ARNOLD WROTE TO HIS MOTHER in 1861 “I must finish off for the present my critical writings between this and forty, and give the next ten years earnestly to poetry. It is my last chance. It is not a bad ten years of one’s life for poetry if one resolutely uses it, but it is a time in which, if one does not use it, one dries up and becomes prosaic altogether.” Arnold did not finish off his “critical writings” by his fortieth birthday at the end of 1862, and although he took time from his criticism for poetry, the results were, with the exception of Thyrsis, more or less and usually altogether prosaic.

It is probably useless to inquire what Arnold meant by “prosaic.” As normally applied to poetry, the word is comfortably and imprecisely pejorative, performing a function similar, say, to “academic.” It presumably does not include such things as the opening of Bleak House, and should be applied rather to uses of language in which the figurative element is both limited and obvious, and in which the coherence and additional suggestiveness which come from the repetition with differences of epithets, images, and key terms is minimal or non-existent. “Prosaic” poetry is strictly straightforward, making little or no use of that insistent retrospection which checks the tendency shared by all verbal discourse to an exclusively linear progress. The “prose” reference of “prosaic” is the essay, in which any sense of completeness and inevitability comes usually from satisfaction with matters of rhetoric: the working out of an argument,

1 Works, XIII, 188; Aug. 15, 1861.
the establishment and manipulation of a tone of voice or stance, the skilful introduction of incidental felicities of phrasing.

When such "prosaic" poetry includes landscape, as it so often does in Arnold, the landscape is likely to emerge as simile illustrating a conceptual point but rarely enlarging upon it by conveying, for example, how it feels to hold such a philosophy. The syntax of simile of course insists upon a connection between description and reflection, but it is difficult to make the connection more than one of decorative set-off to an argument. Those few of Arnold's later poems which make use of actual landscape sites rarely succeed in deriving the thought from the description in the manner of Resignation or Kensington Gardens. The effect of such pieces is similar to what might be achieved from laying side by side the philosophizing of the Clough letters and the flower catalogues of Arnold's letters to his mother.

The evident fact that Arnold dried up more completely than most poets of similar stature has led, inevitably, to frequent speculations upon the reasons. The usual and most persuasive is that Arnold felt increasingly the need to treat subjects to which his own poetic talents were unsuited. The remark quoted at the beginning of this chapter should caution against an assumption that Arnold made at any time or over any period of time a clear commitment whose consequences he fully understood. It would be wrong, for example, to seek in Empedocles on Etna or its subsequent suppression evidence for Arnold's rejection of poetry. Certainly he passed through periods of dissatisfaction with his early work, but he continued to alter and republish it to the end of his life. He claimed for his poems, in a frequently quoted pronouncement, a large historical representativeness and a by no means modest aesthetic achievement. We can perhaps account for the decision to publish those late elegies on sundry pets as the whimsical self-indulgence of a Great Man. But his expressed satisfaction with the poeticizing of Westminster Abbey is explicable only if we assume that Arnold was not greatly gifted with critical self-awareness. He continued to write poetry because he thought he could still write it.

2 Works, XIV, 195–96; June 5, 1869.
3 Works, XV, 101; [1882].
From the vantage point afforded by a century the danger signs seem clear enough. Of the forty-six so-called New Poems of 1867, ten had been previously published in magazines or earlier volumes, two were extracts from longer poems already published, four were apparently composed years before. The remaining thirty pieces included some twenty-one sonnets and short poems whose only interest is that they are by the author of Empedocles on Etna and The Scholar-Gipsy. The pieces reprinted or of delayed publication comprise almost everything that is worthwhile in the volume of 1867. Although there is no reason to suppose that Arnold fully appreciated what processes were at work, there is in the 1867 volume an evident effort to rework or relive earlier poetic experiences. The qualified success of Thyrsis depends very much upon the prior existence of The Scholar-Gipsy. A Southern Night alludes explicitly to A Summer Night. The Terrace at Berne is a late epilogue to the Switzerland poems, and, most clearly of all, Obermann Once More is an attempt to repeat the modest success of Stanzas in Memory of the Author of 'Obermann.' These pieces, those of long-delayed publication and the poems reprinted, especially from the 1852 volume, give to New Poems the air of a declining talent feeding parasitically upon its own youthful vigor.

The two Obermann poems exemplify the process most fully, as well as exhibiting that move from doubt to optimism, from regretful dream to enspiriting vision which distinguishes Thyrsis from The Scholar-Gipsy. 'Obermann' is one of the better early poems. It exhibits a control, characteristic of Arnold, over the relationship between the speaker and the person addressed by apostrophe. The relationship is established, also characteristically, through a landscape common to both persons. By finding analogues for the departed Obermann in a mountain setting which he himself experiences in the present, the speaker gains both the immediacy of meditation and a necessary point of contact between his subjective self and the object of his contemplation. The landscape, moreover, is sufficiently varied in its associations to convey the different aspects

\[4\] Early Death and Fame from Haworth Churchyard and Youth and Calm from Lines Written by a Death-Bed.

\[5\] Fragment of . . . a 'Dejaneira' (1847–48?), Calais Sands (1850), Dover Beach (1851), A Caution to Poets (before Dec., 1852). I follow the dating of Allott.

\[6\] Empedocles on Etna, Human Life, Youth's Agitations, Lines Written in Kensington Gardens, The Second Best, Progress. The pieces first published separately and then collected in New Poems were Thyssis (1866), St. Brandan (1860), A Southern Night (1861), and Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse (1855).
of Obermann, which are almost Petrarchist in their contradictions: cold languor and fevered pain, virgin freshness and human agony. The working out of the meditation is the process of resolving these light contradictions; by coming to identify Obermann the speaker comes to identify himself and his kind of life. When identification involves comparison, Wordsworth and Goethe come equipped with a locus, the place of burial. Indeed, the poem's persistent concern with death bed, grave and transfiguration make it very much an elegy in a country cemetery. The speaker apostrophizes and meditates upon shades who come and go through cloud and mist, sometimes gaining a “wide / And luminous view” (ll. 79–80), sometimes offering only “the dreams that but deceive” (l. 129), dreams, that is, of continuous calm and clarity in this life. *Stanzas in Memory of the Author of ‘Obermann’* is a monody on the meaning of that memory for the speaker. Obermann and his Alpine retreat are a means of objectifying introspection; they make it possible for a private meditation to be properly overheard and experienced by another person. What the landscape provides is, once again, the source and correlative of the emotion attaching to a way of life. It conveys no ethical imperatives: that we should or should not be or strive to be like Obermann, Wordsworth, or Goethe. Instead it helps convey what it feels like to lead a life definable in terms of theirs, but different from theirs, following its own ineluctable permutation upon the desire for solitude and the desire for society.

