Phases of the Soul
The Newman Brothers

1

What a man's or nation's available religion at any time is, may sometimes, especially if he abound in Bishops, Gorham Controversies, and richly endowed Churches and Church-practices, be difficult to say.—Thomas Carlyle, Latter-Day Pamphlets (1850)¹

In wading through the recent arguments of counsel on baptismal regeneration and prevenient grace, we could not help asking ourselves—How will all this whole scheme of doctrine look when gazed at from an historic distance...?—J. S. Mill, “The Church of England” (1850)²

“Phases of the Soul” is a conflation of two titles, both of mid-century works by Francis W. Newman: The Soul, Her Sorrows and Aspirations (1849) and Phases of Faith; or Passages from the History of My Creed (1850). Newman’s titles characterize the religious preoccupations of the day as much as his own concerns, and Newman, though soon to be eclipsed by the brother he distrusted, won a limited but genuine fame as “lecturer, scholar, and influential critic of society and religion.”³ George Eliot (still Marian Evans) spoke of Newman as “our blessed St. Francis”;⁴ George Lewes described Phases of Faith as a great and seminal work (see below). Eliot’s praise implies the importance for both herself and her future husband of Newman the man. She later shrugged off Newman’s thinking as quaint and inadequate, but at first she saw in Newman a laudable pioneer: a worthy successor to David Strauss, and a man who had been brave enough to write a book that she had “long wished to see written.”⁵ George Eliot’s praise is exceptional, but her awareness of Newman is not. Whereas Browning found little acknowledgment for his mid-century

[105]
religious work, Newman won praise and notoriety, *The Soul* and *Phases of Faith* stirring up as much interest as the tracts of John Henry Newman had stirred up a decade before.\(^6\)

If Newman's *The Soul* tries to define (with Coleridge's terms) the elements of divinity in men and to characterize the "Infinite Personality" of God, *Phases of Faith* draws together two heavily used words of the time to indicate that Newman's own life is a more or less paradigmatic vehicle in a common search for belief. An "honest doubter," as Basil Willey calls him,\(^7\) Newman wrote *Phases* in an autobiographical mode in order to indicate the relation of a representative man—a finite personality—to a God whom Newman found unavailable through Anglican dogma. His book lacks the novelistic force and the full sense of an emergent self that we find in Gosse's later *Father and Son*, but Newman writes with a comparable self-deprecation and economy. He details the problems of faith for a man unafraid to ask questions.

Both the Newman brothers faced religious perplexities, struggled with self-doubts, and came to record their personal histories as though they were of use to their countrymen. But, almost uncannily, the two men moved in contrary directions, possibly seeing their own ways according to the darkness they associated with the other. While John rejected the religious liberalism of his day and found, in 1845, surety in Rome, Francis came increasingly to reject any dogma and any church authority. John respected his younger brother, but with a grudging acknowledgment of his "independent mind." In the *Apologia pro Vita Sua* (1864) he records that he and Francis had returned to England in 1833 on the very same day, John from Italy ("I have a work to do in England"),\(^8\) Francis from an ill-fated mission in the Near East. Since he has emphasized the significance both of his need to return and of the impending historical events (in fact, the Oxford Movement), and since he knows what Francis has in the meantime thought and published, he evidently calls attention to the physical gulf between them, which is in no way lessened by their coincidental proximity. Similarly Francis, accounting for his years at Oxford, describes his brother's development so as to point out how utterly unlike the two have become. Each distrusts, each is hurt by the other; each seems prodded toward an extreme clarification of his own position. Rarely have two brothers moved so far apart. Even after John Henry Newman died, Francis could not resist what most readers still consider the unkind and petty comments in *Contributions to the Early History of the Late Cardinal Newman* (1891).\(^9\)

At mid-century the Newman brothers represented extremes of religious
differences—and difficulties—facing their countrymen. How urgent religious issues were for ordinary men and women of the time would be difficult to say with any certainty, since evidence like the Census of 1851 suggests a blurry picture. But we can guess from the religious topics treated in periodicals and from the large number of periodicals representing religious positions that in one way or another religion was on people’s minds. We have seen the preoccupation with faith in Tennyson, Clough, Browning, and other poets, and will see it again in a different guise in Charles Kingsley (chapter VIII). A work of Kingsley’s friend James Anthony Froude, Nemesis of Faith (1848), had seriously offended academicians, just as Essays and Studies was to disturb them a decade later, and Froude’s book was publicly burned at Oxford.

