

MATTHEW ARNOLD, EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA, AND THE 1853 PREFACE

A RE-INTERPRETATION OF MATTHEW
ARNOLD'S EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA AND
A CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF HIS 1853 PREFACE

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SCOPE AND CONTENTS:

Matthew Arnold's Empedocles on Etna is a profound poem which touches on the fundamental problems of human experience. This study attempts to re-interpret the particular solutions to these problems advanced in the poem. A consideration of other works of literature which explore the same questions of life and death suggests that the suicide of Arnold's Empedocles is not an act of despair but a symbolic ritual of purification. In this light, a new reading of the poem discovers much internal evidence to support this view of it as a celebration of visionary calm. Arnold himself, however, repudiated Empedocles in the Preface to his next volume of poems, and he did not reprint it until fifteen years later. This study attempts to prove that Arnold's repudiation was not based on any intrinsic defects in Empedocles or on the objections and complaints made against the poem by critics and reviewers, but that it was rather the result of his intensely personal and painfully ambiguous relationship to the poem.

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I

A CONTEXT FOR EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA

It is now generally agreed that Empedocles on Etna is Matthew Arnold's most important poem. Walter Houghton, in his notable interpretation, approvingly repeats T. Sturge Moore's judgement that "Empedocles more and more appears the most considerable poem of a comparable length by a Victorian."¹ The amount of critical attention which the poem has received is of itself sufficient evidence of the poem's importance, but opinions remain sharply divided about the quality and success of Arnold's achievement in Empedocles on Etna. The majority of critics² acknowledge the stature of the poem while confessing some reservations about the resolution, or lack of resolution, of issues raised in the poem. A number of critics have also expressed their dissatisfaction with other aspects of the poem, but the critical debate inevitably continues to centre on the problem of suicide. However much we may sympathize with the figure of Empedocles it is, after all, difficult to wholly understand the ecstatic state of mind in which he leaps

¹Walter E. Houghton, "Arnold's 'Empedocles on Etna'", Victorian Studies, I(June 1958), 311. In addition to citing Moore's 1938 essay, Houghton also quotes Allott's opinion: "When the devil's advocate has done his worst, 'Empedocles on Etna' remains perhaps the best long poem by a Victorian."

²Commentators on the poem are too numerous to identify individually here but I will have occasion to refer to most of them in the course of this study. For an excellent, discriminating summary of the major writings on Empedocles, complete to the end of 1966, see Frederic E. Faverty, ed., The Victorian Poets: A Guide to Research, Second Edition (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), pp. 197-200.

to his death, and we understand only too well Arnold's "rejection" of the poem in 1853. The critical consensus, then, with a few exceptions and a host of qualifications, suggests essentially that if Empedocles is a signal figure in Victorian literature, he is nevertheless a giant of despair.

What we make of the suicide of Empedocles will influence not only our interpretation of the poem itself, but also our conception of Arnold's complex relationship to his poem. It is, therefore, useful to consider briefly some of the attitudes to suicide which have been prominent at one time or another in the course of Western thought, especially those attitudes which were current during the time of Empedocles of Agrigentum, the Greek philosopher of the fifth century B.C. who provided Arnold with a model and some basic materials for the poem.

Among the ancient Scythians suicide was regarded as a duty and an honour by those who grew too old to keep up a nomadic life; by killing themselves they relieved the tribe of a burden. One report of the Scythian sages notes, "the anticipation of the time of death is a glory in their eyes, and they have themselves burned alive as soon as age or sickness begins to trouble them . . . Fire would be contaminated if it did not receive the human sacrifice still breathing."³ Charondas, the lawgiver of Catana, is said to have taken his own life for breaking one of his own laws (cf. Arnold's "The Sick King in Bokhara"). From the

³A. Alvarez, The Savage God (New York, 1970), p. 56. Alvarez is quoting Quintus Curtius, by way of Durkheim.

many instances of ancient suicide, both factual and legendary, one writer concludes: " . . . suicides . . . in ancient Greece, had one quality in common: a certain nobility of motive . . . the ancient Greeks took their own lives only for the best possible reasons: grief, high patriotic principle, or to avoid dishonour. Their philosophic discussion of the subject is proportionately detached and balanced. The keys were moderation and high principle."⁴

Stoicism was also instrumental in promoting suicide as a dignified and rational act, first by example and later by precept. Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, and his successor and disciple Cleanthes, taught indifference to both pleasure and pain and urged their followers to live virtuously and "in agreement with nature", but they found nature less than agreeable themselves. Zeno apparently hanged himself "out of sheer irritation"⁵ and Cleanthes, after starving himself for two days to cure a gumboil, refused to resume eating after his infection had cleared and so starved to death.⁶ Suicide was an act of equanimity in response to an immoderate life. We also know from the extant writings of decadent Rome that suicide later became fashionable and frequent.⁷

⁴ Alvarez, p. 59, quoting Fedden.

⁵ Alvarez, p. 61.

⁶ Alvarez, p. 61.

⁷ Alvarez, p. 63, lists some of the more famous ancient suicides, including: Socrates, Lycurgus, Cato, Seneca and Paulina, Marcellinus, Isocrates, Demosthenes, Lucretius, Lucan, Labienus, Terence, Aristarchus, Petronius Arbiter, Hannibal, Boadicea, Brutus, Cassius, Mark Antony and Cleopatra, Nero, Otho, King Ptolemy of Cyprus, King Sardanapalus of Persia, Mithridates, and a host of others. Alvarez also reminds us that Donne's Biathanatos lists three pages of notable classical suicides and that Montaigne compiled an even greater list; according to Alvarez both touch on only a fraction of known classical suicides.

Without elaborating further, we can detect the outlines of a classical tradition of suicide which did not generally recognize despair as a motivation and which was not compelled to justify suicide against theological or Christian prohibitions. Significantly, all of these examples display similarities to the case of the ancient Empedocles: like the Scythian sages, he was concerned to maintain the purity of fire and the other elements free from contamination; like Charondas, he was a resolute and single-minded man with a divine and mystical conception of his office and of his place in the world; also like Charondas, he was an inhabitant of Catana, a Greek colony in Sicily; and with the Stoics he shared a number of philosophical tenets -- indeed, the Stoics acknowledged their debt to Empedocles as the originator of some of their ideas. We have, then, a basic context in which Empedocles' suicide may be considered in terms more appropriate than Christian repugnance, philosophical antipathy or modern compassion. More important, Matthew Arnold had a sure sense of this calm, rational and detached attitude to suicide, which he also saw as characteristic of other aspects of classical culture and the Greek mind. Whether or not Arnold was conscious of the history of suicide and the philosophy and literature of suicide as constituting a distinct tradition, he was certainly familiar with the philosophic spirit of which these classical attitudes to suicide are a manifestation. Consequently, Arnold's Empedocles not only shares the situation of the historical Empedocles, but he is also endowed with characteristics and beliefs which we do not find in the historical Empedocles but which are apparent among his Greek contemporaries and elsewhere in classical tradition. Even among the few examples already

mentioned we note that the Scythian concern with age and sickness, and their desire to die while still breathing, Zeno's irritation, and a widespread philosophical ennui, are features of Arnold's Empedocles which suggest that he represents an age and a habit of mind as much as he dramatizes an individual consciousness. It is important to invoke a classical tradition as a context for Empedocles on Etna because it offers us an alternative attitude to suicide, a sense of the age of Empedocles, and a recognition of Arnold's intimacy with ancient philosophy and literature. But before developing the specific classical currents in Empedocles on Etna, another perspective is necessary.

Approximately twenty-two centuries separate the Greek philosopher and Arnold's sage; the distance between them constitutes the bulk of Western history and Arnold's Empedocles seems to feel the full weight and complexity of this history as his burden. Implicit in much of the dialogue of Empedocles on Etna, and explicit in the long oration which Empedocles delivers to Pausanias, is the sage's sense of this burden; he is almost conscious of the gulf between himself and his ancestor. Among the shifts and changes between these two points in history, remnants of Empedocles's classical milieu persist, albeit in fragmented and modified forms, and in a sense, these complex changes and this enduring or recurring permanence are two of the major themes of Arnold's poem. In his discussion of Empedocles on Etna in the Preface to his Poems. A New Edition (1853), Arnold suggests the ideas of change and permanence simultaneously in a passage which is both a kind of compressed and personal version of history and an implied identification of his own age with that of the ancient Empedocles:

I intended to delineate the feelings of one of the last of the Greek religious philosophers, one of the family of Orpheus and Musaeus, having survived his fellows, living on into a time when the habits of Greek thought and feeling had begun fast to change, character to dwindle, the influence of the Sophists to prevail. Into the feelings of a man so situated there entered much that we are accustomed to consider as exclusively modern; how much, the fragments of Empedocles himself which remain to us are sufficient at least to indicate. What those who are familiar only with the great monuments of early Greek genius suppose to be its exclusive characteristics, have disappeared: the calm, the cheerfulness, the disinterested objectivity have disappeared; the dialogue of the mind with itself has commenced; modern problems have presented themselves; we hear already the doubts, we witness the discouragement, of Hamlet and of Faust.⁸

Arnold's sense of this emergent modernism -- debilitating, enervating, and marking the decline of a more stable age, the end of Periclean Athens, the beginnings of the Peloponnesian War -- is frequently echoed in descriptions of his own age in his poetry and other writings. For example, in a letter to Clough from Thun (September 23, 1849) Arnold complains:

My dearest Clough these are damned times -- everything is against one -- the height to which knowledge is come, the spread of luxury, our physical enervation, the absence of great natures, the unavoidable contact with millions of small ones, newspapers, cities, light profligate friends, moral desperadoes like Carlyle, our own selves, and the sickening consciousness of our difficulties: but for God's sake let us neither be fanatics nor yet chaff blown by the wind⁹

Of course, the brief portrait of the age of Empedocles is part of a well-considered and careful work of prose whereas the comments to Clough are

⁸R.H. Super, ed., The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold (Ann Arbor, 1960 -), I, 1. Hereafter cited as Prose Works.

⁹H.F. Lowry, ed., The Letters of Matthew Arnold to Arthur Hugh Clough (London and New York, 1932), p. 111. Hereafter cited as Letters to Clough. Note that Arnold had begun writing Empedocles on Etna at the time of this letter.

part of an intimate and distraught outburst; but if the respective occasions dictate the differences in tone, the two passages are nevertheless linked in Arnold's thought -- each is an elaboration upon the other, one defining what has "disappeared" and the other explaining what has replaced the lost spirit. A more vital connection is Empedocles on Etna itself where the classical predicament and the modern situation are fused together in a single consciousness:

Hither and thither spins
 The wind-borne, mirroring soul,
 A thousand glimpses wins,
 And never sees a whole;
 Looks once, and drives elsewhere, and leaves its last employ.

 What? hate, and awe, and shame
 Fill thee to see our time;
 Thou feelest thy soul's frame
 Shaken and out of chime?
 What? life and chance go hard with thee too, as with us;

 Great qualities are trodden down,
 And littleness united
 Is become invincible.

 ... over all the world
 What suffering is there not seen
 Of plainness oppressed by cunning,

 What anguish of greatness,
 Railed and hunted from the world,
 Because its simplicity rebukes
 This envious, miserable age!¹⁰

¹⁰ Kenneth Allott, ed., The Poems of Matthew Arnold (London, 1965), pp. 159, 160-61, 180-81. Allott's edition of the poems has been used throughout this study because it is based on the textus receptus established by Arnold's 1885 edition, and Allott also includes all variant readings of any consequence. Hereafter, quotations from the poem will be identified by line references incorporated into the text. Line references for the above quotations are as follows: I, ii, 82-86; I, ii, 112-116; II, 92-94; II, 99-101; II, 104-107.

These few extracts from Empedocles illustrate the same sense of bewilderment and frustrated indignation that Arnold articulates in his letter to Clough and hints at in the 1853 Preface. Arnold sees himself, the historical Empedocles, and his own imaginative Empedocles beset by a common enemy which he elsewhere calls "the world's multitudinousness",¹¹ and the resemblances of their situations underlie a number of Arnold's other observations to Clough. At about the same time that he was beginning his Empedocles Arnold writes: "Reflect too, as I cannot but do here more and more, in spite of all the nonsense some people talk, how deeply unpoetical the age and all one's surroundings are."¹² In the following year he speaks of "this poor exaggerated surexcited humanity".¹³ In another letter, soon after the publication of Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems (1852), Arnold reformulates the dilemma in these terms: "But woe was upon me if I analysed not my situation: and Werter[,], René[,], and such like[,], none of them analyse the modern situation in its true blankness and barrenness, and unpoetry-lessness."¹⁴ Although he does not name Empedocles, he is discussing the volume to which that poem gives its title and he seems in an unguarded moment to identify himself with the protagonist of his poem insofar as Empedocles's analysis of "the modern situation" is also his own analysis. Less than two months later Arnold reiterates the

¹¹Letters to Clough, p. 97.

¹²Ibid., p. 99.

¹³Ibid., p. 116.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 126.

identification, this time maintaining the distinction between himself and his character by means of a simile: " . . . yes -- congestion of the brain is what we suffer from -- I always feel it and say it -- and cry for air like my own Empedocles."¹⁵

The force of these interwoven associations, and there are many more, suggests a ground for the kind of comparison which Arnold makes in his inaugural lecture as Professor of Poetry at Oxford, "On the Modern Element in Literature" (1857).¹⁶ There he insists repeatedly on the "modernity" of the age of Pericles, AEschylus and Sophocles, but by this time his definition of modernity has changed. The "modern element" in the age of Pericles is supremely defined by "the manifestation of a critical spirit,"¹⁷ the spirit of disinterested inquiry which is exalted in Culture and Anarchy (1869); but the modern element in the story of Empedocles is the element of doubt, of alienation and of self-consciousness which is, in a sense, a consequence of this critical spirit, although it is admittedly a somewhat tangential offshoot. In the 1853 Preface Arnold rejects Empedocles's modern aspect as excessively morbid, calling it "the dialogue of the mind with itself", but this anticipates a problem which will be considered later; the point of noting the "modern element" in Empedocles' situation here is to emphasize not only Arnold's attraction to the historical Empedocles, and his conflation of that period of Greek history with his own age, but also to suggest a

¹⁵Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁶Prose Works, I, 18-37.

¹⁷Prose Works, I, 25.

balancing perspective for a consideration of the poem -- Empedocles on Etna participates equally in its classical roots and its striking modernity.¹⁸

In conflating these two periods of history, however, Arnold does more than imaginatively assimilate the legend and the philosophy of Empedocles as the source for his poem; in effect, he also collapses into a single dramatic moment much of the intervening history between these two focal points. Indeed, Empedocles on Etna is a very eclectic poem. According to the retrospective account of the 1853 Preface, Arnold discerns the gloom of Hamlet and of Faust as already incipient in the ancient Empedocles. It seems to me that Arnold implies a distinction between Hamlet and Faust as two different kinds of doubters, and it is necessary to try to establish Arnold's conception of their differences.

Arnold's profound admiration for Senancour's Obermann is well-known, as is also his respect for George Sand. In 1833 George Sand wrote an article on Obermann for the Revue des Deux Mondes (Series 2, vol. 2, 15 juin 1833, 645-658), presumably on the occasion of the second edition of Obermann in that year (it had not been reprinted since its

¹⁸It seems to me that this fact must be emphasized because of the influence of Houghton's interpretation, cited above. Houghton's argument is actually very judicious and temperate, but his treatment of the poem in terms of the "modern thought" delineated in Act I and the "modern feeling" which emerges in Act II (a distinction which he says Arnold probably intended) has been unduly exaggerated by subsequent critics who, perhaps unwittingly, give a disproportionate weight to the poem's modernity. Arnold himself recognizes broader dimensions: "The poet's matter being the hitherto experience of the world, and his own, increases with every century." (Letters to Clough, p. 65).

original publication in 1804). In the next edition of Senancour's epistolary "novel" (1840), George Sand's essay was incorporated as a "Preface" which was also reprinted in a number of subsequent editions (1844, 1847, 1852, 1863). It is highly probable that Arnold read Obermann in the 1840 edition (or the 1844 or 1847 edition) prefaced by George Sand and that this preface suggested to him a basis for his important distinction between Hamlet and Faust and also stimulated ideas which eventually became part of his conception of Empedocles.¹⁹ George Sand's "Preface" to Obermann begins by defining Obermann's character comparatively:

¹⁹Cf. Kenneth Allott, "Matthew Arnold's Reading-Lists in Three Early Diaries", Victorian Studies, II (March 1959), 257 n. 15, where Allott notes Arnold's first mention of Obermann in November 1848 (Clough Letters, p. 95), "by which date he could have discovered Senancour for himself in Sainte-Beuve" according to Allott. In fact Sainte-Beuve had written a preface for the 1833 edition of Obermann which Arnold might have known, but Allott is probably thinking of Sainte-Beuve's essay on Senancour in Portraits Contemporains (1845). I have not seen the 1833 edition of Obermann, but it is possible that Sainte-Beuve's preface is identical with "Senancour" in Portraits Contemporains (which is mainly a collection of earlier essays). In any case, Allott's footnote continues, "It does not really help to know that [Arnold] probably read Obermann in George Sand's edition of 1840." This strikes me as an irresponsible comment in an otherwise valuable piece of research. Arnold's awareness of Sand's Preface is both demonstrable and significant, as I will show here and later in my discussion of Arnold's 1853 Preface. Arnold's 1869 essay on Obermann for the Academy also mentions both George Sand's and Sainte-Beuve's writings on Senancour and Obermann. This essay is reprinted in Fraser Neiman, ed., Essays, Letters, and Reviews by Matthew Arnold (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), pp. 156-163. Sand's Preface is also echoed in On the Study of Celtic Literature. See Prose Works, III, 372-373.

Quoique la souffrance morale puisse être divisée en d'innombrables ordres, quoique les flots amers de cette inépuisable source se répandent en une multitude de canaux pour embrasser et submerger l'humanité entière [note, incidentally, how the nautical metaphors anticipate some of Arnold's later poetry], il y a plusieurs ordres principaux dont toutes les autres douleurs dérivent plus ou moins immédiatement. Il y a, 1° la passion contrariée dans son développement, c'est-à-dire la lutte de l'homme contre les choses; 2° le sentiment de facultés supérieures, sans volonté qui les puisse réaliser; 3° le sentiment de facultés incomplètes, clair, évident, irrécusable, assidu, avoué: ces trois ordres de souffrances peuvent être expliqués et résumés par ces trois noms, Werther, René, Obermann.

Le premier tient à la vie active de l'âme . . . Il relève de l'amour, et comme mal, a pu être observé dès les premiers siècles de l'histoire humaine. La colère d'Achille perdant Briséis et le suicide de l'enthousiaste allemand s'expliquent tous deux par l'exaltation de facultés éminentes, gênées, irritées ou blessées. La différence des génies grec et allemand et des deux civilisations placées à tant de siècles de distance, ne trouble en rien la parenté psychologique de ces deux données. Les éclatantes douleurs, les tragiques infortunes ont dû exciter de plus nombreuses et de plus précoces sympathies que les deux autres ordres de souffrance . . . Celles-ci n'ont pu naître que dans une civilisation très-avancée . . . la mieux connue de ces deux maladies sourde et desséchantes . . . [René est le] type d'une rêverie douloureuse, mais . . . à l'amertume de son inaction sociale se mêle la satisfaction orgueilleuse et secrète du dédain . . . qui établit la supériorité de cette âme sur tous les hommes, sur toutes les choses au milieu desquelles elle se consume, hautaine et solitaire.

A côté de cette destinée à la fois brillante et sombre, se traîne en silence la destinée d'Obermann, majestueuse dans sa misère, sublime dans son infirmité . . . René signifie le génie sans volonté: Obermann signifie l'élévation morale sans génie, la sensibilité malade monstrueusement isolée en l'absence d'une volonté avide d'action.²⁰

George Sand's initial distinctions are subtle yet intelligible: Werther's suffering is essentially "primitive" and his disillusionment in love, not

²⁰ George Sand, "Preface", in E.P. de Sanancour, Obermann (Paris, 1840), pp. ii-iii.

unlike the anger of Achilles,²¹ appeals to our most primary sympathies; but in contrast to "les éclatantes douleurs" of Werther and Achilles, René and Obermann represent "deux maladies sourdes et desséchantes," which "n'ont pu naître que dans une civilisation très-avancée." But if Werther embodies the first and most basic order of "la souffrance morale", whereas René and Obermann undergo the more modern sufferings of refined sensibilities, we must make a further distinction. Different as they certainly are, Werther and René nevertheless belong to the same large tradition of "existences manquées". Obermann, on the other hand, has an obscure heritage; his only famous ancestor is Hamlet with whom he shares "la naïve tristesse des facultés qui s'avouent incomplètes, la touchante et noble révélation d'une impuissance . . . d'une intelligence élevée, que d'une âme d'élite." The tradition of Faust is essentially characterized by ambition:

Il est impossible de comparer Obermann à des types de souffrance tels que Faust, Manfred, Childe-Harold, Conrad et Lara. Ces variétés de douleur signifient, dans Goethe, le vertige de l'ambition intellectuelle; et dans Byron, successivement, d'abord un vertige pareil (Manfred); puis la satiété de la débauche (Childe-Harold)

 la majorité des lecteurs s'est tournée vers l'ambition des rôles plus séduisants de Faust, de Werther, de René, de Saint-Preux.

