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978-0-521-76464-3 - Thinking about Other People in Nineteenth-Century British Writing

Adela Pinch

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THINKING ABOUT OTHER PEOPLE
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY
BRITISH WRITING

Nineteenth-century life and literature are full of strange accounts that describe the act of one person thinking about another as an ethically problematic, sometimes even a dangerously powerful thing to do. Adela Pinch explains why, when, and under what conditions it is possible, or desirable, to believe that thinking about another person could affect them. She explains why nineteenth-century British writers – poets, novelists, philosophers, psychologists, devotees of the occult – were both attracted to and repulsed by radical or substantial notions of purely mental relations between persons, and why they moralized about the practice of thinking about other people in interesting ways.

Working at the intersection of literary studies and philosophy, this book both sheds new light on a neglected aspect of Victorian literature and thought, and explores the consequences of, and the value placed on, this strand of thinking about thinking.

ADELA PINCH is Associate Professor of English and Women's Studies, University of Michigan.

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Nineteenth-century British literature and culture have been rich fields for interdisciplinary studies. Since the turn of the twentieth century, scholars and critics have tracked the intersections and tensions between Victorian literature and the visual arts, politics, social organization, economic life, technical innovations, scientific thought – in short, culture in its broadest sense. In recent years, theoretical challenges and historiographical shifts have unsettled the assumptions of previous scholarly synthesis and called into question the terms of older debates. Whereas the tendency in much past literary critical interpretation was to use the metaphor of culture as “background”, feminist, Foucauldian, and other analyses have employed more dynamic models that raise questions of power and of circulation. Such developments have reanimated the field. This series aims to accommodate and promote the most interesting work being undertaken on the frontiers of the field of nineteenth-century literary studies: work which intersects fruitfully with other fields of study such as history, or literary theory, or the history of science. Comparative as well as interdisciplinary approaches are welcomed.

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For Webb and Clara Keane

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