

## Matthew Arnold's Criticism: A Reconsideration

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## I

In his discussion of Matthew Arnold in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (1933), T. S. Eliot wrote:

Arnold hardly looks ahead to a new stage of experience; and though he speaks to us of discipline, it is the discipline of culture, not the discipline of suffering. Arnold represents a period of stasis; of relative and precarious stability, it is true, a brief halt in the endless march of humanity in some, or in any direction.<sup>1</sup>

While this may be unfair in some ways to the author of *Empedocles on Etna* or *Sohrab and Rustum*, what Eliot says about Arnold's precarious stability is true. Arnold's literary criticism does not look ahead to a new stage of experience. It does mark time. It cannot cope with change. In one particular direction, it is fair to say, Arnold brings criticism to an impasse.

The main reason for this is Arnold's attitude towards pleasure in poetry. He belittles it. To argue that he ignores it is untenable.<sup>2</sup> But he does belittle it; and this attitude remains a constant feature of his criticism, producing wide-ranging effects, which this essay seeks to explore.

But first to sketch what is familiar to Arnold students, his attitude towards pleasure in poetry. In 1853 he wrote to his friend Clough:

I am glad you like the Gipsy Scholar — but what does it do for you? Homer *animates* — Shakespeare *animates* — in its poor way I think Sohrab and Rustum *animates* — the Gipsy Scholar at best awakens a pleasing melancholy. But this is not what we want.

The complaining millions of men

Darken in labour and pain —

what they want is something to *animate* and *ennoble* them — not merely to add zest to their melancholy or grace to their dreams.

1 T. S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (London, 1964), p. 103.

2 F. R. Leavis would disagree here. In his essay "Matthew Arnold" in *The Importance of Scrutiny*, ed. E. Bentley (New York, 1948), p. 96, Leavis argues against T. S. Eliot that Arnold does pay some attention to "diction", "accent" and "movement". These seem more suitable headings under which to discuss the grand style than to discuss whatever style or styles make for "natural magic". Besides, my contention is that if Arnold did attend to certain aspects of naturalistic poetic pleasure, he did not do so enough.

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— I believe a feeling of this kind is the basis of my nature — and my poetics.<sup>3</sup>

Arnold fails to credit his poem's achievement and Clough's pleasure in it. Wanting poetry to *do* something, while underestimating the importance of the sheer pleasureableness of a poem, is the very basis of Arnold's poetics.

Arnold's début as a critic in the same year makes this official. In what is now called the Preface of 1853, Arnold put together, for the second edition of his poems, some of the ruminations that had gone between Clough and himself in their correspondence from the mid-1840s. This preface is the result of peculiar circumstances that are now well known and well analysed,<sup>4</sup> and need not be repeated here in detail. Briefly, Arnold suppressed *Empedocles on Etna* because he considered it "morbid". Poetry, he declared, should make for happiness. Quoting Schiller, he linked the aim of poetry to happiness: art is "dedicated to Joy, and there is no higher and no more serious problem, than how to make men happy".<sup>5</sup> Nearing the end of his career, Arnold still insisted in "The Study of Poetry" on poetry's duties to happiness. The only significant change is that he expanded its duties to include even more difficult duties, man's "sustenance", "consolation", the very "self-preservation" of humanity:

We should conceive of [poetry] as capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto. More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us.<sup>6</sup>

No one seriously or for long disputes that ultimately poetry increases or at least ought to increase our happiness or sustains or somehow ought to sustain our humanity. What is disputable is how poetry does this. Arnold would not agree that mere pleasurableableness alone is one way. Poetry is a complex and serious affair:

If we conceive thus highly of the destinies of poetry, we must also set our standard for poetry high, since poetry, to be capable of

3 *The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough*, ed. H. F. Lowry (Oxford, 1968), p. 146.

4 See, for example, Sidney Coulling, "Matthew Arnold's 1853 Preface: Its Origin and Aftermath", *Victorian Studies*, VII (1964), 233-263; H. W. Garrod, "Matthew Arnold's 1853 Preface", *Review of English Studies*, XVII (1941), 310-321; and J. D. Jump, "Matthew Arnold and the Spectator", *Review of English Studies*, XXV (1949), 61-64.

5 *Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R. H. Super (Ann Arbor, 1960), i. 2-3 (hereafter referred to as *CPW*).

