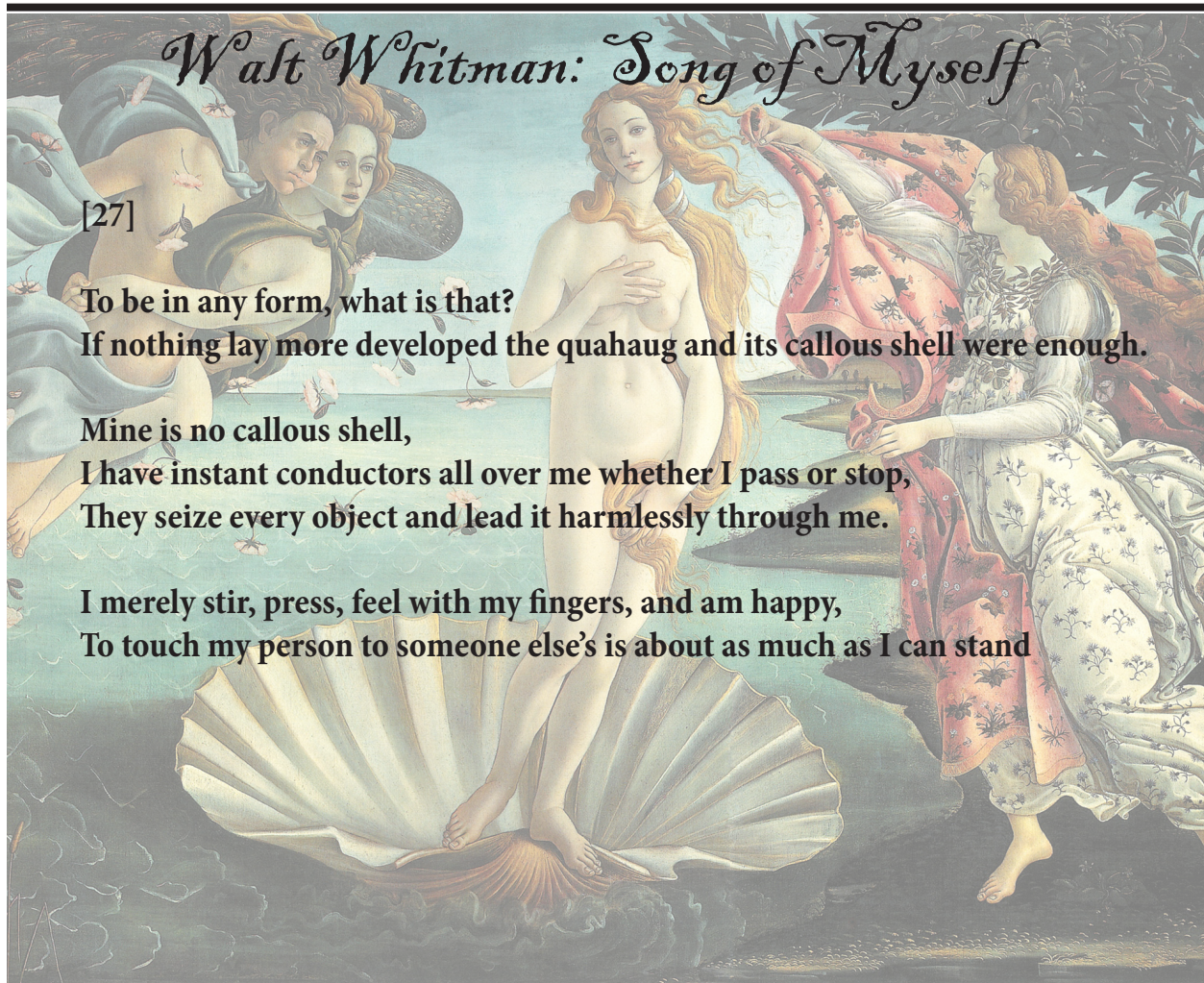
Initial operational definition:

To be intimate with something articulates a specificity of closeness, knowledge familiarity and proximity.