A lucid and seminal discussion of religious issues, which attacks any theological and emotional extremes, is John Stuart Mill’s “The Church of England,” published in the Westminster (1850), the year before George Eliot became its editor. Mill’s position is perhaps predictable, given his and the Westminster’s Utilitarian assumptions. But that Mill would concern himself with the church, that he would try to find for it what amounts to a Broad Church justification, implies the importance of both doctrinal and social aspects of faith to the age. In his recommendations, Mill anticipates the latitudinarian positions of Matthew Arnold (in Literature and Dogma and St. Paul and Protestantism), although Arnold at this time is writing about the ebbing “sea of faith,” while Mill is finding for the church a role as social mediator and public servant. Arnold’s response to Mill is clear in his remark to Clough: “How short could Mill write Job?”

Mill may be sympathetic to the “alienation” of men and women who are “above the faith they profess,” but his concern is with the institution rather than with the individual. He wants to demonstrate the general “blight of unreality” caused by a church that has “worn itself out,” and which “gives no adequate voice to the faith and piety of the present day.” By defining the church as “the product of compromise,” he accepts neither the personal and skeptical course of Francis Newman nor the road toward authority and dogma of John Henry Newman. Mill feels that the church must, if it is to survive, assert again its open welcome as “a system of pacified discrepancies.”

Behind Mill’s essay, and of course behind the writings of the Newman brothers, lie at least two decades of religious controversy, including the High Church movement associated with the Tractarians (especially Newman and Keble), the Broad Church movement associated with Thomas Arnold (to whom Francis Newman turned for guidance), and the claims
for something more than religious tolerance by Roman Catholics on the one hand and various groups of Dissenters on the other. Mill seems to have written his essay, however, in specific response to what came to be known as the Gorham Controversy. Gorham was an elderly Anglican clergyman with evangelical leanings. Because he denied the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration, the bishop of Exeter (Phillpotts) refused him a benefice. Gorham appealed his case and finally won, when the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council decided, in Mill's terms, that the church must have "provision for variety." Unfortunately, to many thinkers, a lay authority had no right to enter theological debate, let alone to demand any sort of provision. Although the case might seem slight enough in itself, it involved issues of establishment and of church authority that the Tractarians had raised in the thirties. To read contemporary reports (like the Greville Memoirs) is to see how much energy the Gorham Case released, how much it interrupted political routines. A flutter of conversions followed the controversy, of which the best known was Henry Manning's. Manning, after attending worship with Gladstone, said to his friend: "Come with me." Gladstone could not and did not. But he wrote about Manning's conversion: "I do indeed feel the loss of Manning. . . . Nothing like it can ever happen to me again." Kingsley might mock those who went over to Rome, including and above all John Henry Newman, but the conversions were signs of religious turmoil that involved Kingsley himself.

The Gorham Case occupied people in the spring. In the fall, there arose what seemed an even more serious issue. Pope Pius IX restored the Catholic hierarchy in England and appointed Nicholas Wiseman cardinal. Wiseman's notorious letter "Out of the Flaminian Gate" offended many Englishmen, including the prime minister, Lord John Russell, who saw Wiseman's gleeful announcement as an insult if not a threat to the country. It is in the context of anti-Catholic sentiment that John Henry Newman's writings have to be read. Before turning to Newman's "Christ upon the Waters" and Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans, I want first to look at Francis Newman's Phases of Faith, a book that prefigures John Henry Newman's Apologia and that seems to embody a generation of religious insecurity.
1851, 10,300 were works on divinity. Sermons were bought, and presumably read. Newman's Tract 90 (of controversial interest to be sure) sold 12,000 copies before it finally went out of print in 1846. . . . In a list of 117 new books noted in the *Athenaeum* on October 23, 1841, thirty-nine were on religious subjects, eleven were poetry, ten medical, thirteen travel, and only sixteen were novels.—John Dodds, *The Age of Paradox* 

Like *The Prelude* and *David Copperfield*, *Phases of Faith* is a work about education. It is also a retrospective work, which treats, from the perspective of a mature narrator, the “progress” of the author’s religious growth. “The progress of his *creed* is his sole subject.” Newman recognizes that *Phases* “is perhaps an egotistical book; egotistical certainly in its form, yet not in its purport or essence.” Egotistical in form, not in essence. Why, then, run the risk of being called egotistical? Newman raises several points. He says that he does indeed want to show that he had “no choice” in arriving at his conclusions and hence he admits his defense against those “unjustly alienated” from him. “But the argument before the writer is something immensely greater than a personal one. So it happens, that to vindicate himself is to establish a mighty truth.” His truth approximates the distinction made in our time by Paul Tillich between *Faith* (which is internal, is true “fidelity” “to God and Righteousness”) and *Belief* (which is “intellectual” and “dogmatic”). Newman is sure that a personal narrative in “historical form” will interest his reader, although he carefully disclaims autobiographical intent, even the intent to give a full “mental history.” He spares us in Copperfield’s words “all the weary phases . . . through which I passed.” Yet in a sense he does give a full history. His book like John Stuart Mill’s is an autobiography, which is limited by choice, but also by temperament. Mill includes in his autobiography what he too calls “phases” of his intellectual development. Newman includes phases of a life seen as spiritual quest.