The reasons that keep ‘Obermann’ below *The Scholar-Gipsy* in achievement are no doubt attributable to its stanzaic form. Arnold certainly eliminates most of the sing-song hymnal effect of his variation upon common measure by the plentiful use of an initial reversed foot, but there is in his meter a large residual jauntiness which sorts oddly with the sober melancholy of the poem's utterance: ‘Obermann’ goes well if startlingly to the tune of *All Things Bright and Beautiful*. The other tendency of common measure to settle into a rhythm of short declarative phrases is checked by the use of run-on lines. But even these cannot properly slow the fast-moving stanzas to the deliberation appropriate to reverie. The rapid, impressionistic sketching of the opening lines makes their scene-setting sound more perfunctory than it is. We have only to compare *The Scholar-Gipsy*’s slow making of a dream figure out of a mood in a landscape to appreciate what is missing from ‘Obermann.’
The inappropriateness between manner and matter which limits the achievement of 'Obermann' largely disappears in the use of the same stanza for Obermann Once More. The hymnal chant of common measure, breaking at moments of narrative into the related rhythms of ballad (ll. 85–140), sorts well with the spiritual uplift of the later poem. But, this aside, Obermann Once More is clearly inferior to 'Obermann.' The reason is not hard to see. In his early poems Arnold developed and at times came close to perfecting a talent for poetry to be overheard: a private meditation effecting its necessary communication with others by working out mood and thought in terms of landscapes which recall common experiences. Arnold came later to prefer a poetry to be heard, the rough equivalent in verse to his prose addresses to the English people. The wistfully equivocal dreams of the earlier poems give place to the authoritative visions of the later. Thyrsis whispers briefly but conclusively from the grave, and the shade of Obermann delivers a sermon complete with lengthy historical exemplum and assurance of a social millennium. Where Arnold once climbed a mountain to understand a mood and a way of life, he now ascends as a chosen vessel to be filled with the Word of Hope. Such mutations require changes in poetic mode which Arnold was seemingly unable to make. Especially do they require attention to the arts of rhetoric: the persuasive establishment and manipulation of an ethos. We know from his later strictures upon Dryden and Pope that Arnold thought these arts appropriate to prose not verse, and his own prose is a constant revelation of his mastery.\textsuperscript{7} Epilogue to Lessing's \textit{Laocoön} is lengthy testimony to his inability to effect a satisfactory adaptation of the manner of Pope in verse, while Obermann Once More marks a notable failure to unite the landscape of private mood with the discourse of public address.

Like much of Arnold's work, Obermann Once More is evidently a made poem, for the speaker's progress through a landscape in the opening and closing sections clearly corresponds to a spiritual progress whose details are set out in the visionary homily of the middle section. The valley and lower slopes evoked in the opening lines invite the traveler to pause for refreshment by indulging his nostalgia for the past. "The gentian-flower'd pass, its crown / With

\textsuperscript{7} For an analysis of rhetorical effect in Arnold's prose see John Holloway, \textit{The Victorian Sage} (1953), pp. 202–43.
yellow spires aflame" (ll. 21-22) marks the way out of random self-indulgence to purposeful and hopeful action. We are not told what program that action entails (Arnold was reluctant even in prose to make practical suggestions), but we are told why it is necessary to undertake that unspecified action: things are better than they were; there must be no more lolling in meadows with the cows, for it is time to be up and on.  

Throughout the night on the mountain the ghost of Obermann insists that a new day is dawning, just as the day of Christianity once dawned. The tempests are past, the sun up and the ice melting. It is a lengthy sermon and with "the vision ended" (l. 325) there is not long to wait for testimony that it passed through the gate of horn. "Dost thou ask proof?" Thyris once whispered; well, it is available:

And glorious there, without a sound,
Across the glimmering lake,
High in the Valais-depth profound,
I saw the morning break.  

(ll. 345-48)

Arnold's assumption seems to be that if you repeat a cliche metaphor often enough—a new age is dawning—it is sufficient to describe a literal occurrence of its vehicle—a sunrise—to effect a strong symbolic charge. We are asked to accept, and it is difficult to do so, a continuous landscape in which some features are important as they set off moods and memories in the speaker while others are held to contain significances existing independently of the speaker. Arnold's own criterion of naturalness is most obviously violated by such a landscape, just as it was by the signal tree of Thyris.

The criterion of naturalness is also strained by the apparition of Obermann's ghost. The visionary homily is presumably offered, not as actual happening, but as a poetical version of the speaker's own nocturnal musing upon the mountain. The spirit is raised, rather abruptly, as a consequence of the speaker's nostalgic recollection of his "wandering youth" (l. 39), but it is raised in order to bridge the disjunctive gap between wistful memories and enspiriting prognostication. The ghost is a way of smoothing over the fact that the historicist meditation by night does not follow from the random

8 See also the essay on Wordsworth, where Arnold approvingly quotes a passage from Epictetus (Discourses, II, xxiii) requiring men to leave the pleasant inn or meadow in which they would linger and make their way home to a sense of moral duty, Works, IV, 106-7.
reverie of the day. The ghost serves to join two landscape syntaxes: the "mountain-flower" and "shepherd's garb" of wistful emotion (ll. 64–65) and the daybreak of moral exhortation. To do so, the ghost is assigned a speech he patently did not write himself. The effect is painfully ventriloquial. Old Matthew takes young Matthew by the scruff of the neck and makes him recant. The recantation is given a pseudo-objective authority by delivering it from the lips of Umbra Obermann. But since we plainly cannot believe literally in Umbra Obermann, he ought, for poetic validity, to emerge as an extension of old Matthew just as he once emerged as an extension of young Matthew. The poem seems to lack, indeed, a section immediately before the appearance of the ghost in which old Matthew himself makes the transition from "infinite desire / For all that might have been" (ll. 51–52) to a conviction that what might have been is now what is. Such a transition could have made for a more satisfying unified poem, although it would certainly have diminished its effectiveness as prophecy, in which Arnold, an English Moses, hands down the Word to a nation running after false gods.

False gods figure largely in an earlier and more successful elegy, Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse. The world is as committed there to "pride of life" (l. 167) as was the haggard Roman of Obermann Once More (l. 133). But in The Grande Chartreuse men must wait longer than the next sunrise for a millennium. Indeed, the tentative hope that "years hence, perhaps, may dawn an age, / More fortunate, alas! than we" (ll. 157–58) is severely questioned by its implicit association with the "emblems of hope" which the Carthusians are said to find in the "yellow tapers" shining over the high altar (ll. 200–202). It is a questioning not so much of whether the hope will be realized as of the hope's spiritual validity. For the yellow tapers play also against "the high, white star of Truth" to which the speaker insists he is still committed (ll. 67–78). This is a truth of purged faith and trimmed fire, although we are characteristically not told the constituents of such

9 Although suggesting landscape, the star of truth is a metaphor outside the literal setting of the Grande Chartreuse and thus does not jar in the manner of the signal-tree or the daybreak of Obermann Once More.