It has seemingly divergent meanings, a plurality of potential and yet still exalts closeness to—and familiarity with—a specific idea, person, and/or thing.

*From this:*

In intimate's role as an adjective is complicated and frustrating. It is difficult to not confuse what is intimate with an intimacy. The noun and adjective are so equated within my thought. On a linguistic level itself, it's interesting because an adjective often demands a subject to describe while a noun can exist without the adjective adorning it or coupling with it. As an Adjective, the word itself, is in relation to a noun and therefore, works with and for the noun—part of a (maybe (?) linear) signifying chain and familial relationship of a sentence. And so, intimate must grammatically have something to refer to, to relate to, to bond with and be intimate with. This is what makes intimacy—as a noun—seemingly more challenging and unfamiliar. Its referent is an abstraction; “intimacy” is not a thing that has a definitive form. I don't know what to do with the ideas that “intimate” and “intimacy” without an established structural relationship of a referent. The relation between noun and adjective needs more unpacking but isn't specifically textual...so we'll see how much I dwell upon this.



Whitman's work is inviting and familiar. The poem universalizes experiences and disparities and makes them intimate by forcing the reader to put them in association with one another. The language of inclusion and the narrator's ownership of—and familiarity with—these divergent identities and experiences makes intimacy inescapable and/or hard to resist. Being familiar and close with many things, many people, many identities and experiences is seemingly contradictory to the idea of intimacy itself; however, the language within the poem functions to make the unfamiliar familiar. I focused on the language of closeness, embodiment, identification and espousal with these identities that comprise a corporeal whole. Language of: oneness and corporation through familiarity and adoption of (and intimacy with) disparities, paradoxes and opposites. Song of Myself effectively attempts to enfold a diaspora of deviating ideas into something that can be experienced and known as a whole. Put another way, “the poem is wanton and makes johns of us all” (Ensor). Transactionality, and a relationship of exchange is still framed as intimate by the poem's logic; it does not foster alienation through transaction.

Song of my Subject

By Me, Myself

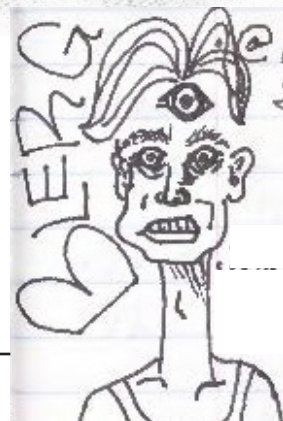
I speak -- sometimes -- I don't,
Sometimes, sometimes, too much,
Often too much. Often,
Sometimes, I'm a damn fool.
I make mistakes, fool
Sometimes a flash of red
Flushed onto my faces flushes
As I slither down into my chair.
Sometimes I feel drunk, overindulgences
Intoxicated into excitement and possibility
Spills spilling onto over the chair, anticipating.

In these moments, I am a vessel, cistern, sieve, a hydrant,
"How is it that I can both 'be' one, and yet endeavor to be one at the same time?"
Butler gropes at the supple folds of my velvety grey matter,
Flitting, flirting, orgasm before the courtship. Courtesan, paragon,
Whitman's eloquence -- the -- wantonness is virginal,
His halo, his crown of thorns, his beauty, apotheosis.
My mouth is open, eager for peer pure intellectual bukkæ,
Spunk, seed of discourse. You say: gross. I say: Satisfying.

Judith/Jack boy/girl boy child man cub -- I want to be like you
"A kind of imitation for which there is no original"
Butler drones and her sinewy tendril caresses.

I bound into the sling, my mouth full of gag
In the tawdry dim light of the bathhouse dungeon. He
Hoists disciplines and punishments, Foucault, bald.
An unfamiliar smell, his -- the panopticon. The scrivener's wall.
Smarmy, uncouth, too couth, it's the gay 90's, he's dead.
In prison, entrapped in contraption, the Cartesian
He has devious deviant devout way with my willing,
The safe word is "Biopower"
I -- I use it freely -- there's no escape.

Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Subordination," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 13-31.



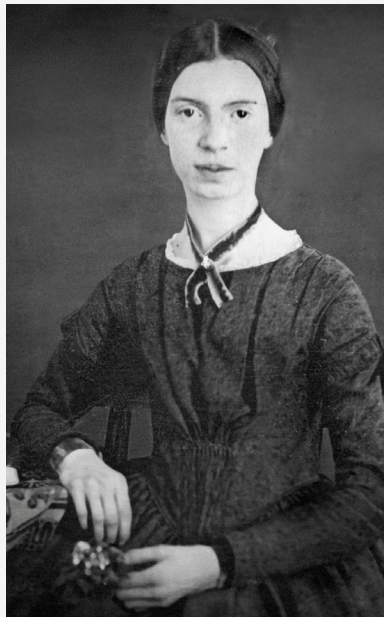
505

Emily Dickinson

199

I would not paint - a picture -
 I'd rather be the One
 Its bright impossibility
 To Dwell - delicious - on -
 And wonder how the fingers feel
 Whose rare - celestial - stir -
 Evokes so sweet a Torments -
 Such sumptuous - Despair -

I would not talk, like Cornets -
 I'd rather be the One
 Raised softly to the Ceilings -
 And out, and easy on -
 Through Villages of Ether -
 Myself endued Balloon
 By but a lip of Metal -
 The pier to my Pontoon -



I'm "wife" - I've finished that -
 That other state -
 I'm Czar - I'm "Woman" now -
 It's safer so -

How odd the Girl's life looks
 Behind the soft Eclipse -
 I think that Earth feels so
 To folks in Heaven - now -

This being comfort - then
 That other kind - was pain -
 But why compare?
 I'm "Wife"! Stop there!

657



I dwell in Possibility -

A fairer House than Prose -

More Numerous of Windows -
Superior - for - Doors

Of Chambers as the Cedars -
Impregnable of Eye -
And for an Everlasting Roof
The Gambrels of the Sky -

Of Visitors - the fairest -
For Occupation - This -

The spreading wide my narrow Hands

To gather Paradise -
-To gether Paradise-

- To gather Paradise -
- To gether Paradise -

Sappho

-34- Lament for a maidenhead

First voice Like a quince-apple
ripening on a top
branch in a tree top

-9-

Although they are

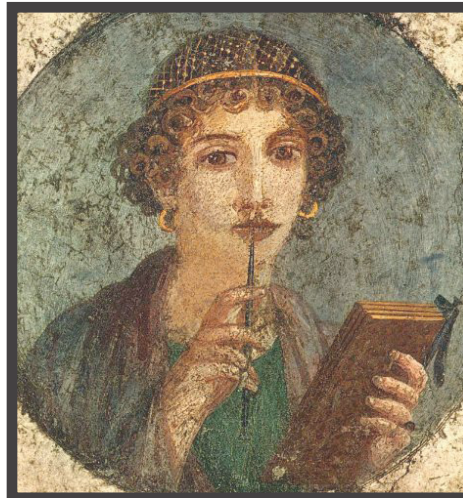
Only breath, words
which I command
are immortal

not once noticed by
harvesters or if
not unnoticed, not reached

Second voice Like a hyacinth in
the mountains, trampled
by sheperds until
only a purple stain
remains on the ground

-61-

Pain penetrates Me drop by drop



Dickinson and Sappho are odd, but appropriate, bedfellows. They deal with the intimate and invite intimacy in unusual, interesting ways. Unlike Whitman—who treats poetry as an immortalizing, open vessel through which anyone is invited, allowed, and pulled into—both Sappho and Dickinson treat poetry and their words as privileged places. To be intimate in these poems is to be both familiar and to recognize the inaccessibility of certain aspects—a knowing unknowing and a comfort with the impossible. It is less coercive than Whitman who constantly insists upon permeability.

