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'DIVINE LIQUIDNESS OF DICTION . . . DIVINE FLUIDITY OF MOVEMENT': READING POETRY AFTER MATTHEW ARNOLD AND THE HIGHER BIBLICAL CRITICISM

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Abstract

This article is prompted by the turn since 2000 in literary study to 'formalism' ('New Formalism') to return to Matthew Arnold (1822–88) and his work to realign the Bible and literature after Strauss' mid-century higher biblical criticism. The article interrogates the terms of Arnold's poetic-religious formulations, and his reputation for scepticism, so as to recover an obscured energy in how the academy reads poetry in his wake. It demonstrates this through a reading of the 'man of sorrows' and weeping in Arnold's 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse', seeking ways to recover the historical conditions of faith and expression.

The strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry.[1]

Thus Matthew Arnold re-asserted the binding tie he felt between poetry and religion when he, initially reluctantly, agreed to provide an Introduction for T.H. Ward's *The English Poets* in 1880.[2] Feeling he had over-promised himself for several other projects, Arnold was hesitant and by September 1879 he still had 'no notion what I shall say', but added, by way of reassurance, 'Providence will, I hope, make my way plain before my face'.[3] Evidently, guidance was forthcoming, and the resulting introduction, titled 'The Study of Poetry', became one of Arnold's most celebrated (and exasperating) essays, emblematising a career in criticism that makes him, in Herbert F. Tucker's words, 'still the tutelary patron of English studies'.[4] Such patronage has often been understood as releasing poetry's potential in an age of doubt, focusing

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frequently and lengthily on the melancholy of poems such as 'Dover Beach' and statements, later in the above essay, that 'most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry'.[5] My purpose here, however, is to interrogate the terms of Arnold's formulation, and to use his reputation for scepticism differently, aiming to recover an obscured energy in how the academy reads poetry in his wake. Perhaps surprisingly, this energy is accessed through feeling, engaged by poetry, and it issues from engagements with faith, revealing the value of religious thinking in what I seek to characterise as Arnold's affective, experiential notion of culture. Reading for this affective energy—which mobilises the body to feel for resonances—might, in fact, reverse and adapt Arnold's phrasing so that we could find that the strongest part of *reading* poetry to-day is its unconscious religion.

Given Arnold's other reputation—for instigating a liberal, bourgeois agenda in literary studies predicated on the ability to recognise 'the best' poetry—this sounds to be another version of conservative Arnold.[6] But, the characterisation I want to keep in view is Morris Dickstein's sense that 'to be genuinely Arnoldian' is 'to be a historicist, a Hegelian',[7] while still remaining attentive to that sense of Providential revelation that Arnold anticipated in the preparation of 'The Study of Poetry'. Arnold's long-held reputation as the voice of Victorian doubt too often serves to muffle the sound of religiosity in Arnold's reasoning, the sense that thinking might be linked to faith. Most significantly, it occludes the precision of Arnold's sense that a relationship between poetry and religion would be forged first not in the action of compensation (as is often supposed), but in the process of *interpretation*: 'More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us'.[8] Aligning poetry thus with hermeneutics, which derives, as David Jasper summarises, from 'interpretation that seeks to bridge the gap between the divine and the human realms',[9] Arnold institutes as one legacy to English studies the richly political assertion that 'poetry too had a point of view',[10] but this was cast in a theological crucible, subtly altering the Arnoldian legacy. From this juncture, Arnold emerges as a figure through which to take some measure of the critical turn to the aesthetics of form seen since 2000 by adding to the concurrent reconsideration of religion by the critical Left. Arnold might seem an odd fit here, given his inclusion in accounts of the rise of English as a discipline, as Terry Eagleton summarises, being due to 'the failure of religion',[11] and so inevitably secular. Yet, by tracing Arnold's formulation of poetry via his response to theological investigation of the Bible, I want to use Arnold to feel for the affinities I sense between Slavoj Žižek's characteristically robust protest that 'the authentic Christian legacy is much too precious to be left to the fundamentalist freaks',[12] and Isobel Armstrong's concern that 'the politics and poetics of "beauty" ' have been 'implicitly left to the reactionaries—an

assumption that makes it more rather than less important to remake aesthetic discourse'[13] (both published in 2000).