10 The trimming of faith's fire is perhaps recalled in the yellow tapers of hope.
a truth, we must assume from the purging of faith that it involves some restriction of supernatural sanctions upon man and the substitution of a pattern of life which will produce wisdom without tough cynicism and gaiety without frivolity (ll. 157–60): joyful self-knowledge, perhaps. It is when we extrapolate this characteristic opposition between the clarity of natural light and an artificially lit gloom that we confront the central weakness of what is, in many respects, a highly impressive poem.

*Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse* is impressive in ways which should now be familiar. It poses openly the question which serves implicitly as an organizing principle in many of Arnold’s early works: “what am I, that I am here” (l. 66). The speaker proposes, that is, to understand himself, his present feelings, in terms of the landscape in which he finds himself. By the time the question is asked, in fact, the answer to it is already half-given. The ascent to the monastery and the tour of its buildings and precincts establish by repeated motifs the quality of life and kind of feeling which are to be explored. The tour gives us the context of the monks; the ascent, the context of the speaker in his emotional passage to their retreat. The evident similarity between the two contexts fixes a connection between speaker and monks even before he asks his question. The similarity is expressed in terms of the transmutation of rain-soaked meadows into humid corridors with splashing fountains, of the “spectral vapours white” of “the cloud-drift” to the “ghostlike . . . Cowl’d forms . . . in gleaming white,” of the “strangled sound” of “the Dead Guier’s stream” to the monks’ kneeling and wrestling “with penitential cries” before retiring to “that wooden bed, / Which shall their coffin be, when dead,” of the “boiling cauldron” of the Guiers Mort to “stone-carved basins cold.” This repetition of motifs with differences not only prepares the speaker emotionally for identification with the monks, it also makes clear, before the move to reflection and comment, which are the elements of significance. Before the voice of conscience implanted in the speaker by the “rigorous teachers” of his youth upbraids him with “what dost thou in this living tomb?” (l. 72), it is plain that he has undertaken an emotional passage to forested retreat and stony death. Appropriately, retreat and death are associated with the past, both by recalling the pilgrim hosts who once thronged the halls of Grande Chartreuse and by the rather artificially forced question, “what pointed roofs are these advance?—/ A palace of the
Kings of France?” (ll. 23–24). The sense of historical survival, of
a coelacanth in a sea of mackerel, is applied in reflection to out-
moded faiths and outmoded melancholy. In the final assertion of
the speaker’s emotional identity with the Carthusians, landscape
and figures are accorded a faintly medieval dress:

We are like children rear’d in shade
Beneath some old-world abbey wall,
Forgotten in a forest-glade,
And secret from the eyes of all.
Deep, deep the greenwood round them waves,
Their abbey, and its close of graves! (ll. 169–74)

Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse is the most consistently and
overtly escapist poem in the Arnold canon. Escape is from the un-
attractive alternatives of the frivolous gaiety of hunters (ll. 160,
181–86) and the tough practicality, the big pomp of the life battle
(ll. 159, 175–80) with its suggestive vulgarity (ll. 164–67). Escape
is toward both aspects of the Scholar Gipsy: his literal death and
his imagined “perennial youth,” toward stones and spectres and the
bowering wood. The final couplet of the poem originally read:

—Pass, banners, pass, and bugles, cease;
And leave our forest to its peace!

When he reprinted the poem in the volume of 1867 (it was first
published separately in 1855), he changed forest to desert, chang-
ing, that is, the final impression of Grande Chartreuse as a his-
torical survival to that of another place in the wilderness in which
to die, having saluted the promised land from afar.11

What, then, is impressive about the poem is the way the setting
provides a full objectification of the emotions associated with the
speaker’s meditation. But the setting is not the only operative
analogy for the speaker; there are also the monks. The full success
of the poem depends upon our accepting as true an analogy be-
tween the “last of the race of them who grieve” and the “last of the
people who believe” (ll. 110–12). The speaker anticipates Yeats
by numbering himself among the last Romantics; he sees the Car-
thusians as survivors from a medieval age of faith. But it is not the

medievalizing strain in the Romantics with which he identifies himself; instead he sees himself as the inheritor of a generally apprehended melancholy or agony (ll. 121–50), and he is justifiably vague about the causes of that Romantic melancholy, not identifying it as a loss of religious certitude. Revealingly, the fullest statement of an analogy between the speaker and the monks comes in the form of allusion, an analogy for an analogy:

Not as their friend, or child, I speak!
But as, on some far northern strand,
Thinking of his own Gods, a Greek
In pity and mournful awe might stand
Before some fallen Runic stone—
For both were faiths, and both are gone. (ll. 79–84)

What is striking about this analogy is the extent to which it fails to express the relationship between speaker and monks. To a (presumably) modern Greek the disappearance of Teutonic paganism may well parallel the fall of the Olympians. But the Carthusians still believe, however the world may deride them for it (l. 89). The speaker may lament the loss of his personal Olympus, but the rock on which the monks fix themselves is no fallen stone. The true relationship between speaker and monks is in fact very close to the relationship between the speaker and the Scholar Gipsy: disjunction, not conjunction. In that poem Arnold can exclaim ‘‘thou hadst—what we, alas! have not,’’ and be reasonably sure that no one will suspect him of desiring to rule ‘‘the workings of men’s brains.’’ The Scholar’s ideas are important only for the general feelings they inspire. But the ‘‘ideas’’ of the Carthusians are less amenable to such treatment. Professor Culler’s point is nicely taken: ‘‘Arnold is well aware that a young Oxford man visiting a continental monastery in 1851 might easily be queried about his intentions.’’

Arnold is engaged in the delicate task of fashioning an analogy between himself and the monks, while at the same time making clear that he certainly does not share their convictions: ‘‘Not as their friend, or child, I speak!’’ The consequences are, inevitably, a damaging haziness. The world is condemned for crying that the Carthusians’ ‘‘faith is now / But a dead time’s exploded dream’’ (ll. 97–98). But the speaker had felt the same thing when contemplating the ‘‘fallen Runic stone’’ of the monastery, although—

12 Culler, p. 92.
and the difference is certainly important—he expressed himself "in pity and mournful awe," not derision. The haziness is most apparent in the concluding stanzas, where Arnold strives for a full establishment of analogy between speaker and monks by way of a shifty use of personal pronouns reminiscent of The Buried Life. The "we" of line 156 are plainly the last Romantics, of whom the speaker is representative, addressing the shades of the first Romantics. But this "we" is tacitly associated with the monks, the last believers, in the medievalizing simile of lines 169–92, which finds in the monastery an appropriate setting for the last Romantics. When the warriors of action and the pleasure hunters bid the "shy recluses, follow too!" (l. 192), they address themselves to monks who, if the poem is working properly, are also representative of the last grievers. In replying for themselves the monks should also be replying for such a last Romantic as the speaker. But they do not. Their kind of hope is different from the speaker's; it burns in yellow tapers not high, white stars. Unlike his, their hope is not for a "perhaps"; it is the hope that walks with faith. The one true point of contact between last believers and last grievers is the impulse to retreat from a furious and frivolous world. And so the last line applies to both, because landscape avoids the divisive consequences of concept.