Whitman's work seems to hold onto the reader, to pull them through his words; whereas, Dickinson is often abrupt and off-putting, structuring her poems with comfort and discomfort simultaneously. Dickinson

has ephemerality, in 505, she wants to float off and around but also stays tethered to something—a lip of metal. Instead of investigating the tethers, she leaves it unelaborated upon. It's left for the reader to question. Whitman would, and often does, approach such limits to freedom with excessive exposition. Both Whitman and Dickinson deal with the paradoxes of reading, the paradoxes of experience, and the paradoxes of discomfort and comforts of use but they do so in different ways.

Sappho is utterly arresting, beautiful, and simple. Her poetry blurs Saphorism with the subjective so that truth and individuality reach immortality and apotheosis together. Her poetry feels deeply intimate because it deals with topics of pain, pleasure, romance and friendship within fragments and glimpses. Ideas are never complete or satisfying but they are rich and developed, nonetheless.

-45-

If you will come

I shall put out
new pillows for
you to rest on

-46-

Thank you, my dear

You came, and you did
well to come: I needed
you. You have made

love blaze up in
my breast--bless you!
Bless you as often

as the hours have
been endless to me
while you were gone

In -45- Sappho expresses the intimate in the simplest of terms; within those terms are the expectations of hospitality, the expectations of awaiting a visitor, and the expectations of rest and relaxation. The pillows laid out are not even to share with one another, or laid with the expectation of conversation, sex; they are put out for her guest to rest.

Immediately after, in -46-, there's a dilation of passion and time. Her guest rekindles not only love but also time. This allows the speaker to consider how timeless her existence has felt without. The intimate visit, the proximity, the dearness, and the reawakened love allows the incomprehensibility of time and distance to be evoked—and blessed, celebrated and lamented.

Sarah Orne Jewett - *The Country of Pointed Firs*

Jewett's work surrounds a community, town and social relationships. Poor Joanna and Poor Dear stand out as two departed characters with whom the community cannot let the idea and memory of dissipate.

They remain intimate with the memory of these people: there's an intimacy within the language that is used to describe these women, Mrs. Todd especially expresses that she is intimate with Poor Joanna—she and the narrator know that

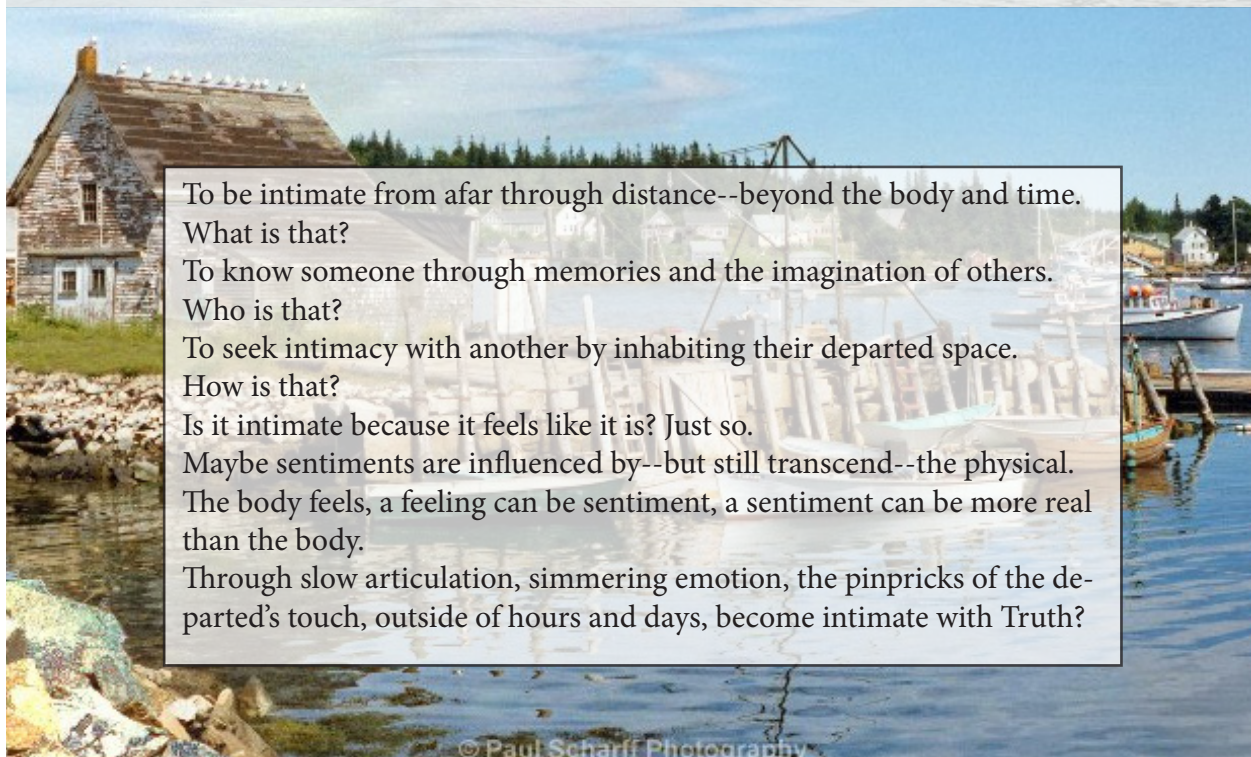
certain things cannot be said about her, that the unspoken cannot truly be done justice. "Poor Joanna" is the speech act employed to give voice to the anxiety and lack of ability to speak about Joanna.