Mystérieux, rêveur, incertain, tristement railleur, peureux par irrésolution, amer par vertu, Obermann a peut-être une parenté éloignée avec Hamlet, ce type embrouillé, mais profond de la faiblesse humaine, si complet dans son avortement, si logique dans son inconséquence.²²

²¹Note Sand's brilliant assertion of the shared psychology of Werther the Romantic archetype and Achilles the epic hero, notwithstanding "la différence des génies grec et allemand", in the light of my contention of Arnold's identification of Empedocles' suffering with his own.

²²Sand, "Preface", pp. iv-vi.

Sand goes on to describe the condition of Obermann in moving phrases, some of which seem to be reflected in Arnold's two poems and his essay on Obermann, and many more of which describe Arnold's Empedocles almost as well as they do Senancour's engaging hermit. Arnold certainly recognizes the kinship of Empedocles and Obermann when he writes: "as deep as [Obermann's] sense that the time was out of joint, was the feeling of this Hamlet that he had no power to set it right . . . a root of failure, powerlessness, and ennui, there certainly was in Senancour's own nature; so that, unfavourable as may have been his time, we should err in attributing to any outward circumstances the whole of the discouragement by which he is pervaded."²³ Arnold's Empedocles also has a pervasive "settled gloom" which has both internal and external sources. According to Pausanias, the times are responsible:

. since this new swarm
of sophists has got empire in our schools
Where he was paramount, since he is banished
And lives a lonely man in triple gloom --
He grasps the very reins of life and death. (I, i, 121-125)

According to Callicles, however:

'Tis not the times, 'tis not the sophists vex him;
There is some root of suffering in himself,
Some secret and unfollowed vein of woe,
Which makes the time look black and sad to him. (I, i, 150-153)

And, of course, Callicles proves to be the surer analyst although Empedocles, in the narrow vision of his "triple gloom", agrees with Pausanias

²³Neiman, pp. 160-161. Although Arnold attributes these qualities to Senancour himself, he illustrates them with Obermann's comments.

in complaining about the times and the sophists. In the course of the poem Empedocles seems to arrive at the diagnosis which Callicles here intuits. But if George Sand's discussion of Obermann reinforces Arnold's own conception of Obermann, suggests the parallel with Hamlet,²⁴ and distinguishes the separate traditions of Hamlet and of Faust, all of which indirectly stimulate his portrait of Empedocles, then her "Preface" also has a more direct influence on Arnold's poem.

The second half of Sand's "Preface" is prophetic. Briefly, she argues that Obermann, "born" thirty years too soon, embodies "l'esprit général depuis 1830." At the same time, she observes that "notre époque se signale par une grande multiplicité de maladies morales . . . désormais contagieuses et mortelles." In fact, she recognizes that Obermann will be superseded in the imminent future, just as he had replaced the exemplary figures of previous ages; the "esprit général" will continue to be modified: "Le mal de Werther, celui de René, celui d'Obermann, ne sont pas les seuls que la civilisation avancée nous ait apportés, et le livre où Dieu a inscrit le compte de ces fléaux n'est peut-être encore ouvert qu'à la première page." According to Sand, a new age is already arising, bringing with it a new malady; she describes her presentiment in terms that challenge and invite a new rendering of "la souffrance morale". She calls powerfully for a new hero, yet to emerge on the

²⁴ Arnold's letters to Clough frequently echo Hamlet. His letter to Clough about Empedocles, quoted above, implies Sand's argument by defending Empedocles in contradistinction to Werther and René "and such like". His essay, "Obermann", also quoted above, makes the same identification of Hamlet and Obermann. Similarly when Arnold writes to Clough of "surexcited humanity" he is borrowing the phrase from Sand's "Preface", p. xiv.

horizon, one who will not only translate "l'esprit général" of the moment but also portray the pain and suffering of those who are, or try to be, true to life ("vécu"), in effect, true to their buried selves, to use Arnold's own phrase. This new sufferer, this modern hero, George Sand feels, may answer Obermann's plaintive desire to be able to say, "If only we have been true to ourselves!" with his resolute "Obermann, console yourself, for then we will have been true in vain."²⁵ Arnold's *Empedocles*, we recall, articulates the pain of trying to "at last be true / To our own only true, deep-buried selves". In 1840 the new hero has not yet arrived: "Il appartiendra peut-être à quelque génie austère, à quelque psychologue rigide et profond, de nous montrer la souffrance morale sous un autre aspect encore". It seems that Arnold's *Empedocles* is an effort to meet this challenging diagnosis, and some of the hints in George Sand's outline are developed in Arnold's characterization of *Empedocles*. Of course, if the 1853 Preface implicitly promotes Sand's distinction between Hamlet and Faust, *Empedocles on Etna*, while recognizing this distinction, involves aspects of both traditions; *Empedocles* is possessed by two orders of doubt which roughly correspond to, and account for, Houghton's postulation that the poem delineates successively "a modern feeling not less remarkable than the modern thought . . ."²⁶

²⁵My translation of Sand's "Preface", p. xvii: "Une telle âme peut s'efforcer à consoler Obermann, en lui montrant une blessure plus envenimée que la sienne, en lui disant la différence du doute à l'incrédulité, en répondant à cette belle et triste parole: Qu'un jour je puisse dire à un homme qui m'entende: « Si nous avons vécu! » - - Obermann, consolez-vous, nous aurions vécu en vain."

²⁶Prose Works, I, 32.

It is not impossible that Arnold might have announced himself to George Sand as this "génie austère" when he visited her at Nohant in 1846. Shortly after Sand's death in 1876, Arnold confides in a letter to his daughter: "I also heard from Morley yesterday that G. Sand had said to Renan that when she saw me years ago, 'Je lui faisais l'effet d'un Milton jeune et voyageant.' Renan told him this."²⁷ This comment certainly suggests that their 1846 meeting entailed a more thorough discussion of poetical matters and of Arnold's plans than Arnold indicates in his reminiscence published in the Fortnightly Review in 1877:

She conversed of the country through which I had been wandering, of the Berry peasants and their mode of life, of Switzerland, whither I was going; she touched politely, by a few questions and remarks, upon England and things and persons English -- upon Oxford and Cambridge, Byron, Bulwer . . . After breakfast she led the way into the garden, asked me a few kind questions about myself and my plans, gathered a flower or two and gave them to me, shook hands heartily at the gate, and I saw her no more.²⁸

²⁷G.W.E. Russell, ed., Letters of Matthew Arnold, 1848-1888 (London, 1901), II, 151. Hereafter cited as Letters. Arnold's 1846 visit to Nohant was the occasion of their only meeting.

²⁸Reprinted in Mixed Essays (New York, 1880), pp. 318-319. Apparently Iris E. Sells in Matthew Arnold and France: The Poet (Cambridge, 1935), conjectures that on this visit George Sand introduced him to Obermann. In "Matthew Arnold's Reading-Lists in Three Early Diaries", p. 257 n. 15 (cited above), Allott supports this conjecture: "If George Sand spoke to him about Switzerland at Nohant in 1846, as Arnold says, then Obermann may well have come into the conversation." Mrs. Sells's book has not been available to me, but I consider this suggestion plausible, and I would add that, whether or not Sand first introduced Arnold to Obermann, he would have come eventually to associate his relationships with Sand and with Obermann and he would probably have made an effort to read her Preface. However, since Allott says in the same footnote, "It does not really help to know that he probably read Obermann in George Sand's edition of 1840", it leads me to suppose that Mrs. Sells has not presented this aspect of the Arnold-Sand relationship convincingly.

Arnold must have said a great deal more about himself and his plans than he leads us to believe in order to have impressed George Sand as a young Milton on his voyages; in fact, by 1846 Arnold had written little and published nothing. To warrant the comparison with Milton, of all people, Arnold might have simply told Sand that he was diligently preparing himself for a poetic career by reading the classics and other great works of literature, as Milton had done. But we have no evidence that Arnold began his assiduous study of the classics as early as 1846 (when he impressed his friends as a dandy, and read a great deal of philosophy); this would not, in any case, provide sufficient grounds for calling him a young Milton. Perhaps Arnold addressed himself to the challenge issued in Sand's "Preface" to Obermann (which Arnold could have read prior to the visit, or which Sand could have outlined to him during their interview) to record a new version of "la souffrance morale", to produce the new "hero"; perhaps Arnold explained his general intentions in "epic proportions", or perhaps the comment alludes to a more specific connection (it might not be entirely fruitless to compare Empedocles on Etna with Samson Agonistes²⁹). We can only guess what Sand's comparison might have meant, but her choice of Milton was probably not gratuitous.

From these few suggestions towards constructing a context in which to consider Empedocles on Etna we note that neither the classical tradition with its equanimity nor the modern examples of Romantic heroes, nor yet the other figures alluded to in passing, present suicide anti-

²⁹Arnold refers to Samson Agonistes and Milton's preface to it in his own "Preface" to Merope. See Prose Works, I, 60-62.

pathetically. Most of them win our sympathies, some even gain our admiration, and this usually in spite of, rather than because of, the fact that they take their own lives. And this is true also of the death-oriented figures who consider suicide but do not actually proceed to the act by any direct means; Hamlet and Obermann, for example, are not superior to their Faustian counterparts by any margin of moral courage which restrains them from suicide. Their specific situations simply demand different resolutions. What all of these suicides and death-contemplating figures have as their common legacy (and this is perhaps what makes them more or less attractive to us) is a wealth of motivations to perform the deed. Arnold's Empedocles is clearly the consummate Victorian inheritor of these several traditions, yet he stands alone, so far as I know, among the famous suicides of literature in being taxed with insufficiently developed motivation. Arnold himself is partly responsible for making the question of motivation a critical issue. In publicly rejecting Empedocles in the 1853 Preface he uses the words "morbid", "monotonous", "painful, not tragic", and he describes the situation as one "in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done." Most of his early critics agreed with the general tenor of these epithets, and on the basis of Arnold's phrase, "poetically faulty", they began to discern a variety of faults; the most frequent target was understandably the suicide and the 1853 Preface undoubtedly encouraged the critics and reviewers in this course. Carl Dawson's recent study of the contemporary criticism leads him to conclude, "the critics considered Empedocles' leap

to be an intolerable gesture."³⁰ The most frequent complaint centred explicitly on the disparity between Empedocles's advice to Pausanias and his suicide. But in their proper perspective, such criticisms can be explained. The reviewers demanded of Arnold, as indeed they did of Tennyson and Browning, that he meet the many needs of their age. The reviews compiled by Dawson suggest that Arnold's critics were almost as unanimous in this respect as Edgar Shannon's Tennyson and the Reviewers shows that poet's early critics to have been. The "social relevance" of literature seems to have been a Victorian preoccupation.

In the case of this particular complaint about Empedocles, however, the commonplace has persisted. Even those critics most sympathetic to Arnold concur with Kathleen Tillotson's opinion when she says, "It is a notorious flaw in the poem that Empedocles' subsequent despair and the catastrophe seem arbitrarily juxtaposed to, not logically developed from, the statement of his creed."³¹ The complaint has been echoed by most of Arnold's recent critics in spite of the fact that we can more readily than could Arnold's contemporaries accept Empedocles' suicide in the light of a

³⁰ Carl Dawson, ed., Matthew Arnold, The Poetry: The Critical Heritage (London and Boston, 1973), p. 11. Hereafter cited as Critical Heritage. See also p. 72 for Clough's comment, and p. 217 for R.H. Hutton's verdict.

³¹ Kathleen Tillotson, "Matthew Arnold and Carlyle", in Geoffrey and Kathleen Tillotson, Mid-Victorian Studies (London, 1965), p. 229. This essay was originally the 1956 Warton Lecture. Note incidentally that in another essay in this collection, "Yes: in the sea of life", (p. 177) Kathleen Tillotson suggests that Foscolo's Ultime Lettere di Jacopo Ortis might have had some influence on Arnold's Empedocles. Arnold probably read the book in Dumas's French translation of 1839 if we can believe the original title of "To Marguerite - Continued" which was first published in 1852 as "To Marguerite, in Returning a Volume of the Letters of Ortis". It should be noted, however, that Arnold nowhere else refers to Ortis while his references to other literary figures in whom he was interested are frequently repeated. In any case, I have been unable, despite repeated attempts, to acquire any translations of this work.

context of the sort I have suggested. The English critics of Arnold's time did not think the suicide justifiable, but we have not the same criteria; from this distance in time Empedocles' suicide seems sufficiently motivated because our perspective is informed by more psychological insight and less ethical rigidity. Yet Empedocles's action remains problematic, perhaps not because of the fact that he commits suicide after delivering to Pausanias "a philosophy to live by", but rather because he presents such a philosophy before committing suicide. Kathleen Tillotson offers a similar explanation: "When Arnold said, many years after, that 'if Empedocles throws himself into Etna, his creed can hardly be meant to be one to live by', he stated the difficulty, but the wrong way round. For the creed is presented as one 'to live by', and carries conviction to every reader whether or not he accepts it; and the more so to contemporary readers, because it was so recognizable as the creed of Sartor Resartus."³² As Kathleen Tillotson says, Arnold's relation to Carlyle, at least in Empedocles, is "essential" and, in all likelihood, "completely conscious". But Arnold's relation to Carlyle is also the most complex and ambiguous of all his literary relations (with the possible exception of that with Clough which is slightly less ambiguous but more complex).

Throughout most of the eighteen-forties Arnold entertains a very high estimate of Carlyle. In March, 1848 he sends his mother a new article

³²Ibid., p. 230.

by Carlyle with this recommendation: "The source of repose in Carlyle's article is that he alone puts aside the din and whirl and brutality which envelop a movement of the masses, to fix his thoughts on its ideal invisible character."³³ On the following day he writes about the same article to Clough: " . . . and how solemn, how deeply restful it strikes on one amidst the heat and vain words that are everywhere just now . . . it is the style and feeling by which the beloved man appears."³⁴ But by September of the following year, in the letter to Clough from Thun, "the beloved man" has become a "moral desperado". In 1859 Arnold summarily dismisses "that regular Carlylean strain which we all know by heart and which the clear-headed among us have so utter a contempt for".³⁵ Arnold is not alone in his reversal of attitude to Carlyle but the reasons for his changed view are different from the reasons of others who rejected Carlyle at about the same time.

A recent defender of Carlyle, George Levine, appraises the collective attitudes of his contemporaries in this way:

When they knew they would not listen to what Carlyle had to say but could not ignore how much he had inspired them in their early years, they joined a kind of conspiracy to emasculate him through praise: he may not be right, but he is poetic . . . When the generation that Carlyle had inspired decided he was not to be trusted, they tended to make the division between the substance and the style almost absolute.³⁶

³³Letters, I, 4.

³⁴Letters to Clough, p. 75.

³⁵Letters to Clough, p. 151. Tillotson, p. 232, notes that in 1866 there was "a brief rapprochement" but she also points out that Arnold continued to see Carlyle "as typical of Hebraism without Hellenism".

³⁶George Levine, "The Use and Abuse of Carlylese", in G. Levine and W.A. Madden, eds., The Art of Victorian Prose (London, 1968), pp. 101-102.

To illustrate the diplomacy of fickleness of which Carlyle became a victim, Levine offers John Morley's remarks as representative:

the writer who in these days has done more than anybody else to fire men's hearts with a feeling for right and an eager desire for social activity, has with deliberate contempt thrust away from him the only instruments by which we can make sure what right is, and that our social action is wise and effective. A born poet, only wanting perhaps a clearer feeling for form and a more delicate spiritual self-possession . . . he has been driven by the impetuosity of his sympathies to attack the scientific side of social questions in an imaginative and highly emotional manner.³⁷

The general feeling, according to Levine, was that "Imagination and personal insight are fine for singing, but have nothing to do with the resolution or even formulation of practical problems."³⁸ But Arnold, long before he turns to public criticism, venerates Carlyle for precisely those qualities which were being excoriated as ineffectual by critics like Morley. Arnold deplored this "firing of men's hearts to social activity" preferring "Imagination and personal insight" as the proper qualities to be cultivated for the age. He admires Carlyle's ability "to fix his thoughts on [the] ideal invisible character" of political movements, and his "restful" voice "amidst the heat and vain words that are everywhere". And later, when Arnold in turn also rejects Carlyle, it is because of that extravagant "Carlylean strain" with its vituperative and polemical gestures, that pseudo-poetic language which Carlyle's erstwhile disciples were still willing to grant as a quaint virtue after they had

³⁷ Levine, p. 102, quoting from John Morley, Miscellanies (London, 1888), I, 148-149.

³⁸ Ibid, p. 102.

effectively repudiated his teachings. In the reaction against Carlyle, his critics claimed that he had abandoned them by forsaking his quest for practical solutions to social problems. Clough, for example, is reported to have said to Emerson, "Carlyle led us out into the wilderness and left us there."³⁹ Of course, Carlyle had done no such thing, but the charge was convincingly imputed to him as an ironic consequence of his own method. Carlyle characteristically used a Juvenalian, bludgeoning, satirical kind of humour to ridicule an idea by showing that following the idea to its logical conclusion revealed its utter absurdity; but in doing so, Carlyle usually also took his reader beyond the point at issue, into a now-frustrating and maddening, now-delicious fantasy world, in effect, not rousing his readers to redress a specific wrong, but inspiring them with a general confidence in the wisdom of his pronouncements. Once inspired, they took practical action which they dedicated to Carlyle, though he had only indirectly elicited any action. His early admirers could "no longer accept" his ideas when he turned out to be a transcendentalist, a visionary idealist, instead of a practical, liberal reformer.

Arnold had recognized Carlyle's idealism from the beginning, yet he too turned against Carlyle, somewhere between "the beloved man" of March 1848 and the "moral desperado" of September 1849. Between these dates Arnold had begun writing Empedocles on Etna and I believe that

³⁹D.J. DeLaura, "Arnold and Carlyle", PMLA, LXXIX (March 1964), 105. DeLaura's source is J.I. Osborne's Arthur Hugh Clough (Boston and New York, 1920), which gives July 15, 1848 as the surprisingly early date of this remark. Whether or not Clough actually said this, the fact is that he could have said it, in the light of Carlyle's already waning influence and reputation.

Arnold's attempt to apply Carlyle's idealistic affirmation of Sartor Resartus in the critical case of Empedocles, and his subsequent sense of the inefficacy of Carlyle's "creed", accounts for Arnold's reversal of attitude to Carlyle as well as the "incongruity" between Empedocles's creed and his suicide. Kathleen Tillotson points out, and recent critics repeat, the most obvious parallel between these two works: Empedocles says, ostensibly to Pausanias, and perhaps at this point also to himself, "Make us, not fly to dreams, but moderate desire" (I, ii, 386); Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh similarly exhorts, "Blockhead . . . the Fraction of Life can be increased in value not so much by increasing your Numerator as by lessening your Denominator . . . Well did the Wisest of our time write: 'It is only with Renunciation (Entsagen) that Life, properly speaking, can be said to begin.'"⁴⁰ Empedocles's gnomic conclusion, "Because thou must not dream, thou need'st not then despair!" (I, ii, 426), seems to be a further development from the same source. But if Sartor Resartus, among other influences, provides a source for Empedocles's philosophy "to live by", it also points indirectly to the suicide. To be sure, Teufelsdröckh, unlike his Faustian predecessors, is not himself a suicide, but he suffers through "The Everlasting No", he declares (after Novalis) that "the first preliminary moral Act" is "Annihilation of Self (Selbst-tödtung)",⁴¹ and he argues that the means of this annihilation is a "Baphometric Fire-baptism".⁴² For Teufelsdröckh death is to be considered symbolically, as

⁴⁰C.F. Harrold, ed., Sartor Resartus (New York, 1937), p. 191. All page references will be to this edition, hereafter cited as Sartor. As Harrold notes, the last sentence is adapted from Goethe's Wilhelm Meister.

⁴¹Sartor, p. 186.

⁴²Sartor, p. 168.

an act of quasi-mystical transcendence akin to the Christian idea of regeneration (cf. John 3:7, which Arnold quotes to Clough; see Letters to Clough, p. 109), and this opens the way for another kind of interpretation of Empedocles' suicide. The influence of Sartor Resartus is finally most important in the structure of Empedocles, but this will be considered later.

Carlyle also presents to Arnold in a different light many of the same ideas which had been urged by George Sand's "Preface" to Obermann: both invoke configurations of the traditions of Hamlet and of Faust which reverberate curiously through Empedocles; both open to Arnold their overlapping yet distinct versions of the kinds of metaphysical speculation which Empedocles confronts; and both make similar calls for a new hero⁴³ in addition to introducing their own heroes. And Carlyle initially introduced Arnold to many of the German writers whom Arnold later sought out in their original language; to these, especially Goethe, he clung long after he had renounced Carlyle.

To these names we must certainly add a host of others but it is sometimes difficult to apprehend the exact nature of these early influences. We know, for example, that Arnold later studied Goethe for his humanism, but of his early acquaintance we can be sure only that he had read Goethe's lyric poems, Carlyle's extensive essays on Goethe, probably the story of Werther and Carlyle's translation of Wilhelm Meister, and perhaps parts of

⁴³ Carlyle's Heroes, Hero Worship and the Heroic in History, which exalts an order of theocrats, was first delivered as a series of lectures in May 1840, roughly contemporary with Sand's edition of Obermann. Past and Present (1843) makes a similar plea.