The weakness of Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse is that in answering the question "and what am I, that I am here?" it seemed necessary to deal explicitly with possible but incorrect reasons for the speaker's presence and thus to draw attention to the tenuousness of the analogy on which the poem is based. It may be, indeed, that the very posing of the question points to a failure prior to weakness in execution, a failure in invention. The question perhaps signals Arnold's uneasiness that the analogy he commits himself to working out is not truly viable.

The weakness of analogy in Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse is forced upon us by the overt presence of Arnoldian man, the "I" in the poem. He focuses, and damagingly, those areas in which the analogy will not hold. Empedocles on Etna gains, in contrast, by

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13 It is true that Arnold makes the distinction: "we are like children rear'd in shade," but "deep the greenwood round them waves." Of this pronominal shift we can only say that Arnold wants to use an analogy he knows will not hold.
the fact that its analogy with Arnoldian man in Victorian England is implicit, if unmistakable. Empedoclean metempsychosis, lying as it does conceptually outside the limits of analogy with the nineteenth century, is far more acceptable than the Carthusians' faith. Their faith is sufficiently unlike the speaker's view of things to weaken the analogy conceptually, and yet sufficiently similar to limit the possibility of using it, as the gipsies' strange art is used, to express the emotion, the feel, of looking at things in a way analogous to the speaker's.

The issue here is one of contemporary relevance; what Arnold was to call an adequate interpretation of the age. Whenever we feel that relevance is not properly achieved, we are likely to call the work "academic" or "escapist." Arnold's interest in the temporally and spatially remote has opened him to the charge of academicism, of rendering the materials of antiquarian research with only minimal relevance to his own age. Poems like Empedocles on Etna, Tristram and Iseult, or The Sick King in Bokhara are properly exempt from such a charge because so much of their total "meaning" is conveyed in terms of landscape. They benefit, in fact, from Hazlitt's principle that "the interest we feel in external nature is common and transferable from one object to all others of the same class." It is to the long poems of the mid-1850's, Sohrab and Rustum, Balder Dead, and Merope, that the charge of academicism seems, if in varying degrees, most appropriate. It seems so because, as we know from Arnold's comments in letters and prefaces, the main endeavor was to locate the significance in an action which embodied some fundamental human emotion or situation. And of course he does. We can describe these pieces in terms of other poems by saying that Sohrab and Rustum is a tragic rendering of enislement in the sea of life, Balder Dead is an epic version of the Empedoclean move from joy to strife, Merope is a tragedy about the buried life or, perhaps, the lament of Parting: "what heart knows another? / Ah! who knows his own?" But the crucial difference between embodying fundamental emotions or situations in landscapes and embodying them in historically remote actions is that, where the descriptive details of landscape are, at least potentially, a necessary part of the embodiment, the details of actions are quite incidental to the fundamental truths. Mount Etna is meaningful from the charred crust of its summit to the cool glen below, but Peran-Wisa's "sheep-skin cap" is an item principally of local or antiquarian color.
To mention the cap seems niggling. Obviously, a poem of some length can comfortably accommodate details of local color, just as a landscape poem can afford to indulge itself occasionally with scraps of lichen and rock fissures while primarily engaged in composing the scene into some morally or emotionally significant arrangement of objects. In fact, *Sohrab and Rustum* depends heavily upon the creation of a landscape to complement the central action and situation. The landscape is presented in terms of descriptions of the plain and river where the combat takes place, of the homes of Sohrab and Rustum, and in terms of frequent epic similes. The contribution of the landscape matter to the poem has been finely discussed by Professor Culler, who has pointed out the way it draws the single incident of the battle within a continuing cycle of life, seasonal, diurnal and human.  

Despite the generalizing tendencies of the nature myth, that life cycle is specifically *ein Heldenleben*, from “high mountain-craddle” to marine grave and heroic stellification among “the new-bathed stars” which “shine upon the Aral Sea.” *Sohrab and Rustum* is an obvious attempt to compensate Victorian England for its “absence of great natures” in contrast with the bulk of Arnold’s poems, which constitute a lament at being surrounded by “millions of small ones.” It takes its place with the youthful prize poems on Alaric and Cromwell, or the early sonnet on Wellington, rather than with *Empedocles on Etna*.

I said that *Sohrab and Rustum* is tragic rather than epic. It is so because, despite its heroic preoccupation and its Homeric imitation, the emphasis falls not upon the epic revelation of qualities needed to sustain a society subject to attack from without and emulation within, but upon a tragically fateful dichotomy between individual fulfillment—to find a father or a child of whom one can be proud—and the public obligation to be a great warrior. The sense of the situation is tragic, and is therefore, as Arnold later insisted, emancipated from “that which is local and transient.” But the context of the situation is presented epically, giving us, in addition to “the thought and passion of man, . . . the forms of outward life, the fashion of manners, the aspects of nature, that which is local and transient.” It gives us Peran-Wisa’s cap and the “sugar’d mulberries” with which the “pedlars, from Cabool” “slake their parch’d throats” when crossing “the Indian Caucasus” (ll. 160–66). Now,

14 Culler, pp. 209–14.
15 *Clough Letters*, p. 111; Sept. 23 [1849].
16 It is of note that the 1853 preface conducts its tacit endorsement of *Sohrab and Rustum* principally in terms of tragedies, not epics.
said Arnold in his inaugural lecture at Oxford, "in the *reconstruction*, by learning and antiquarian ingenuity, of the local and transient features of a past age, in their representation by one who is not a witness or contemporary, it is impossible to feel the liveliest kind of interest."\(^{17}\)

Arnold's idea of the epic follows from the false premise that Homer was "representing contemporary or nearly contemporary events."\(^{18}\) We have only to read Moses I. Finley's *World of Odysseus* to appreciate the extent to which Homer was representing past events. More often than not an epic action is set in the quasi-legendary past of its author's society. It avoids antiquarianism by its sense of the relevance of the past for the present of its society. The virtues needed for the founding of Rome are relevant to its flourishing under Augustus. The idea of an Elizabethan gentleman can be embodied in adventures through Faerie. The earliest "Christian" community is of highest import for seventeenth-century Christians. The pastness of the action facilitates that introduction of the marvelous which permits the needed qualities to be shown in magnified form. Beowulf's fortitude appears far greater in Grendel's mere than it would if he tackled Unferth in single combat, but his conduct of himself is far from irrelevant to Brunanburh and Maldon. When this kind of relevance is lacking, as it appears to be lacking to *Sohrab and Rustum*, the representation of "the local and transient" will appear antiquarian. Curiously, *Sohrab and Rustum* grew later in the century into a kind of relevance it scarcely possessed at its first publication. Khartoum and Omdurman, the North West Frontier of India and the Zulu War gave immediacy to the poem's portrayal of stoic death in the desert, and *Sohrab and Rustum* vied for a time with *The Scholar-Gipsy* as the poem by Arnold most frequently used as a school text. It probably lost its brief relevance in Passchendaele, in company with much else.