6 *CPW*, ix. 161.

fulfilling such high destinies, must be poetry of a high order of excellence.<sup>7</sup>

For Arnold that meant poetry of a "high seriousness", poetry of a profound "criticism of life", or "moral profundity",<sup>8</sup> to use the phrases which he has made famous, and which are still the best description of what Arnold thought poetry ought to be and what the greatest poetry is. But they do not explicitly include pleasure, that is, naturalistic pleasure, not even if one were to take such pleasure to include what Arnold does say is one valid function of poetry, "natural magic", the definition of which is given below. If natural magic, the only form of naturalistic pleasure that Arnold ever considers at length, is one valid function of poetry, it is nevertheless superseded by poetry of high seriousness. Natural magic is an inferior poetic achievement. What documents this attitude most economically is his treatment of Maurice de Guérin in 1863 and his last judgment of Keats in 1880.

After rendering high praise to Guérin for his achievement in natural magic, Arnold qualifies his praise:

One aspect of poetry fascinated Guérin's imagination and held it prisoner. Poetry is the interpretress of the natural world, and she is the interpretress of the moral world; it was as the interpretress of the natural world that she had Guérin for her mouthpiece. To make magically near and real the life of Nature, and man's life only so far as it is a part of that Nature, was his faculty; a faculty of naturalistic, not of moral interpretation.

He is, Arnold adds, "hardly a moral agent".<sup>9</sup> In his final judgment on Keats, Arnold gives high praise to Keats too, and then similarly qualifies it. In placing Keats once and for all in the history of English poetry, Arnold grants him a place below that of true greatness. Keats will be remembered "as no merely sensuous poet could be".<sup>10</sup> But he is to be remembered, in spite of his "fascinating felicity", as failing of absolute greatness:

For the second great half of poetic interpretation, for that faculty of moral interpretation which is in Shakespeare, and is informed by him with the same power of beauty as his naturalistic interpretation, Keats was not ripe.<sup>11</sup>

7 *CPW*, ix. 162.

8 *CPW*, ix. 177 *et passim*; ix. 46 *et passim*; iii. 33 *et passim*.

9 *CPW*, iii. 30-31.

10 *CPW*, ix. 213.

11 *CPW*, ix. 215.

## II

There are assumptions about the nature of pleasure in these two essays and elsewhere that do not come to the surface clearly, and Arnold's confidence that natural magic is finally an inadequate or partial poetic achievement might appear a prejudice or a superstition as gigantic as Carlyle's about pleasure. But Arnold's criticism of pleasure is philosophical; and his utter confidence in this criticism stems from what he considered to be the particular relation of pleasure to time. Long before publicly considering Guérin or Keats, as long ago as "The New Sirens" in the early to mid-forties, Arnold had formed his views on the inadequacy of pleasure when tested by time. "The New Sirens" is the young poet's warning that the pursuit of pleasure leads in time to a life pattern of alternations between satisfaction and malaise, satiety and emptiness, which ends in despair. That is, tested by time, pleasure is not a viable means to happiness:

When the lamps are paled at morning,  
Heart quits heart and hand quits hand.  
Cold in that unlovely dawning,  
Loveless, rayless, joyless you shall stand!<sup>12</sup>

In a lecture at Oxford in 1857, Arnold made the following comment on *De Rerum Natura*:

One of the most powerful, the most solemn passages of the work of Lucretius, one of the most powerful, the most solemn passages in the literature of the whole world, is the well-known conclusion of the third book. With masterly touches he exhibits the lassitude, the incurable tedium which pursue men in their amusements; with indignant irony he upbraids them for the cowardice with which they cling to a life which for most is miserable; to a life which contains, for the most fortunate, nothing but the old dull round of the same unsatisfying objects for ever presented.<sup>13</sup>

"Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die" works only if tomorrow you do die. Arnold — Lionel Trilling would say here, Dr Arnold's son — saw early that one lived, and that one did not want to live just to continue the slavish alternations between fulfilment and despair. Is that not why his Empedocles kills

12 *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. K. Allott (London, 1965), p. 43 (hereafter referred to as *Poems*). Incidentally the Greek motto for Arnold's volume *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems* (1852), attributed by Allott (pp. 616-7) to Thales, is translated as "Time is the wisest of things, for it finds out everything" (Bohn).