Faust. Thus when Arnold writes in "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" in 1855, "rigorous teachers seized my youth, / And pruned its faith and quenched its fire" (67-68)⁴⁴ it is uncertain whether Goethe can properly be identified as one of the "rigorous teachers". The stanza seems to have a bearing on Empedocles which is also about "gazing" upon and "aspiring" to the "star of Truth", suggesting that "pruning" and "quenching" (or "purging" and "trimming") the faith and fire of youth is one of the mental processes dramatized in Empedocles. In this very loose analogy it might be interesting to see Empedocles as the "rigorous teacher" of Pausanias and Callicles (together perhaps representing Arnold's divided responses);

⁴⁴Cf. Allott, ed., Poems, p. 288 n. Allott gives the 1867 reading, "purged its faith, and trimmed its fire", and notes the 1855 version as a "more candid" variant. It seems to me that "purged" is a much more instructive adjective for considering the meaning of Empedocles, as I shall make clear. Also in his annotations to this poem Allott identifies Carlyle, Goethe, Senancour and Spinoza among the "rigorous teachers" but Carlyle is hardly appropriate in this context, except ironically. Carlyle is important to the idea of purgation in Empedocles, but his impact is negative insofar as the purgation which is effected there involves a rejection of Carlyle. Carlyle's overall influence on Arnold seems rather to exaggerate the faith and fan the flames of Arnold's youth. Allott seems to recognize this when he alters the list in his later essay, "A Background for 'Empedocles on Etna'", reprinted in D.J. DeLaura, ed., Matthew Arnold: A Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1973), pp. 55-70. Here Allott repeats the stanza in which these lines occur, adding: "There has been speculation on the names of the 'rigorous teachers' . . . but the shortest list would have to make room for Goethe, Senancour, Lucretius, Epictetus and Spinoza, who are among the men with whose writings Arnold struggled most manfully in the 1840s". Allott's study of Arnold's reading-lists, cited above, proves this to be true in the case of Arnold's struggles with philosophical writers but that does not necessarily warrant the inclusion of Goethe and Senancour in this list, because we do not know what aspects of Goethe he had encountered in his youth, and his response to Senancour is not very accurately described as to a "rigorous teacher". Consider this comment to Clough: "[I] took up Obermann, and refuted myself with him in his forest against your Zeit Geist." (Letters to Clough, p. 95).

Empedocles' suicide might be the putting-off of the old man for the new (Ephesians 4:22-24) and the sacrifice required for a "rebirth" (Romans 12:1; and Sartor, passim). But Empedocles is not to be identified so readily.

The confluence of classical and Romantic influences on Arnold and on Empedocles, the importance of specific writers and particular works, the impact of Arnold's philosophical reading and "abstruse researches" of the eighteen-forties, and the personal associations suggested here by no means constitute a thorough context for the poem, but most of the other influences have been assiduously investigated and require only brief mention. The widely used Commentary⁴⁵ reproduces from the Yale MS. Arnold's notes from Karsten's edition of the fragments of Empedocles and his outline of the poem; it discusses Arnold's sources in Lucretius, Epictetus, Parmenides, Carlyle and Senancour, and it offers a brief but eloquent defence of Empedocles. Bonnerot's introduction to his translation⁴⁶ of the poem adds Marcus Aurelius and Byron to the list, and suggests an interesting but limited context by comparing Arnold's poem, not always favourably, to several obscure nineteenth-century French poems on the subject of Empedocles, to Hölderlin's Death of Empedocles (1826 and 1846), to Shelley's Prometheus Unbound (1820), Byron's Manfred (1817), Browning's

⁴⁵C.B. Tinker and H.F. Lowry, The Poetry of Matthew Arnold: A Commentary (London, New York and Toronto, 1940), pp. 286-303. Hereafter cited as Commentary.

⁴⁶L. Bonnerot, Matthew Arnold, Empédocle Sur l'Etna: Etude Critique et Traduction (Paris, 1947), pp. 13-91.

Paracelsus (1835), and several others. Numerous books and articles contribute insights in passing, and together they comprise a formidable framework in which to consider the poem.

Influences, sources and literary precedents elucidate an intellectual ambience but, of course, they remain secondary to their transformation by the poetic imagination and the resultant artistic work. The more immediate circumstances of the writing of Empedocles are relatively nebulous but occasional glimpses have been preserved. In the summer of 1849 J.C. Shairp writes to Clough from Dresden:

By this time I just begin to spell a few words of Goethe -- and his 'Gedichte' I read, but I don't think he will ever be an oracle for me, though Matt says 'he saw life steadily and saw it whole.' I saw the said Hero -- Matt -- the day I left London. He goes in Autumn to the Tyrol with Slade. He was working at an 'Empedocles' -- which seemed to be not much about the man who leapt into the crater -- but his name and outward circumstances are used for the drapery of his own thoughts. I wish Matt would give up that old greek form but he says he despises all the modern ways of going about the art and will stick to his own one. Also I do not believe in nor feel with that great background of fatalism or call it what you will which is behind all his thoughts. But he thinks he sees his way⁴⁷

Shairp's brief description of the poem has become a critical touchstone, but the letter contains other important information. It suggests, for example, that Arnold's mature attitude to Goethe could have been formed much earlier than we suspect. Unfortunately, Shairp is quite unreliable here because he quotes a phrase which Arnold intended to describe Sophocles. It is also noteworthy that Arnold was willing to debate the value of "that old greek form" as opposed to "the modern ways of going about the art" at

⁴⁷F.L. Mulhauser, ed., The Correspondence of Arthur Hugh Clough (Oxford, 1957), I, 270.

this early date; this is one of several instances which clearly anticipate the 1853 Preface. Perhaps even more interesting is "that great background of fatalism" which Shairp ascribes to Arnold's habit of mind; the phrase describes the Empedoclean concept of Necessity which is central to the poem. At the end of the letter Shairp says that Arnold "thinks he sees his way", doubtless repeating something Arnold had told him, since Shairp, with his reluctant skepticism, certainly doesn't believe Arnold "sees his way" at this point. This phrase has the greatest importance for Arnold: "seeing one's way" is the best we can hope to do, according to Arnold, in an age when seeing life "steadily and whole" is such a rare achievement. He explains the importance of seeing in the letter to Clough from Thun:

What I must tell you is that I have never yet succeeded in any one great occasion in consciously mastering myself: I can go thro: the imaginary process of mastering myself and see the whole affair as it would then stand, but at the critical point I am too apt to hoist up the mainsail to the wind and let her drive . . . [my] one natural craving is not for profound thoughts, mighty spiritual workings etc. etc. but a distinct seeing of my way as far as my own nature is concerned.⁴⁸

Similarly, in "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of 'Obermann'", Arnold uses the same figure of speech to express his admiration:

. . . of the spirits who have reigned
In this our troubled day,
I know but two, who have attained,
Save thee, to see their way. (45-48)

And one of these two has a defect which Arnold identifies as faulty vision: "Wordsworth's eyes avert their ken / From half of human fate" (53-54). The same idea is behind the complaint that Keats and Browning "will not

⁴⁸Letters to Clough, p. 110.

be patient neither understand that they must begin with an Idea of the world in order not to be prevailed over by the world's multitudinousness".⁴⁹ Arnold praises the Duke of Wellington in an early sonnet because he "saw one clue to life, and followed it." Empedocles too sees life "steadily", though not "whole"; he follows the "one clue" and allows himself to be ruled by a single guiding idea to accomplish his victory over life's "oscillations". That this is the idea of suicide is really not an issue, but we must apply Arnold's criteria, and determine whether the suicide results from "a distinct seeing of [his] way as far as [his] own nature is concerned" or whether it is finally an act of "hoist[ing] up the mainsail to the wind and let[ting] her drive".

To return to the most famous part of Shairp's letter, we should consider the charge that Arnold uses Empedocles's "name and outward circumstances . . . for the drapery of his own thoughts." This description fits a few passages in the poem, but most of the "thoughts" in the poem have already been traced to various sources; and it is curious that Shairp's comment has been often repeated as a criticism of the poem, especially since it might not have been meant pejoratively at all. In Shairp's defence, we might plead his ignorance of the origins of the poem's ideas; moreover, it is likely that in June 1849 he saw or heard parts of a work that was still a long way from completion. What is unclear about his observation is whether or not Shairp disapproved of Arnold's use of Empedocles "for the drapery of his own thoughts." Shairp makes clear his

⁴⁹ Letters to Clough, p. 97.

disagreement with "that old greek form" (which I understand not as a specific Greek form, but the Greek notion of form as a general principle), but this would in fact imply that he preferred poetry in which the poet's "own thoughts" were more prominent than "that old greek form." Indeed, several months earlier (March 1849) Arnold himself had written to Clough, "Shairp urges me to speak more from myself",⁵⁰ suggesting that Shairp's tastes in poetry favoured Romantic and subjective verse. That Arnold could add, "I less and less have the inclination . . . or even the power [to speak more from myself]" makes Shairp's opinion about the source of the ideas in the poem somewhat suspect, especially in the light of another letter to Clough in November, 1849 where Arnold reports, "I said a lovely poem to that fool Shairp today which he was incapable of taking in."⁵¹ What is genuinely personal in Empedocles is Arnold's feelings, especially his feelings about the philosophical thoughts he is contending with; it is this "drapery", after all, that interests us most.

Matthew Arnold's quarrel with J.C. Shairp, not unlike his running debate with Clough, is typical of his responses to contemporary poetic practice. The opposing terms of the debate are identified as "form" and "feeling", and a later letter from Shairp to Clough, after the publication of Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems, repeats the complaint that Arnold had sacrificed "feeling" to "form":

I fear Mat's last book has made no impression on the public mind. I'm not much in the way of hearing but I've seen no one,

⁵⁰Letters to Clough, p. 104.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 113. But Arnold seems ill-tempered throughout this letter.

except a few Oxford Rugbeans who have even read it. It does not much astonish me, for though I think there's great power in it, one regrets to see so much power thrown away upon so false and uninteresting (too) a view of life. Since you have gone from England, it's well you've gone to a hearty fresh young people, rather than into the 'blank dejection of European Capitols'. Anything that so takes the life from out things must be false. It's this I like about your things that though in theory you maintain the contrary, yet in fact the 'grand human heart' will out and you can't hinder it: Stick to this. Mat, as I told him, disowns man's natural feelings, and they will disown his poetry. If there's nothing else in the world but blank dejection, it's not worth while setting them to music.⁵²

Shairp's complaint sounds very much like Arnold's own declaration in the 1853 Preface but Shairp still implicitly blames the "blank dejection" on "that old greek form" whereas Arnold sees that very form as the one sure way of overcoming dejection and restoring "feeling" to poetry. The decisive battleground on which Arnold attempts to resolve the dilemma of incompatible poetic loyalties is bounded on the one side by Empedocles on Etna and on the other by the 1853 Preface.

In the autumn of 1849 Arnold did not go to the Tyrol with Slade as he had told Shairp; he went alone to Switzerland to work out his Empedoclean problems. His remarkable letter to Clough from Thun has prompted one critic to conclude that Arnold went to "act out his own drama in the Bernese Alps. For Arnold's ascent into the mountains in September 1849 to wrestle with his own soul was certainly analogous to Empedocles' ascent of Mt. Etna to wrestle with his soul and 'poise his life at last.' Indeed, on the day before Arnold went up into the

⁵²Mulhauser, ed., The Correspondence of Clough, II, 401. The letter is dated March 19, 1853, but this paragraph occurs in a subsequent addition to the same letter, dated April 16.

mountains he penned to Clough a note which might almost have been written by Empedocles."⁵³ This is the letter in which he speaks of mastering himself and seeing his way clearly and also about the "damned times" and "moral desperadoes like Carlyle", and these passages have already been quoted as central to the poem; but even more revealing is the beginning of the letter, in which Arnold assesses his position and alludes to his mysterious mountain-quest of introspection. The letter "might almost have been written" not only by Empedocles but also by Werther or Obermann or perhaps even Ortis; it is a confession and a declaration of resignation:

I wrote to you from this place last year. It is long since I have communicated with you and I often think of you among the untoward generation with whom I live and of whom all I read testifies. With me it is curious at present: I am getting to feel more independent and unaffected as to all intellectual and poetical performance the impatience at being faussé in which drove me some time since so strongly into myself, and more snuffing after a moral atmosphere to respire in than ever before in my life. Marvel not that I say unto you, ye must be born again. While I will not much talk of these things, yet the considering of them has led me constantly to you the only living one almost that I know of of

The children of the second birth
Whom the world could not tame --

.. .. .
-- I am here in a curious and not altogether comfortable state; however tomorrow I carry my aching head to the mountains and to my cousin the Bhunlis Alp.

.. .. .
You will not I know forget me. You cannot answer this letter for I know not how I come home.⁵⁴

The intensity of this personal glimpse reinforces the urgency of Arnold's

⁵³ A.D. Culler, Imaginative Reason (New Haven, 1966), p. 153.

⁵⁴ Letters to Clough, pp. 109-111.

need to analyze his own situation. His sense of being "faussé" recalls a comment to Clough: "For me you may often hear my sinews cracking under the effort to unite matter";⁵⁵ similarly he tells his sister "K", "I am fragments",⁵⁶ and at a later date he speaks to her of "knocking yourself to pieces . . . to attain or approach perfection in the region of thought and feeling . . . demands not merely an effort and a labour, but an actual tearing of oneself to pieces".⁵⁷ Arnold uses metaphors of stretching, straining and dismemberment to describe the agony of poetic creation; he also mentions the problems of "respiration" and an "aching head" which recall his concern with "congestion of the brain", and anticipate the problem of "breathing" and the fear of suffocation which both Callicles and Empedocles experience. Clearly, when Arnold calls the situation of Empedocles "painful", the adjective also has a literal meaning. Arnold's quotation of John 3:7 about rebirth, like Empedocles's almost Pauline desire for dissolution, points the way to a dramatic transformation which is also suggested at the end of the letter; "I know not how I come home" is invested with a sense which means more than an uncertainty about which route Arnold will take back to England. Prior to his crucial ascent he knows neither by what spiritual road he will return to life, nor by what means he will effect the return, nor yet into what condition he will be reborn.

⁵⁵Letters to Clough, p. 65.

⁵⁶A. Whitridge, ed., Unpublished Letters of Matthew Arnold (New Haven, 1923), p. 18.

⁵⁷Letters, I, 84.

The problem of interpreting Empedocles on Etna is complex; the poem has been overlaid with philosophical and biographical constructs and other information which has tended to distort or obscure parts of the poem and to throw others into prominent relief according to a particular set of external considerations or preconceptions. The poem is filled with ambiguities and it invites a multiplicity of responses; this is not in itself an unhealthy situation but agreement is necessary on a few basic issues. In a sense, the present attempt at a context merely introduces another critical construct; however, if we can more or less suspend all external considerations temporarily to read the poem carefully, yet at the same time illuminate our understanding of Empedocles' suicide through these contextual ideas, we may discover fresh insights and a better perspective for re-assessing Arnold's relationship to the poem.

II

A READING OF EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA

Callicles is the poem's first speaker, and his voice is distinctly Wordsworthian, in spite of its obvious Keatsian affinities. His situation, alone, seated on a rock in Etna's forest region, identifies him as a classical lyricist and also as a type of the Romantic nature poet, perhaps descended from the strayed reveller, but of this we cannot yet be certain. His attitude and imaginative stance echo Wordsworth in several significant respects: he feels a sense of joy at the sublime beauty of his surroundings ("How gracious is the mountain at this hour!"); he describes nature selectively, with a characteristically Wordsworthian focus which points to the harmonious co-existence of the elements of this scene ("the sun / Is shining on the brilliant mountain-crests, / And on the highest pines"; "these pines / . . . climb from the stream's edge"); and he has a concept of memory with a capacity for recognizing "spots of time" ("A thousand times have I been here alone, / . . . / But never on so fair a morn"). Time, memory and "spots of time" later become issues of central importance to Empedocles himself. Callicles also ironically anticipates later developments in the poem: the description of Pausanias as Empedocles' "sage friend" is not borne out -- it is undermined as early as Pausanias's first speech a few lines later; Callicles' suggestion that the "half mad" and "brooding" Empedocles "Could scarce have lighted on a lovelier cure" is

an ironic version of Wordsworth's idea of the "healing power" of Nature, and it may be a doubly ironic comment on the suicide if we consider not only the forest region of Callicles but also the crater of Etna as part of healing Nature; and when Callicles asks rhetorically, "What mortal could be sick or sorry here?", we might recall that Arnold's notes on the historical Empedocles include this direct quote from the extant fragments of the philosopher's writings: "I come among you an immortal God, a mortal no longer" (Commentary, p. 290).

Callicles's relationship to Nature at this point, however, is Wordsworthian mainly insofar as what he chooses to describe is discriminated and selected according to the principle of directing the kinds of imagery towards the sublime and tranquil. If his overall conception of Nature is Wordsworthian, his particular perceptions and the language of description are Keatsian ("cool wet turf", "the mist still hangs", "footprints crushed in the wet grass", "long grey tufts [of the pines] . . . jewelled thick with dew", "breath curl[ing] in air", "tinkling bells", etc.). In the twenty-nine lines of Callicles's first speech, his conflation of Keatsian sensuous intensity and Wordsworth's sublime, calm and reflective mood tells us that he represents the best of the Romantic spirit, that which is worthy of preservation; and this is also evident in the form of his speech -- the soliloquy is predominantly a reflective mode, but it is not a meditation. This distinction, essentially between true lyricism and veiled solipsism, is important because it provides a basis against which significant changes will be rung as the subsequent modulations of both reflective and meditative moods sound their counterpoint variations. Callicles summarizes his purged Romanticism by identifying

his operative symbols, in line 19, as Apollo and the harp.

This first speech offers an economical definition against which the entrance of Pausanias juxtaposes a multi-level shift: from lyric to dramatic voice; from an imaginative to a sensory perception of externals; and from a Romantic to an anti-Romantic perspective. We have already been told that Pausanias is a physician; however, in his first speech he does not define himself in direct or positive terms, but rather by negation. Instead of telling us what he is, Pausanias implies that he is Callicles's opposite, but his appraisal of Callicles is faulty. He disparages the Romantic poet conclusively in his description of Callicles "with [his] head full of wine, and [his] hair crowned", hurling against him immediately the standard Victorian accusation of subjectivity and solipsism ("Touching thy harp as the whim came on thee"). Finally, in addition to challenging the Romantic spirit, Pausanias makes the attack personal by likening Callicles to "the new dancing-girl". The severity of this attack must not be overlooked, because it instantly establishes a critically ironic context for the presentation of Pausanias. We should notice that Callicles not only refuses to repudiate or deny the charges, but in fact, implicitly confirms them (as true of his former self) in his next speech. Callicles describes the kind of Romanticism which Pausanias attacks, as that which he has just abandoned. His realization that "the feast [was] past its prime", and his recognition of the night's heat and his inability to breathe in that atmosphere of revelry, lead him to concur with Pausanias's indictment of "Romanticism", without refuting that purer Romanticism which is signified in his discipleship to Apollo. Callicles's garland is "soiled" and he discards it. Slipping out from the feast in

order to breathe is also a proleptic image: Callicles is stifled by density and by an Epicurean bombardment of the senses, and the metaphor of "breathing" will reappear later when Empedocles confronts the problem of breathing in a too rarefied air, experiencing the other extreme of an ascetic, Stoical barrenness of the senses.

Significantly, it is his vision of Empedocles in the litter which awakens Callicles to the needs of soul and mind beyond the senses, and alerts him to mount his white mule of pilgrimage. When he says, "I saddled my white mule", Callicles unwittingly offers us a suggestive verbal ambiguity: as well as describing his action of "saddling", he suggests the idea of entering a new state of being -- he has burdened the mule with himself and, without pushing the Christian allusion too far, we can see that he has submitted himself to a symbol of selflessness which vaguely recalls Christ's procession through the palms. The result is an implied analogy between Callicles and Empedocles: both are burdens to their mules, and both are on pilgrimages to free themselves from the tyrannies of the senses and the mind, respectively. It is important to remember that Callicles is a developing figure in the poem, not a fixed symbol or an allegorical character; since we know that Callicles emerges as a positively modified force, the connection with Empedocles, through their symbolic relationships to the mules, acknowledges the possibility that the old philosopher can arrive at a similar affirmation. Indeed, Callicles and Empedocles develop a reciprocal relationship through the course of the poem; each moves the other to modify his perceptions until both are capable of celebrating the final vision, albeit in different languages.