Animating these affinities is the conducting principle of history, in which, Arnold asserts, aesthetic production and experience takes place. Here I debate the implications for the discipline of reading poetry today of embedding Arnold's ideas about aesthetics, poetry and form into the theological history of ideas represented by the higher criticism of the Bible in the 19th century. Using Arnold as an affective route back to form through the social and collective processes of history, I then essay a way in which poetry might take us, via an emotional hermeneutic, both into the past *and* into our own historicised moment; this is focused in a close reading of his lyric poem, 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse'. My aim on this path is to respond to Žižek's imperative to feel for 'the residual', (my echo of Raymond Williams[14] is intended), which I interpret as the necessary recognition that the 'study of poetry' undertaken today is still ghosted by the traces of theological enquiry undertaken in the 19th century:

> Perhaps the best way of encapsulating the gist of an epoch is to focus not on the explicit features that define its social and ideological edifices but on the disavowed ghosts that haunt it, dwelling in a mysterious region of nonexistent entities which none the less *persist*, continue to exert their efficacy.[15]

As becomes clear, Žižek's terms echo Arnold's own formulations not only of history—which he sees materialised poetically into epochs—but also of the half-hidden traces of faith that stimulate, 'ghost-like', lyrical expressions and their subsequent affective potential.

The launch in 1987 of the journal *Literature and Theology* constitutes an important intervention in recognising this theological blueprinting, materialising and institutionalising this point as an interdisciplinary approach (its first edition cited Arnold as one of those predecessors who would have 'taken the combination for granted').[16] In significant ways, this interdiscipline is still establishing its appreciation of the shared roots and, by extension, overlapping fruits of literary and biblical hermeneutics, although the hereditary links between Rabbinic practice and the postmodernity emblematised by Jacques Derrida has been enthusiastically described and richly considered by Susan Handelmann and David Jasper, among others.[17] Yet, as Jasper still noted in 2009, literary theory 'remains uneasy' with its roots in biblical hermeneutics, 'unwilling finally to acknowledge them'.[18] This unease is especially felt in acknowledging descent from the German tradition of higher biblical criticism, understood to be somehow handicapped by 'historical absorption' and, perhaps as a result, informing 'the technical processes of . . . conservative literary criticism'.[19] In an elegantly polemical introduction to her 1975 study of

Coleridge and the higher criticism, however, E.S. Shaffer finds a different legacy. Apart from the insightful attention she gives to the origins of higher criticism in the Romantic period, and Coleridge's vital role in mediating it for the 19th century, Shaffer has significant points to make about the practice of literary criticism in her own period. Shaffer focuses specifically on the historicism implied by higher criticism to call for a reinvigorated practice of the literary discipline, to remedy the failings that she recognised in contemporary efforts, in which 'the history of ideas appears ... if at all, deplorably impoverished, mechanical, and trivial'.[20] I begin by responding to Shaffer's call by bringing Arnold's literary criticism into dialogue with the 'history of ideas' that Shaffer asserts, through re-embedding his formulations into their original context, in response to the higher biblical criticism undertaken so ferociously by David Strauss in his *Das Leben Jesu* (1840, fourth edition translated into English by George Eliot as *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* in 1846).