13 *CPW*, i. 32.

himself? To end the vacillation?<sup>14</sup>

Autotelic, short-lived pleasure does not necessarily lead to happiness. As Arnold observed in an 1864 Oxford lecture,

The sentiment of the 'religion of pleasure', has much that is natural in it: humanity will gladly accept it if it can live by it; to live by it one must never be sick or sorry, and the old, ideal, limited, pagan world never . . . *was* sick or sorry, never at least shows itself to us sick or sorry . . . But in the new, real, immense, post-pagan world, — in the barbarian world, — the shock of accident is unceasing, the serenity of existence is perpetually troubled. . . . How does the sentiment of the 'religion of pleasure' serve then? does it help, does it console? Can a man live by it?<sup>15</sup>

A man cannot live by it, Arnold makes clear in *Literature and Dogma*, a work that shows somewhat more systematically than elsewhere the moral foundation of his criticism. Arnold once favoured a mournful but apt line of Sainte-Beuve's by putting it into his notebook, "*L'essential en ce monde est de vivre, de durer*",<sup>16</sup> and enduring, living on *through time* is the whole end of Arnold's moral considerations about life — and about poetry. Here is what he says in *Literature and Dogma*, and this one can take as Arnold's definitive answer to the question of whether the "religion of pleasure" is enough:

So entirely does the idea of humanity, of intelligence, of looking before and after, of raising oneself out of the flux of things, rest upon the idea of steadying oneself, . . . making order in the chaos of one's impressions, by attending to one impression rather than the other. The rules of conduct, of morality, were themselves, philosophers supposed, reached in this way; — the notion of a whole self as opposed to a partial self, a best self to an inferior self, to a momentary self a permanent self requiring the restraint of impulses a man would naturally have indulged; — because, by attending to his

14 Kenneth Allott (*Poems*, p. 191) would disagree. But it seems that Arnold sends Empedocles to his death at a moment of hope simply because he knows he will live beyond that moment to endure despair again. At the very moment that he says "The numbing cloud/Mounts off my soul I feel it, I breathe free" (ll. 407-8), he doubts it can last: "Is it but for a moment?" (l. 409). His final words are:

Ere it flag, ere the mists  
Of despondency and gloom  
Rush over it again,  
Receive me, save me! (ll. 413-416)

15 CPW, iii. 227-8.

16 *The Note-books of Matthew Arnold*, ed. H. F. Lowry, K. Young, W. H. Dunn (London, 1962), p. 532 (from a letter of Sainte-Beuve of 28 August 1866).

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life, man found it had a scope beyond the wants of the present moment.<sup>17</sup>

There is very little difference between what Arnold thought a man must do with certain impulses — if he was to survive the present moment happily, avoiding both satiety and despair — and what a poem must do to help man do just that. If a man must restrain some impulses and attend to one impression and not another, so too must poetry. And if poetry is to attend to our lives, poetry must make, not for mere pleasure, but for happiness, and all its various ingredients, serenity and hope and joy, which Arnold celebrated in certain of his poems.

The way in which Arnold's critique of pleasure directs his critical judgment is obvious. The essay on Wordsworth, whom he praises for his profound application of ideas to life, is a typical and familiar example. But "The Study of Poetry" is closer to the purpose. It exhibits his judgment on a wide range of poetry as well as his famous touchstone method of judging, and both are affected by Arnold's attitude to pleasure.<sup>18</sup>

The aim of the essay is to expound a critical method for the study of poetry, a method of judging poetry that will take account of poetry's "high destinies", its duty to happiness, to life, to the self-preservation of humanity. The method that does this is Arnold's "strict judgment", the famous comparative method of the touchstones that exposes relative failure after relative failure from Chaucer on. This method produces the "real estimate", Arnold claims. The personal and the historical estimates are actually "fallacies" — Arnold's own word.<sup>19</sup> To find the classic, the work of optimum and fixed greatness, is why we study poetry. He continues:

Everything depends on the reality of a poet's classic character. If he is a dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic . . . , then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can, and to appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character.

For Arnold, if a glass is half full, it is half empty. He concludes:

This is what is salutary, this is what is formative; this is the great

17 *CPW*, vi. 179.

18 An interesting discussion of the background and influences on Arnold's writing "The Study of Poetry" is given in John P. Farrell, "Homeward Bound: Arnold's Late Criticism", *Victorian Studies*, XVIII (1973), 194-196, 202.