But this quirk of literary history scarcely constituted a full and proper response to the poem. Too many elements in *Sohrab and Rustum* make it a closed and alien system for it to be a true Victorian (or Edwardian) myth. Most obviously is this true of its animate view of nature: the "sympathetic" sand eddy which shrouds the father and son for the duration of their combat (ll. 480-85,

\(^{17}\) *Complete Prose*, I, 35.

\(^{18}\) *Complete Prose*, I, 34.
522–24), the curdling of the Oxus at the “dreadful cry” of “Ruksh, the horse” (II. 501–8), and, most painfully of all, “the big warm tears” which “roll’d down” from the “dark, compassionate eyes” of Ruksh “and caked the sand” when his master wept for the son he had mortally wounded (II. 730–36). If Ruksh were just another Victorian stag at bay or doleful dog mourning a lost master, he would simply be uncomfortably mawkish. But Ruksh is representative of a simple, homogeneous life, in which heroes are expressed in terms of the landscapes they traverse and the beasts of the field and air they so closely resemble in combat. It is a life completely in harmony with nature, neither passing nature nor resting “her slave.” It is not a view of nature with which Arnold was ever comfortable and his uneasiness declares itself in the way he introduces his fullest statements of one nature and one life:

And you would say that sun and stars took part
In that unnatural conflict; for a cloud
Grew suddenly in Heaven, and dark’d the sun
Over the fighters’ heads; and a wind rose
Under their feet, and moaning swept the plain,
And in a sandy whirlwind wrapp’d the pair. (II. 480–85)

Who is the “you” responsible for this theory of chain reaction in nature? The conditional “would say” is an evident attempt to soften objections to the philosophical implications of that purposeful wind. So, too, when Ruksh moves downstage to weep over the father and son, he is presented “as if inquiring what their grief / Might mean” (II. 734–35). But that is precisely what the poem makes Ruksh do: there is no “as if” about it.

It is difficult not to admire Sohrab and Rustum; and just as difficult not to feel uneasy about doing so. The last one hundred and fifty lines have a movingly sustained dignity in their gradual absorption of the life cycle of heroes into the life stream of the Oxus, compensating, as do so many other works, for the sense of tragic loss by epic affirmation. But the noble resolution unties an antiquarian knot. The sense of nature informing the close is established earlier in terms alien to Arnold and his England. It is a sense, moreover, which does not rise fully from the action itself and which must be supplied by similes occurring, at times, so closely together and illustrating such sparsely described gestures that they seem a parody,
not an imitation of the epic manner. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to decide whether the similes illustrate the action or the action the similes. But that is not altogether surprising in a poet whose characteristic strength lay in the objectification of mood and emotion in natural phenomena and the representation of action by means of tableaux in landscapes.

By contrast, it is comfortably unnecessary either to admire *Balder Dead* and *Meroge* or to feel uneasy about not doing so. *Balder Dead*, indeed, contains a small kernel of meaningful relevance in a thick shell of antiquarianism. Beneath the heavy characters of its Teutonic myth there are discernible traces of a Christian significance. Balder, the mild spirit of joy, the miracle worker, the poet of youth, family, and home is evidently Christlike, and like Arnold's Christ he is lost to his fellows when the forces of strife and hate have their way. There is a Dombeyish play with frozen landscapes and the tearful thaw of love and joy. And lest we should think this of importance only for Valhalla and Hell, we are assured that the gods are, at least in some respects, like the sons of men (III, 426). But it is indeed impossible to feel a lively interest in this careful antiquarian reconstruction. The general significance of Hermod's journey to the dead, the difficult and frozen passage to joylessness, is not much affected by the details of the landscape through which he passes, and the details accordingly "justify" themselves by the extent to which they accurately recall the poem's sources. It is true that Arnold takes such opportunities as he can to parallel by half allusion the Teutonic myth with classical and biblical events and situations.\(^{19}\) The result is to make the poem read at times like an exercise in comparative mythology, a kind of antiquarianism from which *Meroge* is at least reasonably free. Professor Culler has made out the best possible case for the relevance of *Meroge*'s concern with a politics of self-justifying expediency and a politics of ethical principle to the Victorian concern with motive and authority.\(^{20}\) In fact, the play's action is grounded so firmly upon constitutional issues of tyranny, usurpation, insurrection, and hereditary succession that its investigation of the nature of public obligation makes it a suitable subject for a seventeenth-century heroic play reflecting upon the political troubles of the Stuarts. It is less clear what it has to offer to the England of Victoria and Albert.

\(^{19}\) See the notes to the poem in Allott.
\(^{20}\) Culler, pp. 224–25.
We are pointed toward the explanation for Arnold’s poetic decline by Professor Culler’s remarks upon the landscape of *Merope*. Landscape in *Merope* is almost entirely restricted to descriptions of Aepytus’ Arcadian upbringing, especially the long, fictitious account of his death while hunting which Aepytus gives Polyphontes (ll. 722–846). Professor Culler comments: “one feels that this passage, almost alone in the drama, is vital and alive because in it Arnold is returning to the source of his true poetic feeling.” For Professor Culler this means a largely fixed symbolic landscape of “idle youth” in the glade, an underground river of the buried life, and a mature acceptance of responsibility on the plain of public life. The vitality of the passage is in fact referable to its using a landscape, of forest, lake, and mountain, whose details are amenable to an attempted rendering of the quality of a life. By contrast, the plain and its variants in hot or drab cities and brazen prisons seem not to have moved Arnold imaginatively as, say, they moved Dickens. Dickens again and again expressed his sense of Victorian life in detailed descriptions of chimney pots, dirty streets, factories, tottering houses, dust heaps, or the Marshalsea. But when Arnold came to express his sense of the active life the urban details he found useful were very few in comparison with his rural scenes. It is of note that Arnold’s best “London” poem is *Lines Written in Kensington Gardens*.