When Pausanias speaks again, it is in the positive (although ironic) terms of action; he assumes the role of stage manager, inspecting the scene and directing the choreography in preparation for Empedocles's appearance. He urges Callicles to remain "viewless" and "unseen", fearing that the sight of Callicles may "vex" Empedocles. There are several levels of irony here: first, when he changes his terms of self-definition from negative indirection to positive assertion, Pausanias nevertheless maintains his condescending attitude to Callicles, seeing him still as a symbol of debauched Romanticism, even after Callicles has repudiated that attitude, both in his soliloquy which embodies the more admirable aspects of Romanticism, and also in his second speech, castigating those very excesses which are the targets of Pausanias's complaint. Pausanias, then, has inaccurately and ironically stereotyped Callicles. Secondly, this irony is emphasized in the revealing inversion of a Victorian adage by Pausanias. In line 76, Pausanias calls Callicles a "child", in keeping with his rigid anti-Romanticism. Ten lines later, he completes the inverted adage: "Yet thou may'st try thy playing, if thou wilt -- / But thou must keep unseen". His prescription says, in effect, a child should be heard and not seen, and the curious inversion is the result of his confused attempt to include contradictory elements (Callicles' "soothing" lyricism, and his own provocative worldliness) in his programme of treatment for Empedocles.¹ There is a further irony in

¹Cf. Allott, ed., The Poems of Matthew Arnold, p. 152 n. I believe that Allott is here, as elsewhere, wrong to suggest that the "shadowing" of Empedocles is derived from Byron's Manfred. Byron's hero is Faustian, Promethean, characterized by "will", whereas the whole tone of Arnold's poem opposes to this spirit of defiance, an elegiac, meditative, quietist direction. My derivation of the "shadowing" proposal as an inverted adage

the fact that, after Pausanias describes Callicles as a child, but before he advises him to "keep unseen", Pausanias inadvertently assumes the language of Wordsworth's formula for memory. "There was a time / (But that is passed)" presents a conflation of almost direct echoes from The Prelude ("There was a time", "There was a boy", etc.) and from "Tintern Abbey" ("That time is past"). Callicles obviously makes a more convincing Wordsworthian figure, but in the sustained irony of this speech, Pausanias also recognizes the healing power of music, memory and song, and accordingly tries to accommodate this single concession to Romanticism within his plan to cure Empedocles (the resultant confusion speaks for itself). Pausanias seems to think that if Empedocles sees only Pausanias and is exposed exclusively to his counsel towards action, it may "soothe him" to hear Callicles's lyrical strain in the pauses. Again ironically, we see that, far from mutually reinforcing each other, these two voices will pull against each other, subjecting Empedocles to the devastating influence of divided forces, by separating the attentions of his ear and his eye. When we recall the effect which the sight of Empedocles had earlier on Callicles, freeing him from the excesses of feeling, it is tempting at this point to suggest that seeing Callicles could have a complementary effect on Empedocles. In the long run, it is

is superior for two reasons: it recognizes the limited but overlooked humour in the first part of the poem; and it argues that the importance of "seeing" and remaining unseen is the direct result of the dramatic relationships among the three characters. To mention Byron's poem really has little meaning for this situation, although there are suggestive parallels elsewhere in the poem, some of which are discussed in Allott's "Arnold's 'Empedocles on Etna' and Byron's 'Manfred'", Notes and Queries, n.s. ix (August 1962), 300-302. Of course, Empedocles's indignation has as much in common with Childe Harold's or Marino Faliero's as with Manfred's; but unlike all of them, Empedocles is also a Victorian who feels stifled by social pressures similar to Pausanias's injunction to Callicles.

of course unlikely, because Empedocles has more or less determined a course; in fact, it seems that both Callicles and Pausanias sense his resolution when they speak of his "settled trouble" and "settled gloom". Nevertheless, there is certainly a difficulty already implicit in the plan to draw Empedocles out of his vexation by dividing his attentions between Pausanias and Callicles; we learn later that division is the real cause of Empedocles's vexed state, and that this further division intensifies the dilemma and helps to precipitate the final action.

Quite rightly, Callicles becomes suspicious of Pausanias's motives:

But tell me, how hast thou persuaded him
In this his present fierce, man-hating mood,
To bring thee out with him alone on Etna? (I, i, 105-107)

When Pausanias reveals his self-interest, and his true motivation for keeping Callicles unseen and at a distance, his entire position is undercut by insincerity; he confirms the accumulating suggestions that Callicles might be a more suitable companion for Empedocles at this hour. Pausanias' story about the miracle of Pantheia provides the focus of contention between Callicles' selfless and compassionate wish to help Empedocles, and Pausanias' suspect motive of personal gain. Callicles charges Pausanias with being "superstitious" and "credulous of fables as a girl", and he is right. Pausanias's literal acceptance of legend and gossip ("an idle tale") provides a strong contrast to Callicles's later mythical songs.² If Callicles is right about Pausanias's

²But note that in discounting this particular miracle, Callicles has knowledge from Pantheia's kinsmen; however, he is not necessarily, as Allott's footnote (p. 154) suggests, convinced that "miracles do not happen". Indeed, later Callicles himself acknowledges mythical, magical

credulity, then Pausanias is only ironically right in calling Callicles "a boy whose tongue outruns his knowledge"; this is true only to the extent that his songs speak more truth than he realizes (Empedocles notes, "He fables, yet speaks truth", II, 89). From the first scene, then, emerges the fact that Pausanias is an agent of error and miscalculation, not only misrepresenting Callicles's Romanticism, but also confused about his own role as a healer, a man of action, and a representative of the world. It is the advice of Callicles which tells Pausanias his proper function and prescribes the right cure (of course, as already said, this cure is only theoretically right, because in fact Empedocles has moved beyond the possibility of simple reconciliation).

The story of Empedocles's "raising" of Pantheia introduces the idea of resurrection which later becomes incorporated into Empedocles's theory of the transmigration of souls. Several critics have noted the parallel to the Christian story of Lazarus,³ and one recent commentator has gone even further:

the man who is believed to have raised another from the dead
and who scorns to deny it, the man who, when he is about to

and miraculous aspects of Empedocles, and his various mythical song-allegories confirm the Orphic attributes which Pausanias has mentioned:

He could stay swift diseases in old days,
Chain madmen by the music of his lyre,
Cleanse to sweet airs the breath of poisonous streams,
And in the mountain-chinks inter the winds. (I, i, 115-118)

The point of Callicles' speech is not that he is skeptical, but that he knows the importance of urging Pausanias not to speak to Empedocles of miracles now. cf. I, i, 154-159.

³Culler, Imaginative Reason, p. 161.

die, tells his disciple,

Either to-morrow or some other day,
In the sure revolutions of the world,
Goodfriend, I shall revisit Catana

-- this man has invited . . . superstitious regard for himself
. . . here are the seeds of miracles like the raising of
Lazarus and the resurrection of Jesus himself.⁴

Another suggests: "The ascent of the volcano from the shady, moist
'forest region' at its foot to the 'charr'd, blacken'd, melancholy waste'
of the cone becomes a secular Way of the Cross that ends in self-crucifix-
ion."⁵ These overtones are certainly present, but they are suggested in
order to be denied later. We recall that Arnold conceived of Empedocles
as embodying the "refusal of limitation by the religious sentiment."⁶
"He sees things as they are -- the world as it is -- God as he is: in
their stern simplicity."⁷ Arnold also says that Empedocles does not have
a sense of "religious consolation"; his advice to Pausanias is to "Nurse
no extravagant hope" and Arnold's own declared intention is "to get breast
to breast with reality".⁸ Empedocles believes finally in a personal resurr-
ection, but only after he "sees his way" and has stripped away all of the
comforting illusions of superstition; he turns aside Pausanias's curiosity
because he recognizes that effective miracles are generated from within.

⁴R.H. Super, The Time-Spirit of Matthew Arnold (Ann Arbor, 1970), p. 22.

⁵Allott, "A Background for 'Empedocles on Etna'", p. 65.

⁶Commentary, p. 287.

⁷Ibid., p. 291.

⁸Letters to Clough, p. 86.

In Scene II, Pausanias gives a perverse and half-hearted application of Callicles's recommendation to speak to Empedocles "of things at hand and common". Instead of describing the beauty of the forest region, Pausanias waits until after they have crossed the stream, and then chooses to emphasize the nakedness and elemental singularity of the landscape; even then, he is impatient, and after his brief description of the gentian, the heat, and "those naked slopes like flame", his real concern surfaces again: " . . . and now Empedocles, / Pantheia's history!" Empedocles answers abruptly ("That? and to what end?"), and confirms the whole direction of irony and tension in Scene I as he declares himself more interested in Callicles's music than Pausanias's questions. Callicles's first song is half lyrical (recalling his opening speech and his identity as the archetypal Romantic poet), and half mythopoeic (pointing forward to his later songs, and to his function of providing correctives for Empedocles' state of mind). Coming after Pausanias's brief description of the gentian, which urges Empedocles to look upward to "those naked slopes", the lyrical portion of Callicles' song attempts to redirect Empedocles's attentions downward to the cool forest, and by implication, to the world below and to the healing power of memory ("backward-looking"). Callicles is conscious of the importance of timing: Empedocles is in the glen, half way to the summit, and the song paints the entire imaginative, symbolic landscape, and explicitly draws the contrasts which, he hopes, will induce Empedocles to turn back:

The track winds down to the clear stream,
To cross the sparkling shallows; there
The cattle love to gather, on their way
To the high mountain-pastures, and to stay,
Till the rough cow-herds drive them past,

Knee-deep in the cool ford; for 'tis the last
 Of all the woody, high, well-watered dells
 On Etna; and the beam
 Of noon is broken there by chestnut-boughs
 Down its steep verdant sides; the air
 Is freshened by the leaping stream, which throws
 Eternal showers of spray on the mossed roots
 Of trees, and veins of turf, and long dark shoots
 Of ivy-plants, and fragrant hanging bells
 Of hyacinths, and on late anemones,
 That muffle its wet banks; but glade,
 And stream, and sward, and chestnut-trees,
 End here; Etna beyond, in the broad glare
 Of the hot noon, without a shade,
 Slope behind slope, up to the peak, lies bare;
 The peak, round which the white clouds play. (I, ii, 36-56)

Callicles is not merely fulfilling his own suggestion by describing "things at hand and common", but also persuasively comparing a fertile present to a bleak future on the summit. Inasmuch as Empedocles conceives of another bleak prospect, which awaits him if he does not continue to the summit, Callicles's comparison initiates a complex network of irony and interaction which develops in the succeeding songs.

The mythical part of this song is, in one sense, a prelude to Empedocles's chant. Interestingly, Callicles here identifies Pausanias with Achilles, the exemplar of action; but whereas Pausanias had earlier labelled Callicles with a Romanticism he had already surpassed, Callicles now represents Pausanias with "heroic" qualities which he has not attained. However, if Pausanias does not fulfill the Achilles role, the suggestion is nevertheless important. As the song indicates, Empedocles will teach Pausanias "all the wisdom of his race".⁹ Pausanias-Achilles is a symbol

⁹Allott (p. 158 n.) makes a useful distinction between "traditional lore" and "philosophical instruction", but I must disagree with his idea that the two are contrasting forms of knowledge. It seems to be that the distinction should refer not to the matter presented but to the different methods of instruction. There is ultimately a similarity between "all the

of heroism and social action who, as the recipient of this wisdom, can enlighten the world which Empedocles himself can no longer face. It is, after all, Callicles' song which precipitates Empedocles's chant, suggesting that Empedocles is responding to Pausanias as an Achilles figure, as much as he is counselling Pausanias as his old personal friend. To this extent, it seems that Callicles is successful in his effort to redirect Empedocles's attentions back to the world below; the chant offers Pausanias a philosophy "to live by". Empedocles's focus on life and the living also has important ramifications for the conclusion; although Empedocles's own journey is ostensibly away from life, it proves actually to be a circuitous but necessary way of re-entering the world.

The chant itself strikes out in all directions and its seventy stanzas work on several levels, but there is a unified thrust to the whole. In order to sort out some of its various overlays, we need to look at the historical Empedocles, the last philosopher of the "Cosmological Period" of Greek history. After him came the "atomistic" philosophers (ancient precursors of Lyell and Darwin), and gradually the world's first period of metaphysical speculation gave way to the study of ethics, politics, etc., in what is usually called the "Anthropological Period" (introduced by the Sophists, refined by Plato, Aristotle, et al.). Empedocles was the last thinker of his period to attempt a qualitative synthetic explanation of the nature of the world and of the first principles of causation. He tried to reconcile the two main philosophies current in his time. The

wisdom of his race" taught by Chiron, and Empedocles's "primarily stoical . . . insistence on recognizing and accepting the limits of human freedom".

first of these opposite views of the world was crystallized in the doctrine of Heraclitus, who held that everything was continuously in flux and motion. Heraclitus believed that "Fire" constituted the first principle of all things. On the other hand, Parmenides, approximately his contemporary, argued that everything was constant, indivisible and eternal. For him, "BEING" was the sum of all things; since everything was subsumed and contained by "Being", there could be no space, hence no motion or change -- the sense-world was not real.

The Empedoclean synthesis tries to encompass both extremes: his system confirms Parmenides's idea of "Being", but modifies it to account for change; the four primary elements -- earth, air, fire, water -- became the constituents of "Being". For Empedocles there could be no real destruction or generation of matter if he was to support the idea of "Being", but since there appeared to be change in the world, he explained it as a constant redistribution of matter, effected by successive combinations and reportionings of the four elements. Redistribution took place according to two main principles: the principle of "Love" accounted for the phenomena of elemental "mixture" which produced the illusions of "growth" and "becoming"; the principle of "Strife" caused "separation" which accounted for the illusion of decay and death. In this way, Empedocles' system can acknowledge Heraclitus's flux while retaining the consolatory concept of eternal "Being". Ironically, it was this successful synthesis which brought the Cosmological Period to its end; by incorporating Heraclitus into his system, Empedocles brilliantly but irrevocably undercut the stability of Parmenides's monistic scheme, and paved the way for the atomists in areas of natural philosophy, and the Sophists in social

philosophy; both schools demolished the fixed system completely and replaced it with contending reduction theories based on relativist principles, quantitative analysis, and physical dissection. The parallels to the nineteenth century are obvious -- metaphysics was again (for the last time) yielding to science and establishing Heraclitean flux as the real nature of the world, in continuous dissolution. Between the time of the historical Empedocles and 1852, the history of philosophy illustrates a number of swings of the pendulum, alternating between these two extreme views, but the notion of the world as flux became a part of man's consciousness, and the later philosophies of Stoicism and Epicureanism developed essentially as opposite ways of dealing with the world of flux -- the former waiting patiently for a return to the stable, eternal world, denying the efficacy of flux and enduring its vicissitudes, while the latter advocated enjoyment and freedom from pain, and in its corrupted forms also encouraged a delight in bathing the senses in motion. Arnold conflates these later philosophies with that of Empedocles, and polarizes their respective attitudes in his readings of Spinoza and Lucretius (cf. Allott's notes, passim). Lucretius is one of the most attractive spokesmen for the best, undiluted ideas of Epicurus, but Spinoza presents a fundamental ambiguity: he is a Stoic in attitude and ethics, but his metaphysics are distinctly similar to the ideas of the historical Empedocles, positing a system which acknowledges flux and change, yet frames them within a monistic, fixed and eternal concept like Parmenides's "Being". Because of this combination, Spinoza actually provides the link between Empedocles and Stoicism in the poem. All of these ideas are, of course, combined with much of Arnold's own thought.

The chant of Empedocles is a sermon, but unlike the Victorian sermons and exhortations to duty, industry, propriety and decorum against which this chant is implicitly directed, its structure is not simply linear. The extent to which Arnold appropriates the ideas of the ancient philosopher has not been recognized: the doctrine of four elements and the concept of transmigration have been noted, but to date all critics have agreed that Arnold makes little or no use of Empedocles's concepts of Love and Strife. Only one critic has gone so far as to say: "Regarding the Empedoclean Leitmotiv of a cosmic struggle between Love and Strife [Arnold] has nothing to say; yet in a sense this may be the master symbol of the entire poem."¹⁰ Unfortunately, this critic says nothing more about the matter after giving us this tantalizing suggestion. In fact, this "Leitmotiv" provides the structural principle of the chant. The largest pattern of the chant is the progress from the surface to the centre of the concept of life -- that is, the movement from the initial metaphor of the soul as a mirror to the injunction, "Sink in thyself!" which is several times repeated in different forms. But this is a movement accomplished only in several overlapping phases, repeated interior thrusts, canvassing the apprehensions of all five senses. Within this larger shape, the chant defines a series of oscillations; Empedocles repeats numerous epicycles of perception, trying repeatedly to get beyond a static psychological limit from which he is several times foiled, until he finally penetrates to the next layer of consciousness and repeats the same process. The

¹⁰W.D. Anderson, Matthew Arnold and the Classical Tradition (Ann Arbor, 1971), p. 39.

successive advances are effected partly by a dialectical transaction and partly by the intensity of continual assault. Empedocles must follow to their completion all of these transactions with his senses and his intellectual apprehensions before he can be free to act. In the process, he seems gradually to disembody himself from his own situation in the first stage of a complex ritual of self-transcendence. Strife, as the principle of separation, becomes the technique of analysis; Love provides the momentum for a subsequent outward reconstruction.

At the beginning of the chant, then, Empedocles as a historical person is poised between views of the world as endless chaos and as statically rigid order. His mediating position is mirrored in the dramatic situation of the poem; Empedocles is half way to the summit which symbolizes the barrenness of pure thought, and a more or less mystical state of mind in contact with the secrets of the universe. Empedocles responds literally to Pausanias's desire to know his secrets, and metaphorically to Callicles's indirect plea to the sage to share his wisdom with the world -- he assumes an oracular role. The structure of the meditative chant depends on this perspective of mediation insofar as Empedocles begins and ends his discourse to the world's representative from a consciously superior point of view, the attitude of omniscience. In the middle of the chant, however, he tries to penetrate through the facts and phenomena of experience to arrive at a core of truth. The rhythm of incantation allows him to move backwards, analytically, through "Strife", the principle of separation, and by a process of cumulative negation, piercing through surfaces, stripping away the incrustations of time and of self, to penetrate to this basic core of truth at the exact centre

of the discourse:

Nature, with equal mind,
Sees all her sons at play;
Sees man control the wind,
The wind sweep man away;
Allows the proudly-riding and the foundering bark. (I, ii, 257-261)

Empedocles overcomes the partisan ideas of Nature as either hostile or sympathetic, and sees it objectively. In the second half of the discourse, he reconstructs his ideas towards a positive statement, synthetically articulating his "philosophy to live by". The most appropriate analogy for the structure of the chant seems to me the symbolic progression of Carlyle's Sartor Resartus. Like Teufelsdröckh, Empedocles passes from "The Everlasting No", through "The Centre of Indifference", to "The Everlasting Yea" (significantly, the above-quoted stanza is about Nature's "Indifference"). While this seems to be the overall method and shape of the chant, it is not nearly so systematic or consistent in its actual form. For example, sections of the second half also involve the method of "negation" which characterizes the first half (i.e., ll. 317-331, in which Science, History and Philosophy respectively are "negated" as examples of the vanity of human knowledge, and so on). In general, however, it remains true that the first half of the discourse employs "negation" for the purpose of denial whereas, when it occurs in the second half, it is essentially "negation" in the service of "definition". Two relevant fragments from the writings of Empedocles provide an insight into the procedure of the chant:

169. But now I shall go back over the course of my verses, which I set out in order before, drawing my present discourse from that discourse. When Strife reached the lowest depth of the eddy and Love comes to be in the midst of the whirl, then all these things come together at this point so as to be one alone, yet not immediately, but joining together at their pleasure, one

from one place, another from another. And as they were joining together Strife departed to the utmost boundary. But many things remained unmixed, alternating with those that were mixed, even as many as Strife, remaining aloft, still retained; for not yet had it entirely departed to the utmost boundaries of the circle, but some of its members were remaining within, and others had gone outside. 180. But, just as far as it is constantly rushing forth, just so far there ever kept coming in a gentle immortal stream of perfect Love; and all at once what before I learned were immortal were coming into being as mortal things, what before were unmixed as mixed, changing their courses. And as they [the elements] were mingled together there flowed forth the myriad species of mortal things, patterned in every sort of form, a wonder to behold.¹¹

Empedocles's metaphor of the "eddy" or "whirl", which the historical Empedocles seems to have meant literally, suggests the inward motion which penetrates through a massive "Everlasting No" to a calm "Centre of Indifference" and, during this process of "Strife" or separation the dislodged negatives of "unmixed" things seem to be hurled outward centrifugally to the limits of the conceptual sphere of the world, while into the resultant vacuum flows a "stream of perfect Love", transforming "immortal" (elemental, unmixed) into "mortal" (compound) things. The problem of seeing this procedure clearly in the chant stems from the fact that Empedocles is actually doing two different things simultaneously: first, he proceeds inward to the essence of truth which is contained at the centre of experience, in effect following the principle of Strife to its cataclysmic encounter with Love "in the midst of the whirl" (this motion is governed by a necessity, which I will discuss later); secondly, once the centre has been reached, he can work outwards, reshaping and

¹¹Milton C. Nahm, ed., Selections from Early Greek Philosophy (New York, 1964), p. 121. The numbers, 169 and 180, are fragment numbers used by Nahm, based on H. Stein's Empedoclis Agrigentini Fragmenta (London, A. Marcum, 1852). It is not likely that Arnold would have seen this edition before publishing the poem, but Karsten contains the same material.

redefining life according to the newly-dominant principle of Love. At the same time, however, there is a new opposite motion inwards (not mentioned in the above fragments), which begins at infinity and proceeds in a series of decreasing circles to circumscribe and define a set of limits, which will eventually meet, and frame (contain) the outward progression of materializing creation according to the principle of Love.

The symmetry which is apparent in this broad, double thrust of the chant is elusive because it is accomplished by the increasing amplitude and reverberation of constant alternations between denial and affirmation. In other words, the main shift from "Nay" to "Yea" is constructed out of dozens of lesser "yeas" and "nays" which are necessary because of the many overlaid implications which the entire dithyramb is designed to circumscribe. The chant reflects this rhythm of alternation in the last stanza, which offers a heavily qualified counsel of optimism encompassing both polarities:

I say: Fear not! Life still
Leaves human effort scope.
But, since life teems with ill,
Nurse no extravagant hope;
Because thou must not dream, thou need'st not then despair!