19 *CPW*, ix. 164.

benefit to be got from the study of poetry. Everything which interferes with it, which hinders it, is injurious.<sup>20</sup>

"The Study of Poetry" presents us with negative criticism, to use Arnold's own words: "But the use of this negative criticism is not in itself, it is entirely in its enabling us to have a clearer sense and a deeper enjoyment of what is truly excellent".<sup>21</sup> The essay does help towards a clearer sense and a deeper enjoyment of what is truly excellent, but for all other purposes, it remains "negative criticism". In fact, it is a demoralizing document. Its ultimate implication is that the relative failures which are, after all, relative successes, need not have been written. They are superfluous. The touchstones of fixed optimum value make them superfluous.

Perhaps this could be amended simply by Arnold's taking a more charitable attitude towards relative failures, and instead of directing the study of poetry to sift and explode them he could merely ask that they be gently given their due place. But what cannot be amended easily and what is far more serious is the incomplete critical theory implied in the essay, and indeed in the whole body of Arnold's criticism. Arnold leaves an important situation in the history of taste unaccounted for. High seriousness and touchstones aside, Arnold himself succumbed in his youth to a host of these relative failures — Senancour, Maurice de Guérin, George Sand, Byron and Keats. He remained through middle-age deeply attracted to writers strong in "natural magic", the very natural magic that is an incomplete, an inferior poetic achievement. Arnold never ceased to place Keats's achievement below the touchstones, but he never ceased to find enchanting his "fascinating felicity".

Arnold's attitude to George Sand is of most interest here, partly because his liking for George Sand is, in his own eyes, more vulnerable than his liking for Keats. After her death in 1876, Arnold looked back in an essay for Morley's *Fortnightly Review* on her meaning to him over the years. Before I cite a passage from this personal and appealing article, I would like to quote from a letter to his wife of 5 May 1877, Arnold being fresh from having re-read George Sand's complete works the summer before for the *Fortnightly* article: "G. Sand is beginning to weigh upon me greatly, though she also interests me very much; the old feeling of liking for her and of refreshment from

20 *CPW*, ix. 165.

21 *Ibid.*

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her, in spite of her faults, comes back".<sup>22</sup> It is then with utter sincerity and not because of the decorum of a memorial occasion, that Arnold says in this article:

Those who, amid the agitations, more or less stormy, of their youth, betook themselves to the early works of George Sand, may in later life cease to read them, indeed, but they can no more forget them than they can forget Werther.

What is unforgettable, Arnold confesses, is her natural magic.

How the sentences from George Sand's works of that period still linger in our memory and haunt the ear, with the cadences! Grandiose and moving, they come, those cadences, like the sighing of the wind through the forest, like the breaking of the waves on the sea-shore.<sup>23</sup>

"Who can forget the lanes and meadows of *Valentine*?"<sup>24</sup> he asks and even in middle-age, clearly Arnold cannot. His attraction to George Sand was in spite of her faults, in spite of her lack of light and hope,<sup>25</sup> and was largely because of her natural magic.

George Sand is just one example of how contemporary literature had been an attraction for Arnold, a deep and even a formative one. Why not so for others as well? The attractions a younger generation was feeling in the 1870s and 1880s Arnold dismisses. Zola is bad; Hugo half charlatan; Gautier a mere inn on the road of life;<sup>26</sup> Flaubert a novelist of petrified feeling;<sup>27</sup> and eagerly read as Arnold admits the realists are, Balzac and "his school" are, nonetheless, bounded by their "mingled motive of curiosity, cupidity, lubricity".<sup>28</sup> Swinburne is dismissed as a pseudo-Shelley. Rather patronizingly Arnold once said that he "should like to do him some good", but that he feared "he has taken some bent". Arnold felt things amiss when Swinburne could be "the favourite poet of the young men at Oxford".<sup>29</sup>

The list could be longer. It is enough to show that Arnold repeatedly deprecated those modern or contemporary writers whom

22 *The Letters of Matthew Arnold 1848-1888*, ed. G. W. E. Russell, Scholarly Press reprint of 1895 Macmillan edition (Grosse Pointe, 1968), ii. 158 (hereafter referred to as *Letters*).

23 *CPW*, viii. 220-1.

24 *CPW*, viii. 224.

25 *CPW*, viii. 222.

26 *CPW*, viii. 231; 230; ix. 47.

27 *The Works of Matthew Arnold*, AMS reprint of the Macmillan Library edition, 1903-4 (New York, 1970), iv. 202-3 (hereafter referred to as *W*).

