

importance of theatrical failure itself to the development of the novel of interiority.

Such countercurrents muddy the waters of Kurnick's crystalline argument but do not greatly weaken its impact. Indeed, this reviewer is currently reading *Can You Forgive Her?*, itself based on an unperformed play (*The Noble Jilt*), and finds himself noticing aspects of the text he would not have noticed and posing questions he would not have thought to pose before reading *Empty Houses*. This is an important book that demands to be pondered and deserves to be argued with—and applauded.

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ADELA PINCH, *Thinking about Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. x + 247. \$95.

Adela Pinch's *Thinking about Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing* is an impressive book on several levels: as an interdisciplinary study of the ways in which philosophy and literature can advance one another's concerns; as an unusually wide-ranging study in nineteenth-century intellectual culture; as a series of original readings of Victorian texts, some familiar, some little-known; as the articulation of a tentative but engaging theory of ethics; and as a contribution to theoretical debates about prosody and genre. Pinch sets out to examine "a tenacious pattern in nineteenth-century writing which could be described as a simultaneous attraction to and repulsion from belief in the belief that thinking about someone can affect him or her" (p. 5). The phrase "belief in the belief" is not a misprint. Pinch recognizes that believing that you can make an impact on another person just by the way that you think about them—without saying or doing anything—could be seen as delusional. It may be, however, a belief that one might have reasons for *wanting* to have; in that sense, it might be a belief that one could come to believe in. Pinch is interested in this matter both as a question of moral agency for us, now, and as a pervasive concern in nineteenth-century writing.

Pinch's "belief in the belief" turns out to be well grounded in nineteenth-century thought-patterns. She notes that in Coventry Patmore's *Angel in the House*, for example, "a woman claims, rhythmically,

‘He thought I thought he thought I slept’” (p. 4). Reflections on the possibility of a deep reciprocal involvement with other humans, through what Pinch—quoting Patmore again—calls “love thinking,” are expressed in the very rhythms of Victorian verse. In fact, Pinch suggests that it is the verse itself that is “love thinking,” a phrase that she takes as expressing both the characteristic mental processes of a lover and the mental processes that invent love in the first place.

In pursuing these concerns, Pinch resurrects some interesting, largely forgotten, thinkers. In her first chapter, she deals mainly with the Scottish philosopher James Frederick Ferrer, author of *Introduction to the Philosophy of Consciousness* (1838–39). This eccentric character, much admired by Thomas De Quincey, is of interest here for his concept of thinking as negation: “We could not perceive and know a rose,” paraphrases Pinch, “if the rose were not discriminated from the self; negation renders the rose an object to our subjecthood” (p. 37). Thinking is thus an aggressive process, an assertion of power over others. This idea led Ferrer to an interest (shared with many other Victorians) in the theory and practice of mesmerism, which Pinch explores in a way that is typical of this book, moving with great agility not just between academic disciplines, but between the academic world as a whole and popular beliefs and practices, even superstitions.

Pinch’s scope widens further in the second chapter to embrace “the idiosyncratic metaphysician Shadworth Hodgson, the utopian polygamist ear doctor James Hinton, the philosophical ribbon-manufacturer Charles Bray, the psychological mathematician Mary Everest Boole, and even the fin-de-siècle idealist J.M.E. McTaggart” (p. 46). All of these turn out to be fascinating individuals, and all fit credibly into Pinch’s account of a wave of interest in “mental force”: thinking as not merely a private, subjective experience, but as a process with agency, and with consequences for those whom we think about—a set of ideas that rolls around in a dynamic relationship, in Pinch’s account, with the views of nineteenth-century “epiphenomenalists,” for whom consciousness is a mere by-product, with no impact on the outer world or even on ourselves. Once again, in addition to relatively mainstream philosophical and scientific thinkers, Pinch pays attention to what we might mistake for the lunatic fringe of Victorian culture. Thus, the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) is rediscovered, not just as a club for would-be communicators with the dead, but as, in the words of Mary Everest Boole, an organization devoted to investigating “all classes of cases where there is reason to suppose that the mind of one human being has affected the mind of another, without speech uttered, or word written, or sign made” (quoted on p. 60). Far from being fantasists, the SPR were, for the

Cambridge philosopher J.M.E. McTaggart (remembered as a friend of Thomas Hardy and an influence on T. S. Eliot), merely stating the obvious: for him it was entirely clear that “Absolute reality” (as described in his unfinished work, *The Nature of Existence*) was constituted and sustained by cognitive energy—more precisely by refined, strenuously targeted *love*, the kind articulated and eternized by poets such as Dante and Tennyson: “the love of ‘the *Vita Nuova* and of *In Memoriam*” (quoted on p. 74).