More recently, the Victorian period's relationship with higher criticism has received further welcome and careful attention, with critics significantly situating themselves as healing rifts in continuity, to 'make recent interpretive discourse more aware of its history'.[21] Suzy Anger's clear-sighted tracking of then-to-now sees her assert that 'secular interpretation in both the Victorian age and today is ... indebted to the strategies and conceptual models of sacred hermeneutics'.[22] Charles LaPorte's *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible* (2011) importantly focuses this onto poetry, demonstrating the need for generic specificity (itself a higher critical imperative), giving richness and subtlety to the contention that poetry gained spiritual significance as higher critics chafed at the Bible.[23] LaPorte's opening chapter sensitively lays out the semantic heft of poetry as a genre distinct within 'literature' for the 19th century, tracing a legacy from Bishop Lowth's *On the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews* (1753) that required recalibration after Strauss, such that George Gilfillan's *The Bards of the Bible* (1853) could imply that, ' "Poetry" is not merely associated with religious truth ... they are effectively synonymous'.[24] As both Anger and LaPorte recognise, Arnold is significant here, but Anger's précis of his position as celebrating 'the interpreting power of the poet'[25] and LaPorte's surprise that Arnold's 'The Study of Poetry' essay narrows Gilfillan and others' capacious use of 'poetry' to denote spiritual writing in either verse or prose to the example of verse in particular,[26] leads me to consider Arnold again. LaPorte's scholarly precision[27] importantly recovers and raises the question of form (the plastic manifestation of the aesthetic) within what Strauss had characterised as the gospels' 'sacred poetry'[28] and Arnold, following Strauss, had seen as Israel's 'poetry and eloquence'.[29] For LaPorte it becomes 'remarkable' that Arnold would cite English poets from Chaucer to Dryden as 'sufficient for [the] job' of 'replac[ing] Christianity with poetry',[30] but I suggest that the emphasis here needs to shift. Arnold is less concerned to offer

these poets as 'replacements' for Christianity as to engage with the emotional effects that the *form* of their writing (their prosody, we might say) has on him, to understand those effects as cognitive as well as affective (the essay remembers Arnold's 1865 assertion that 'poetry is the interpretress of the natural world, and ... the moral world'[31]), and to see that as exemplifying the action of the Bible on the reader at the level of conduct. This we might see as repeating the cognitive work that Arnold saw poetry doing for the ancient nation of Israel, for whom 'the word "God" ' was a 'term of poetry and eloquence. A term *thrown out* so to speak, at a not fully grasped object of the speaker's consciousness'.[32] Of note here is Arnold's sense that *poetry* rather than *the poet* (as Anger had suggested) is the interpretive subject. In this sense, Arnold importantly prefigures Armstrong's notion of an 'alternative aesthetic', extending from how 'one might think about thought *in artwork*' (my emphasis), wherein 'the traditional distinction between affect, or the emotions, and knowledge, is dissolved'.[33] Where this essay signals a shift from Shaffer and LaPorte is in seeking the effects of higher criticism less on the writing of poetry (which LaPorte sees as re-invigorated in its wake) and more on how it was and is *read*, the salient concern of so-called 'New Formalism'.

The critical return to form, or formalism, has issued in various and important ways from Marxist critics' rigorous exposure of the aesthetic as ideological over the past few decades of the 20th century. Seeking to recover something understood to be 'lost' in this analysis—or otherwise to reiterate the piquancy of form *because* it is ideological, as Marjorie Levinson's acute 2007 overview elucidates—the New Formalism 'movement' (she rightly distinguishes it from a theory or a method) 'divides along a single axis: the conception, role, and importance of form in new historicism'.[34] Historically situated views of the aesthetic versus a Kantian model of disinterestedness provide the animus that generates New Formalist rhetoric (in Levinson's pragmatic taxonomy, 'activist formalism' and 'normative formalism' map loosely onto the two). But, seeing the clear danger of *impasse* here, and that the rhetoric of return can become a seductive distraction from rather than impetus to reconceiving the aesthetic, Levinson remains sceptical of this distinction, or at least of New Formalism's tendency to reiterate rather than dismantle it.[35] One hears again in this debate Shaffer's impatient demand that literary criticism should be recognising 'the need to consider the entire milieu of a work of art, in its intimate relations with artistic creation, and not simply to offer superficial and perfunctory "background" history'.[36] To think again about aesthetic form and history, I, like Shaffer, want to take a theological turn in literary study (and thus an interdisciplinary turn) and consider how the 'reinterpretation of the major religious text of the West is a communal event. [But] It is, of course also a private event, and proceeds through the inner struggle of individual conscience'.[37] This can be seen in generic terms—using history and the lyric to