(I, ii, 422-426)

Essentially, and throughout the discourse, Empedocles says that the attempt to resolve the paradoxes of life is futile; consequently, he enumerates some of them and finally allows them to qualify each other. Another reason we are finally unable to trace exact patterns in Empedocles's chant, or to isolate specific shifts or movements is that there is another purpose behind the discourse. Besides articulating a "philosophy to live by" for Pausanias, Empedocles is also undergoing the first of his two

great rituals in the poem. This "sermon" is a preparative for Empedocles's final solution to his dilemma; it is an act of exorcism and purgation which necessarily precedes the later act of purgation, affirmation, and return.

Since Swinburne praised the chant as the crowning jewel of the poem (see Critical Heritage, pp. 164-168), it has been regularly abused as an overlong, "crabbed" piece of rhetoric, prosaic and dull. But its severe diction is a reflection of "barrenness" and "unpoetrylessness", and its length is defensible as a necessary ritual of circumscription. Most of the objections, however, are aesthetic judgements based on Arnold's own censure of the poem as "monotonous" and lacking action. Of course, this is moving psychic action, a meditative recitation, and it is unfair to think of it in the narrowly dramatic terms of external action; in spite of the Aristotelian claims of the 1853 Preface, Empedocles is not intended for the stage¹² -- its meaning is in the force of direct statement and careful imagery and in the very fact of outward stasis itself. Similarly, the rendering of Etna's harsh landscape makes it a critique of Empedocles' situation, as well as of itself.

Houghton makes a general distinction between the two acts of the poem, arguing that Act I concerns "modern thought" and Act II deals with "modern feeling", and, he says, Arnold intended such a distinction. In an approximate way, this is true, and it suggests that the chant provides a means of coming to terms with "thought". Indeed, Empedocles draws

¹²In 1884 Arnold admitted: "I restored it for reading only -- I would never have restored it for representation." Letters, II, 312.

himself to a stage of readiness for his intended action, and his sermon allows him to articulate his position in such a way that it makes sense as a positive philosophy -- for Pausanias (hence for the world), for the reader (to better interpret the leap), and for himself. However, in the presence of Pausanias he can go no further. Nevertheless, we understand the sequence of Empedocles's thought when, after three more songs from Callicles, Empedocles resumes his meditation and reformulates the ideas of the chant into more personal terms, speaking of himself as Apollo's "votary":

Where shall thy votary fly then? back to men?
 But they will gladly welcome him once more,
 And help him to unbend his too tense thought,
 And rid him of the presence of himself,
 And keep their friendly chatter at his ear,
 And haunt him, till the absence from himself,
 That other torment, grow unbearable;
 And he will fly to solitude again,
 And he will find its air too keen for him,
 And so change back; and many thousand times
 Be miserably bandied to and fro
 Like a sea-wave, betwixt the world and thee,
 Thou young, implacable God! and only death
 Can cut his oscillations short, and so
 Bring him to poise. There is no other way. (II, 220-234)

This conclusion is based upon the entire movement of the chant. The inescapability of the conclusion is the result of the restricted choice between polarized, opposite absolutes which constitute the "yea" and "nay" of the chant, and disallow everything between them. The position expressed in these lines is the same one which is implicit at the end of the chant. After this conclusion ("There is no other way"), Empedocles shifts from thought to feeling, beginning with memory, his reminiscences of youth ("And yet what days were those, Parmenides!"); but first, he must effect the translation from the general terms of the chant to the personal terms of action, and this translation depends on the intervening songs (all of which

have the same operative principles mentioned earlier, insofar as they are all directed towards Empedocles with, if you will, Wordsworthian "sympathy" and Keatsian "negative capability").

As though intuitively aware of the directions of Empedocles's thought, Callicles sings the song of Cadmus and Harmonia. The story proposes escape by transformation, but the language of the song itself suggests that Callicles knows how ineffectual this alternative would be for Empedocles' situation. First, the whole song contradicts the positive, if qualified, "will to live" statement which ends the chant; secondly, it demands the obliteration of memory ("Wholly forget their first sad life") and this is impossible for Empedocles's hyperconscious condition (remember that after these songs, and the reformulated resolution, Empedocles turns immediately to memory); thirdly, the most positive language which Callicles can find to describe the idyllic state of the transformed pair is weak at best: they "stray / For ever through the glens, placid and dumb." The song is charming by itself, but in its dialectical context it offers an insidious counsel.

Empedocles does not seriously consider this solution because of these implications, and Callicles virtually realizes this, but he sings the song, nevertheless, for an important reason -- the last line of the chant leaves Empedocles suspended, in a state prerequisite for action, but unable as yet to act. Callicles intuits the need to point a direction, even if it is a false one; he seems to be aware of the danger of static indecision. Moreover, Callicles' song does not simply respond to the literal statement of qualified optimism at the end of the chant; it also anticipates suicide: " . . . they did not end their days / In sight

of blood". It is to this vision of suicide that the Cadmus and Harmonia escape is offered as an alternative. Although Empedocles ignores the directives of the song, its two central ideas provide the seeds for the final conversation between Empedocles and Pausanias: the idea of an alternative is echoed in Empedocles's request that Pausanias leave one mule behind, and the idea of transformation provides the key to interpreting Empedocles's answer to Pausanias's question about whether or not the philosopher will return to the city.

The mule provides Empedocles with an alternative of escape and it emphasizes the voluntary nature of his action; at the same time, it remains behind as a symbol of the whole pilgrimage to Etna's summit and of the return. For Empedocles, of course, the return cannot be effected in conventional terms -- he has achieved such a profound level of consciousness that he can only return by way of the volcanic and elemental crater. The mule does, however, symbolize this return, and the idea of transformation indicates the terms of this return. The transformation of Cadmus and Harmonia to serpents is modified by one of the chief teachings of the historical Empedocles. His doctrine of the transmigration of the soul makes Empedocles' speech legitimately prophetic:

Either to-morrow or some other day,
In the sure revolutions of the world,
Good friend, I shall revisit Catana.
I have seen many cities in my time,
Till mine eyes ache with the long spectacle,
And I shall doubtless see them all again;
Thou know'st me for a wanderer from of old. (I, ii, 471-477)

The prophecy of return is here somewhat equivocal, largely because of an elegiac tone, but when it is later confirmed by the joyful and triumphant leap into the crater, the idea of a returning, purified soul demands a

positive interpretation.

The song, then, has at least a double effect: on a literal level, it motivates Empedocles to action after he has gone through an exorcism of the paradoxes of thought (the stage direction tells us that he "departs on his way up the mountain" after the farewell to Pausanias); and, at a deeper level, the song has helped Empedocles complete the first stage of his personal and peculiar, but necessary, translation of the philosophical conclusion of the chant into the terms of symbolic action. Throughout this first stage, Empedocles can approach the idea of a positive suicide only in sardonic and heavily cloaked language, as in the request about the mule, and the ambiguous prophecy, because Pausanias is still present, and his complete lack of understanding is glaringly apparent in his last speech and his decision to enlist the aid of Peisianax.

In Act II, Empedocles is relieved of the necessity to be indirect as the departure of Pausanias allows him to concentrate his attentions on the immediate scene. The radical shift to an arid landscape provides the objective correlatives for the world-weariness of which Empedocles now speaks:

... But I --
 The weary man, the banished citizen,
 Whose banishment is not his greatest ill,
 Whose weariness no energy can reach,
 And for whose hurt courage is not the cure --
 What should I do with life and living more?

 Receive me, hide me, quench me, take me home! (II, 10-36)

This passage sounds like an exclamation of despair until we examine it carefully. Essentially, Empedocles offers an explanation for the fact that he cannot return to live among men in conventional terms; his

weariness is all-pervasive. He provides a clue to his situation in his use of metaphors and images. For example:

And being lonely thou art miserable,
For something has impaired thy spirit's strength,
And dried its self-sufficing fount of joy. (II, 20-22)

To use the categories of the historical Empedocles, he has come under the influence of the principle of "Strife"; the drying of the "fount of joy" is one of several indications that one of the four vital elements has been "separated" and is being withheld. The banishment to which Empedocles refers is simply another manifestation of the same principle. Once the course of "separation" takes hold, it must be completed under the aegis of Fate or Necessity:

369. There is an utterance of Necessity, an ancient decree of the gods, eternal, sealed fast with broad oaths: Whenever any one defiles his body sinfully with bloody gore or perjures himself in regard to wrong-doing, one of those spirits who are heir to long life, thrice ten thousand seasons shall he wander apart from the blessed, being born meantime in all sorts of mortal forms, changing one bitter path of life for another...One of these now am I too, a fugitive from the gods...at the mercy of raging Strife.¹³

The action of "Strife" must be followed to its conclusion:

Thou canst not live with men nor with thyself --
O sage! O sage! Take then the one way left;
And turn thee to the elements, thy friends,
Thy well-tried friends, thy willing ministers. (II, 23-26)

It is important to note that the elements are "friends", "ministers", "helpers", and when he describes them as "well-tried" Empedocles also

¹³ Nahm, p. 128. Significantly, this fragment is from Empedocles's treatise entitled *On Purifications* (*Katharmoi*). A. Roper, *Arnold's Poetic Landscapes* (Baltimore, 1969), p. 195, adds: "The *Katharmoi*, Karsten notes, were the lustral songs of poets and priests who, by almost divine, especially Apolline inspiration, saw the causes of woes and the means to expiate them." This description applies to both the chant and the poem as a whole.

describes the condition to which he aspires. He also firmly denies the onset of despair as yet: "Before the sophist-brood hath overlaid / The last spark of man's consciousness", and "Before the soul lose all her solemn joys", he turns to the elements. That his joys are "solemn", and that his plea to the elements sounds utterly desperate, reflects the increasing presence of an autobiographical Arnold, but I would like to defer considerations of the poet until later. In any case, the mood of desperate insistence is no longer felt at the end of the poem, but we must follow Empedocles through several further stages of development before we arrive at certain affirmation. Even here, however, the bleak prospect is qualified if we re-invoke the context of what has gone before; Empedocles confesses the necessity of committing himself to the ultimate "separation" caused by the principle of "Strife" but he has foreseen this doom -- the entire thrust of the philosophical chant was towards an objective perspective of both opposing principles of Love and Strife ("Because thou must not dream, thou need'st not then despair!"). Clearly, the necessary consolation to counteract the current supremacy of the principle of "Strife", rests in whether or not Empedocles will be able to envision its redress, an eventual return to the ascendant influence of the "Love" principle. Before we can accomplish this, however, Callicles again interposes, this time with the song of Typho.

Once again, Callicles addresses the song to Empedocles for his consideration:

The lyre's voice is lovely everywhere;
 In the court of Gods, in the city of men,
 And in the lovely rock-strewn mountain-glen,
 In the still mountain air. (II, 37-40)

Contrary to Allott's suggestions, this is the first time Empedocles is identified as a Titan, a type of Prometheus. Much of the imagery is esoteric and the suggestion is intended as a warning to Empedocles. Again, the song responds exactly to the new stage in the progression of Empedocles's thought, and the warning argues that Empedocles should beware lest his resolution be a self-deception. Perhaps, as the Gods tricked Typho, Empedocles's mind is deceiving his heart, and perhaps he is misinterpreting the symbolic meaning of his proposed suicide. Empedocles answers with his own interpretation of the myth, which is much more sympathetic towards Typho than Callicles's ambiguous version. In effect, Empedocles confidently defends his plan, and this element of confidence in the face of a somewhat skeptical reservation, takes him another stage towards his goal; he reverses the argument and sees the oppression of Typho as all the more reason to move towards the completion of his plan; the ironic effect of this song is further emphasized by the short passage which follows as the result of Empedocles's interpretation. By raising the whole issue of deception and cunning and the magical, beguiling draught of Hebe's cup, the song reminds Empedocles that he still carries his symbols of healing. Discarding the circlet and the robe as now a "fool's-armoury of magic" thus helps him sever another tie with the world. The song also suggests a contrast between Empedocles (ON Etna) and Typho (under Etna); Empedocles's plan to jump is, then, distinguished from Typho's oblivion insofar as Empedocles conceives of the path through the crater as a route to new life.

Similarly, the song of Marsyas becomes part of the ironic dialectic through which Empedocles advances. Callicles implicitly announces

this song as his final effort to dissuade Empedocles from his course of action, by singing about music itself:

As the sky-brightening south-wind clears the day,
And makes the massed clouds roll,
The music of the lyre blows away
The clouds which wrap the soul. (II, 121-124)

Basically, the song is an attempt to re-assert the superiority of the "true music" of the lyre by demonstrating its victory over the flute of Marsyas. Callicles twice describes the contest as "Strife" (II, 140; 144) as if, ironically, to remind us of Empedocles's doctrine of Necessity. Callicles' sympathies are once again sufficiently ambiguous to permit Empedocles to offer his own interpretation; in the song, he identifies himself as Olympus, "aloof, on the lake-strand", weeping for Marsyas (Empedocles) the Faun. The attempt to appeal to Empedocles on an emotional level is equally unsuccessful because it demands the naïve admission that Apollo is superior, and it tries to capitalize on a fear of Apollo's scorn. When we recall that Apollo is Callicles's patron, his sympathy for Marsyas is inevitably false and ironic. The irony is compounded when, at the end of the poem, Callicles's final song is a vision, not of Apollo's scorn, but of his unqualified approval of Empedocles. Now more resolute than ever, Empedocles reverses the order of his responses to the song. Earlier he had interpreted the song of Typho, and subsequently discarded his circlet and robe; here he offers his interpretation and commentary after first discarding his last symbolic connection with the world, his laurel bough, which completes his ritual-stripping and leaves Empedocles the archetypal "unaccommodated man". As his subsequent interpretation of the song makes clear, this is an act

which simultaneously rejects the Dionysiac music of Marsyas and the harmonies of Apollo. Empedocles strikes Romanticism at its heart by denouncing the "intolerable severity" of its isolation and its enforced division, both of which make him gasp for air:

I am weary of thee,
 I am weary of the solitude
 Where he who bears thee must abide --
 Of the rocks of Parnassus,
 Of the gorge of Delphi,
 Of the moonlit peaks, and the caves,
 Thou guardest them, Apollo!
 Over the grave of the slain Pytho,
 Though young, intolerably severe!
 Thou keepest aloof the profane,
 But the solitude oppresses thy votary!
 The jars of men reach him not in thy valley --
 But can life reach him?
 Thou fencest him from the multitude --
 Who will fence him from himself?
 He hears nothing but the cry of the torrents,
 And the beating of his own heart.
 The air is thin, the veins swell,
 The temples tighten and throb there --
 Air! Air! (II, 198-217)

When we recall the first scene and Callicles's complaint about breathing in the stifling and congested atmosphere of the feast, we are also able to accept the legitimacy of Empedocles's complaint that the air of solitude is too "thin", too rarefied. Callicles cannot effectively answer this charge with another song, and Empedocles moves another step towards his release by conclusively reformulating the terms which concluded his chant into the language of personal resolution: " . . . only death / Can cut his oscillations short, and so / Bring him to poise" (II, 231-233). As it stood at the end of the chant, his "poised" view of a balanced response to both Love and Strife was articulated as a counsel of hope for Pausanias and the world; now, through the dialectical interaction with the songs of Callicles, Empedocles confronts the fact that his own

situation is beyond this consolation of qualified optimism -- he has suffered the "oscillations" too long, lost his natural flexibility, and now feels the need to be reborn; and for Empedocles this must be done through death ("There is no other way"). Again, however, the word "death" is qualified as a means -- the end to which it is directed is "poise" (consider Carlyle's use of "Baphometric Fire-baptism"). In this light, Callicles' songs become doubly ironic, insofar as his intentions to save Empedocles, are literally thwarted, but ultimately fulfilled, partly because of the songs themselves.

The next passage returns us to a point mentioned earlier: the possibility of consolation depends on Empedocles's ability to see a return to the principle of Love after Strife has completed its course. Empedocles initiates his movement towards this vision with a Wordsworthian meditation on past joy. Ostensibly, he bewails the loss of joy from his melancholy perspective of the mind's "tyranny", but implicit is the recognition that he may experience the effects of "Love" again, simply because he has enjoyed such happiness in the past. Empedocles restates his case with a difference which marks a subtle advance:

But, in a world he loves not, must subsist
 In ceaseless opposition, be the guard
 Of his own breast, fettered to what he guards,
 That the world win no mastery over him --
 Who has no friend, no fellow left, not one;
 Who has no minute's breathing space allowed
 To nurse his dwindling faculty of joy --
 Joy and the outward world must die to him,
 As they are dead to me. (II, 267-275)

It is no longer a matter of arriving at an adequate rationale for his intention; now it has become wrong not to follow his plan. More and more, Empedocles conceives of the suicide as a positive act, so much so that here he says the "outward world must die to him", where his previous

statements had indicated rather that he must die to the world (his use of the third person continues the process of distancing and disembodiment in anticipation of the act of self-transcendence). Moreover, until now the Heracleitan flux has been manifested in "the outward world" as social change; now, the reversal of the terms of death (the world will die instead of the self) involves a change of focus, and the idea of Heracleitan flux is, as it were, liberated from its associations with the world of decay. Once the conceptual view of the world as flux ceases to be a negative idea, the following meditation on the stars (II, 276-300; cf. "Dover Beach") becomes an exercise of re-orientation, re-familiarization with the elemental universe, as if to integrate the newly liberated idea of flux within a cosmic perspective of eternal harmony. The culmination of this re-appraisal is an "intimation of immortality":

No, no, ye stars! there is no death with you,
No languor, no decay! languor and death,
They are with me, not you! ye are alive --
Ye, and the pure dark ether where ye ride
Brilliant above me! And thou fiery world. (II, 301-305)

With the advantage of this sudden perception, Empedocles can redirect his gaze at the fires of Etna, which are not now the portents of death, but the elemental life-force of Heracleitus, in contact with universal stability, as though the idea of flux has been freed from its context of destruction and re-absorbed by the vision of fire and flux as continuous dynamic creation:

... And thou, fiery world,
That sapp'st the vitals of this terrible mount
Upon whose charred and quaking crust I stand --
Thou, too, brimmet with life! (II, 305-308)

As a result of his ability to see fire as regenerative, there is also a tonal shift -- Empedocles becomes ecstatic and eager to rejoin the flux

of creation.

He has, however, one final reservation about Mind. The problem is that mind's tyranny is likely to survive, to keep him from "clasping the All"; consciousness is the last obstacle to his return to the elements. Empedocles again resorts to incantation as a way of dealing with his enslavement to mind, but this time his chant is not an exorcism, but a ritual of transcendence:

And in our individual human state
 Go through the sad probation all again,
 To see if we will poise our life at last,
 To see if we will now at last be true
 To our own only true, deep-buried selves,

 And each succeeding age in which we are born
 Will have more peril for us than the last;
 Will goad our senses with a sharper spur,
 Will fret our minds to an intenser play,
 Will make ourselves harder to be discerned. (II, 367-381)

Empedocles's use of language has changed as he reaches his final stage; beyond the Logos of Mind is still the unknowable All, and before he can reach it with his proposed leap, Empedocles must make a prior mental leap -- philosophically, psychically, and imaginatively. If the All remains unknowable, its frightening prospect is nevertheless motivation for the leap, because the other term has changed drastically -- the alternative of enduring is not conducive to Empedocles's real aim, to discover and be faithful towards his "deep-buried" self. Empedocles is completing his own movement beyond the counsel of Stoicism which he had given to Pausanias. His solution is paradoxical: he favours a quasi-mystical submission over the Stoic attitude of endurance, but it is Stoic doctrine which finally enables him to overcome Stoic endurance. Recall the double movement of the chant. There was an outward movement to define life, beginning with

truth and ending with a balanced awareness of both Love and Strife, qualifying each other. This is the movement which brought Empedocles to his present state, and convinced him that ending the reign of Strife would initiate a new phase of Love. The other phase of the chant was the inward direction of circumscribing this definition by the limits of freedom. It is this freedom that mind threatens to withhold; mind is the limiting factor. Now, on the brink of his leap, Empedocles is able to recall the lesson of limits. He overcomes his last hesitation by asserting that, if he faces the possibility of never achieving freedom, he has, after all, never been free:

And who can say: I have been always free,
Lived ever in the light of my own soul? --
I cannot; I have lived in wrath and gloom,
Fierce, disputatious, ever at war with man,
Far from my own soul, far from warmth and light. (II, 392-396)

With this articulation of self-knowledge, Empedocles can also confidently say that he has never lived in negative terms, in spite of his "bonds": "I take myself to witness, / That I have loved no darkness, . . . / Allowed no fear". "Therefore", he resumes with the language of philosophical certainty, therefore he will trust the elements to decide the terms of his rebirth and the limits of his freedom. His last question, "Is it but for a moment?", is not a lingering doubt, but a recognition of infinity: this symbolic death which involves ritual purgation and anticipates rebirth may well be "but for a moment", yet it can be eternally re-enacted. If mind tyrannizes the heart, it also speaks the chant which overcomes its own tyranny; reason guides instinct not only to weariness, but also to purification by fire and the soul's return to the world, transformed and renewed by the elemental flux. And it is finally not the

physical leap which saves Empedocles -- it is the psychic leap, which is then outwardly confirmed by his actual plunge. The concluding note of rejoicing is echoed in Callicles' celebrative vision, suggesting that he has shared Empedocles's experience by "negative capability"; consequently, when he hymns an epitaph for Empedocles it is a triumphant and visionary song. Callicles perhaps remains for us a more readily accessible affirmation of life, and his final song registers the catharsis effected in Empedocles's joyful leap; we cannot follow Empedocles "Through the black, rushing smoke-bursts" of his intense mystical experience to the unknown elements, but we can participate in Callicles's vision of resurrection and ascension to the spheres of harmony, and we can celebrate with him a realized calm.