"Poor Joanna" is an intimate term of endearment

but also lack of understanding. There's compassion within this intimacy but also ignorance and a (to the characters) lamentable unintelligibility that's expressed through calling her "Poor Joanna".

However, the narrator attempts to be intimate with the spectral, disembodied memory of Joanna by going to Shell Heap Island in a sort of intimate pilgrimage. The narrator attempts to experience the unspeakable and to form an intimate bond with the experiences of Poor Joanna—maybe.



To be intimate from afar through distance--beyond the body and time.
What is that?
To know someone through memories and the imagination of others.
Who is that?
To seek intimacy with another by inhabiting their departed space.
How is that?
Is it intimate because it feels like it is? Just so.
Maybe sentiments are influenced by--but still transcend--the physical.
The body feels, a feeling can be sentiment, a sentiment can be more real than the body.
Through slow articulation, simmering emotion, the pinpricks of the departed's touch, outside of hours and days, become intimate with Truth?



The narrator relates to his pallid, spectral, marble-bust companion in very strange ways—but considers him a companion nonetheless. Bartleby is described in myriad ways. He’s a paradoxical being that is, at times the most human and pitiable of creatures, and at other times, he’s a dead letter, a Stoic’s marble bust, or cadaverous, completely inhuman.

Interestingly, The narrator “never feel[s] so private as when [he] know[s] [Bartleby] [is in his office]” and this inspires a momentary sense of stewardship over his perplexing vagrant (26). There’s no ultimate or satisfying reading of this text, it is too rich, complicated, and slippery—like

Bartleby, it’s often somewhat unintelligible. A reading of the Intimate within this text reveals that Bartleby is a sort of ghostly presence, a living dead that affects reflection and forces the narrator to reflect obsessively. Bartleby is someone who “knows you” and yet “wants nothing to say to you” (31). He’s an unanswerable question, someone who knows you but you’ll never know. His knowledge of the narrator seems intimate and the narrator’s desire to know Bartleby—and to reciprocate a different form of intimacy—creates the story we are given.

The parable becomes intimate in moments and glimpses, as the narrator reflects upon Bartleby’s pitiable status, as the narrator feels the need to care for Bartleby,

as the narrator stands over Bartleby’s corpse. Bartleby dies in the fetal position, made smaller and more vulnerable--something sympathetic.

