

THE PRESENCE OF PERSONS

WILLIAM MYERS

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Essays on Literature, Science and Philosophy in the
Nineteenth Century

WILLIAM MYERS

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The Nineteenth Century

General Editors' Preface

The aim of this series is to reflect, develop and extend the great burgeoning of interest in the nineteenth century that has been an inevitable feature of recent decades, as that former epoch has come more sharply into focus as a locus for our understanding not only of the past but of the contours of our modernity. Though it is dedicated principally to the publication of original monographs and symposia in literature, history, cultural analysis, and associated fields, there will be a salient role for reprints of significant texts from, or about, the period. Our overarching policy is to address the spectrum of nineteenth-century studies without exception, achieving the widest scope in chronology, approach and range of concern. This, we believe, distinguishes our project from comparable ones, and means, for example, that in the relevant areas of scholarship we both recognize and cut innovatively across such parameters as those suggested by the designations 'Romantic' and 'Victorian'. We welcome new ideas, while valuing tradition. It is hoped that the world which predates yet so forcibly predicts and engages our own will emerge in parts, as a whole, and in the lively currents of debate and change that are so manifest an aspect of its intellectual, artistic and social landscape.

Vincent Newey
Joanne Shattock

University of Leicester

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For Bill, Pat, Danny, Meg and David

Introduction: Nothing New

I may venture to affirm of ... mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux or movement ... nor is there any single power of the soul, which remains unalterably the same, perhaps for one moment. The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos'd.¹

Beside this celebrated observation of David Hume's may be set the following:

No coward soul is mine
No trembler in the world's storm troubled sphere
I see Heaven's glories shine
And Faith shines equal arming me from Fear

O God within my breast
Almighty ever-present Deity
Life, that in me hast rest
As I, – Undying Life, have power in thee

Vain are the thousand creeds
That move men's hearts, unutterably vain,
Worthless as withered weeds
Or idlest froth amid the boundless main

To waken doubt in one
Holding so fast by thy infinity
So surely anchored on
The steadfast rock of Immortality

With wide-embracing love
Thy Spirit animates eternal years
Pervades and broods above,
Changes, sustains, dissolves, creates and rears

Though Earth and moon were gone
And suns and universes ceased to be
And thou wert left alone
Every Existence would exist in thee

There is not room for Death
Nor atom that his might could render void

Since Thou art Being and Breath
And what thou art may never be destroyed²

For Emily Brontë, too, the mind is a spectacle; but while Hume's is a randomly generated virtual reality experience, Emily Brontë's is grandly laid out to her own design. The site of Hume's spectacle is invisible; we are supposed not to know what exactly it is. Emily Brontë's, though equally mysterious, is simultaneously herself, the universe, and 'God', the first being apparently the *fons et origo* of the other two. Hume takes his seat and reviews the passing scene, a sensible, unobtrusive critic who judges what he observes but cannot control it, and disappears when the lights go out. Emily Brontë's consciousness is at once author, setting, action and audience, and even her putative extinction is a function of her own courageous will.

Hume's is the currently fashionable view; both his and Emily Brontë's accounts would be read by various writers to whom passing reference is made in these essays – Deconstructionists, Marxists, evolutionary biologists, cognitive philosophers and even postmodernist theologians – as 'fictions'. It is now an intellectual commonplace that the self is 'a subject-position', constituted in consciousness by factors external to the human being, or by a practical inner need to entertain the illusion of a centred individuality, or both; and that the sense of identity so generated is accidental and variable, personality not personhood. This is a conclusion Hume would embrace and Emily Brontë contemptuously dismiss.

There are two strategies for dealing with a Humean reduction of the self to an unexaminable nullity – foundational status must be given either to the world or to language and other systems of cultural interrelation. For empiricists, from Hume and John Stuart Mill to modern philosophers like Daniel C. Dennett and Galen Strawson, the ways of the (phenomenal) world provide criteria for the meaningful use of language. Relativists, on the other hand, in the tradition of Karl Marx, Walter Pater, Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, post-Saussurean Formalists and Deconstructionists, emphasise the importance of existing systems of understanding. Each tradition calls the other in aid, particularly by announcing an adherence to 'determinism' or 'materialism' or 'law'. Marxists and psychoanalysts claim to be 'scientific' – even though scientific findings may not always support their view of things. Empiricists appeal to laws of thought (Mill) or common sense (Dennett and Strawson), to give empiricism a push start, yet the outcomes of the empiricist endeavour may not be unproblematically consistent with such premises. There is an element of disagreement between the two traditions about language. Typical of relativist assertions is J. Hillis Miller's claim that language and other sign-systems are 'fundamentally

constitutive'³ in human life: we are unthinkable except in linguistic terms. An empiricist philosopher like Dennett attaches less importance to language and consciousness. For Dennett, as for Miller, the self is a fiction but it is invented to dissolve contradictions arising out of the ensemble of semi-autonomous computing subsystems of which our mental life is composed, and it is the non-self, the system on which the story floats, that is the real thing.⁴