To read *Phases of Faith*, to encounter what U. C. Knoepflmacher calls the “centripetal I,” which “appropriates for itself all those elements from the outside world pertinent to its growth,” is to enter the world of a sophisticated innocent. Newman relentlessly examines Anglicanism, Unitarianism, Evangelicalism, and Catholicism—in addition to the Bible itself—as each of these dominates a period of his life; but he also approaches experience as if he were a Citizen of the World for whom any custom or belief will finally prove alien. Newman’s tools of criticism may seem crude, and they lacked the sophistication, for example, of the higher critics, whom Newman says he did not know. Since German criticism of
the Bible had been available to other linguists for decades, and since Newman refers to Strauss and fellow scholars for authority, Newman apparently means that his early doubting was independent of the Germans. Still, his oddly reverential, literal approach to experience would probably have remained the same regardless of such readings. John Henry Newman spoke of Francis's independent mind needing to "unravel the web of self-sufficient inquiry," of a kind of intellectual doggedness, which reflected personality, not training. Francis's either/or thinking and his desire for definable certainties lead him into troughs of bathos as well as into moments of lonely insight.

Yet there is in *Phases of Faith* a quiet heroism that parallels John Henry Newman's. Whatever the results, Francis lives by his conclusions. The implications of modern science, particularly the work of geologists like Lyell, mean for Francis inescapable decisions: "Thus at length," he says of one point in his career, "it appeared, that I must choose between two courses. I must either blind my moral sentiment, my powers of criticism, and my scientific knowledge (such as they were) in order to accept the Scripture entire; OR I must encounter the problem . . . of adjusting the relative claims of human knowledge and divine revelation" (69-70).

Such a writer is not "egotistical" in the sense of being self-congratulatory or self-important; he is egotistical in his self-exploration. And so he had to be. Newman thinks of faith as private, as the effect of an active and morally engaged mind coming to terms with the obstacles posed to religion by his age. He believes that truth "can in no other way so well enter the heart, as when it comes embodied in an individual case" (iv). This comment, which might apply to Browning's *Christmas-Eve* or to any retrospective chapter of *David Copperfield*, indicates that Newman is necessarily more confessional than his "mental history" disclaimer allows. It raises a further question about his intellectual "unraveling."

An empirical and personal approach to truth does not make Newman a novelist, but it may point to new directions for fiction taken by Dickens and other novelists of the time (see the two following chapters) and to the dilemma faced by mid-century writers between collective as opposed to personal or individual theories of mind. J. D. Morell, in his *Philosophical Tendencies of the Age* (1848) had described the main intellectual problem of his generation in terms of the conflict between *individualism* and *collectivism*. For Morell, collectivism meant primarily forms of science, particularly social science like Comte's Positivism, which Morell already isolates as the most powerful of collective theories. Opposing collectivism is individualism, which Morell thinks of at once as the political activism of
Sheffield and Manchester industrialists and as the dominant attitude toward truth emerging in his time. He feels that individualists are rejecting authority, tradition, accepted beliefs, while trying to base their ethics upon private ideals. Morell himself curses both houses and wants a Mill-like compromise. But other writers, including Charles Radcliffe, were thinking of a different answer, by which personal exploration might lead to universal truth. I have mentioned Radcliffe and will turn to him again. A related thinker is Robert Mackay, who published *The Progress of the Intellect* in 1850.

Ostensibly a study of ancient religions, Mackay's book is directed at various tendencies in the thought of his own age. Mackay believes, for example, that modern fiction is too matter-of-fact (a question I take up in the following chapters), but also, and more importantly, that it reflects a society in which there is no sense of poetry. Implicitly, Mackay accuses a radical individualist like Newman of lacking imagination. He shares with Newman a distrust of dogma, deplores the falling back "upon a worship of form," but he also finds fault with "fallacies of perverted ingenuity." Our faculties must "work in unison," and we cannot separate mind from emotion. The fact that we do separate marks us as unimaginative, disjointed people, who can no longer think "mythically." It would not be too unfair to Francis Newman to see him in Mackay's terms as obsessed by intellectual ingenuity. What complicates such criticism is Newman's insistent emotions: his weeping, like Tennyson's, for the infant in the night, and his appeal, like Dickens's, to "the heart" as final arbiter.

"My heart was ready to break," he says at one point; "I wished for a woman's soul, that I might weep in floods." His book describes his "great transition," his progressive isolation from other people, his "alienation," until he can accept what amounts to a newly "disciplined heart," the comfort of a wiser and sadder man. He describes his dark night, when friends have deserted or foresworn him, and before he finds Agnes in the form of renewed faith: "Now I am alone in the world: I can trust no one" (36–37).