We must, however, be careful when we allow Callicles the last word. The importance of his last song rests not so much in his inherent power of song as in his participation in Empedocles's affirmation. A number of recent discussions have come almost to seeing Callicles as the victorious figure in the poem by virtue of his survival,¹⁴ yet Callicles is not even mentioned in Arnold's outline of the poem. But by the end of the poem Callicles is actually a Horatio of sorts¹⁵ to Empedocles's Hamlet, and the

¹⁴E.D.H. Johnson, The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry (Princeton, 1952), pp. 172-178; Linda Lee Ray, "Callicles on Etna: The Other Mask", Victorian Poetry, VII (1969), 309-320; and, to some extent, D. Bush, Matthew Arnold (New York, 1971), pp. 58-61.

¹⁵Bush, p. 56, following a century-old precedent, assigns this role to Pausanias, but by the end of the poem Callicles has assumed the roles of the witness (though "viewless") and the eulogist who will "report [Empedocles] and [his] cause aright / To the unsatisfied."

concluding hymn is his "goodnight" to this elder melancholy prince. The young harp-player's function is to confirm the efficacy of the symbolic suicide and its resultant calm without attempting to resolve its ambiguities. Empedocles overcomes Strife and, like Obermann, takes his refuge in eternity by attempting to accelerate and compress his thirty thousand transmigrations into a single process of purification which will lead to his "second birth". Arnold refuses to say whether Empedocles must "Go through the sad probation all again" or whether Apollo's Nine intone the definitive praise of his triumph of re-integration, but the 1853 Preface suggests that while Empedocles overcomes Strife, his anticipation of a return to the harmonious principle of Love is not fulfilled. Indeed, the total absence of Love as a theme in the poem is conspicuous. The word is used only once in the Empedoclean sense (I, ii, 248) and not at all in an erotic sense, and this surprises us, especially in the light of the other poems in the Empedocles volume. Even Hamlet and Obermann, the most celibate of Empedocles's ancestors, have some trace of erotic consciousness in spite of the power of the death-impulse in them. It may be that Love is symbolic by its absence, or that it is sublimated as part of the larger concern; it certainly proves Arnold's belief that "the service of reason is freezing to feeling" (Commentary, p. 270), and most important, it clearly shows that Empedocles is an attempt at fundamental self-definition. Perhaps Empedocles's release from the pain of this world leaves him in limbo, "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born". At the very least, however, this sacrifice of self-annihilation succeeds in its purgative function insofar as Arnold re-enters the world divested of his quest for an obscure, absolute "All"; after Empedocles, "thought" ceases to be a "devouring flame" for Arnold.

III

ARNOLD, EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA AND THE 1853 PREFACE

Empedocles's final reservation about "Mind" is perhaps not unfounded because, if the poem successfully serves its therapeutic function, exorcizing a menacing part of the self, promoting "a distinct seeing" of Arnold's way, "Mind" nevertheless re-surfaces to haunt Empedocles with a vengeance.¹ The problem of attaching the poem to Arnold must focus on his so-called "suppression" of the poem and his justification of that "suppression" in the 1853 Preface because this is the means by which he first detaches himself from it. But before attempting such a re-integration we should try to establish Arnold's attitudes towards the poem as accurately as possible; it is highly misleading to say simply that he suppressed the poem.

Of the poem's 1121 lines almost one-quarter (274) were regularly reprinted during the fifteen years between its short-lived debut in 1852 and its restoration in 1867. "Cadmus and Harmonia" found its way into Poems. A New Edition (1853) and Poems (1854), both of which became generally known as the "First Series" after the publication of Poems, Second Series (1855) which contained "The Harp-Player on Etna" consisting of the remainder of Callicles' songs -- "The Last Glen", "Typho", "Marsyas"

¹F. Kermode, Romantic Image (New York, 1964), p. 12, says, perhaps more accurately than even he realizes, "the 1853 Preface . . . was written by Arnold's spectre."

and "Apollo" -- and a passage of Empedocles' solitary meditation entitled "The Philosopher and the Stars" (II, 276-300). The proportion of the poem which survived "suppression" is remarkable when we consider that its dramatic nature renders much of the rest unsuitable for separate printing: the chant's 350 lines would lose too much out of context; Pausanias speaks 107 lines which would have neither meaning nor merit by themselves, and much of the poem's best diction is interspersed throughout dialogue which could not stand alone. This difficulty also explains why most of the surviving extracts are songs by Callicles, since these can function as independent pieces, although as such they lose many of their original nuances. These extracts, however, carry none of the serious implications of the poem as a whole, the questionable matters which are the objects of "suppression".

Arnold uses the word "suppressed" only once in a private communication (Letters, II, 312) after the poem had been restored. In New Poems (1867) Arnold says rather that he "withdrew" the Empedocles volume before it had the opportunity to achieve a significant circulation; in reviewing the volume, however, Swinburne reports: "Mr Arnold says that the poem of 'Empedocles on Etna' was withdrawn before fifty copies of the first edition were sold. I must suppose then that one of these was the copy I had when a schoolboy".² The reviewer for the Spectator also notes: "Mr. Arnold says that 'Empedocles on Etna' cannot be said to be republished in this volume, because it was withdrawn from circulation before fifty

²Critical Heritage, p. 163.

copies of it were sold, but . . . the present writer, at all events, was amongst the fifty buyers".³ And there were not less than eight influential reviews of the Empedocles volume⁴ which, by Arnold's own admission, had an impact on sales: "I still, however, think it very doubtful whether the book [Poems. A New Edition (1853)] will succeed; . . . The great hope is that the Times may trumpet it once more. Just imagine the effect of the last notice in that paper; it has brought Empedocles to the railway bookstall at Derby."⁵ It seems, then, that Empedocles was not only selling widely, but still on sale after the 1853 edition had already been published. Arnold no doubt also sent copies of Empedocles to his friends, and these would not be enumerated among the copies actually sold, but the exact number is not in dispute here. The point is that Empedocles received due notice as an important new work and it achieved a wide enough circulation to permit us to question the accuracy of the term "withdrawal" as a description of Arnold's transactions with the poem. In fact, in December 1852, less than two months after Empedocles was published Arnold could write to Clough: "This volume is going off though: a nice notice of it was in the Guardian -- and Froude will review it in the April Westminster, calling me by name."⁶ If the volume was "going off" so soon after its publication, and it was still selling

³Ibid., p. 208.

⁴Ibid., p. 439. Items 9-15 inclusive, and 19 of Dawson's bibliography contain reviews of Empedocles.

⁵Letters, I, 37. The Times review, apparently by Goldwin Smith, appeared November 4, 1853 (See Critical Heritage, p. 439, item 15). This letter is dated November 26, 1853. Note that by November 25, 1853 Arnold had already received letters in praise of Sohrab and Rustum which had appeared in Poems (1853). See Letters to Clough, p. 145.

⁶Letters to Clough, p. 126.

more than a year later as far away as "the railway bookstall at Derby" (Arnold seems almost delighted to discover this; at any rate, the fact does not distress him) concurrently with the volume which purports to explain the "withdrawal", then we clearly need to re-assess the precise relationship between Empedocles and the 1853 Preface.

The facts indicate that Empedocles was superseded, or simply not reprinted, but the same fate had befallen Arnold's first volume, The Strayed Reveller, and Other Poems (1849). Indeed, Empedocles was only one of three dozen poems from the first two volumes which were not reprinted in 1853, and the principle of Arnold's selection is not consistent; he retains poems like "Mycerinus", morbid and inconsistent with the demands of the Preface, yet discards a fine piece like "Memorial Verses" which he himself describes as "in the grand style".⁷ But Empedocles is singled out to be repudiated -- not "suppressed" or "withdrawn" for such terms imply a silent and private action, not one announced by an elaborate discourse (besides, the poem was still in circulation and as late as 1854 Arnold sent a copy to Sainte-Beuve) -- to be offered as a public sacrifice.

One recent critic suggests:

... his rejection of the poem resulted from impatience with the judgements of his readers. Arnold accounted for his republishing of the poem in 1867, not because he found it improved, he said, but because Browning had persuaded him to restore it. (Ironically, for most reviewers of New Poems 'Empedocles' was the pre-eminent work.) Arnold withdrew both The Strayed Reveller and Empedocles from circulation soon after they were published [sic] ... probably

⁷ Ibid., p. 115.

because he was displeased with them. But his displeasure must have been increased by the public's reception. Not to have published the volume in the first place would have indicated doubt about their quality; to withdraw them after publication suggested concern about reputation.⁸

He is right about "quality", but in this case seriously wrong about "reputation". If anything, the reviews of Empedocles in 1852 and 1853 enhanced Arnold's reputation; they were certainly not as harsh as the reviews of The Strayed Reveller had been and they were much less severe than the responses to the 1853 Preface (though the poems in the 1853 volume were well-received). Contradicting himself, the same critic in the same discussion notes a letter to Clough which contends that Empedocles has been "scarcely reviewed at all -- but when reviewed, generally favourably", and immediately this critic feels compelled to add: "'Partly favourably and with respect' would be a better description."⁹ In a similar vein, though slightly more suggestive, is Coulling's description of the Preface:

It was, to begin with, a general attack on the critics who wrote for contemporary journals, and a specific attack on two of these critics. It was a general condemnation of romantic excesses in poetry, and a specific condemnation of Alexander Smith and his predecessors. It was a general reply to the reviews of the 1849 and 1852 volumes, and a specific reply to the objections made to those volumes by Clough and other Oxford friends. And, finally and most importantly, it was a general defense of his own poetry, and a specific defense of his choice of classical subjects and of his refusal to be a mere spokesman for his age.¹⁰

⁸ Critical Heritage, p. 4.

⁹ Ibid., p. 10. The letter to Clough, from Francis Palgrave, is in The Correspondence of Arthur Hugh Clough, II, 363.

¹⁰ S.M.B. Coulling, "Matthew Arnold's 1853 Preface: Its Origin and Aftermath", Victorian Studies, VII (March 1964), 234.

Arnold's 1853 Preface is some of these things, as well as an answer to George Sand's "Preface" to Obermann, a declaration about Carlyle, a general response to the various forces which induced him to write Empedocles, and a personal reformulation of Aristotle's Poetics.

Above all, the Preface is a "general" statement. Coulling's error lies in his narrow focus on specific issues and on the immediate precipitants which are secondary to the main issues of the Preface and are used by Arnold mainly as illustrations of larger ideas. Coulling insists that the "immediate target of the Preface was a writer for the Spectator" (p. 235) and this perspective leads him to the perverse conclusion that, "if Arnold's motives in withdrawing the poem were personal as well as artistic, surely the most compelling of the personal motives was the desire to enjoy a turn on his critics" (p. 246 n. 28). On the contrary, nowhere is Arnold more deadly serious than in this Preface; he had not yet learned the tactics of elusiveness, the subtle pleasantries of wit which characterize his later prose.¹¹ Behind his seriousness lies a sincere attempt to solve on another level the problems of Empedocles by exploring the opposite direction. Empedocles examines the limits of extreme subjectivity and the Preface articulates a position of extreme objectivity, but both are efforts to "a distinct seeing" beyond the same psychologically urgent problem, the need to alleviate the burden of history imposed by his "rigorous teachers" in order to liberate the "deep-buried" self.

¹¹Cf. Letters to Clough, p. 144. "The Preface is done . . . but it is far less precise than I had intended. How difficult it is to write prose: and why? because of the articulations of the discourse: one leaps these over in Poetry . . . but in prose this will not do."

The real origins of the Preface are the disconnected fragments of theoretical speculations about poetry in Arnold's letters and the antecedent influences which stimulated some of these thoughts. As early as 1845 Arnold seems conscious of the impulse to make theoretical pronouncements about art but he resists it: "I know the strong-minded writer will lose his self-knowledge, and talk of his usefulness and imagine himself a Reformer, instead of an Exhibition . . . [but we] will keep pure our Aesthetics by remembering its one-sidedness as doctrine."¹² The inclination stays with him, however, and Arnold gradually surrenders his aesthetic purity by forgetting "its one-sidedness as doctrine." The next two of Arnold's extant letters to Clough venture specific criticisms which are in turn "doctrinally" formulated, but each time he immediately reprimands himself for having made any pronouncements. After a few comments on Clough's poems in the first of these two letters Arnold continues: "This is the worst of the allegorical -- it instantly involves you in the unnecessary -- and the unnecessary is necessarily unpoetical. Golly what a Shite's oracle!" (p. 60). Similarly, the second letter protests: "I have abstained from all general criticism . . . But on the whole I think they [Clough's poems] will stand very grandly, with Burbidge's 'barbaric ruins' smirking around them" (p. 61). Among other things, these letters (both written about December 1847) illustrate Arnold's reluctance to acknowledge

¹²Letters to Clough, p. 59. The date is approximate but Lowry offers sound reasons for preferring an early date. In this letter Arnold also speaks of George Sand in terms of what seems to be a distinction between artist ("Exhibition") and critic ("Reformer"): "Rightly considered, a Code-G.-Sand would make G. Sands impossible." Lowry suggests that Arnold means more or less that codification stifles and contradicts creativity. Since we have already hinted at Sand's role in the conception of Empedocles it is interesting to note that Lowry's headnote to this letter mentions Clough's view of Sand as "a Socrates among the Sophists."

an emerging critical attitude which was beginning to insinuate itself into areas of his mind where he was unwilling to allow it scope. If we recognize with Allott¹³ the importance of Arnold's early programme of intensive readings in philosophy, begun in 1845, we can see one major source of the developing spirit of inquiry which eventually undermines and transforms so much of the orthodox thought which was his legacy from his father. This critical intellect, the "Mind" which is the centre of Empedocles's "root of suffering in himself", is what Arnold tries to exorcize in Empedocles and the extremity of his solution indicates how deep-rooted the problem is. But, although Arnold's tone in the Preface assumes a sense of calm which suggests that the attempt at equipoise in Empedocles had been successful after all, the fact that Arnold had to write the Preface proves that the critical impulse had not been banished. Indeed, the later course of his literary career shows criticism more and more eclipsing the poetic faculty.

Throughout the letters, especially those to Clough, criticism becomes more frequent and Arnold begins to theorize and dictate, ostensibly to Clough, but surely also to himself. At the beginning of 1849 he clearly anticipates the 1853 Preface: "You succeed best you see . . . where man, his deepest personal feelings being in play, finds poetical expression

¹³"Matthew Arnold's Reading-Lists in Three Early Diaries", cited above, discusses Arnold's reading of Plato, Kant, Berkeley, Augustine, Descartes, and Mill in 1845. These are all on the first list and, with the possible exception of Mill (though we could include even him with qualifications), are the pre-eminent representatives of a tradition of ethical idealism which, incidentally, would support to a considerable extent my reading of the poem's conclusion as a symbolic act with positive implications.

as man only, not as artist: -- but consider whether you attain the beautiful, and whether your product gives PLEASURE, not excites curiosity and reflexion."¹⁴ This is essentially the complaint against Empedocles in the Preface, but here it is made before the fact -- the poem had not yet been written. The ascendancy of the critical faculty over the poetic next causes Arnold to redefine his compromised aesthetics: "there are two offices of Poetry -- one to add to one's store of thoughts and feelings -- another to compose and elevate the mind by a sustained tone, numerous allusions, and a grand style. What other process is Milton's than this last . . . There is no fruitful analysis of character: but a great effect is produced."¹⁵ A year earlier (February 1848) Arnold had been still able to speak simply of "the beautiful . . . alone being properly poetical" (p. 66), but now he has qualified the office of poetry to give attention to whether or not a poem gives pleasure or produces "a great effect". His aesthetic sense is being subtly modified by other considerations, notably a philosophical concern about the ends of poetry. In this respect the idealist philosophers Arnold was reading were eminently practical; Plato's Republic is at the head of Arnold's first reading-list and in that treatise Plato banished poets from his ideal State because they were not useful. Arnold has moved from a purely aesthetic notion of "the beautiful" and of pleasure (in 1845) to an ethical interpretation of these

¹⁴ Letters to Clough, p. 99. In the same letter he notes "that even a slight gift of poetical expression . . . is overlaid and crushed in a profound thinker so as to be of no use . . . to express himself. -- The trying to go into and to the bottom of an object instead of grouping objects is as fatal to the sensuousness of poetry as the mere painting (for, in Poetry, this is not grouping) is to its airy and rapidly moving life."

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 100.

qualities (Plato equates the Beautiful with the Good, the highest of all ideal Forms -- and Arnold's emphasis on "beautiful" may be to call attention to this Platonic meaning); in effect, he is no longer content to be "an Exhibition", which Plato condemns as a "rhapsodic", possessed state of being (cf. Ion), and he has begun instead to "talk of his usefulness and imagine himself a Reformer". In 1849 he actually describes himself in this way to his sister "K": "I feel rather a reformer in poetical matters . . . If I have health & opportunity to go on, I will shake the present methods until they go down, see if I don't. More and more I feel bent against the modern English habit . . . of using poetry as a channel for thinking aloud, instead of making anything".¹⁶ Once again, the critical voice is dominant.

The 1853 Preface, then, was inevitable long before Empedocles was written; it was neither a sudden reversal of Arnold's attitudes nor primarily a debate with the reviewers, although it appears to be this because it was not actually written until September or October 1853, months after its conception. It grew out of a long-standing concern with critical issues, probably encouraged by philosophical reading, Carlyle's exhortations, George Sand's inspiring writings, and the numerous other influences on Arnold's early thought. But their combined force in his mind conflicted with what he most valued, his natural feelings, and his

¹⁶Unpublished Letters of Matthew Arnold, p. 17. See also p. 14 where, in another letter to "K" in 1849, Arnold says, "I have many poetical schemes, but am fermenting too much about poetry in general to do anything satisfactory." Empedocles certainly dramatizes this "fermenting" and dissatisfaction.

desire to write poetry unencumbered by corrosive thought yet informed by self-knowledge. Yet Arnold had earlier predicated the loss of self-knowledge and of purity as the corollaries of turning to the "usefulness" which more and more preoccupied him. The resultant contest of forces issues in the oscillations which Empedocles describes, alternating between thought and feeling, generating ennui. When Shairp says that Arnold "disowns man's natural feelings" he is very close to the truth: Arnold's critical intellect disowns his own natural feelings. Shairp is, however, quite wrong to lay the blame on "that old greek form" which remains for Arnold a means of "seeing" his way, containing his "oscillations", a way to check the advance of the "tyranny of mind" which chokes Empedocles, and a method for attempting to expel the "devouring flame of thought" by immersing it in a greater fire. Several years later Arnold admits, "I have such a real love for this form and this old Greek world that perhaps I infuse a little soul into my dealings with them which saves me from being entirely ennuyeux".¹⁷ In this case, he refers to Merope but the statement also holds suggestive implications for Empedocles.

If Empedocles on Etna is Arnold's attempt to overcome the contention between the critical intellect and the poetic imagination and to achieve a condition of equipoise, its success is finally equivocal. Empedocles's joyful leap and the argument which precedes it lead us to suspect that the poetic soul has been liberated from the mind's tyranny,

¹⁷Letters, I, 69.

but this seems not to be the case. Certainly a measure of calm is achieved, and it is akin to the calm of which Callicles sings when he senses that the struggle has been resolved; there is noticeably less distraught frenzy in Arnold's letters to Clough after Empedocles, and in the spring after the poem was published he writes to his mother, "I never felt so sure of myself, or so really and truly at ease as to criticism, as I have done lately."¹⁸ To a large extent the tone of calm is also apparent in Sohrab and Rustum, which he had just finished at the time of this letter, and in the 1853 Preface. But the very fact that the Preface was written at all, and written confidently, suggests that the conflict is indeed resolved, but in favour of the intellect. In a sense, then, Empedocles marks the end of a phase of Arnold's intellectual development during which he was torn between a poetry of "self-knowledge", personal and subjective, speaking for itself as an "Exhibition", and on the other hand, a poetry of "usefulness", critical and more or less didactic. This is to oversimplify the problem somewhat insofar as the struggle with divided loyalties continues, but the latter conception of poetry is essentially the one articulated in the Preface.

Notwithstanding the singular thrust of the Preface and its firm stand against Empedocles, it has divided aims. In the light of the poem's ambiguities it is not surprising that the Preface offers a cogent defence of Empedocles before rejecting it. Arnold says that he has "omitted"

¹⁸Letters, I, 35. This further supports my position, that Empedocles was not repudiated primarily in response to the reviewers.

(not suppressed or withdrawn) the poem,

not because the subject of it was a Sicilian Greek born between two and three thousand years ago, although many persons would think this a sufficient reason. Neither have I done so because I had, in my opinion, failed in the delineation which I intended to effect. I intended to delineate the feelings of one of the last of the Greek religious philosophers, one of the family of Orpheus and Musaeus . . .