Pinch observes that “it sometimes seems as if the entire story of Victorian beliefs about the act of thinking could be told as the story of the era’s collective meditation on [not just Dante and Tennyson, but] Shelley and Coleridge” (p. 76). In her third chapter, Pinch develops this insight in relation to “the poetics of address,” where “what appear to be philosophical problems reveal themselves as literary forms” (p. 77). Building partly on the thinking-together of philosophy and poetry in Simon Jarvis’s work, Pinch makes a strong case for rethinking the dynamics of the nineteenth-century lyric, in particular the role of the apostrophe, which now, in the light of the previous chapters’ investigations in metaphysics, spiritualism, and other fields and discourses, can be seen as embedded in a vast body of theory about “second-person thinking” (p. 78). In a series of vivid close readings of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Letitia Elizabeth Landon, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Pinch explores “poetic second-person writing . . . as an imaginary technology” (p. 99) that both creates and questions, under the unique conditions of literary form, the possibility of holding another in our thoughts. Now, when Elizabeth Browning takes the refrain from Letitia Landon’s “Night at Sea,” “Do you think of me, as I think of you?” and uses it as the conclusion of her own sonnet, “L.E.L.’s Last Question” (p. 101), what might have seemed a banal wish not to be forgotten becomes a searching interrogation of the mechanisms that poetry wills into being, to keep two poets, or two people, in touch.

In her fourth chapter, Pinch concentrates on Coventry Patmore and George Meredith. Here we are back with something like Ferrer’s “thinking as negation,” insofar as both poets were “attuned to the perils of diminishment, or destruction, attendant upon becoming an object of thought” (p. 112). And yet they recognized that thinking may be the best hope that we have, in a world in which knowledge seems out of reach. Pinch discusses both *The Angel in the House* and *Modern Love* as studies of the role of thinking in marriage: about how the ideal of thinking of one another, or thinking *with* one another, is what keeps the concept of marriage afloat. It is also what

keeps poetry afloat, and Pinch brings all of these elements creatively together. In doing so, she reasserts the special power and significance of literature, against what she clearly regards as the reductive tendencies of at least some kinds of cognitive poetics. Returning to Patmore's line, "He thought I thought he thought I slept," Pinch wonders "whether the fact that researchers see human ability to process 'he thought I thought' statements to four or five levels of embeddedness rather has something to do with the fact that units of four and five are the backbone of English common meters" (p. 117). Like Patmore and Meredith themselves, Pinch stands up for willing, believing, interpreting, thinking, writing—ongoing discursive and literary operations—against a too-hasty appeal to supposedly decidable, shareable fact.

Pinch talks about "the roar of Victorian writing about the silent power of thinking about another person" (p. 59). This is clearly an echo (typical of Pinch's fertile allusiveness) of the "roar . . . on the other side of silence" in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*: the immeasurable mass of feeling, suffering, and potential responsibility in the outer world that would overwhelm us if our thoughts could reach that far. But Pinch reverses the idea, revealing a roar of Victorian literary activity, and thought, directed against this ignorance of others, or this inability to affect others for good or ill. Thus, it is appropriate that Pinch turns to George Eliot in her last chapter, "*Daniel Deronda* and the omnipotence of thought," where the ethical stakes of the whole book are brought into sharper focus. Pinch's reading of Eliot's novel, as of so many other texts, is dense and intricate, but revolves around simple questions, within and concerning the text. For instance: Does Gwendolen Harleth contribute to Grandcourt's death—just by willing that it were so, *thinking* it into being, without *doing* anything about it? And does Eliot distance herself from Gwendolen's illogical guilt? By now, we realize that these would not be simple matters for a thinking Victorian. Nor should they be simple for us. Pinch makes connections with the idea of "moral luck" articulated by Bernard Williams: "Asking us to ponder the example of the dreadful, world-crushing emotions of guilt of the truck driver who has had the bad 'luck,' so to speak, to completely accidentally cause the death of a child, Williams famously pointed out that we tend to feel that it is understandable, and essential, for people to feel guilt about unintended harm to others. We'd feel there was something truly morally wrong about the truck driver who didn't" (p. 168). Similarly, Eliot, many of the other writers and thinkers discussed in this book, and Pinch herself seem to be saying that attributing agency to the thoughts that we have about one another, although

perhaps logically indefensible, may be a moral necessity. An ethics is not there to be found; it has to be thought and written into existence.

Not all of the allusions to twentieth- and twenty-first-century philosophy, in this deeply learned book, are equally convincing. There are moments when Pinch seems determined to keep a reference that almost seems to fit, but that she does not have time to integrate completely. There is a suggestive comparison to the work of Hannah Arendt, for example, but it seems to call for the kind of rich contextualization that Pinch gives to her nineteenth-century sources: one point that this book makes over and over again is that philosophical and poetic ideas only come fully to life when they are seen as part of a great matrix of thought. A more systematic overview of ideas of mental agency and responsibility in contemporary philosophy might have been helpful—but that would have been a lot to ask of this book, which does so many other things so well.

“Reading about second-person thinking,” says Pinch, “can make sense of our own experience of mental life, which often seems—if you are like me—peopled with other people, and in which a great deal of what feels like conscious thinking takes the form of inner address to others” (p. 83). Pinch is speculating here about what we will think of how she wonders about what we think about the way that she thinks that she thinks (at least, I think that’s it—six levels!). She is joking about, but also committing herself to, a moral decision that we (Pinch and her readers) are to be *thought* of as being alike. *Thinking about Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing* connects poetry with philosophy, thinking with writing, scholarship with ethics, “primary” authors with the reader and the critic, in a project of remarkable coherence.

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RANDALL FULLER, *From Battlefields Rising: How the Civil War Transformed American Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. Pp. xii + 251. \$29.95.

Not so long ago in the search for a nascent American literature, it seemed the mark of a founding literary poise to be disengaged. The country’s formative writers took to the woods or retreated to their studies, lit out for European parts or holed up at home. That was not true of Walt Whitman or Edgar Allan Poe, of

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