

Nancy Yousef, *Romantic Intimacy*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013, Pp. 182. \$55. ISBN 9780804786096.

Nancy Yousef's *Romantic Intimacy* is a sophisticated, multifaceted study of several enlightenment and early Romantic accounts of the moral sentiments, especially as they are supposed to animate and qualify, for good or ill, a variety of interpersonal relationships. The work is principally multifaceted in its aims and subject matter, offering a critical exposition of its target texts for primarily historical and literary purposes. But it also has a philosophical aim – to remind us of the limitations in our relations with others when we try to align our relationships according to the demands of such moral sentiments as sympathy and even respect. Yousef argues, in opposition to the eighteenth-century moralists from Shaftesbury and Hume to Rousseau and Kant, that the foundational role the moral sentiments or attitudes play in moral theory might better be filled by the condition she calls 'intimacy', since this may better fit all the morally significant varieties of interpersonal relationships. This is the crucial insight, she argues, that can be gleaned from the poems of encounter, and solitary meditation of Wordsworth, some of the meditative poems of Coleridge, but also in novels such as Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

The first few chapters are primarily taken up with a critical exposition of the accounts of moral sentiments in Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume and Kant. Her aim here is to expose the limitations, tensions and impasses these theories inevitably face in application to certain key cases of interpersonal relationship. The common problem with these accounts, for Yousef, is that they are committed to a strict kind of motivational basis for the morality of action – e.g. sympathy or even respect for persons – that must remain imperfect so long as it is not reciprocated between equals who know one another deeply. In Kant, for example, only in the rare and unstable relationships between intimate friends can the moral sentiments of benevolence and even respect be fulfilled completely. In more removed cases, the commands and consequent sentiments of duty and justice can at best orient one towards one's fellows only as mere other instances of humanity. What is missed, in each of the accounts covered is an orientation to humanity from which one can properly or fittingly attend to the individual. This is what Yousef argues that intimacy makes possible, a condition in which one, in proximity with another, shares something with the other in a way that is private to them.

Most of Yousef's attention is focused in Chapters 3 and 5 on Wordsworth's poems of encounter with disadvantaged others. In 'The Cumberland Beggar', for instance, Wordsworth portrays his narrator contemplating the abiding condition and habits of an old beggar, who has lived within the narrator's community throughout at least the narrator's recollection, but has barely entered into society with others, except as a dearly acknowledged recipient of their small acts of charity. Even the beggar, however, does a morally significant service to all who encounter him as a person. While his indigence is regrettable, his place in the community and their free and open charity, requiring no eventual repayment from him, are, perhaps, as they should be allowed to be. The attitude of sympathy ill fits this situation, for from such an attitude, this asymmetric relationship is an imperfect one, and so in need of remedy. But even so, the most apt treatment of the old man as an individual remains possible from an orientation of intimacy. The works of Wordsworth may be fruitfully read as commenting critically on eighteenth-century moral sentimentalism, Yousef argues, precisely because they embody this last insight about the better prospects of intimacy as a moral orientation to others as individuals.

Here, we may agree with Yousef regarding Wordsworth's exposure of the limitations of any moral theory that must portray generosity in conflict with the requirements of justice. But

even so, the fault for any such theory might not lie in taking such attitudes as sympathy, or respect, as the primary basis for morality. Perhaps, the source of the apparent conflict is in the conception of what is just or due in terms of a commensurable exchange of goods or benefits. The latter may be a species of justice but not its whole. Justice cannot compel as a strict rule any specific act of charity, but it must allow it according to individual discernment in particular circumstances. But while Kant, for example, may write in many places – e.g. on friendship, marriage and punishment – as if just respect and benevolence must conflict, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, in particular, he conceives of the duty of benevolence as just such a discretionary categorical duty. Other similar points may be made in defence of Shaftesbury and Hume against Yousef's criticisms.

Yousef's work should be of interest to literary scholars already familiar with the recent work on the connexions between early Romantic literature and the works of eighteenth-century moralists. It is written in way that makes it primarily accessible to such scholars and it makes most of its more novel and promising contributions in this area.

Anthony Jenkins
St. Thomas More College, University of Saskatchewan