told, "a vivid personal preference broke through the dreamy idealism, which had almost come to doubt of other men's reality, reassuringly, indeed, yet not without some sense of a constraining tyranny over him from without" (130). Marius's doubt is dispelled, but it is dispelled not through refutation, as by argument. Instead, it is dispelled by a friendship—and this friendship is seen to open a way toward Marius's improvement.

Marius the Epicurean is a particular case, and perhaps an idiosyncratic one. If so, I can begin to evoke the much broader, indeed massive influence of moral perfectionism on nineteenth-century Britain by considering these impressively unequivocal remarks by Walter Bagehot, written in 1869, the same year *Culture and Anarchy* was first published:

> Great models for good and evil sometimes appear among men, who follow them either to improvement or degradation.... [T]his unconscious imitation and encouragement of appreciated character, and this equally unconscious shrinking from and persecution of disliked character, is the main force which molds and fashions men in society as we now see it.... The more acknowledged causes, such as change of climate, alteration of political institutions, progress of science, act principally through this cause.... [T]hey change the object of imitation and the object of avoidance, and so work their effect. (89)

As we will see, Bagehot is reductive: others recognized that imitation and avoidance were the only available responses to exemplars. (Indeed, strict imitation and avoidance were often understood as signs of failed perfectionism.) But Bagehot's emphasis on the powers of our receptiveness to others characterizes the broad historical and conceptual phenomenon I aim to describe. In novels by Jane Austen, Maria Edgeworth, Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Charlotte Brontë, and Henry James; in philosophical prose by John Stuart Mill, Henry Sidgwick, James Martineau, F. H. Bradley, and T. H. Green; in poems by William Wordsworth, Percy Shelley, Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, and Gerard Manley Hopkins; in political oratory by William Gladstone and John Bright; in essays by Thomas Carlyle, Matthew Arnold, and Florence Nightingale; in sermons by John Henry Newman and F. D. Maurice; in memoirs by Edwin Waugh and Edith Simcox: in all of these, responsiveness to exemplary figures is praised for its powers of improving. If that praise sometimes seems exorbitant, perhaps, it was so because the alternative appeared so all-encompassing and so bleak: a world without meaning, anomic, inert, uninviting of desire. In such a world, as Newman put it, "nothing has a drift or relation; nothing has a history or a promise. Every thing stands by itself, and comes and goes in