A desert is hot and sandy, and there, for Arnold, you have it. Three lines on the darkling plain with ignorant armies contrast with twenty-eight on the shore-line in *Dover Beach*. *A Dream* devotes thirty-six lines to the details on the banks of “a green Alpine stream” and a bare line to “burning plains / Bristled with cities.” Mycerinus only acquires an environment when he moves to the glade. *Consolation*’s comment upon the pains and small pleasures of active life requires for its landscape realization the brief description of four different cities. The topographical possibilities of the bare upper slopes of Etna are soon exhausted, and so are the topographical possibilities of Catana. The plain and its variants

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21 Culler, p. 227.
22 By contrast—or compensation—when Dickens moved into Arnold territory in the pastoral scenes of *Oliver Twist* or *The Old Curiosity Shop* the result was a diminished imaginative intensity.
figure frequently in Arnold's poetry, but their qualitative and quantative contribution is small beside that of glade and mountain, river, lake, and field. These rural settings are places of retreat, meditation, imagination, dream-weaving, and these are for Arnold all activities which derive from and find a counterpart in the details of the scene. But when Arnold has noted that public life is subject to hot sun, to metaphorical battles and prisons, the environment lets him down, and further rendering of active life must proceed in terms of explicit discourse with, perhaps, incidental metaphor. Bokhara is a seeming exception, but, when the poem is not reiterating the consequences of plague and drought, its rendering of environment is largely in terms of glades or glade surrogates. The late poem Palladium sums up in its brief compass the maximum topographical possibilities of the plain in order, once again, to contrast the active and contemplative lives. And Palladium is a superficial little poem, whose simple, indeed banal, declarations are no more than decorated by the Homeric setting. By contrast with Kensington Gardens, which creates a complete landscape image for the inner and outer life of a man, Palladium offers a landscape simile for the body and soul which not only distributes these properties about the landscape, but also leaves it quite uncertain what Arnold means by such crucial words as "soul" and "die."

Whatever the source of Arnold's poetic feeling, the source of his poetic strength was a by no means constant ability to objectify a mood, an emotion, a quality of life, more rarely an idea, in a landscape. There is certainly variety in his output, but his characteristic poem is The Scholar-Gipsy, in which the withdrawn life of contemplation and imagination is rendered in terms of a detailed landscape and is then tested against an active life conveyed by straightforward discourse and incidental metaphor. Such an active life might, in other poems, be associated, if briefly, with the plain and the city, although it is given no topographical context in The Scholar-Gipsy. Arnold's strength, which manifests itself even in lesser poems, is the sense he so often conveys of something evidently made. The making involves his own solution to the aesthetic problem of uniting reflection and description in landscape poems.

Increasingly, it is clear, Arnold was moved to treat the active life directly instead of from the vantage point of nook or mountain top. One consequence was a poetry of declarative discourse in which brief landscape similes enter to illustrate some straightforward
point. Another consequence was the curious confusion of *Bacchanalia*, in which an English rural scene is incongruously disturbed by "wild Mænads" in order to effect a not very compelling analogy with the ebullience and vulgarity of Victorian life as Arnold saw it. The neat division of the poem, juxtaposing the two halves of the analogy, declares the way in which it was excogitated, just as the rude importation of maenads into England signals an ill-advised attempt to use rural scene as illustration for, not contrast with the life of cities and plains. But the most obvious consequence was an increasing tendency "to treat political, or religious, or social matters, directly" in prose, instead of touching them "only so far as they can be touched through poetry." 23 Landscape still plays a part in Arnold’s prose, most often as appropriately brief and discontinuous similes, although Arnold occasionally indulged himself with descriptive mood pieces rendering qualities of life or emotion through landscape. Such pieces are the memorial review of his first visit to George Sand, the crossing from Liverpool to Llandudno which opens *Celtic Literature*, the wistful recreation of the society at Great Tew in the essay on Falkland, and, most famous of all, the apostrophe to Oxford at the end of the preface to *Essays in Criticism*.

If we think, as we should, of the apostrophe to Oxford as a landscape equivalent to a way of life, then we have, evidently, a parallel in Arnold’s prose to one of the most frequent features of his poems. Nor is its concluding apostrophe the only point at which the preface to *Essays in Criticism* may remind us of Arnold’s poetry. The preface has, in its first and fullest form of 1865, what might be called a double movement: a movement through a series of false images, of gods and edifices, towards the true image of Oxford as both the "beautiful city" and the "Queen of Romance"; and a movement through a series of mockingly defended positions in which the attention is drawn to ironic turns of phrase, to the establishment of tone and personality. The second movement, which may fairly be called rhetorical, accounts for the topical satire in which the original preface is so rich as to make it, perhaps, another "prologomena of the Dunciad," 24 complete with testimonies of

23 *Works*, XIII, 308; May 24, 1864.
authors. The first movement, which may, with less assurance, be called poetic because it encourages retrospection to the terms of what has been previously established, mythologizes Arnold’s skirmishes with the newspapers into an episode in a continuing holy war. The full success of the preface depends upon a proper confluence of the two movements into one stream. Such a success would be as a satiric apology for a life. It is as pertinent to recall the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* as *The Dunciad*.

Even if it is valid to distinguish rhetorical and poetic elements in the preface, it must be admitted at once that the poetic is by no means restricted to images of gods and edifices. These are not the only features which encourage retrospection and between which lie those implicit links which make for coherence and added suggestion. When reading the penultimate paragraph devoted to Müller the murderer and the transcendentalist consolations offered by Arnold to his fellow travelers on the Woodford Branch, we should recall the complaint earlier in the preface of the unlucky Mr. Wright that Arnold had “declared . . . there is not any proper reason for his existing.” Mr. Wright dated his complaint from Mapperley Hall, Nottingham, and thus prompted Arnold to enquire whether he could report “what has become of that poor girl, Wragg?” (p. x). Wragg, as no reader of *The Function of Criticism* can forget, was “in custody” at Nottingham after killing her illegitimate child “on Mapperly Hills,” and thus delivering herself as mute witness against the thesis that “our old Anglo-Saxon breed [is] the best in the whole world.” By the chance of geography, then, Mr. Wright, the unfortunate translator of Homer, is associated with the vulgar Philistine assurance of Podsnappery. Because he is so associated,

25 *Essays in Criticism* (1865), p. ix. Subsequent references to the first edition will be shown in the text by page number. The preface is usually printed in the greatly shortened version of Arnold’s later editions, which reduced the first edition by nearly a half. The cut passages are given in the textual notes of *Complete Prose*, III, 535–39.
26 *Complete Prose*, III, 485.
27 *Complete Prose*, III, 273. *The Function of Criticism* was first published separately in Nov., 1864, two or three months before *Essays in Criticism*.
28 Arnold’s “juxtaposition [of ‘Wragg is in custody’] with the absolute eulogies of Sir Charles Adderley and Mr. Roebuck” on “our old Anglo-Saxon breed” is obviously similar to the unfortunate interposition of that “stray personage of a meek demeanour” into the after-dinner conversation of Mr. Podsnap. The meek man, it will be recalled, enacting his diffidence in indirect speech in contrast to Podsnap’s self-assured direct speech, referred “to the circumstance that some half-dozen people had lately died in the streets, of starvation,” and thus attracted to himself the angry incredulity of Podsnap (*Our Mutual Friend*, I, xi). The “Podsnappery” chapter of *Our Mutual Friend* appeared in the fourth number of the serial version in Aug., 1864.
and because Arnold had apparently declared there was not any proper reason for his existing, Mr. Wright is doubly connected with that "portly jeweller" on the Woodford Branch whose fear that he would be the next victim of a railway murder Arnold pretends to have assuaged with "il n'y a pas d'homme nécessaire" (p. xvii).29