In company with Copperfield and John Stuart Mill, Newman seems to describe his lonely progress in terms of fathers. He says at one point, "I had begun to think that the old writers called Fathers deserved but a small fraction of the reverence which is awarded to them" (15). The comment is apt in an account of a personal and theoretical search for the father. Interestingly, the individuals Newman singles out for detailed attention all serve as "a father, or indeed as an elder brother," who invariably both disappoint and hurt. John Henry Newman offers a good example of Francis's almost repetitive patterns of relationships with older figures.
One person there was at Oxford, who might have seemed my natural adviser: his name, character, and religious peculiarities have been so made public property, that I need not shrink to name him:—I mean my elder brother, the Rev. John Henry Newman. As a warm-hearted and generous brother, who exercised towards me paternal cares, I esteemed him and felt a deep gratitude; as a man of various culture and peculiar genius, I admired and was proud of him; but my doctrinal religion impeded my loving him as much as he deserved, and even justified my feeling some distrust of him. He never showed any strong attraction towards those whom I regarded as spiritual persons: on the contrary, I thought him stiff and cold towards them. Moreover, soon after his ordination, he had startled and distressed me by adopting the doctrine of Baptismal Regeneration; and in rapid succession worked out views which I regarded as full-blown “Popery.” I speak of the years 1823-6: it is strange to think that twenty years more had to pass before he learnt the place to which his doctrines belonged. (7)

The difficulty with John Henry Newman epitomizes Francis’s entire struggle with authority. His brother, like the Irish clergyman, the Calvinistic leaders, the “unitarian gentlemen,” and several others whom Francis meets, serves much like the Thirty-Nine Articles and finally the Bible itself as an obstacle to true faith. And the true faith, for Francis Newman, involves the right “path” toward a private spiritual morality. As with most autobiographers, Newman has arrived at a certain self-understanding when he begins his narrative. His understanding is that “Faith is a moral art,” that “Morality is the end, Spirituality is the means” (93). Phases of Faith is thus a record of Francis Newman’s coming of age. If his sense of the private religious experience recalls Clough and Browning, or Kierkegaard, another contemporary, his emphasis on right behavior and the effect of faith again suggests the retrospective self-assessment of David Copperfield, who similarly turns alienation into psychic integrity.

3

“I see [the truth] . . . in that man who, driven fatally by the remorseless logic of his creed, gives up everything, friends, fame, dearest ties, closest vanities, the respect of an army of churchmen, the recognised position of a leader, and passes over, truth-impelled, to the enemy, in whose ranks he is ready to serve henceforth as a nameless private soldier:—I see the truth in that man, as I do in his brother, whose logic drives him to quite a different conclusion, and who, after having passed a life in vain endeavours to reconcile an irreconcilable book, flings it at last down in despair, and declares, with tearful eyes, and hands up to Heaven, his revolt and recantation.”—W. M. Thackeray, Pendennis 21
Thackeray's easy-going Pendennis, finding it difficult to take sides on any question, reflects the ideological confusions shared by his author and anathematized by Carlyle or by the Newman brothers themselves. "Driven," no less than Francis, by his own "remorseless logic," John Henry Newman had undergone his conversion, had entered the Roman Catholic priesthood, and, with his work in the Birmingham Oratory, had accepted the possibility that he might be the nameless soldier anticipated by Pendennis. But Newman's writing tell of neither self-abasement nor simple obedience. While still years away from the autobiography by which he is best remembered, his writing at mid-century already springs from religious controversy and meets opposition out of hard-won personal assurance. How personal Newman's writing had become we know from the fictionalized portrait of Charles Reding in *Loss and Gain*, the novel of 1848 which describes a young man's intellectual and spiritual journey toward the Roman Church. The sermon "Christ Upon the Waters" and the lectures *On Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans in Submitting to the Catholic Church* restate the arguments of *Loss and Gain* and point to the self-estimate elaborated in the *Apologia*.

Eighteen fifty was an important year for English Catholics. *The Rambler: A Catholic Journal and Review* (which Newman was to edit) spoke in January of "Hopes and Fears for 1850," anticipating "the coming conflict between the Church and her foes." The pope's restitution of the Catholic sees and Wiseman's announcement brought out the enemies but also pointed to divisions among English Catholics. Newman's "Christ upon the Waters" is a discussion of the new situation facing Catholics, the new problems, the new challenges. It is an analysis of Newman's own "Hopes and Fears" in light of English religious history and of the English character as Newman sees it.