The essays in this volume were all written out of a conviction, and have been arranged to suggest, that all such accounts of the self are unreal, that Emily Brontë is sounder on the subject than Hume, and that one of the splendid truths variously communicated by numerous writers of the nineteenth century is that selfhood is not illusory, and language not the exclusive determinant of understanding. I use the word 'unreal' in the sense that it has for John Henry Newman, whose account of thought, language, choice, belief and action encompasses both Hume's perspectives and Emily Brontë's, and is implicit in everything in this collection.

Newman was a serious student of Hume and Mill and learned a lot from them (especially Hume), not least the habit of inspecting his own mind. Newman's assertion that 'phenomena ... give us no exact measure or character of the unknown things beyond them'⁵ derives from traditions which led Hume to insist that we can know nothing of 'the theatre' in which our perceptions are produced, and Mill to accept that we only know 'phænomena'. Hume's influence is also evident in Newman's attitude towards the argument for the existence of God from the order of nature. Hume was trenchantly dismissive of this argument,⁶ but it was subsequently given wide currency in the writings of William Paley, and remained in high regard throughout the 1820s and 1830s. Mill thought 'the Design argument ... the best ... the most persuasive'⁷ of the arguments for God's existence, an admiration shared in our own day by Richard Dawkins, who describes Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802) as the clearest and most articulate exposition of the argument from design.⁸ He goes on, of course, to demolish Paley's thesis on the same grounds that both Newman and Hume do. The 'system of Nature by itself', Newman argues, does not force us 'to take it for *more* than a system';⁹ in so far as it makes sense to speak of 'Divine Intelligence' as the author of the 'piece of machinery' which the physical creation appears to us to be, then that intelligence may be no more than 'the animating principle of a vast and complicated system ... subjected to laws, and ... connatural and co-extensive with matter' (*Discussions and Arguments*, p. 302). A personal creator-God is not disclosed in the order of nature: the highest theology Paley's argument yields is pantheism.

Newman's distrust of Paley derives from his sense of the limitations of empiricism. This he shares with the Scottish Common Sense School of Thomas Reid, as well as Reid's editor, Sir William Hamilton, and Thomas Carlyle. Hamilton is a key figure, Newman's philosophical precursor, and the victim of Mill's overwhelming polemic, but, as the first post-Enlightenment thinker to press relativism to its limits, an important influence on Victorian intellectual life. His escape-route from relativism – the thesis that, included in any set of premises, and yet outside them, is a substantive holder of those premises – was unacceptable to Mill, and he earned Mill's implacable intellectual enmity by elaborating this insight into a system. Carlyle chose the opposite method. While agreeing with 'modern Science' (that is, with Berkeley, Hume, Hamilton and Mill) that 'matter in general [is] *non-extant*' – a datum of consciousness only – he represents the body as 'rendering visible the divine mystery in us that calls itself "*Me*"'.¹⁰ But he also recognises that in presupposing the '*Me*' that utters it, language cannot signify the self. The price he pays for the Silence thus imposed on him is that no one is quite sure what he means.

Newman's approach is different. He neither systematises like Hamilton, nor indulges in the vociferous refusals of Carlyle. If a foundational belief in the world leads to the obliteration of distinctions between the individual, the world and God, Carlyle's solipsistic alternative takes things no further. It is true that, like Hamilton and Carlyle, Newman holds consciousness of self to be 'prior to all questions of trust or assent. We act according to our nature, by means of ourselves, when we remember or reason [and] ... are as little able to accept or reject our mental constitution, as our being' (*Grammar of Assent*, p. 67). Newman also accepts Hamilton's argument that memory and reason imply a mental constitution which, as the condition of experience and language, cannot be contained in either. Hamilton goes on to argue that because the self cannot be conceptualised and so expressed in rational terms, we are justified in resorting to bare analogy when we speculate about free will, the absolute, the infinite, the origins of the universe, and so forth;¹¹ but this sounds like a weak last resort, and leaves him open to Mill's polemic. Newman is bolder. He perceives analogical and figurative language as powerful indicators of how human beings are mentally constituted in the first place. Analogy – literariness – does not have to wait for the logical resources of language to be exhausted before coming into play; on the contrary, without the mental powers disclosed in its use, logical and scientific discourse would lack authority.