28 *W*, iv. 248.

29 *Letters*, i. 227-8, 436; ii. 50-51.



others found profoundly attractive; and that he did so without exploring why these writers are rightly or wrongly so attractive. Arnold was once one of those young men at Oxford. His Swinburne was Senancour or Guérin or George Sand. Arnold's criticism fails to account for the fact that the young men at Oxford were and still are attracted — and powerfully so — to contemporary literature of less than touchstone greatness. To put it another way, Arnold's criticism fails to acknowledge that the naturalistic value, the mere pleasurable of the touchstone *recedes*. This is why young men do not generally turn to Homer, Dante, Shakespeare or Milton for their immediate poetic pleasures. It is not enough for criticism that is also cultural criticism, as Arnold's was, to say that they *ought* to do so. A sample from his essay on Wordsworth clearly shows that not only did Arnold not explain this attraction to contemporaries, contemporaries he deemed low, but that, after barely acknowledging the attraction, he thought it ought to be "cured":

We find attraction, at times, even in a poetry of revolt against [morals]; in a poetry which might take for its motto Omar Kheyam's words: 'Let us make up in the tavern for the time which we have wasted in the mosque.' Or we find attractions in a poetry indifferent to them; in a poetry where the contents may be what they will, but where the form is studied and exquisite. We delude ourselves in either case; and the best cure for our delusion is to let our minds rest upon that great and inexhaustible word *life*, until we learn to enter into its meaning.<sup>30</sup>

Arnold's criticism did not attempt to explain or understand such a "delusion"; it sought solely to "cure" it. Hence "The Study of Poetry" and the touchstones.

It may appear at this point that I have not taken into consideration Arnold's letter to the *Pall Mall Gazette* of 1884. Here he continues to praise George Sand, but on grounds far different from natural magic. It is on grounds of her lofty motives. Dropping the former personal appraisal, Arnold returns here to his usual method of ranking, and he actually ranks George Sand somewhere near Goethe and Wordsworth:

In the literature of our century, if the work of Goethe is the greatest and wisest influence, if the work of Wordsworth is the purest and most poetic, the most varied and attractive influence is, perhaps, the work of George Sand. *Bien dire, c'est bien sentir*, and her ample and noble style rests upon large and lofty qualities.<sup>31</sup>

30 *CPW*, ix. 46.

31 *W*, iv. 249.

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But the difference in appreciation between these two views of George Sand, the more personal one of 1877, is but an additional argument against the notion of fixed values in art. That is to say, Arnold found different value in George Sand's work at different times. Whether he was offering a "personal estimate" in 1877 or a "real estimate" (as I think he was trying to do in considering her future) in 1884, is not the issue. The issue is that Arnold had two estimates. George Sand clearly meant different things at different times and profoundly attractive things; and if she finally meant to Arnold a writer of lofty motive, she originally and for a long time meant a writer of delightful, unforgettable, natural magic. All this without being a touchstone.

Had Arnold taken up the implications of his own change in taste for George Sand, his criticism would have had to admit that taste does indeed change, that works of art are not of fixed value, let alone of fixed optimum value; and had Arnold taken up the implications of his own *early* taste for George Sand, his criticism would have had to admit that the mere pleasure value of the touchstones does indeed recede and that contemporary or modern work is attractive because it offers just that, a great deal of mere pleasure, whatever else it may offer. In other words, Arnold's criticism would have had to develop a principle of change or modernity in art and abandon the notion of a tradition of fixed optimum value.

I am not arguing that Arnold should not have *ranked* works of poetry, that he should not have considered some works great or greater than other works. Ultimately Arnold is right that *Paradise Lost* is a "greater" work than Gautier's *Emaux et Camées*. I am arguing that the value of *Paradise Lost*, however superior to that of other works, is not fixed. It is constantly altering. At no point since its own century has its value or its aggregate of values, intellectual, poetic and moral, been the same. The sheer pleasure of the work has receded it would seem, in favour of the intellectual. But had Arnold developed a principle of modernity or change, he would have acknowledged this, and along with it the necessity of the constant modernization of art.

It would be an exaggeration to say that in failing to do this, Arnold's criticism laid a dead hand on contemporary poetry. That surely went its own way regardless. But it is not an exaggeration to say that Arnold brought criticism, in this particular direction, to an impasse. He asked so much of moral

profundity and so much of a tradition he considered absolutely great, and he asked so little of anything else, that only religion could satisfy Arnold's demands, and to religion he eventually turned.