Essentially, Newman thinks of the English along the lines he sketches in the *Apologia*, except that here English honesty is a gruff hostility, English fairness an illusion, English independence of thought a myth perpetrated by the press, which itself forms the hodgepodge of judgments held by most Englishmen. One might have argued, as Kingsley was to argue, that Newman tailored his remarks to fit both audience and argument, or that his estimate of his countrymen changed conveniently. But in fact the situation for Catholics was anything but comfortable. If by the 1860s Newman could receive a fair hearing for his *Apologia*, he had reason for pessimism when he wrote "Christ upon the Waters." Carlyle's final "Latter-Day Pamphlet" was, for example, an attack on "Jesuitism" and seemed a general indictment of Roman Catholics.
I hear much also of “obedience,” how that and the kindred virtues are prescribed and exemplified by Jesuitism; the truth of which, and the merit of which, far be it for me to deny. Obedience, a virtue universally forgotten in these days, will have to become universally known again. Obedience is good, and indispensable: but if it be obedience to what is wrong and false,—good Heavens, there is no name for such a depth of human cowardice and calamity; spurned everlastingly by the gods. Loyalty? Will you be loyal to Beelzebub? Will you “make a covenant with Death and Hell?”

If unusually irate, Carlyle’s diatribe was typical in its sentiments. Moreover, his essay appeared in August, before the pope’s reinstitution of the English sees and before Wiseman’s offending announcement.

“Christ upon the Waters” was a sermon addressed to Catholics; On Certain Difficulties Felt by Anglicans was a series of lectures Newman delivered to his unconverted countrymen, also in 1850, but before the reestablishment of the Catholic hierarchy. In the lectures Newman attacks the English Church more than the English character. He argues that Anglicanism is an untenable via media, a shoddy compromise. The English Church is essentially identical with the state and has neither “personal nor integral quality.” “The [Roman] Catholic Church, and she alone, is proof against Erastianism.” Newman’s position is that the people of the Oxford Movement (“the Apostolical Party of twenty years ago”) can no longer be true to the Church of England, because the church has shifted, has betrayed Tractarian ideals. Hence, the individual must move toward the constancy of the mother church. Newman’s views are of course elaborated in the Apologia: they need not be repeated here. What interests me is Newman’s sense of personal development (to borrow one of his own favorite words). He thinks of the believer as joining the church “to encounter, and to beat back the spirit of the age.” To be true to the spirit of the church, one cannot “remain still.” Thus, here, as in the Apologia, Newman conceives of a personal struggle away from the incertitudes of Anglicanism and the evils of Erastianism toward the sanctuary of inherited dogma.

Newman’s address to the men and women frustrated by the Anglican Church involves a kind of double history. The Rambler aptly pointed to Newman’s “singular and unusual pains to saturate his mind in the wisdom of the past . . . ,” understanding that Newman imposes on his subjects a sense of historical order. Unlike Loss and Gain and Phases of Faith, Certain Difficulties provides no chronological exposition, no approach to its subject through personal or biographical development. But Newman
reaches constantly for historical parallels on the one hand and for autobiographical evidence on the other. Conscious of his "power" (60) and using himself as example, he too speaks out of a centripetal "I":

Now, as I have no desire to imitate a line of conduct which I cannot approve, I will not follow [my opponents] in leaving the question unsettled: I will not content myself with insisting merely upon the external view of the subject, which is against them, leaving them in possession of that argument from the inward evidences of grace, on which they especially rely. I have no intention at all of evading their position,—I mean to attack it. I feel intimately what is true in it, and I feel where it halts. . . . (59)

Newman sounds here much like his brother, with whom he shares an urgent and apparently egotistical rhetoric. Although rejecting out of hand the topics that disturb Francis—"the science of criticism, the disinternment of antiquities, the unrolling of manuscripts, the interpretation of inscriptions" (124)—Newman worries about another order of questions, equally compelling. Both Francis and John need to deliver themselves of a personally achieved "truth" for the benefit of potential followers and for the embarrassment of hostile opponents. Both practice a confessional rhetoric that reveals, if not their evangelical background, at least their evangelical intent. Yet John, with his scathing attacks on the Evangelical Establishment, is the more evangelical. Why else a challenging series of lectures in a country increasingly hostile to popery? Why, that is, a personal apology with a call to conversion when the very arguments proposed admit the small likelihood of conversion?26 True, he says he addresses the few, the remnant, who have sympathized with the Oxford Movement. The beckoning from the far shore comes, however, with fervor and intensity.