Newman's humanism has, therefore, a double aspect – he affirms the personal wholeness of the individual human being but avoids identifying it with a reductively logical, transparent model of intelligence.

Wholeness is primary. At this level, his view of the self is the obverse of Hume's: 'every man', he writes, 'has a distinct soul ... as if there were no one else in the whole world but he';¹² 'every being ... is his own centre, and all things about him are but shades' (*Parochial and Plain*, IV, p. 82); 'as gathered from our experience of human agents', we are led 'to consider *personality* as equivalent, in its very idea, to the unity and independence of the immaterial substance of which it is predicated'.¹³ This does not suppose a ghost in a machine; the words 'immaterial substance' imply no more than Hume's distinction between 'the mind' and 'the materials of which it is composed'. Newman's claim is simply that a person is not the outcome of events beyond scrutiny in (say) the body or the world. Personhood is not merely 'normative', as it is for Dennett¹⁴ and so many modern philosophers: it is a state of being. So, even in his writings about the Trinity, where he recognises the inadequacy of the word 'person' to the doctrine under discussion, he insists that it denotes more than 'certain outward manifestations of the Supreme Being, relative to ourselves, which are of an accidental or variable nature' (*The Arians*, p. 366). Human personhood is certainly more than an accidental or variable matter of appearance. If a persona is adopted, it is adopted by a person; if personhood is attributed, it is attributed by persons to persons; if it is a story constructed by individual human beings or imposed on them by others, it remains a story told to and about persons. Dispersed as we may be, spatially and temporally, in body, mind, thought, action, sense and feeling, or even in narrative, substantial unity, something like George Berkeley's 'thinking active principle that perceives, knows, wills and operates'¹⁵ may be, must be, attributed to each of us.

But this does not entail self-transparency. Only God is One in this full sense. Personal unity is not a 'homunculus', virtual or real, controlling the human organism from a command centre,¹⁶ but the being in its entire sphere of thought and action taken as a whole, as it takes itself to be when it uses the words 'I' and 'me', without bothering whether such words include teeth, fingernails, air in the lungs, or thoughts in consciousness. It would make as much sense to seek a self within this whole as to locate the space-time continuum. The personal unity of human beings is foundational but indeterminate, self-experience 'inchoate'. For all 'our separation from things visible, our independence of them, our distinct existence in ourselves, our individuality, our power of acting for ourselves this way or that way, our accountableness for what we do' (*Parochial and Plain*, I, p. 19), 'it is very difficult to know ourselves even in part' (*ibid.*, I, p. 41). A man is 'unable, as he well knows, to read his own heart in that clear unerring way in which God reads it' (*ibid.*, III, p. 99). Selfhood is the site of a struggle in the 'inchoate and

rudimental nature' (*Grammar of Assent*, p. 274) of every human being, a vast and far-reaching system, impenetrable to examination based on 'scientific rules and fixed standards for weighing testimony, and examining facts ... conclusions ... [that] can produce their reasons', for 'reasons ... [that] can be exhibited in simple propositions' are fundamentally insufficient to account for 'judgment and action'.¹⁷ In this Newman stands with the empiricists rather than the relativists: 'the content of ... judgments doesn't have to be expressible in "propositional" form,' Dennett tells us, '— that's a mistake, a case of misprojecting the categories of human language back onto the activities of the brain too enthusiastically' (*Consciousness Explained*, p. 365).

Newman's view of language corresponds with his view of the unity and indeterminacy of human personhood. In the first place, just as substantial unity must be attributed to the individual subject, so the meaning of an intelligent utterance must be available to the honestly enquiring intellect. Newman writes of 'drawing ... their own doctrines' from the Church Fathers.¹⁸ The Bible, in particular, has 'one meaning' and 'to make people think that it may have a hundred meanings, all equally good' is to suggest 'that it has no meaning at all' (*Discussions and Arguments*, p. 60). As 'a general rule ... every passage of Scripture has some one definite and sufficient sense, which was prominently before the mind of the writer, or in the intention of the Holy Spirit, and to which all other ideas, though they might arise, or be implied, still were subordinate'. This 'one main primary sense' might be 'literal or figurative' (*The Arians*, pp. 60–61), but even in the latter case, 'the use of figures in a composition is not enough to make it figurative as a whole. We constantly use figures of speech whenever we speak; yet who will say on that account that the main course of our conversation is not taken literally?'¹⁹ Real communication is accordingly possible.