The narrator concludes that Bartleby’s work at the dead letters office makes an apt metaphor for the life he lived—through being the living dead. This conclusion is both contrived and poignant, illustrating that the narrator is only truly with Bartleby from afar and only experiences intimacy in fleeting moments of reflection and imagination.

"Friendship" - Henry David Thoreau

S + M

Sophia and Mitchell
Sittin' in a tree.
Definitely not k-i--s-s--i-n-g

**A poem written to a -then- girl friend during HS Sophomore year.
Rediscovered while moving and emailed to a -now- best friend.**



Sophia, a poem about the roses in your bouquet.

The pink shows the freshness you bring to my life,
The full red showing the beauty that lies inside,
The white rose asking, "I am worthy of you?"
The small, budding white rose has a heart ignorant of love,
Not yet ready for such burdens.
All the yellows show the freindship we share, and,
Finally; combined, the white and red roses together show a unity,
A unity that shines on this day,
See past the cliché, roses are more than they seem.

And now and how and why and where:

Sophia, we are intimate, you and I. We've shared too much to be otherwise,
we are cities and worlds and hours and days apart. Moldova, Tanzania, Kenya, and Seattle
—you are so very far away—always and never. And yet, you are here with me.

Your mad laughter, your smirk, your chiding disapproval, your uproarious support surround
and inspire. Me. You are a part of me. But you are not here. But you are here. Me. You. Us.
But you are your own person. But you are mine. I miss you, I miss physicality, I miss proximity,
I miss your touch.

And yet you are touching me now; reaching outwards from the ether and grabbing onto me,
captivating me. I ___ you; I have ____ you for years. I ___ you in ways that no one else is.
We are. Damn what Thoreau says, I'm making it known.

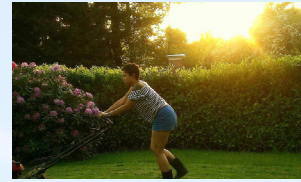
No, not to you, not to anyone;
but let the record show that you are my friend. That it need not be spoken or uttered,
it is not fragile, its foundations are deep, that despite having not seen you
months upon months upon months,

I feel nothing, everything pour out from you onto me.
I am doused in your cascade and outpouring, a deluge.

And I am wealthy and happy and gleeful and sad. Come visit me; I still need you.

K + M

Kathryn and Mitchell
Sittin' in a tree.
Still not kissing. Thankfully.
(Well, not French kissing, anyway)



Kathryn, you said sorry the other day. As if I didn't already know.
As if we weren't two people - with lives
With worries, lusts and preoccupations, neuroses and baggage and needs. And needs.
Kathryn, I said sorry the other day. As if you didn't already know.
As if we weren't happy - with imperfections.
With jealousies, and hurts; thrills and admirations with sympathies. And in-love.

No need to speak it and still we do
because speaking is what we expect
what—how we appreciate—what we forgive.
You read me, I read you and we are the better for it.
We create the language that pushes and strives and is made better by one another.

I have no one like you.

And so I panic when you are not there to read me and my words.
And so I panic when you find another's words you read.
And so I panic at how easy it is to say okay.
It's okay.

And while your vocal appraisals - tingle - give pride and please me.
Working for approval -yet- never reaching climax. No utterance works--for me.
Because it's me you are driving, you driver. And sometimes, often, maybe that's enough.