This transcendentalist consolation contributes, moreover, to an important topic which runs through the preface, that of the brevity of human life and the permanence of certain verities. It is, of course, a topic which Arnold had frequently explored in his poems. Mr. Wright and his complaint account for its introduction into the preface. In his mock apology for declaring that Mr. Wright had no reason for existing Arnold confessed that his "phrase had, perhaps, too much vivacity: alas! vivacity is one of those faults which advancing years will only too certainly cure" (p. ix). But, he insisted later in the preface, "Mr. Wright would perhaps be more indulgent to my vivacity if he considered [that]. . . . it is but the last sparkle of flame before we are all in the dark. . . . the earnest, prosaic, practical, austerely literal future" of Philistinism (pp. xi, xii). The concern with epochs, which makes its first significant appearance in Arnold's work with the volume of 1852, was fully developed and articulated by the time of Essays in Criticism in 1865. It appears in the preface in Arnold's speculations upon the remote ancestry of "Presbyter Anglicanus," ancestors from "long before the birth of Puritanism" (p. xii). It is overt in the reference to "an epoch of dissolution and transformation, such as that on which we are now entered" (pp. xv-xvi). And it merges naturally with assertions of the permanence of truth and the transience of lives and fashions.

Mr. Wright, with his concern for the existence of himself and his translation of Homer, reappears, I have said, as the "portly jeweller from Cheapside," a representative of "the great English middle class, [with] their passionate, absorbing, almost blood-thirsty clinging to life" (p. xvii). The Philistines base themselves upon the seemingly solid pragmatism of bank dividends and gravel walks (p. xvii). The edifices they build are the logicians' pyramid of addled eggs with one fresh egg of truth buried in the middle (p. viii), or

29 Müller, the railway murderer, escaped to America, whence he was brought back to England by Inspector Richard Tanner (Complete Prose, III, 484-85, 489). Earlier in the preface Arnold had envisioned the Philistines' "Palatine Library of the future" with volumes expressive of "the healthy natural taste of Inspector Tanner" (p. xiv). Tanner is not mentioned in the paragraph of transcendentalist consolation, and this small thread of coherence in the preface depends, as the implicit association of Wright and the Cheapside jeweller does not, upon an external and topical connection.
“the Palatine Library of the future. A plain edifice, like the British College of Health enlarged” (p. xiii). Their heroes are “Goliath, the great Bentham” (p. xiii) and “that representative man, that Ajax of liberalism, one of our modern leaders of thought, who signs himself ‘Presbyter Anglicanus’” (p. xi). Their god is Dagon, their “Palladium of enlightenment, the hare’s stomach” (p. xiii), which Bishop Colenso had used to exemplify the scientific inaccuracy of the Bible. They religious life is exercised in “a pious pilgrimage, to obtain, from Mr. Bentham’s executors, a sacred bone of . . . [their] great, dissected Master” (p. xviii). Their literature constitutes a library free “from all the lumber of antiquity,” except for Demosthenes, “because he was like Mr. Spurgeon” (p. xiv), and fills “the whole earth” with “the magnificent roaring of the young lions of the Daily Telegraph” (pp. xii–xiii). Mr. Wright, that Philistine by unlucky association, would do well to remember that in the Philistine future there will be no place “for his heroic blank verse Homer” (p. xiii). Nor, presumably, will there be any place for the blank verse Homer of the Chancellor of Oxford, despite “its freshness, its manliness, its simplicity” (p. xv).

The wit of the preface, with its grand edifices and strange gods, with its constant writing up of polemical debate into incongruous battle, is mock-heroic. Arnold, the preface reminds us, is not only the most classical, but also the most neoclassical of the Victorians. The imaginative wit which is at times, as the Pall Mall Gazette noted, “so whimsical,”31 the urbane teasing which is at times so facetious, are reminiscent of Swift’s Battle of the Books. In the counterpoint of Homeric translation and Benthamite jewellers there is even the suggestion of an ancients and moderns controversy.

But if the mock-heroic elevation of his adversaries and their creeds provides Arnold with multiple opportunities for the exercise of urbane wit and through the wit for the establishment of tone and ethos, the elevation also provides those comfortable worldlings of “the great English middle class” (p. xvii) with a religion, a temple, a field of battle, and a cadre of champions to set against the heroic cause of those valiant for truth. The preface begins with an account of Truth as a “mysterious Goddess, whom we shall never see except in outline. . . . He who will do nothing but fight im­petuously towards her on his own, one, favourite, particular line, is

31 Pall Mall Gazette, I, No. 16, p. 127.
inevitably destined to run his head into the folds of the black robe in which she is wrapped" (p. vii). The religiose transcendentalism of this personification establishes the tone of patience and humility, as well as the images of battle and the feminine patronage of truth.\textsuperscript{32} The tone is tested in verbal battle with "a people 'the most logical' " and self-assured "in the whole world" (pp. vii–viii). The Goddess Truth finds an adversary in the Philistine Dagon and a false-semblant in that "Urania, the Goddess of Science herself;"