But Newman is also aware of the limitations of language, for which the elusiveness of personhood is in some measure responsible: 'the very same speech or sentiment [coming] from two persons ... has quite a different meaning, according to the speaker, and takes a different form in our minds. We always judge what meets us by what we know already. There is no such thing as a naked text, without note or comment' (*Essays Critical*, II, p. 252). Newman can also be radically historicist. Even the Moral Law, in his account, is historically contextualised: commandments, 'uttered in man's language and written upon tables', are inherently incommensurable 'with what is of an infinite and of a spiritual nature ... the Law of Moses represented the Law of God in its place and age; was the fullest revelation of it, and the nearest approximation to it, then vouchsafed, and was that Law' — but only 'as far as it went' (*Parochial and Plain*, V, p. 145). At best,

language places us at the door of truth; we must 'bear to use words which we feel to be deficient, if they ... begin trains of reflection which they do not end' (*Sermons Bearing*, p. 356). Indeed it is because of the fragmentariness of linguistic representations of Truth that dogma uses simple, antithetical expressions to serve as 'faithful shadows of those truths, which unlearned piety admits and acts upon, without the medium of clear intellectual representation' (*University Sermons*, p. 65).

Newman's awareness of the limitations of language explains his commitment to the principle of reserve, which gave rise to Charles Kingsley's insinuations about his un-English and unmanly economies with the truth, and so to *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*. Newman's difficulty was not just that any doctrinal formulation can be misunderstood. Something more intimate was at stake, as Kingsley sensed and Newman admitted: the issue between them, in Newman's words, was nothing less than the 'living intelligence, by which I write, and argue, and act'.²⁰ Reserve is essential because, whatever it may explicitly signify, language also discloses deep uncertainties in those who use it, about themselves and the world, and their relations with one another.

Newman's thought has strongly deconstructionist tendencies. He anticipates deconstructionist notions of narrative as a makeshift version of a fuller, absent truth, forever, as far as its expression goes, deferred. 'Truth', he reminds us, 'is vast and far-stretching ... its advocate, unable to exhibit more than a fragment of the whole, must round off its rugged extremities, and unite its straggling lines, by much the same process by which an historical narrative is converted into a tale' (*University Sermons*, p. 90). The factual narratives of Scripture are 'plain and colourless ... we are continually perplexed what to think about them and about the parties concerned in them. They need a comment, they are evidently but a text *for* a comment, – they have no comment; and as they stand, may be turned this way or that way, according to the accidental tone of mind in the reader' (*Discussions and Arguments*, p. 178). We may compare this with Hume's account of reading as a copying process:²¹

If one person sits down to read a book as a romance and the other as a true history, they plainly receive the same ideas, and in the same order; nor does the incredulity of the one, and the belief of the other, hinder them from putting the very same sense upon their author. His words produce the same ideas in both; though his testimony has not the same influence on them. (*A Treatise*, pp. 97–8)

Michel Foucault proved himself Newman's not Hume's disciple, therefore, when he wrote, 'Commentary averts the unpredictable in discourse by giving it its due: it allows us to say something other than the text itself, but on condition that it is the text itself that is spoken, and in a sense, fulfilled.'²²

This explains why Newman scandalised liberals like Sir Leslie Stephen: his proto-deconstructionism threatened the unexaminable premises on which the empiricist world-view of Stephen's hero, Mill, was based, that is, Humean notions of the univocal, transparent text composed from impressions generated by a law-governed universe. It was necessary, therefore, to cast Newman, like Hamilton, in the role of reactionary; and this was done with such success that even writers strongly drawn to him, such as Matthew Arnold and Pater, represent him as 'chastened, high-strung, athletic'²³ in his resistance to the 'current of new life'. More bluntly, Stephen sees him as blocking 'improvement of the race'.²⁴ But in fact (as the subtle Pater discreetly acknowledged) empiricist doctrines of intellectual, social and biological development, of the *Zeitgeist* and Darwinism, have their own alarmingly relativist implications: 'the universality of natural law, even in the moral order ... that magnetic system of which modern science speaks, penetrating us with a network, subtler than our subtlest nerves, yet bearing in it the central forces of the world'²⁵ makes all cultural developments, itself included, contingent and temporary. So, however circumstantial Darwin's account of how the Humean theatre came to be built, the story of evolution implies that all such accounts are potentially unreliable. A scientist like Darwin constructing a narrative about the evolution of intelligence, or a thinker like Mill constructing a narrative of its operations, or a novelist like George Eliot and her positivist successors, Thomas Hardy, George Gissing and H. G. Wells, constructing stories about how people's thoughts and actions are typically determined, has to face the possibility that the same sort of determinants operate on them as they write, that they are all more like the Teacher of Languages in Conrad's *Under Western Eyes*, deterministically [mis]handling their sources, than they are like Charlotte Brontë's Lucy Snowe, the self-knowing mistress of her memories and her narrative.