N + M

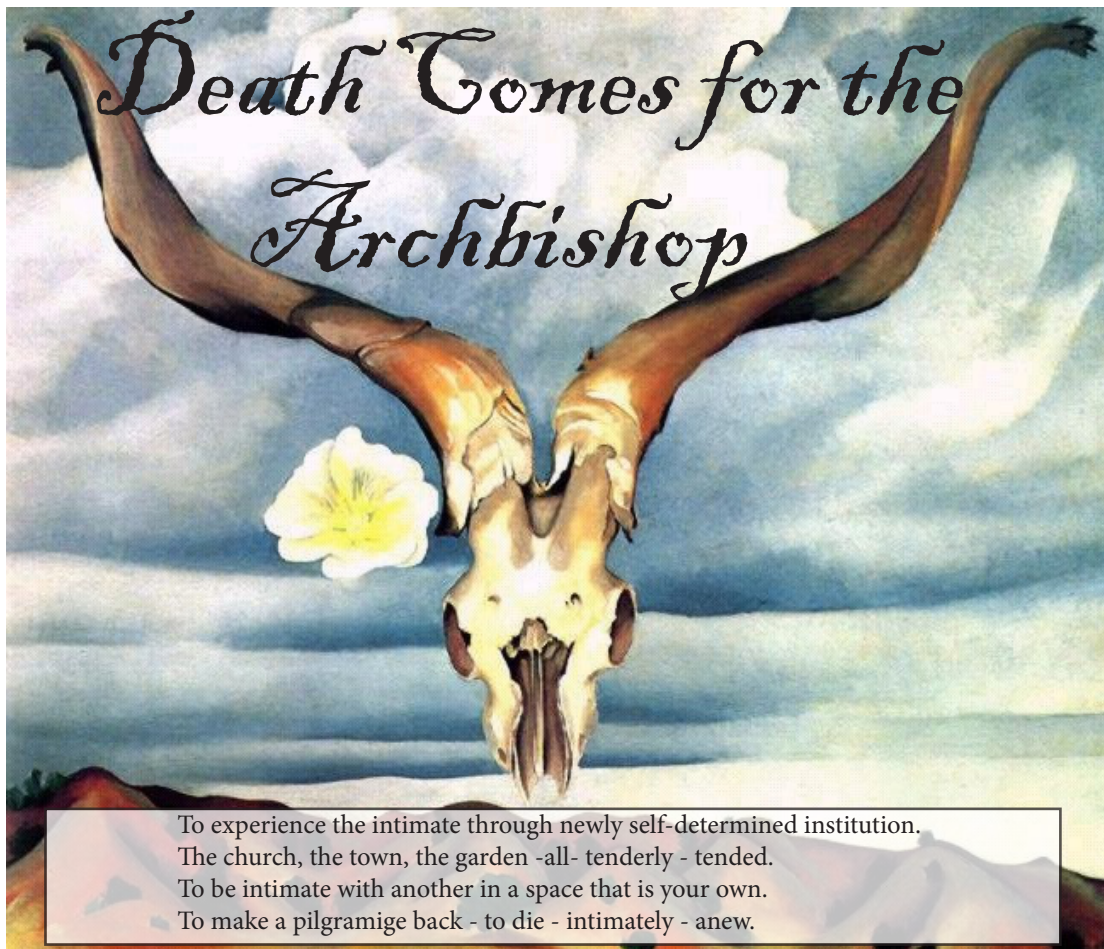
Nathan and Mitchell
Sitting in a tree.
And k-i-s-s-gleefully.



Nathan, after all of this talk of not talking:
Let's not talk.
Not here.
Not now.

Thoreau's right, some things are stronger left unsaid.
And what's left to say that isn't already spoken.
You know that I know and I know that you know that you know that I know.

And So <3



Meanwhile in the also Southwest...
That self-determining spirit
is still alive-and-well.



The intimate bonds formed between sisterwives are something for which language ceases to provide. These women make relationships through the man but beyond the man as well. They take the spirit of the new west and provide their own rules and regulations by controlling their own possibilities. They are tethered to, places, each other, and patriarchy in unique and different ways—but that’s not really the point. These women are separate but together; in their own houses and the same house, married to the same man but also each other—and together, they create and produce. With production comes new regimes, new forms of control and regularity, but at least it’s (somewhat -- maybe) their own.

Intimate: a Summary and Conclusion

An embarrassment of riches and what are we left with? Our reporter in the field has the inside scoop.