Newman's ingrained confessional tendency, apparent in his habit of polishing and preserving letters, keeping a journal, writing (in *Loss and Gain*) a novel drawn from his own sufferings, is, as Thomas Vargish has shown, related to "the Evangelical emphasis upon self-examination."27 It is also a sign of Newman's close ties with the fiction and the poetry of his age. Confessional literature, as Tennyson and Browning illustrate, was not limited to religious documents as such. Arthur Clough recognized that Wordsworth's poetry offered a version of lay, spiritual autobiography, inverting and extending a confessional mode that comes down from earlier English writers and that—to go beyond Clough—perhaps substitutes imagination for faith in its central discussions.28 We might think of John Newman affected by Wordsworth, and by Keble's writings on Wordsworth,
assessing his soul for his chosen work, which is the work of a writer as well as a priest. But the zeal in his writings, the preoccupation with faith, the use of an emblematic self for purposes of religious discovery—these suggest both a link through Wordsworth to seventeenth-century confessors such as Fox, Donne, and Bunyan and a shared obsession with the poets of his own day.

Robert Vaughan, as the editor of the conservative Quarterly Review, would seem to have little in common with either of the Newman brothers, whose “irrepressible yearnings” took them, from Vaughan’s point of view, in equally dangerous, if antithetical, directions. But Vaughan’s metaphors are indicative. They are, in fact, similar to those of the Newmans and similar to those of Tennyson, Browning, Clough, and Arnold. “My object,” he says, “is to demonstrate to bewildered and weary wanderers, that the old path is, after all, the true one.” Without the “old path,” “existence is a wide sea overspread with cloud, and storm, and darkness.”29 (An older, disillusioned John Ruskin was to characterize what he saw as evil and destructive forces as “The Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century.”)

If in their differing ways the Newman brothers reject Robert Vaughan’s appeal to tread “the footprints of our [English] sires,” both—like Bunyan and Dante before them—think of the religious struggle as a journey. John Henry Newman wants “to remove difficulties from the path” of potential converts (v); he also thinks of the religious journey in terms of storms at sea: we are all on perilous waters awaiting the advent of Christ. “Christ upon the Waters” sustains the traditional metaphors of ships and sea in its commentary on mid-century religion and culture. Of course, as the reference to the New Testament makes clear, such metaphors are as old as Christianity itself. What I want to suggest is simply that writers of exclusively religious works—whether Robert Vaughan or John Henry Newman—rely upon the same metaphoric patterns as poets and novelists of the time, in part because they are concerned with the same questions. It is surely no
accident that John Henry Newman’s play on shipwreck should echo or be echoed in any number of melodramatic novels of the time—including *David Copperfield* with its climactic storm scene. After the death of Ham and Steerforth, David Copperfield is forced in upon himself; he, too, sees the darkness about him, becomes aware of his loneliness and suffering. Similarly, “the sea of faith” in “Dover Beach” with the description of barren shingles tossed upon the shore and—in the second “Marguerite” poem—the shores themselves separated by subtly hostile forces (geological as well as theological?) are characteristic of the age.

George Saintsbury pointed out (in the 1908 Oxford edition of Thackeray’s novels) that Arnold’s metaphors of sea and islands and separation may have come from Thackeray’s *Pendennis*. “Matthew Arnold . . . did not think Thackeray a great writer yet Mr. Arnold’s finest poem by far, the second *Isolation*, is simply an extension of a phrase in an early chapter of *Pendennis*.”

In chapter 16, “Which Concludes the First Part of This History,” Thackeray speculates about human isolation in a way that reflects on his narrative methods and his relationship with his readers as well as on the life that he imagines for his characters.

Thus oh friendly readers, we see how every man in the world has his own private griefs and business. . . . How lonely we are in the world! How selfish and secret, everybody! . . . O philosophic reader, answer and say,—Do you tell [your wife] all? Ah, sir—a distinct universe walks about under your hat and mine—all things in nature are different to each—the woman we look at has not the same features, the dish we eat from has not the same taste to one and the other—you and I are but a pair of infinite isolations, with some fellow-islands more or less near to us.

Arnold may well have borrowed his phrasing from Thackeray’s novel:

Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
With echoing straits between us thrown,
Dotting the shoreless water wild,
We mortal millions live alone.

(*Poems, 124*)

But Arnold shares the sense of isolation, the metaphoric patterns, and the exclamatory rhetoric with Newman, Browning, and Tennyson, as well as with Thackeray. The common feeling of isolation, of anxiety—to use a modern term—expresses itself as a rupture in nature and with nature, at a time when religious surety was often seen in terms of harmony with nature. And Arnold is not alone in mocking the glib command to live in harmony with nature. A letter to the *Leader*, a paper priding itself on its liberal and humanitarian positions, defends Malthus and attacks
“sentimentalists” in a reply to the Leader’s views: “The fact is, though sentimentalists are apt to forget it, that Nature is no sentimentalist—she is, on the contrary, rigidly stern—nay, often, according to the morbid sensibility of civilization, unjust and cruel.”32 Here, nature is seen as historical necessity, as movement, divided from human consciousness.