Newman confronts these tensions in *An Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* and his later philosophical writings. He is not only prepared to 'go the whole hog with Darwin',²⁶ but anticipates more recent developments in Darwinian theory. The animating principle of evolution, as neo-Darwinists understand it, is the interaction of chance and necessity, by which bits of the universe with the capacity to create copies or replicas of themselves, gradually vary over time and thereby become more or less 'fit' in effecting further self-replication. The most celebrated exemplars of this competitive interaction are Dawkins's selfish genes; but he and Dennett are almost as enthusiastic about memes, that is, ideas, images, tunes, or any other units of cultural transmission, which propagate themselves by 'leaping from brain to brain via a process' which obeys the laws of natural selection

exactly.²⁷ But this model of cultural evolution had been anticipated by Newman's suggestion that when 'an idea, whether real or not, is of a nature to arrest and possess the mind, it may be said to have life, that is to live in the mind which is its recipient'.²⁸ Newman moreover envisaged the development of ideas being carried on through 'communities of men and their leaders and guides; and ... [employing] their minds as its instruments' (*Development of Christian*, p. 38). Just as Dennett holds that 'there is a considerable competition among memes for entry into as many minds as possible' (*Consciousness Explained*, p. 206), so Newman writes of an idea 'invading' a community, and of 'the warfare of ideas', in effect their natural selection (*Development of Christian*, p. 39).

The natural selection of ideas, however, is self-evidently not a straightforward one between 'true' and 'real' memes against 'false' and 'unreal' ones. Far too many contradictory memes, and manifestly false ones, have flourished in the meme-pool for that to be the case. How do we manage to distinguish the wise from the foolish meme? Dennett and Dawkins argue that there is what Newman would call 'an antecedent probability'²⁹ that memes which accord with the facts of the world in which those who hold them live will flourish in the long term, that there are evolutionary advantages for memes which are 'real' and 'true' over those which are not; but even so the problem of how to distinguish the gold from the dross in the short and even the medium term remains, the short and the medium term being all we, as mere meme-carriers, can expect to enjoy. Evolutionary biology and cognitive philosophy ask the same question about truth, therefore, as the psalmist asks about justice and peace: How long?

This is a pressing question because, in Dennett's words, some memes 'tend to make their own replication more likely by disabling or preempting the environmental forces that would tend to extinguish them'. He gives the example, first proposed by Dawkins, of 'the meme for *faith*, which discourages the exercise of the sort of critical judgment that might decide that the idea of faith was all things considered a dangerous idea' (*Consciousness Explained*, p. 206). Hamilton and Carlyle would reply that such an idea needs to be distinguished from a related idea, that of faith in the self. This is a distinction Dennett accepts in practice. The self may only be a fiction in his book, but it is a fiction in which the average empiricist has to believe in practice, or at any rate to infer – a formulation preferred by Newman to that of faith in the self, which he thought nonsensical. In any case, if ordinary empiricists did not implicitly believe in or infer a self most of the time – it was only when he thought about his own identity that Hume started to have doubts about it – they could not function as intelligences, and

empiricism would never have got going. The gap between Newman and Dennett is thus very narrow. Both accept that the operations of the human mind are 'inchoate', and that, while all sense of self and all accounts of self are provisional, we are none the less practically justified in having a workaday reliance on them. Both also agree that there is an anti-critical form of 'faith' which is destructive of intellectual honesty but which has a strong appeal to certain (Newman would have said Evangelical) temperaments. The only difference between them is about what conclusions we may draw from this curious self-developing weave of thought and action which makes up our 'histories'.