The representation of such a man's feelings must be interesting, if consistently drawn. We all naturally take pleasure, says Aristotle, in any imitation or representation whatever: this is the basis of our love of poetry; and we take pleasure in them, he adds, because all knowledge is naturally agreeable to us . . . What is not interesting, is that which does not add to our knowledge of any kind; that which is vaguely conceived and loosely drawn; a representation which is general, indeterminate, and faint, instead of being particular, precise, and firm.

Any accurate representation may therefore be expected to be interesting; but, if the representation be a poetical one, more than this is demanded. It is demanded, not only that it shall interest, but also that it shall inspire and rejoice the reader; that it shall convey a charm, and infuse delight.¹⁹

Several distinct arguments are initiated in this passage: first, Arnold defends his choice of a subject from the past; second, he insists that Empedocles succeeds in its intended effect (i.e., to dramatize the doubts of Empedocles and to resolve the conflict); next, he restates Aristotle's argument in implicitly affective terms of "usefulness"; finally, he specifies the direction of greatest usefulness adding, "'All art,' says Schiller, 'is dedicated to Joy'". There are, consequently, two main propositions, and they are developed independently, but contiguously; the first concerns the choice of subject and the second involves the methods of treating the subject. For each topic Arnold seizes upon a quotation from contemporary criticism and elaborates his position in opposition to

¹⁹ Prose works, I, 1-2.

it. The Preface at first appears to be an occasional piece in response to reviewers partly because it dwells so deliberately on these touch-stone quotations which Arnold calls "a fair sample of a class of critical dicta everywhere current at the present day". And, of course, the sense of immediacy in the Preface is also the result of Arnold's acute awareness of the tendencies of the age, his resistance to the "Zeitgeist". In this respect too Arnold has a double purpose; he refuses to accept the age's support of modern subjects and modern treatments, but he recommends classical subjects and treatments which "inspirit and rejoice" for the benefit of the age.

The first quotation which Arnold challenges as typical of current opinions is the advice of "an apparently intelligent critic" who proposes that "the poet who would really fix the public attention must leave the exhausted past, and draw his subjects from matters of present import, and therefore [Arnold's italics] both of interest and novelty." Against this view, which he considers "completely false", Arnold urges the poet "in the first place to select an excellent action" which will "most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections . . . which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time." The ensuing argument continues to defend the practice of choosing subjects from the past:

Achilles, Prometheus, Clytemnestra, Dido -- what modern poem presents personages as interesting, even to us moderns, as these personages of an 'exhausted past'? ... the action is greater, the personages nobler, the situations more intense [than in modern subjects]: and this is the true basis of the interest in a poetical work

The date of an action, then, signifies nothing: the action itself, its selection and construction, this is what is all-important.²⁰

²⁰ Prose Works, I, 4-5.

Arnold's second complaint concerns poetic treatment and he singles out as a false aim the view that "a true allegory of the state of one's own mind in a representative history . . . is perhaps the highest thing that one can attempt in the way of poetry."²¹ Whether or not this is the highest aim of poetry, modern critics generally agree that this description suits Empedocles as well as much of the best of Arnold's other poetry. It would seem that the charge against the poem belongs properly in this second category where poetic treatment is in question, especially since the subject generally accords with Arnold's description of a fitting action taken from the past, and an accurate representation which adds to our knowledge. But Arnold denies this: he claims that his treatment is successful insofar as the poem embodies "the delineation which [he] intended to effect" and that the subject is to blame. The situation of Empedocles is "interesting" but it does not "inspire and rejoice":

What then are the situations, from the representation of which, though accurate, no poetical enjoyment can be derived? They are those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situations there is inevitably something morbid, in the description of them something monotonous. When they occur in actual life, they are painful, not tragic; the representation of them in poetry is painful also.

To this class of situations, poetically faulty as it appears to me, that of Empedocles, as I have endeavoured to represent him, belongs; and I have therefore excluded the poem from the present collection. . . it has not been excluded in deference to the opinion which many critics of the present day appear to entertain against subjects chosen from distant times and countries:

²¹Ibid., p. 8. Note that this sentence occurs in a review printed in August 1853, whereas Arnold had announced to "K" his intention to write the Preface in April. See Letters, I, 34-35. The Preface is mentioned again in a letter to his mother in May. Arnold had clearly envisioned a polemical piece on the basis of his discussions with Clough and his own developing thoughts before the reviews which the Preface attacks were written.

against the choice, in short, of any subjects but modern ones.²²

At first, this would appear to be a curious turnabout. Arnold wishes to defend the choice of ancient subjects as a matter of principle, yet he rejects the subject of Empedocles as a particular exception to this principle; similarly, he distrusts modern treatments, yet exempts his treatment of Empedocles from the discussion.

Arnold was surely aware that the story of Empedocles is in itself amenable to a more "heroic" treatment that he gives it; it could more forcefully "inspirit and rejoice", except that he renders its "action" in a peculiar "construction". But we recall that Arnold's attraction to Empedocles lies to a large extent in the similarities to his own situation which he recognizes in the sage's dilemma. The fact of Empedocles' suicide, which is part of the donnée, could hardly be avoided in any treatment (indeed, it might well have been part of the attraction for Arnold), and it is admittedly susceptible of "morbid" representation, but suicide in itself is neither rare nor exceptionable in the classical drama and history which Arnold venerates. In suggesting that the situation in itself, rather than his treatment of it, is to blame, Arnold circumvents the real issue with a shrewd rhetoric, but he does offer us a clue; he admits, in a revealing qualification, that the class of poetically faulty situations includes "Empedocles, as I have endeavoured to represent him". It is, after all, Arnold's treatment, modern and psychological, that provokes him to use censorious adjectives like "morbid", "monotonous" and "painful" in his repudiation; and, in the light of the reading of the poem which

²²Prose Works, I, 2-3.

has been proposed here, it is not difficult to understand Arnold's reluctance to disclose the nature of his relationship to Empedocles. In the Preface Arnold is outlining his public poetic and assessing the poem "vis à vis of the world", as he says to Clough, and in this respect, Arnold feels, the poem has no validity. In fact, the mere existence of the Preface confirms the essentially private and internal importance of the poem's symbolic workings.

Given the raw materials, Arnold transforms the fragments of Empedocles into a complex philosophical "chant", and the legend of his suicide into a pregnant symbolic act. In the poem, the leap is not a sudden, discrete or contradictory act but one which follows from the dialectical ladder which Arnold constructs out of the fragments of the historical Empedocles and the perceptions of his imaginative counterpart; the suicide is the consummate last stage of a finely-structured sequential psychic process. But "vis à vis of the world", the chant may be "monotonous", the suicide "morbid", and the entire action of the poem, a "painful" ritual of "the dialogue of the mind with itself". In order for the poem to be commensurate with Arnold's spiritual needs at the time, the philosophy and suicide of Empedocles must be expanded to mean more than they literally do. In this case, Arnold's methods of symbolic intensification involve a characteristic self-irony: to exorcize the weight and influence of Carlyle, George Sand, and the many philosophical traditions he had imbibed, Arnold uses the techniques he has learned from them. In effect, the poem employs the ideas of transcendental idealism in order that Empedocles may transcend all extreme idealisms in a cataclysmic moment. Arnold also appropriates from Carlyle concepts which he urgently requires (like the "Baphometric

Fire-Baptism" and the progress from "No" to "Yea") while in the very act of establishing a level of confidence from which he can dismiss Carlyle. Similarly, if Empedocles answers George Sand's call for a new "hero" who expresses the doubts and feelings of the age as Obermann's immediate successor, then the 1853 Preface, which could not sound more like a conscious answer to Sand's "Preface", categorically denies that such representations are fruitful or legitimate by preferring to Empedocles (and his various progenitors) those noble figures whose actions "appeal to the great primary human affections". Using almost the same language, Sand had said, "Les éclatantes douleurs, les tragiques infortunes ont dû exciter de plus nombreuses et de plus précoces sympathies que les . . . ordres de souffrances . . . [qui] n'ont pu naître que dans une civilisation très-avancée." Arnold seems to have written Empedocles in accordance with Sand's belief that "L'invasion de ces maladies a dû introduire le germe d'une poésie nouvelle", but the Preface is an attempt to return to the "précoces sympathies" which Sand too readily dismisses in her fascination for Obermann.

In a sense too, the subjective extremity of Empedocles is itself a causal factor in the opposing extremity of the Preface's tone. The poem explores the limits of the romantic, imaginative and poetic side of Arnold's nature; the development of this "Hebraic" self ends in a ritual purgation, but for the purge to be meaningful an alternative must be available to occupy this vacated mental space; accordingly Arnold brings the rational, critical, "Hellenist" aspect of himself into a new alignment, and in the process, Empedocles becomes a sacrificial corroboration of this critical effort. The repudiation is perhaps finally a symbolic gesture to

reinforce the argument of the Preface, which is an experiment in need of support no less than the experiment attempted in Empedocles. The Preface gains an immeasurable steadiness from the fact that the whole passionate force of the poem has been voluntarily sacrificed to its critical principles. We see that Arnold was later willing to be persuaded to restore the poem, but in 1853 the success of the Preface depends on an oversimplification of Empedocles as an example of "the dialogue of the mind with itself" /

To understand the tensions between the poem and the Preface in this way, is to see that the Preface could not possibly be fair to Empedocles. When Arnold says, for example, that Empedocles's prolonged mental suffering is "unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance", he forces these words to assume narrow meanings; Callicles' songs are not "incidents", Empedocles's advice to Pausanias is not exactly "hope", and the philosopher's wavering doubts and hesitations before the suicide cannot be accurately described as "resistance", yet all of these elements somehow "relieve" or qualify the pitch of distress. Similarly, to say that in the poem "there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done" is to discount the important fact that in the poem there is something to be done; indeed, there is inevitably only one thing to be done and Empedocles does it. In the same way, "morbid", "monotonous", and "painful" describe the poem from an antipathetic ideological position of "usefulness" without taking into account the philosopher's peculiarly affirmative ideology of death and rebirth. Arnold again invokes an a priori stricture when he insists that "the suffering finds no vent in action"; there is indeed an "action", one which gains in meaning by virtue of its uniqueness, a single action which brings the rest of the poem into focus, but Arnold's denial

forces us to translate the entire poem again into the terms of psychic action, as Empedocles had to translate philosophical truth into personal conviction and symbolic action. But even those of us who disagree about the specific meaning or the moral value of Empedocles's action will nevertheless agree that there is an action, a "vent" for suffering, whatever its implications. Yet it is not difficult to see why Arnold wants to deny this mental act its claim to the title of "action". Arnold is attempting to rationalize his "suppression" of the poem from an advanced position of "poise", which was in fact partly achieved through the poem itself. Empedocles's quest is to overcome the "oscillations" between isolation and social ennui and to achieve "poise" and "calm". To some extent, Arnold sees himself as having achieved a measure of stability and calm, but he does not wholly trust it, and he is at any rate unwilling to advocate a calm which is induced by this mystical Empedoclean method. He is acutely conscious of his public role. His conditions for affirmation demand a demonstration of this calm at work -- not the "getting there", but the "being there" -- recommending classical "actions" in the controlled architectonics of classical verse as in Sohrab and Rustum and Merope.

Arnold wants to define "action" as Aristotelian, visible, cathartic, something he can praise and recommend to his contemporaries. His attitude throughout the Preface is similar to the situation of Empedocles counselling Pausanias. The poem has been as necessary to Arnold as the leap to Empedocles, but just as the leap constitutes a singular solution which is liable to misinterpretation by the mentality of a Pausanias, so Arnold recognizes the potentially dangerous constructions to which the poem is vulnerable; and this recognition readily overrides any willingness to defend the poem's merits, especially since so much of the poem's

material seems to have a subconscious source that Arnold may actually have been unaware of the degree to which the poem works out a positive solution. If Callicles and Pausanias are aspects of the same psyche, we must remember that the affirmation of a life-principle by Empedocles-Arnold necessarily looks like a denial of life to Pausanias-Arnold (even if Callicles-Arnold has enough imagination to celebrate it); and the action does, after all, involve the termination of life -- this particular life of weariness.

There is, however, a further level of self-irony in the Preface. Arnold rejects Empedocles on Etna in favour of Sohrab and Rustum because he thinks he has achieved a psychological calm which permits him to detach himself from the poem which was instrumental in achieving the cleansed perspective. But it is only the tone of the Preface which argues this position with conviction; the future course of his poetry returns to new dilemmas and similar "oscillations". Arnold does not believe in Empedocles, hence he denies that the leap is a significant action; but in spite of his denial of the poem's moral efficacy, he cannot alter the fact that the poem embraces a psychological necessity.

Connected with this objection is a related problem which points to an equally moral and aesthetic difficulty:

What is not interesting, is that which does not add to our knowledge of any kind; that which is vaguely conceived and loosely drawn; a representation which is general, indeterminate, and faint, instead of being particular, precise and firm.

Although not specifically attributed to Empedocles, this charge implicitly becomes part of the attack on the poem. Again, Arnold finds fault with the specific action of Empedocles, precisely because its nature is vague, generated by a personal struggle with abstraction and meaning, and solved by a

mysterious and personal act of transcendence. Arnold's language makes it clear that he is concerned about influencing people; he does not want to advocate what appears, in its most "particular, precise, and firm" aspect, to be suicide, a counsel of despair. Not that the poem offers despair, but the difference between suicide and Empedocles's action cannot be articulated -- it is a critical difference, but it is an "indeterminate, and faint" difference; positive interpretation rests finally on a mystical affirmation of the unknowable "All". Arnold simply cannot insist on transcendentalism as a solution for all the world's ills, or even for any other individual's problems.

In the Preface, then, Arnold opts for "publicness" as part of his role as a poet; suppressing the poem means suppressing privateness, or at least refraining from making public what should (he feels) remain private. Moreover, the history of interpretations of the poem proves that he was right to anticipate unfavourable responses to its resolution. There is, however, some evidence that Arnold saw the solution of Empedocles as personally cogent, and that he was willing to maintain for himself a faith in transcendentalism. In a letter to Clough he writes: "This volume is going off though . . . You must tell me what Emerson says. Make him look at it."²³ The letter is dated December 14, 1852, after the publication of the poem, but before its "suppression". Arnold was clearly most eager to learn how another eminent transcendentalist responded to the poem. Unfortunately, we have neither Emerson's comments nor Clough's reply, but we might speculate that Emerson's response would have been as

²³Letters to Clough, p. 126.

ambivalent as Arnold's own, because of the complex paradox involved in Empedocles's final action. Empedocles submits himself to a transcendentalist ideal, giving up physical life for the sake of an unknown but desired idea of life; at the same time, however, his idealism is qualified by (Arnold's) pragmatism -- committing himself religiously to the elemental fire, he also enters that other "flux", the "time-stream", which Arnold repeatedly refused to enter (cf. his letters to Clough), but which he ultimately does enter in his subsequent writings. We have had the advantage of retrospect to see the implications of Empedocles's death insofar as our knowledge of Arnold's later career shows us to what kind of life the Empedoclean spirit was reborn; though our judgements of this will vary, we recognize its importance. In 1853, however, Arnold had not reconciled himself to either transcendentalism or pragmatism to such an extent that he could see the far-reaching implications of Empedocles's transformed return.

The ideas of the "time-stream", of pragmatism, of social commitment, also suggest another context for considering Arnold's repudiation of Empedocles on Etna. Beyond Arnold's denial of Carlyle remains a latent sense of kinship. The affirmation of the leap is, as I have already said, similar to the affirmation of Carlyle's Teufelsdröckh. By 1852, Arnold was beginning to grow acutely conscious of his divided responses to Carlyle, and of his own nascent role as Carlyle's successor as the "Victorian Sage". Essentially, Carlyle's fall from veneration awakened Arnold to the ever-potential fate of the prophet, especially the extravagant prophet. If Empedocles's goal is quietism and calm (Obermann's detached serenity and the vision of mystical communion), it is nevertheless

achieved by means of the language and dialectic of Carlyle and the "Baphometric Fire-baptism". It is this Carlylean element which is most obvious in the poem, and it seems to me that this is another dimension of the poem which Arnold wants to suppress. Carlyle's ideas give Arnold a means of getting where he wants to go, but Carlyle's methods, besides becoming obsolescent and unpolitic, cannot afford Empedocles the insight which lies beyond, the calm which Obermann understands, but to which Empedocles perhaps approaches more closely than any of his literary ancestors: "He only lives with the world's life, / Who hath renounced his own." ("Stanzas in Memory of the Author of 'Obermann'", 103-104).

Empedocles's apparent submission to "Necessity" is finally qualified by the self-assertion implicit in the suicidal act; this suicidal assertion is not the Byronic gesture of defiance but rather a radical confirmation of a strange obedience. If Empedocles seems to acquiesce in "Necessity" it is because he wars against it to such an extent that he transforms it into an agency of his own will. In the same way, the critical spirit to which Arnold so reluctantly yields after the struggle against it in Empedocles is ultimately the foundation of Arnold's argument for Culture.

IV

CONCLUSION

We have now introduced as evidence information external to the poem in order to consider the place of Empedocles on Etna in Arnold's intellectual development; in doing so it has been necessary to insist on a single-minded reading which makes the poem more clear and precise than it really is. In this case, the diversity of interpretations advanced, always to some extent as a reflection of differences in critical taste, is also a consequence of the poem's ambiguities and our relative ignorance of Arnold's mind, which stems mainly from his own secrecy, deliberate elusiveness, and reluctance to disclose his experiences. Nevertheless, the extant documents with their many hints and the disclosures of recent scholarly work like Allott's study of the early reading-lists more and more help to define Arnold as an individual with peculiarities distinct from the characteristics of his age, notwithstanding an inevitable kinship with many of his contemporaries. It is hoped that a reassessment of Arnold's "unknown years", from the genesis of Empedocles to the publication of the 1853 Preface, provides a more searching alternative to the notion of diagnosing his spiritual malaise, personal conflicts, and metaphysical doubts in the conventional terms of the Victorian "loss of faith". Isolating this last phenomenon for scrutiny seems a legitimate critical activity, but about Arnold's "loss of faith" we know almost

nothing except what the poems tell us; and if we knew more, the information would not be wholly adequate for an interpretation of Empedocles because the poem embraces so much more. Rather than looking at a Victorian phenomenon, it might be more fruitful to examine a historically larger context which is at the same time more immediately appropriate to Empedocles.

Within the tradition of the literature of suicide we can discern what we could call a tradition of author-repudiated literature of suicide. To go no further, we might consider the case of Donne's Biathanatos; although by no means a radical tract, it denies the dogmatic view that suicide is invariably sinful. Yet in spite of its plea for charity and understanding, Donne considers his work misinterpretable and feels compelled to "repudiate" it and to withhold it from publication. In a 1608 letter to his friend Henry Goodyer he urges, "publish it not, but yet burn it not."¹ This request suggests an ambivalence not unlike Arnold's curious transactions with Empedocles. Moreover, in his "Preface" to Biathanatos Donne offers an explanation for his sense of endemic depression by recalling his childhood among the Jesuits in terms which remind us of Arnold's recollection that "rigorous teachers seized [his] youth". At least one critic sees Donne's treatise in the light of his divided religious loyalties and he calls Biathanatos "a struggle between two opposing cultural strains".² Like Biathanatos, Empedocles is Arnold's

¹Quoted by Alvarez, The Savage God, p. 154.

²Ibid., p. 157.

attempt to extricate himself from a period of depression but, while he succeeds in this limited aim, the crisis which led to the depression is suspended rather than resolved, because the causal factors behind this crisis recur in the guise of other conflicts in his later poems, as they do in Donne's case.

Whereas Donne was reluctant to publish his study of suicide because he did not want to encourage the use of his arguments as rationalizations for the act, Goethe frequently re-published his Sorrows of Young Werther because he felt the book to have a power of consolation and a therapeutic value for the desperate. His editorial prologue to Werther's letters declares:

Was ich von der Geschichte des armen Werther nur habe auffinden können, habe ich mit Fleiss gesammelt, und lege es euch hier vor, und weiss, dass ihr mirs danken werdet. Ihr könnt seinem Geiste und seinem Charakter eure Bewunderung und Liebe, seinem Schicksale eure Tränen nicht versagen.

Und du, gute Seele, die du eben den Drang fühlst wie er, schöpfe Trost aus seinem Leiden, und lass das Büchlein deinen Freund sein, wenn du aus Geschick oder eigener Schuld keinen nähern finden kannst.³

But Goethe's main reasons were personal: he continued to defend Werther even after it was blamed as the cause of a suicide epidemic and other sensational consequences in which Werther's passion was recklessly emulated. Goethe described himself as a pelican feeding Werther with the blood of his own heart and he said afterwards: "Das war ein Stoff, bei dem man sich zusammennehmen oder zugrundegehen musste . . . So etwas schreibt sich nicht mit heiler Haut."⁴ Carlyle, who no doubt introduced Arnold to Goethe,

³Hans-J. Weitz et al., eds., Goethe Werke (Frankfurt: Insel, 1966), IV, 7.