One response to this negative view of nature is a recurrent and perhaps “sentimental” pastoralism in the fiction of the time, including Thackeray’s (see the following chapters). The response of poets, as I have tried to show, is altogether ambivalent. Arnold sometimes finds “calm” in the natural world he loves; Browning takes pleasure in the energies of natural forces; and Tennyson seeks to resolve his antithetical feelings. All imply a hope for a state of nature less hostile than that which is “red in tooth and claw.” Like Francis Newman they are sensitive to the findings of science but are unwilling to accept a mechanical view of the universe. Presumably none of these writers knew the works of Karl Marx (who now lived in England), but Marx had in part spoken to their dilemma. In 1844, he had written: “Every alienation of man from himself and from Nature appears in the relation which he postulates between other men and himself and Nature. Thus religious alienation is necessarily exemplified in the relation between laity and priest, or . . . between the laity and a mediator.”33 Without trying to define Marx’s terms, let me just suggest that the pervading sense of isolation, in the Newman brothers and in poets who were their contemporaries, clearly does imply (1) a break with benevolent theories of nature, (2) a sense of division, both within the man himself and between him and his society, and (3) a fundamental change in the possibilities for religious life. William Rossetti’s conviction that self-consciousness in poets has manifested itself in religious preoccupations not only parallels Marx’s train of thought—which moves from a recognition of a loss of self and divorce from nature to a necessary application in religion—it seems historically accurate. Both Newman brothers are working on assumptions close to those of Rossetti and Marx. But whereas the older brother sees the spirit of the times demanding a vigorous priesthood and Catholic dogma, the younger brother remains explorer rather than priest, emphasizing the need for protestant conscience. The Soul, again, asks how man’s spiritual “organ” itself mediates between this world and God’s.

What a crisis for religion at large is this period of the world’s history. — W. E. Gladstone in a letter from Germany (1846)34
John Henry Newman had told his brother that, once started, his critical inquiries would not be stopped. And it was Francis's ruthless scrutinies that won him so much ill-will. Entire volumes were written to denounce his writings, and from the Evangelical periodicals especially, he found bitter opposition. His systematic questioning (again, his oddly innocent questioning) of the Bible naturally invited doubts as to whether he could ever have been a Christian. As usual, Newman seems not to have anticipated harsh criticism, perhaps because he was, unlike his brother, never really seeking recruits. He lashed out at Henry Rogers, whose *The Eclipse of Faith*, an attack on *The Soul* and *Phases*, itself went into ten editions within the following ten years. The controversy surrounding Newman's works made a great stir; more importantly, as A. W. Benn writes, it served to polarize opinion: "For years to come the great issue between reason and faith almost resolved itself into a personal controversy between Francis Newman and the Evangelical party."

Newman found defenders, conspicuously in James Martineau (though even his defenders were hard pressed when Newman began to doubt Christ himself). Among the stoutest defenders was George Lewes, who devoted several articles in the *Leader* to a clarification and apology for *Phases of Faith*. Lewes thought of Newman as ideally combining "piety and learning." *Phases*, despite the "discreet silence" of the Quarterlies "is destined . . . to exercise a powerful influence on our religious literature." Returning in later reviews to *Phases*, Lewes speaks of it as "more than a striking book—it is a great action." It is "the story of a mind." Implicitly, Lewes defends the book in terms of the characteristics of poetry of the day; what he praises in Newman is exactly what he praises in Browning—and what he finds absent in Wordsworth. In his review of *The Prelude*, Lewes calls Wordsworth deficient in his understanding of the true subject of poetry, "the Human Soul." Newman's profound "history of the conflicts of a deeply religious mind" is, then, important literature as well as religious testimony.

If Lewes overstates Newman's strengths, he is fairer than Matthew Arnold about what are genuine virtues. When Francis Newman's *Phases* first appeared, Arnold dismissed it as a contemptible and reductive book: Newman "bepaws the religious sentiment so much that he quite effaces it to me." Arnold's anger at this book anticipates and helps to explain his later anger at Newman's translation of the *Iliad*, which seemed to Arnold to represent all of England's cultural difficulties massed together for ill-effect. Arnold thought of Newman as a dangerous and representative man, a kind of brilliant John Bull, if that were possible, whose immoderate
learning and inadequate culture combine to defeat sweetness and light. As Lionel Trilling says, the apostle of culture can hardly be expected to have appreciated a humorless, pedantic, and unpoetic professor of Latin from London University. Still, Arnold tended to be unfair to many of his contemporaries, and he was unfair to Newman.