One way of approaching this problem is to examine the observable preconditions of story as such. Miller addresses this issue in *Versions of Pygmalion*. His thesis is wittily suggested by the following generalisation: 'It is an intrinsic feature of written pieces of language that they demand to be read':³⁰ the (entirely imaginary) assumption that texts can 'demand' anything is an exemplary instance of prosopopoeia, or personification, a figure, Miller asserts, lying at the heart of all story-telling. 'There is no story-telling without prosopopoeia, just as there is no access to the moral law without the intervention of some human figure' (*Versions of Pygmalion*, p. 212). But a person is only brought into existence for us in story. Narrative has therefore to presuppose what it alone can constitute. 'The initial prosopopoeia has always already happened, and there is no way to recall it, or to name it, since all our names belong to what is derived from it, including all the names of the material base presumed to underlie the first prosopopoeia and to be covered over by it' (ibid., p. 240). All thinking, and especially all thinking about being a person, therefore, rests on a prior apprehension of that idea, as on a foundation, in effect the 'metaphysical subject' of Ludwig Wittgenstein which, he declares, 'we must pass over in silence'.³¹

This is where Newman's thought parts from that of Wittgenstein, Miller and the rest. He insists on reaching back beyond the 'always already' which is their starting-point and their limit – in effect, on breaking the Humean and Wittgensteinian silence, and speaking figuratively but with certitude about the complex system of human experience which logically lies beyond language, but which casts faithful shadows on its use. The basis of our doing so he calls the illative sense – what Michael Polanyi was to identify as 'subsidiary awareness',³² and Maurice Merleau-Ponty 'the hidden art of the imagination'.³³ The illative sense has to be recognised before it can be understood. It leads to real assents, which are private and incommunicable. It 'supplies no common measure between mind and mind' (*Grammar of Assent*, p. 287), and would descend into the kind of meaninglessness to which Wittgenstein assigns private languages were it not linked to, while remaining distinct from,

logic, definition, language. The latter lead to notional assents, to the economies of theory, science and theology, to agreement and disagreement, but they always entail real assents, as a condition of their operation – it is through the illative sense, for example, that I know that the story of human evolution is not self-cancelling, even though formally it affirms the unreliability of all story without exception. However, it is only by virtue of other people's doing likewise in my presence, and constructing agreement, according to commonly understood rules, at the level of notions, that my illative sense is confirmed in its basic soundness. But even though we would be lost without that common ground of notions, those notions, precisely because we can put them into words, are inherently incommensurable with our being. That, always already, is presupposed; and in the end the individual 'may be justified in opposing himself to the judgment of the whole world; though he uses rules to his great advantage, as far as they go, and is in consequence bound to use them' (ibid., p. 277).

This suggests how 'close reading' may stand in relation to literary theory, or bare quotation without comment to any subsequent commentary. It rationalises criticism of the kind practised with such brilliance by F.R. Leavis, and, if great things may be linked with small, some of the judgements attempted in these essays. What is 'close reading', after all, but the skilled attention to the play of words by the illative sense? A related set of skills, both in reader and audience, is in operation when a text is read aloud. Spoken words, Dennett notes, 'come clothed in sensuous properties' (*Consciousness Explained*, p. 51).³⁴ They can gratify expectation or surprise it; they make the reader's illative sense present to the listener's as vividly as some of the text's possible meanings. But the knowledge thus known, as Dennett notes, is difficult to analyse, to communicate, or to relate to convictions anyone could put into words. And the same may be said of an author. A text can allow for the author's absence, can suggest a tonal range in choice of metre or diction, can invite attention to irony and ambiguity, or set up contrasts between first and later readings. These effects can be achieved with as little calculation and as much attention as inform a live reading, disclosing the skilled author to the skilled reader, and implying in the author an intimate if inchoate understanding of many possible readers. It is by such means that, in Newman's words, 'the inmost delicacies' of writers' lives and their 'intellectual and moral character' are made known to us in what they write.

In a comparable way the implied skills or lack of them in a fictional personage's interactions with others, or of a fictional narrator's relations with story and reader, can generate a virtual experience of 'characters' which is not limited to what can be, or has been, said or

written about them. A person, Miller believes, disappears when the limits of words are reached. He gives the example of Maisie, in Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, who, he alleges, 'vanishes from our circuit of knowledge' when she becomes unique, that is, 'not tied to the ordinary social round and scale of measurement', and so not susceptible to being 'spoken in words' (*Versions of Pygmalion*, p. 70). This sets intolerable limits on literary criticism; but if Newman, Polanyi, Merleau-Ponty and Dennett are right about the illative sense and the imagination, Maisie does not, after all, 'vanish from our circuit of knowledge' when she is no longer susceptible to being 'spoken in words' – she vanishes only from the circuit of our notions. It is for this reason that character analysis of the most unfashionable kind remains a central task of the critic – we need to understand William Dorrit, Lucy Snowe, Gwendolen Harleth and Isabel Archer precisely as the reasons and causes underlying their own words and actions – even though the effort to do so, like the effort to discuss literary texts through close reading, is bound to stop at mere quotation or degenerate into theory and *ism*.