\textsuperscript{32} In these terms the Goddess Truth seems to be Arnold's invention. The immediate source for his personification is probably (Complete Prose, III, 482) Renan's Préface to his Essais de Morale et Critique of 1859 with its opening image for the ineffable reality of existence: "Des voiles impénétrables nous dérobent le secret de ce monde étrange dont la réalité à la fois s'impose à nous et nous accable; la philosophie et la science poursuivront à jamais, sans jamais l'atteindre, la formule de ce Proteus qu'aucune raison ne limite, qu'aucun language n'exprime" (Paris, 1924, pp. i–ii). Renan's proceeding to insist that to love good and hate evil "aucun système n'est nécessaire" (p. ii) is paralleled by Arnold's attack on "the elaborate machine-work of my friends the logicians" (p. viii). It is perhaps unnecessary to enquire further, but it should be noted that, if Renan is Arnold's sole source, Arnold has combined Renan's two images of an ineffable formula for truth which changes like the god Proteus and a secret reality shrouded in impenetrable veils into a single image of a "mysterious Goddess" in an enveloping black robe. Plutarch is closer to the attributes of Arnold's deity in his account of Isis in De Iside et Osiride. Principally, Isis is for Plutarch matter and multiplicity to complement the form and unity of Osiris. But several of his points seem relevant to Arnold's preface. Plutarch begins with a philological attempt to connect Isis with knowing, wisdom, and truth, and her adversary, Typhon, with conceit, ignorance, and violent destruction (Moralia, 351 F). He later records that statues of Isis, the moon goddess, are draped in black garments (Moralia, 372 D). Equally of note is his use of one of Isis' shrines to illustrate the way in which Egyptian philosophy "is veiled in myths and in words containing dim reflexions and adumbrations of the truth. . . . In Saïs the statue of Athena, whom they believe to be Isis, bore the inscription: 'I am all that has been, and is, and shall be, and my robe no mortal has yet uncovered' " (Moralia, 354 C, trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Library [Cambridge, Mass., 1936], V, 23–25). The robe, or peplos, of Isis-Athena was certainly full and probably included a veil, hence Banier's rendering of the last clause of the inscription at Saïs as "nul entre les mortels n'a encore levé mon voile" (Mythologie [Paris, 1748], II, 296). This is the goddess whom Tennyson used in Maud, Part I, IV, viii, to image the dark "drift of the Maker": "an Isis hid by the veil." And see Bulfinch, The Age of Fable (1855) in Bulfinch's Mythology (New York [1947]), p. 296: "Isis was represented in statuary with the head veiled, a symbol of mystery." There is a curious passage in one of Arnold's early letters to Clough, in which he advances the proposition that a writer should be an "Exhibition" not a "Reformer," should keep pure his "Aesthetics" by not trying to urge it "as doctrine." Such writers will be "fellow worshippers of Isis . . . [believing] in the Universality of Passion as Passion" (Clough Letters, p. 59; [1845]). In the Oxford lecture on Maurice de Guérin, later included in Essays in Criticism, Arnold praised Guérin for the "natural magic" of his interpretation of nature and for his "sense of what there is adorable and secret in the life of Nature . . . his expression has . . . something mystic, inward, and profound. So he lived like a man possessed; with his eye not on his own career, not on the public, not on fame, but on the Isis whose veil he had uplifted" (Complete Prose, III, 34).
who numbers among her hierophants "Professor Pepper, Professor Anderson, Professor Frickel" (p. xv), conjurors and magicians of the day who adopted the title of Professor, and so, we are assured, convinced Arnold he should not congratulate himself on possessing the Chair of Poetry at Oxford (pp. xiv–xv). The Goddess Truth finds at last her true champion among her own sex in Oxford, the "Queen of Romance," an Oxford which "hast given thyself so prodigally, given thyself to sides and to heroes not mine, only never to the Philistines" (p. xix).

But Oxford is not only a warrior queen engaging herself on behalf of a mysterious goddess. In the final apostrophe's blend of tones and roles unqualified admiration for the "Queen of Romance" is simply the last note. If it were the only note, the praise of Oxford would be, perhaps, rapturous to the point of sentimentality. The drift to idolatry is checked by the note of irony which accompanies the introduction of Oxford in the final paragraph. It is not the irony, teasing to the point of occasional facetiousness to which the Philistines were earlier subjected. The irony now is indulgent and affectionate. But it serves to recall that earlier in the preface there were aspects of Oxford almost as ridiculous, as vulnerable to irony, as Mr. Wright, the Saturday Review, and "Presbyterian Anglicanus." One of these aspects was the writings of "nebulous professors" pilloried by Disraeli in a speech at Oxford (p. xi). The other, the blank verse translation of Homer by the "illustrious Chancellor" under whom Arnold served, was found, for all its Anglo-Saxon virtues of manliness and simplicity, to be lacking in Homer's "charm" and "play of a divine light" (p. xv). These ironies return at the beginning of the apostrophe to qualify the succeeding admiration:

Beautiful city! so venerable, so lovely, so unravaged by the fierce intellectual life of our century, so serene!

"There are our young barbarians, all at play."

And yet, steeped in sentiment as she lies, spreading her gardens to the moonlight, and whispering from her towers the last enchantments of the Middle Age, who will deny that Oxford, by her ineffable charm, keeps ever calling us near to the true goal of all of us, to the ideal, to perfection,—to beauty, in a word, which is only truth seen from another side. (p. xviii)

\[^{33}\textit{Complete Prose, III, 484.}\]
The distinction here, focused syntactically by "And yet," is between an earthly Oxford, withdrawn from the age into nostalgia for the past, and a spiritual or, perhaps, essential Oxford, beckoning to a goal which is out of time. The distinction is analogous to that between the Oxford of the nineteenth century and of Duns Scotus in Hopkins' sonnet. Such a distinction serves in the final sentence to resolve the preface's running contrast between passing lives and fashions and eternal verities:

Apparitions of a day, what is our puny warfare against the Philistines, compared with the warfare which this Queen of Romance has been waging against them for centuries, and will wage after we are gone? (p. xix)

The final sentence resolves rather than simply concludes the contrast between permanence and transience because it associates, for the first time in the preface, the battles of the intellectual life with the hitherto unpolemical quest for Truth. A distinction was made in the opening paragraph between those who "try and approach Truth on one side after another" and those who "do nothing but fight impetuously towards her" (p. vii). This contrast between uncombative quest and unproductive battles for opinions runs throughout the preface to be resolved, I say, by making of Oxford in the final apostrophe a quester upon a chivalric errand involving along the way the dispatch of various false gods and champions. As her "unworthy son," fighting in her cause (p. xix), Arnold must try to articulate "her ineffable charm" (p. xviii), must try to glimpse the mysterious goddess, must try to state the charm and "divine light" of Homer, so missing from the Chancellor's translation. He must also—it is an important part of his ethos—apologize, if mockingly, for his undue vivacity to Mr. Wright, and decline, also mockingly, to "raise a finger in self-defence against Mr. Wright's blows" (p. x). For the mockery, the urbane teasing, is the weapon he wields in that busy field of satire which is the preface to Essays in Criticism. Corydon has come down from the Cumnor hills, suspending his quest for permanence, in order to renew the battle in the plain, and assault once more the unbreachable, if long-battered fortress of the world, which now interposes its wall between him and the bright vision of truth on mountain tops. The pastoral care of English sheep is no longer restricted to liberating and giving
them sustenance; now, it is clear, they must be prodded and goaded to better pastures than those they graze so contentedly.

But Arnold's neoclassicism was not strong enough to dominate his Victorian Romanticism for long. In later editions the preface was extensively cut to remove, especially, the more uncompromisingly topical of his attacks: a procedure Pope would scarcely have comprehended. Also removed were some of the more facetious and whimsical sallies of wit, a cut which suggests that Arnold was not prepared to run for long the risk a good satirist must accept: the risk of bad taste. Gone, too, were many of the false edifices and deities: the logicians' pyramid of eggs, the Palatine Library of the future, the Urania of professorial conjurors. Something of the original effect remains. But with this cutting and knotting of so many of the threads of coherence the reticulation of mood and motif, tone and image, gives place to a strong and familiar regret for a Romantic quest gone astray, the attention distracted from the proper experiencing of truth by a need to decide what must be done with life and the age. Less qualified by ironies than in the original, the elegiac note sounds more clearly in the final version of the preface:

We are all seekers still: seekers often make mistakes.

It is not, after all, a bad epitaph for Arnold's prose; and it is the best of epitaphs for his poems.