The "beast" who wrote *Phases of Faith* indulges in the sort of critical arithmetic that offended Arnold in another biblical scholar, Bishop Colenso, but Newman also anticipates Arnold's own religious writings of the decades to come: in his medium, he searches for the buried life, the efficacy of hope; and he tries, honestly and intelligently, to make the case for a "being-not-ourselves," while stressing the importance of "Righteousness."

It is intriguing that Arnold, so quick to dismiss Francis, should be so sympathetic toward John Henry Newman. One can understand his delight in Newman's "urbanity." Even more, perhaps, one can see a connection between Newman's Catholic "remnant" and the later apostles of culture, for Arnold shared with Newman a respect for certain kinds of authority. He deplored the making public, or popular, private doubts about religion, even though his own sense of the Anglican faith was to remain as hazy as critics (including Francis Newman) complained. Theological debate was not for the masses. Hence, Arnold could share with John Henry Newman the contempt for periodicals of his day, which "teach the multitude of men what to think and what to say," and which perform a dangerous pedagogical role: "And thus it is," Newman says, "in this age, every one is, intellectually, a sort of absolute king, though his realm is confined to himself and his family. [The Englishman] . . . is in his own way the creature of circumstances; he is bent on action, but as to opinion he takes what comes, only he bargains not to be teased or troubled about it." Newman's contempt for the chaos of English intellectual and spiritual life clearly parallels Arnold's, and Arnold acknowledges Newman as teacher. Some of the later writings in *Culture and Anarchy* or *Friendship's Garland* might have grown specifically out of Newman's censure, as, for example, the historical survey of English decline in "Christ upon the Waters," which leads Newman to the passage I have quoted.

Consider Arnold's famous comment in "My Countrymen" (1864), in which the metaphors themselves seem to continue Newman's argument:

As often as I consider how history is a series of waves, coming gradually to a head and then breaking, and that, as the successive waves come up, our nation is seen at the top of this wave . . . , I ask myself, counting all the waves which

...
have come up with England on top of them: when that great wave which is now mounting has come up, will she be at the top of it?\textsuperscript{42}

Apart from what are evident influences of affinities, Arnold was in fact no Catholic and, for that matter, no friend even to Anglican dogma; and his reactions to the Newman brothers remain somehow imbalanced, if not inverted. Was it because Francis lacked humor or subtlety, because he failed in urbanity, that Arnold continued to think ill of him? Was it his manner or his matter? Did Arnold think of him, as he thought of Clough, failing in a sense of beauty?

In a letter of 1848, while admitting that Clough’s poems “are not suited to me at present,” Arnold laughingly relates Arthur Stanley’s judgment that Francis Newman is “offensive,” if harmlessly so, “being insane.” Arnold here comes as close to unreserved praise of Clough’s poems as he ever does—and in terms appropriate for Newman as well as his friend:

> The good feature in all your poems is the sincerity that is evident in them: which always produces a powerful effect on the reader—and which most people . . . lose totally when they sit down to write. The spectacle of a writer striving evidently to get breast to breast with reality is always full of instruction and very invigorating—and here I always feel you have the advantage of me.\textsuperscript{43}

How far apart Arnold and Clough had grown by 1850 can be seen in their responses to Newman. Arnold’s earlier praise of Clough’s poems sounds rather like Clough’s own praise of Newman. For in the year in which Arnold dismissed Newman as an “hass,” Clough was writing a favourable review of *The Soul* (not published, however, in his lifetime). Clough is skeptical about some of Newman’s arguments in proof of divinity, and he sees Newman as an example of “over-irritated” conscience in an age too worried about sin. But he offsets what might be self-criticism as much as criticism of Newman with high praise:

> The appearance of this book is a novelty, and may be thought an epoch, we do not say in literature, but in a more weighty matter[,] religious writing. For the first time since we know not what remote period mercy and truth are met together in the world of publication, religion and knowledge have kissed each other. He whom our fathers would have called a Methodist is also what our contemporaries entitle a rationalist: one well known to be rich in historical and philological lore and great in critical acumen is found also possessed of those stories of devout experience which delight the readers of pious biography, proves himself also powerful in those searchings of spirit and delicate self-introspections which are the shibboleth to the tender conscience.

> . . . Mr. Newman . . . is sincere with himself and outspoken with others.\textsuperscript{44}
Clough's commentary on Newman (which gets in manner increasingly Carlylean) finds virtues in *The Soul* that Arnold finds grudgingly in Clough's poems—and that George Lewes praises in *Phases of Faith*. The association points again to the importance of "the soul" and of the writer's "sincere self" in apparently unlike works, and to the community of themes and assumptions shared by writers otherwise as far apart as Francis Newman, John Henry Newman, Arthur Clough, Robert Browning, and Matthew Arnold. Hence, Newman's largely forgotten "mental history" offers ways of reading a generation of poets, including those, like Arnold, who found Newman contemptible.