The difficulties of the task are compounded by another aspect of Newman's thinking about the human person – his version of the doctrine of the fall, that 'every one of us is born into this world ... under the bondage of an inborn element of evil, which thwarts and stifles whatever principles remain of truth and goodness in us' (*Parochial and Plain*, VI, pp. 76–7). Nor is it just the individual who is thus radically disordered: 'the world, with all its ranks, and aims, and pursuits, and pleasures, and prizes, has ever from its birth been sinful', the site of 'manifold and complex corruption'; the best that can be said even of Christians 'is that we have two sides, a light side and a dark, and that the dark happens to be outermost. Thus we form part of the world to each other, though we are not of this world' (*ibid.*, VII, pp. 31, 33, 36).

Here Newman is very much a man of his time. 'The world' as the concrete embodiment of untruth, of ideological complacency or, worse, the world as a community of more or less conscious and deliberate deceit and cruelty, is everywhere represented in the literature of the nineteenth century. It maddened Carlyle and Charles Dickens, not least, one suspects, because they knew how it had penetrated their own minds and hearts. It is repeatedly identified as the enemy of innocence. One of the interesting aspects of Victorian attitudes towards sex is the tendency of Victorian writers to represent worldliness (implicitly of course) in terms of sexual knowledge. Lust is not a major theme of their writing, as it is, say, of Dostoevsky's: the child, the virgin and the celibate are valued as witnesses against the world rather than against the flesh; but the limitations of innocence are recognised as well. The price of integrity is an acceptance, in one way or another, of less than adult status,

with the limitations of view and of scope that this entails. The losses as well as the gains involved in maintaining personal integrity were well understood in the nineteenth century.

The issues raised by worldliness extend beyond fiction into theory. One of the curiosities of Newman's writing is his preoccupation with the prophet Balaam, who could not accommodate his will to the truth communicated to him about God's dealings with Israel. Summoned to prophesy against the Israelites, he found himself compelled to prophesy in their favour, but failed to separate himself from their enemies, and met his destruction in consequence. Newman is fascinated by the intellectual and moral inchoateness which this story implies, and refers to Balaam more frequently than to any other Old Testament figure. Here was a man to whom a revelation had been made and yet who struggled against yielding to its truth: 'he had light without love,' Newman concludes; 'his intellect was clear, his heart was cold' (*Grammar of Assent*, p. 155). What Newman denies here, as thoroughly as ever Karl Marx did, is that 'the theoretical is the only genuinely human attitude'.³⁵ Our relationship with our ideas has a moral component; we cannot speculate about ourselves or the world or literature, without having, more or less inchoately, more or less 'love'. As Carlyle might have put it, all speculation is conduct, and how we conduct ourselves – honestly, lovingly, anxiously, selfishly – in formulating thought and utterance cannot itself be put into words – it can only be shown.

No one can read the exchanges between Newman and Kingsley without recognising the extent to which the *truthfulness* of both men is on display and at stake. The same is true of ourselves. The relativism to which Hamilton drew Newman's attention was not, for Newman, an initial condition of thought at last disclosed to the enquiring modern spirit, but the outcome of a drama, in which philosophy with its thought experiments, and science with its real ones, have their parts to play. The 'always already' paradox, the radical and morally disordered contingency into which we are thrown simply by being what we are to each other, the linguistic Babel on which we are compelled to rely, all this is the consequence of 'some terrible aboriginal calamity', and not simply the ineluctable condition of our inclusion in the relativities of a signifying system or a Darwinian process.

Even recognition of this fallen condition, however, is 'an inchoate state', disclosing our need of 'Objective Truth', that is, of a system 'considered as existing in itself, external to this or that particular mind' (*Essays Critical*, I, p. 34). But the only way of engaging with the bare possibility of truth is a precipitation of the mind into whatever aspects of it are to hand. We need to 'throw ourselves forward upon that which we have but partially mastered ... to embrace, maintain, and use