⁴Goethe Werke, IV, 650.

had written:

to men afflicted with the 'malady of Thought', some devoutness of temper was an inevitable heritage: to such the noisy forum of the world could appear but an empty, altogether insufficient concern; and the whole scene of life had become hopeless enough ... That state of Unbelief from which the Germans do seem to be in some measure delivered, still presses with incubus force on the greater part of Europe ... That nameless Unrest, the blind struggle of a soul in bondage, that high, sad, longing Discontent, which was agitating every bosom, had driven Goethe almost to despair ... Werter is but the cry of that dim, rooted pain, under which all thoughtful men of a certain age were languishing: it paints the misery, it passionately utters the complaint

The writing of Werter, it would seem, indicating so gloomy, almost desperate a state of mind in the author, was at the same time a symptom, indeed a cause, of his now having got delivered from such melancholy. Far from recommending suicide to others, as Werter has often been accused of doing, it was the first proof that Goethe himself had abandoned these 'hypochondriacal crotchets': the imaginary 'Sorrows' had helped to free him from many real ones.⁵

Carlyle's account is fully corroborated by Goethe himself who offers a similar explanation in his autobiographical Dichtung und Wahrheit. To simplify, Donne had contemplated the ethical problems of suicide but, as his later work shows, he had not successfully freed himself from a self-chastizing death-consciousness, hence he refused to publish thoughts which lacked an ultimate solution. Goethe, on the other hand, admits to having experienced a genuine cathartic release through his imaginative enactment of a ritual suicide. It is of the utmost importance that Donne's work is a rational and critical, scholarly defense of suicide, while Goethe's novel is saturated with emotion to the point of melodrama.

Arnold stands between these two proceedings insofar as Empedocles

⁵T. Carlyle, "Goethe", in Critical and Miscellaneous Essays (London, 1894), I, 188-191.

is an attempt to work out an intellectual crisis on an imaginative level. Whatever the precise cause of the crisis, it is formulated intellectually as the 'malady of Thought'; but Empedocles's dramatic solution can only overcome the problem of mind by a final emotional assertion of faith in his resolute determination which validates the leap but circumvents the problem of mind which remains unanswered until the 1853 Preface. 'Thought' and 'feeling' are not as clearly divided in the poem as Houghton suggests, but they are distinguished; the fact that Arnold can posit a 'dialogue of the mind with itself' presupposes a conception of the mind as divided and disaligned. In Empedocles, Arnold attempts a synthesis towards wholeness and achieves perhaps an uneasy reconciliation of the warring factions within himself.

APPENDIX A

TWO EXTRACTS FROM OBERMANN

An English translator of Obermann offers a brief but extremely suggestive sketch of Senancour's work which has a clear application to Arnold's Empedocles:

Apparently Senancour himself regarded [Obermann] as a failure, for he announced his resolve never to reprint it, and dismembered it to incorporate its best passages in later works. Sainte-Beuve... was one of the first to call attention to it, and in 1833 he supplied the preface to a new edition which Senancour reluctantly allowed to appear..... Senancour's reluctance to have it regarded as autobiographical, and his subsequent dislike of the book and anxiety to suppress it, were probably due to the feeling that in it he had laid his soul too bare to the universal prick of light..... But even Carlyle [who railed against "a wretched mortal's vomiting up all his interior crudities, dubitations, and spiritual agonizing bellyaches"] found relief for his soul in a private diary, and the most interesting of his works is the one in which he reveals his own struggles with the Everlasting No. We may justify Obermann out of Carlyle's own mouth: 'The Great Goethe, in passionate words, had to write his Sorrows of Werther before the spirit freed herself, and he could become a man ... For your nobler minds, the publishing of some such work of art, in one or the other dialect, becomes almost a necessity. For what is it properly, but an altercation with the devil, before you begin honestly fighting him?'¹

In the light of Arnold's relation to Empedocles, these observations are illuminating and virtually self-explanatory; Senancour's plan to salvage the "best passages" of Obermann resembles Arnold's dealings with the songs

¹J.A. Barnes, tr., Obermann (London and Felling-on-Tyne, 1910), I, vii-xxvii. The passage from Carlyle is in Sartor, p. 156. The extracts presented here will be from this translation, rather than from the French original, but I have checked the original text to be certain of the reliability of the translation.

of Callicles, and like Senancour, Arnold was persuaded eventually to restore his poem. Obermann itself provides an inexhaustible store of ideas which are echoed in Empedocles. For example, in his first letter Obermann says, "Wisdom . . . is to be followed when she sees what is before her, but in things unknown we have only instinct. If that is a more dangerous guide than prudence, it achieves greater results . . . its rashness sometimes becomes our only refuge".² Much later he observes, "it is reason alone that can enable us to view annihilation without dread."³ Again he deliberates: "you have decreed against self-destruction. Well, how will your law be enforced? . . . What mockery -- a law of slavery that is neither obeyed nor avenged! . . . The Eternal, say you, has . . . set me my part in the harmony of his works . . . You are very soon forgetting the soul . . . This earthly body is but dust . . . But my intelligence, an imperishable breath derived from the universal Intelligence, can never evade his law. How can I desert the empire of the Master of all things? I only change my place".⁴ At a moment of temporary calm, Obermann says with Empedocles's resoluteness, "though a great deal might be said to a passionate man in the grip of despair, there is not a single valid answer to a tranquil man discussing his own death."⁵ Obermann's calm is as fragile as Empedocles's unstrung resignation, and

²Ibid., I, 2.

³Ibid., I, 158.

⁴Ibid., I, 168.

⁵Ibid., I, 171.

the only real difference between their respective situations is that Empedocles's course results in a decision while we never know whether or not Obermann acts upon his speculations. But the specific parallels and the general similarities of temper are too frequent to consider in any detail. There are, however, two representative passages in Obermann which are particularly notable for their remarkably Arnoldian tone. The first of these is a fragment of The Manual of Pseusophanes, a manuscript in Obermann's possession. As far as I know, it is part of Senancour's fiction, but Obermann attributes it to Aristippus, adding, "if it is by him, then that noted Greek, as grossly misjudged as Epicurus, set down as an effeminate voluptuary or the advocate of a loose philosophy, had after all the strictness required by . . . order . . . meet for man". In his thirty-third letter, written in his third year of Alpine isolation, Obermann transcribes this fragment from the "Manual":

Suppose you have just awakened dull and depressed, already weary of the coming day. You face life with aversion; it seems profitless and burdensome; an hour later it will seem more endurable; is the change then in life?

It has no definite quality; everything man experiences is in his heart, everything he knows is in his thought. He is wholly self-contained.

What losses can thus overwhelm you? What have you to lose? Does anything belong to you outside yourself? What do things perishable matter? Everything passes away, except the justice veiled behind the transient show of things. Everything is profitless for man if he does not advance with calm and steady pace according to the laws of intelligence.

Everything around you is restless and threatening; if you give way to fears, your anxieties will be endless. You cannot possess what is beyond possession, and you will lose your life, which does belong to you. Whatever happens is gone for ever. Events occur in an endless circle of necessity; they vanish like an unforeseen and fleeting shadow.

What are your evils? Imaginary fears, fancied needs, the frustrations of a day. Weak slave! You cling to what has no existence, you follow phantoms. Leave to the deluded crowd whatever is illusive, unprofitable, and transitory. Take account only of intelligence, which is the source of order in the world, and of man who is its instrument -- of intelligence to be followed and man to be aided.

Intelligence wrestles with the resistance of matter, and with the blind laws whose unknown consequences used to be called chance. When the strength bestowed upon you has followed intelligence, when you have served the order of the world, what would you more? You have acted according to your nature; and what is there better for a being who feels and knows, than to exist according to his nature.

Daily, as you are reborn to life, call to mind that you have resolved not to pass through the world in vain. The world is travelling to its goal. But you, you stand still, you lose ground, you are still drifting and languid. Can the days gone by be lived again in happier times? Life rests wholly on that present which you neglect for the sake of the future; the present alone is time, the future is but its reflection.

Live in yourself, and seek what does not perish. Examine what it is that our heedless passions seek. Among so many things, is there one to suffice the heart of man? Intelligence only finds in itself the food of its life; be just and strong. No one knows the morrow; you will never find peace in external things; seek it in your heart. Force is the rule of Nature; will is power; energy in suffering is better than apathy in pleasure. One who obeys and suffers is often greater than one who enjoys or commands. What you fear is vain, and what you desire is vain too. The only thing that can profit you is to be what Nature intended.

You are made up of intelligence and matter. The world itself is nothing more. Bodies are modified by a presiding harmony, and the whole tends to perfection by the continual improvement of its different parts. That law of the Universe is also the law of individuals.⁶

The second passage is appended to Obermann's sixty-second letter, of the eighth year, and it comes even closer to Empedocles. The last paragraph of the letter explains Obermann's mood and admirably makes its own connections to the "funeral chant" which follows it and to Obermann's meditative afterthought:

I have two great burdens; one alone would perhaps crush me, but I manage to live between the two because one balances the other. But for this settled gloom, this depression, this listlessness, this stolid attitude towards all one might desire, I should be much more swiftly, and quite as vainly, consumed by that hurrying restless activity which my ennui does at any rate

⁶Ibid., I, 107-109.

serve to relax. Reason would control it; but between these two great forces my reason is very weak; the utmost it can do is to summon one of them to its help when the other gets the upper hand. Thus one may vegetate, and sometimes even sleep.

FUNERAL CHANT BY A MOLDAVIAN

Translated from the Slavonic

Whenever we are profoundly moved we straightway dream of dying. What better sequel could there be to a time of ecstasy? How can we imagine a morrow to great delights? Let us die; that is the last hope of pleasure, the last word, the last cry of desire.

If you wish for longer life practise moderation, and thus postpone your fall. Enjoyment is the beginning of dissolution; self-denial is economy of life. Pleasure emerges at the issue of things, at both ends; it bestows life and deals out death. The essence of pleasure is transformation.

In childhood, man is amused with earth's trifles but eventually he must make his choice among its gifts. When all his choices are made, then he longs to see death; that long-dreaded turn of the game is henceforth the only thing that can impress him.

Have you never yearned for death? Then you have never really tasted life. But if your days flow smoothly and happily, if fortune loads you with favours, if you are on the pinnacle of success, then fall; death is your only possible future.

It is pleasant to dally with death; to regard it anew until the idea of embracing it seems the highest of joys. What beauty there is in the tempest! And that is what death offers. The flashes light up the depths rent open by the thunderbolt.

What nobler object of curiosity, what more imperious need can there be, than death? Sooner or later to each of us there comes an end to our investigation of the things of this world, but beyond death there lies immensity with all its light, or everlasting night.

Those who have least fear of death are the men of lofty character, men of genius, men in the full vigour of life. Can the reason be that they do not believe in annihilation in spite of their emancipation, and that others do believe in it in spite of their faith.

Death is not an evil, for it is universal. Evil is the exception to the supreme laws. Let us accept without bitterness our common and inevitable lot. When death is accidental or startling it may be unwelcome, but when it happens naturally it is a source of comfort.

Let us wait and die. If our present life is but a servitude, let it come to an end; if it leads nowhere, if it is futile to have lived, let us be delivered from its snare. Let us die either to attain life indeed, or to shatter this pretence of living.

Death remains unknown. When we question it, it vanishes; when it stands forth to strike, we are bereft of speech. Death withholds one of the words of the universal enigma, a word which the earth will never hear.

Shall we condemn this dreamer of the Danube? Shall we class with idle freaks of imagination every idea that is alien to the frivolity from which the masses have no wish to escape.

You may have chanced some noontide in the country when drowsiness seemed to be stealing over everything, to experience an indefinable impression, a sweet sense of a more elusive and yet more free and natural life. All sounds grow faint and all objects fade from sight. Then one last thought presents itself so vividly that after this half-waking illusion, so unexpected and fleeting, nothing can follow but either complete unconsciousness or a sudden awakening.

The chief thing to notice is the substance of these rapid images. Often a woman's form appears, transcending all ordinary grace, all enduring charm and voluptuous hope. The vision is more than pleasure, it is the purity of the ideal, it is possession revealed as a duty, as a simple fact, as an all-compelling necessity. But the breast of this woman unmistakably signifies that she will nourish children. Thus is our mission on earth accomplished. Without distress and without regret we could die. To give life and then as our eyes are closing to overstep the limits of the known world is perhaps the essence of our destiny.

All else may be but a means, in itself indifferent, of getting through the rest of our time and reaching our goal.

I do not maintain that most men are visited at such moments by this identical airy dream with its calm and strong emotion, this miniature symbol of life, when all around is sunk in quiet forgetfulness. That I cannot say; but I do think it is not peculiar to myself.

To hand on life and then to lose it in the visible order of things, may be our chief function on earth. Yet I cannot but ask if there are no dreams in the last sleep. I ask whether the law of death is really inflexible. Some among us have seen their intelligence gain strength in many respects; may it not be that these will survive when others succumb?⁷

⁷Ibid., II, 76-80.

APPENDIX B
GEORGE SAND'S L'HISTOIRE D'UN REVEUR
AND ETNA'S FIRE

In spite of the acknowledged importance of the Sand-Arnold relationship, a curious story by George Sand has gone entirely unnoticed by critics and scholars of Arnold. Entitled L'Histoire d'un Rêveur, it seems to have been one of Sand's first attempts at fiction. An English biographer of Sand says that the story was written, or at least begun, in the autumn and winter of 1823, after the birth of her first child, Maurice: "It was not good, and she knew it. Shapeless, inchoate, . . . it pleased her nevertheless because thesis had given way to an interest in character. Besides, it offered refuge from boredom."¹ According to other accounts, this is an understatement. The autobiographical elements in Sand's later fiction certainly present the conditions of ennui and acute enervation under which Sand must have been labouring at this time, and it was, after all, the frustrated idealism and passionate non-conformity which first attracted Arnold to Sand.²

Sand's story was not published until this century,³ therefore we cannot argue that Arnold knew of it. It is not entirely impossible that

¹F. Winwar, George Sand and Her Times (New York, 1947), p. 69.

²Letters to Clough, p. 58, Lowry's headnote.

³G. Sand, L'Histoire d'un Rêveur (Paris, 1931).

she might have discussed the work with Arnold, especially when we consider the story's similarities to Empedocles, but this is conjecture without evidence. The important thing is that the dreamer-traveller in Sand's story and Arnold's Empedocles are in the same situation and they respond in exactly the same way. Whether or not Sand and Arnold discussed the legend of Empedocles, it presents itself to both writers as the same powerful imaginative fact, susceptible of great sympathy.

Gaston Bachelard suggests that the Empedocles legend contains an archetypal experience: he recognizes in it an unconscious psychological complex which he calls the "Empedocles Complex":

Fire is for the man who is contemplating it an example of a sudden change or development and an example of a circumstantial development. Less monotonous and less abstract than flowing water, even more quick to grow and to change than the young bird we watch every day in its nest in the bushes, fire suggests the desire to change, to speed up the passage of time, to bring all of life to its conclusion, to its hereafter. In these circumstances the reverie becomes truly fascinating and dramatic; it magnifies human destiny; it links the small to the great, the hearth to the volcano, the life of a log to the life of a world. The fascinated individual hears the call of the funeral pyre. For him destruction is more than a change, it is a renewal.⁴

Bachelard also briefly traces the history of our conception of fire as a primitive and fundamental human experience which has become an internalized aspect of our unconscious minds. Fire apparently has sexual associations which go back to prehistory and the friction of rubbing sticks together; Bachelard notes Robinet's theory that "new eruptions of old craters . . . give proof of the productiveness and the fecundity of the subterranean

⁴G. Bachelard, The Psychoanalysis of Fire, tr. A.C.M. Ross (Boston 1964), p. 16.

fires." Bachelard argues that this fecundity is not merely metaphorical but a fact of the unconscious mind: "It must be taken in its most precise sexual meaning."⁵ If we consider in this light Empedocles's wish that "we might gladly share the fruitful stir / Down in our mother earth's miraculous womb" (II, 339-340), we recognize also a literal and sexual meaning in his desire for rebirth. Bachelard also says that there is "in man a veritable will to intellectuality" and collects as aspects of the "Prometheus Complex" all of the "tendencies which impel us to know as much as our fathers, more than our fathers . . . more than our teachers."⁶ Bachelard concludes that fire is for us the element which animates everything (the historical Empedocles, we recall, learned this from Heraclitus), and as such, it is "the principle of life and death, of existence and non-existence"; it "acts by itself and bears within itself the power to act."⁷ Man's "philosophic reverie" about fire,

accentuates all forces; it seeks the absolute in life as in death. Since we must disappear, since the instinct for death will impose itself one day on the most exuberant life, let us disappear and die completely. Let us destroy the fire of our life by a superfire, by a superhuman superfire without flame or ashes, which will bring extinction to the very heart of the being.⁸

Bachelard has evidently never heard of Matthew Arnold or his poem, but all of these implications of fire have an obvious importance for Empedocles on Etna. He does, however, know George Sand's story and he finds there a development of the "Empedocles Complex". He gives this

⁵Ibid., p. 44.

⁶Ibid., p. 12.

⁷Ibid., p. 72

⁸Ibid., p. 79.

account of L'Histoire d'un Rêveur:

it bears the mark of the Volcano, imagined rather than described. This is often the case in literature. For example, one will find an equally typical page in the work of Jean-Paul Richter, who dreams that the sun, son of Earth, has been shot up to heaven through a mountain's erupting crater [Arnold could have known of this idea of volcano-genesis from Carlyle]. But since the reverie is more instructive for us than the dream, let us follow the account in George Sand.

In order to obtain the view of Sicily in the early morning light as it stands out fiery red against the glittering ocean, the traveller makes his way up the slopes of Mount Etna as night is falling. He stops to sleep in the Goat Grotto, but, since sleep will not come, he dreams before his fire of birch logs; he naturally remains

...with his elbows leaning on his knees and his eyes fixed on the glowing embers of his fire from which white and blue flames escape in a thousand varied forms and undulations. "Now there," he thought to himself, "is a reduced image of the action of the flame and the movement of the lava during the eruptions of Mount Etna. Why have I not been called upon to contemplate this admirable spectacle in all its horrors?"

How can one admire a spectacle that one has never seen? But, as if to give us a better indication of the true axis of his magnifying reverie, the author continues:

Why have I not the eyes of an ant in order to admire this burning birch log? With what transports of blind joy and of love's frenzy these swarms of little white moths come to hurl themselves into it! For them this is the volcano in all its majesty. This is the spectacle of an immense conflagration. This dazzling light intoxicates and exalts them as the sight of the whole forest on fire would do for me.

Love, death and fire are united at the same moment. Through its sacrifice in the heart of the flames, the mayfly gives us a lesson in eternity. This total death which leaves no trace is the guarantee that our whole person has departed for the beyond. To lose everything in order to gain everything. The lesson taught by the fire is clear: "After having gained all through skill, through love or through violence you must give up all, you must annihilate yourself." (D'Annunzio, Contemplation de la Mort.) As Giono points out in his Les Vraies Richesses such is at any rate the intellectual urge "in old races, as among the Indians of India, or among the Aztecs, among people whose religious philosophy and religious cruelty have rendered anaemic to the point of total desiccation so that the head has become merely a globe of

pure intelligence." Only these intellectualized people, these individuals subjected to the instincts of an intellectual formation, continues Giono "can force the door of the furnace and enter into the mystery of the fire."

This is something that George Sand is going to make clear to us. As soon as the reverie becomes concentrated, the genie of the Volcano appears. He dances "on blue and red embers . . . using as his mount a snowflake carried along by the hurricane." He carries the dreamer away beyond the quadrangular monument whose founding is traditionally attributed to Empedocles. "Come, my king. Put on your crown of white flame and blue sulphur from which there comes forth a dazzling rain of diamonds and sapphires." And the Dreamer, ready for the sacrifice, replies: "Here I am! Envelop me in rivers of burning lava, clasp me in your arms of fire as a lover clasps his bride. I have donned the red mantle. I have adorned myself in your colors. Put on, too, your burning gown of purple. Cover your sides with its dazzling folds. Etna, come, Etna! Break open your gates of basalt, spew forth your pitch and sulphur. Vomit forth the stone, the metal and the fire! . . ." In the heart of the fire, death is no longer death. "Death could not exist in that ethereal region to which you are carrying me . . . My fragile body may be consumed by the fire, my soul must be united with those tenuous elements of which you are composed." "Very well!" said the Spirit, casting over the Dreamer part of his red mantle, "Say farewell to the life of men and follow me into the life of phantoms."

Thus a reverie by the fireside, when the flame twists the frail birch branches, is sufficient to evoke the volcano and the funeral pyre. The bit of straw which flies away with the smoke is sufficient to urge us forward to meet our destiny. What better proof is there that the contemplation of fire brings us back to the very origins of philosophic thought? If fire, which, after all, is quite an exceptional and rare phenomenon, was taken to be a constituent element of the Universe, is it not because it is an element of human thought, the prime element of reverie?

.....
Empedocles chooses a death which fuses him into the pure element of the Volcano . . . Empedocles . . . has eliminated the elements of Werther-like morbid sentimentality, who, by his sacrifice, consecrates his strength and does not confess his weakness; he is "the man of ripe experience, the mythical hero of antiquity, wise and sure of himself, for whom voluntary death is an act of faith proving the force of his wisdom." Death in the flame is the least lonely of deaths. It is truly a cosmic death in which a whole universe is reduced to nothingness along with the thinker. The funeral pyre accompanies him in passing.⁹

⁹ Ibid., pp. 16-19.

The remarkable resemblances between Sand's story and Arnold's poem provide another link in their important literary relationship. Even more central, Bachelard's reflections, uttered without any knowledge of what Arnold had done with the Empedocles legend, prove that Empedocles on Etna enacts an archetypal human experience which clearly appeals to the great "primary human affections", despite the claims to the contrary by the 1853 Preface.

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