To be intimate with something articulates a specificity of knowledge, an understanding and relationality with another thing—person, idea, place, being, all-and-none. Intimate's thematic trappings and tropes usually involve proximity, closeness and relationships that surround knowledge of one another. But this is not always the case.

Whitman pulls onto the anonymous and guides them through him; both proximity and knowledge are important, but the experience is—at once—deeply felt and fleeting, superficial in its temporality and profound in its scope.

Dickinson, through her poems, requires the unknown to be a facet within the intimate, illuminating that knowledge of another comes with new veils, mysteries and impossibilities. Her work is open to the sky, full of infinite possibility and she is floating through it—yet still tethered to “The pier to [her] Pontoon-” (505).

Wakefield is so petrified by the intimate confines of coupling that he only returns to the intimate, to interaction as a surrender to death. He hides and bides his time and is terrified by the possibility of recognition in the meantime—but it's almost as if he still wants to be needed and recognized by his wife. And so, the intimate is both avoided and pined for at the same time.

Sappho yearns for the proximity and touch of the intimate but is structurally fragmented and displays that the intimate is immortal—like Sappho's words—fragile and interrupted, existing as only fragments of memories; both breathed new life and always slipping away.

The Country of Pointed Firs displays intimacy through the meeting of silence and speech. When faced with attempting to speak the unspeakable, to understand and be intimate with Joanna, Mrs. Todd evokes “Poor Joanna”. This performative-speech spell-casting reifies the unknown silence of Joanna's experience and attempts to broadcast an understanding.

And as the narrator stands on Shell Heap Island, to become intimate with Joanna by inhabiting her hermitage, the silence is interrupted by playing children. It is only in this moment of interrupting



Some friends only exist in fiction. Some intimacies are only accessed and accessible via media. Possibilities.

noise that the narrator forms an understanding and intimate bond with the emotions, feelings, sentiments, and memory of Joanna. And even that, doesn't do Joanna justice—she's an unknowable answer, a radical impossibility, she's departed the physical world and found new life as a memory and ghostly specter.

In the same vein, *Bartleby's* narrator feels private when *Bartleby* is around; he is intimate with himself in those moments of quiet, occupied solitude. It is the interruption of people who are not the narrator and not *Bartleby*—and the demands of a social sphere outside of these two men—that cause the narrator to react so manically towards his dead-lettered man.

Thoreau and *Bartleby* would find each other's friendship idyllic. Thoreau's sense of friendship, like all his concepts, is transcendental and therefore, transcends the human and reaches an apotheosis. Thoreau likes nature and the divine, foils which cannot relate to him in the same way other people can. His expectations are daunting and he prefers them to be unspoken; he is ripe with paradox and yet is still a efficaciously intimate writer who peddles his own definitions and possibilities.

And in both New Mexico and Utah—the old west and the new—we see the South West made into metaphor for that pioneering spirit of self-definition and self-determination. Intimate is born anew and made anew by those who build their own lives and

realities out on the frontiers of possibility. They escape to the unreached and unsullied corners of experience and nature, like Thoreau, to live lives that are made to be their own.

The intimate articulates potential forms and styles of relationality and provides a language to express myriad ways in which people can—and do—choose to be close-to and influenced-by others. Closeness and influence need not be tethered to proximity, closeness is a sensation that can span a continent and time; it is a sensation that may require—or be enhanced by—that person's physical touch and presence. Intimacy functions similarly; it's a sensation without referent and made entirely out of whole-cloth. It, like gender and sexuality is “An imitation of a copy for which there is no original” (Butler 21).

Intimacy is an exciting simulacrum that entraps, tethers, and emancipates possible understandings. As the adjective used to conjure the noun, what is intimate is just another layer of hyperreality—of reality through unreality—and this suggests some deeply disappointing and exciting things. Language is always escaping us, fleeing from articulation and yet articulated every time is thought and uttered. We are both tied to what we know to be intimate and also get to build it as our own. Never escaping it fully; it is never actually our own but it is always already our own as well.