The way out of the impasse and into our own century was found by Walter Pater; and how he did so underscores the incompleteness of Arnold's critical achievement. Proceeding from an opposite appreciation of pleasure, proceeding from a modified Coleridgean notion that the immediate and prime end of poetry is a "pleasurable sensation", Pater had no trouble recognizing that art is always improvising, that art is always changing just in order to keep the senses awake; and he had no trouble admitting that a classic could be dull. Copying a classic would be duller still; and Arnold's effort in *Merope* would be indefensible in Pater's criticism, while it seems in some ways a consequence of Arnold's.

Pater's notions about poetry and art are too familiar to rehearse again merely to oppose to Arnold's views. But what is not so familiar is the chapter "Modernity" in the little read *Gaston de Latour*. This essay has the advantage of Pater's actually taking up and scolding some of Arnold's ideas. He does so in order to make out a case for contemporary poetry and for the principle of modernity in art. He begins by suggesting that the classic may well seem dull:

How faint and dim, after all, the sorrows of Dido, of Juliet, the travail of Aeneas, beside quite recent things felt or done . . . At best, poetry of the past could move one with no more directness than the beautiful faces of antiquity which are not here for us to see and unaffectedly love them.<sup>32</sup>

Pater chides the notion of the superiority of another age to the contemporary: "Elderly people, Virgil in hand, might assert professionally that the contemporary age, an age, of course of little people and things, deteriorate since the days of their own youth, must necessarily be unfit for poetic uses". Each age needs and makes its own poetry and rightly so: "The age renews

32 *Gaston de Latour* (London, 1910), p. 52. Compare Arnold's remarks in the 1853 Preface: "Achilles, Prometheus, Clytemnestra, Dido, — what modern poem presents personages as interesting, even to us moderns, as these personages of an 'exhausted past'? . . . I fearlessly assert that *Hermann and Dorothea*, *Childe Harold*, *Jocelyn*, *The Excursion*, leave the reader cold in comparison with the effect produced upon him by the latter books of the *Iliad*, by the *Oresteia*, or by the episode of Dido" (*CPW*, i. 4).

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itself; and in immediate derivation from it a novel poetry also grows superb and large to fill a certain mental situation made ready in advance".<sup>33</sup>

What Pater says about the nature of the classic and the modern can hardly be gainsaid. Whatever else he did — and I would not argue that his criticism is wholly "salutary", to use an Arnoldian word — he did free criticism from Arnold's notion of fixed optimum value; he did acknowledge and accept the constantly changing values in art. This is why Pater's and not Arnold's criticism is the gateway to Yeats and to modernist aesthetics, which has striven and still strives to bring value out of a world Arnold would despair of.

David De Laura suggests that both Arnold and Pater were modern men, both searching for answers in a period of changing values.<sup>34</sup> Certainly they were both searching. But Arnold found stability of value at the end of his search; he actually found fixities, while Pater did not. It is this very stability in Arnold that is more precarious, to use Eliot's word again, in what he hands down to us. Douglas Bush ends his study of Arnold in this way:

Nowadays, if we have been benumbed and befogged as well as stimulated by minute analyses of imagery and myth and symbol, and overworn by abstract jargon, and if we are sick of sick art and of the tawdriness of the literary marketplace, it is refreshing to come back to Arnold, as to the great critics, and encounter central questions about literature and life as they are seen and felt by the mature and civilized mind.<sup>35</sup>

It is refreshing to come back to Arnold today, as most teachers of English must agree, to come back to what Professor Bush calls a humanist's faith in good letters as the teacher of wisdom and virtue, in great literature, above all, great poetry, as a supremely illuminating, animating, fortifying aid in the difficult endeavour to become or remain fully human.<sup>36</sup> Bush's finale makes us all regret our century. But that does not change the fact that the security of a humanist's faith is a precarious one. Returning to Arnold must not blind us to the fact that that faith today is in question.

33 *Gaston*, pp. 52-53.

34 See the final pages of De Laura's study of Newman, Arnold and Pater in *Hebrew and Hellene in Victorian England* (Austin, 1969).

35 *Matthew Arnold: A Survey of His Poetry and Prose* (London, 1971), p. 133.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 132.