general propositions which are larger than our capacity, of which we cannot see the bottom'. This proto-existentialist action is at once private and moral: in numerous 'actions of the intellect,' Newman asserted, 'the individual is supreme and responsible to himself' (*Grammar of Assent*, p. 277). The 'always already' paradox is not, therefore, just a matter of understanding or signification; it involves judgement (*fronesis*). One can only be responsible for choices intelligently made, but intelligence, at the highest level, when it becomes certitude, is itself ultimately a matter of choice, 'an active recognition of propositions as true, such as it is the duty of each individual ... to exercise at the bidding of reason, and, when reason forbids, to withhold' (p. 271). Here is the fundamental difference between Newman and Dennett. Human beings, in Newman's judgement, not only tell stories about themselves; they are capable of intellectual and moral acts which result in certitude. This is an intensely individual event: real assents 'are of a personal character ... They depend on personal experience and the experience of one man is not the experience of another. Real assent ... is proper to the individual, and as such, thwarts rather than promotes the intercourse of man with man' (pp. 82-3). 'I believe' thus involves passivity before 'Objective Truth', yet an active choosing also, which presupposes (and does not just hypothesise) the truths about which it subsequently entertains certitude.

Nevertheless both Dennett and Miller do help us to clarify this structure. Let us suppose with Dennett that the 'I' in '*credo*' is a fiction, but let also us accept with Miller that all fictions, especially those involving ethical considerations, require an initial prosopopoeia. But the ethical can only arise if that initial prosopopoeia always already implies the possibility of responsible action. What would 'person', what would 'Maisie' mean, even in the inchoate condition of the initial prosopopoeia, if they did not imply that – if, in Miller's words, Maisie were not 'ethical'? The initial prosopopoeia involves us therefore not just in a mysterious seeing, but an inchoate doing. In this sense Newman is right when he describes the human person as 'emphatically self-made'.

Deconstructionism and cognitive philosophy also illuminate another of his claims, 'that [his] Maker and [he] were the two beings, luminously such, in *rerum natura*' (*Apologia*, p. 238). Newman puts this conviction down to conscience, which he regards as given in consciousness, impressing 'the imagination with the picture of a Supreme Governor, a Judge, holy, just, powerful, all-seeing, retributive' (*Grammar of Assent*, p. 101), 'the aboriginal Vicar of Christ, a prophet in its informations, a monarch in its peremptoriness, a priest in its blessings and anathemas'.³⁶ Slightly extravagant as this may strike modern readers, it is worth recalling that even Hume believed that the 'mind of man is so

formed by nature that, upon the appearance of certain characters, dispositions, and actions, it immediately feels the sentiment of approbation or blame; nor are there any emotions more essential to its frame and constitution' (*Enquiries*, p. 102). Miller, moreover, takes this idea further. 'The personification of the moral law', he writes, '... is fundamental, original, and ineffaceable. It cannot be erased or suspended by a return to clear, philosophical, reasonable, nonfigurative first principles' (*Versions of Pygmalion*, p. 136). Newman's prosopopoeic intuition of conscience is thus at least thinkable in post-Christian terms; nor does it function for Newman as a *proof* of God's existence, though on occasion he loosely refers to it as such, first because it specifies a condition of thought and not a conclusion, and second because it depends 'on personal experience and the experience of one man is not the experience of another' (*Grammar of Assent*, p. 82). 'God', Newman argues,

dwells intelligibly, prior to argument, in the heart and conscience. And though on the mind's first mastering this general principle, it seems to itself at the moment to have cut off all the ties which bind it to the universe, and to be floated off upon the ocean of intolerable scepticism

– 'solipsism' is the word that might occur to the post-Wittgensteinian reader; other readers might think of Emily Brontë's 'No coward soul is mine' –

yet a true sense of its own weakness brings it back, the instructive persuasion that it must be intended to rely on something, and therefore that the information given, though philosophically inaccurate, must be practically certain. (*The Arians*, p. 76)

It seems, then, that Miller's initial prosopopoeia was what enabled Newman famously to 'rest in the thought of two and two only absolute and luminously self-evident beings' (*Apologia*, p. 89), himself and his Creator. Whether 'conscience' does or does not disclose the presence of 'God' to the individual consciousness, however, may be left to one side. What is clear from Miller, and implicit in the arguments of other deconstructionists and cognitive philosophers, is that making moral choices simultaneously involves an experience (however inchoate and rudimental) of the (potential) presence of another person. Prosopopoeia always already implies the *really* interpersonal.

The essays in this book are thus based on two assumptions. The first is that certitude about the real presence of other persons is the *sine qua non* of all thought. But another person is always already an agent, which brings me to my second assumption, that there 'is one, and only one, truly discerned but non-coercive value which the mind can cognize