engage the dialectic of this communal event.[38] This maps the academic return to form back to a different fork in the road—another ghost—one conceived through higher criticism and instituted in Strauss' disruptive, mid-19th-century text. By reading Arnold reading Strauss, it becomes possible to bridge the New Formalist divide between the aesthetic and history, and to see that built through hermeneutics. Arnold as a religious thinker can undo the tightly wound knot of history and poetry in New Formalism (a knot signalling they are bound together; tightly wound warning they are apt to fold back to cancel each other out).

To turn then to Strauss, and his insistent recognition, in the higher critical mode, that modernity (the post-Enlightenment 19th century) required a revised account of the sacred: the 'history of events in which the divine enters, without intermediation, into the human; the ideal thus assuming an immediate embodiment'.[39] Knowing that this constituted the 'essential' moment of religion, Strauss mounts his argument at the fundamental premise of Christianity, the point at which the divine enters history, contending that modern understanding had to mean that 'the immediate intervention of the divine in human affairs loses its probability'.[40] Strauss' purpose from there becomes an adversarial interrogation of the two poles thus implied, with the aim to separate the historical and supernatural accounts of this moment, and its attendant miraculous events, from an account aimed at revelation of 'ideal truth'. Strauss' dialectical method sees him systematically lay out in the opening chapter of *The Life of Jesus* the different hermeneutic traditions that have shaped an understanding of the gospels and thence interrogate the accounts of each stage of Christ's life with the aim of reaching the *mythical view*.[41] Looking to his treatment of the transfiguration of Christ, for example, it is clear that Strauss' pursuit of the mythical view is designed to preserve, as he said in his preface, 'the supernatural birth of Christ, his miracles, his resurrection and ascension [as] eternal truths', if necessary at the expense of 'their reality as historical facts'.[42] Accordingly, Strauss must dismiss the 'natural system of interpretation',[43] which aims to 'preserve the historical certainty of the narratives' by explaining the splendour around Christ as an optical illusion (because, for Strauss, this takes away the significance of this moment) and instigate instead an explanation that sacrifices the splendour as 'real event' in order to retain it as 'ideal truth', which manifests at the level of the imagination and cognition. To do this, Strauss is keen to demonstrate the literacy of the early Christian authors, who are seen to undertake a kind of readerly typology whereby the events of the Old Testament don't supernaturally predict those of the New, but install expectation via story-telling, symbol, image or vision (the capacious 'poetry' that Gilfillan recognises) that can then be fulfilled by the literate narration of Christ's life in the gospels that triggers a consequential imaginative effect. So §107 of *The Life of Jesus* traces in the

splendour of Christ's countenance the lover's sun- and moon-like face of the Song of Songs, Joshua's splendid appearance and, most significantly, the luminous countenance of Moses. The circulation of this cultural knowledge amongst the early Christians then allowed the recognition of Christ as Messianic in their image.

Strauss claimed in his preface that with this method, 'the essence of the Christian faith is perfectly independent of [the author's] criticism', a fact which 'can alone give calmness and dignity to our criticism' since it didn't intend to subvert religious truth.[44] Yet the conclusion of §107 belies this tactfulness by characterising 'ideal truth' in terms not of the reality of Christ's miraculous transfiguration, but of the aesthetic purpose it serves: 'I yet retain a sense, a purpose *in the narrative*' (my emphasis).[45] Strauss refines here what he had stated so boldly earlier: 'we stand here upon purely mythical-poetical ground; the only historical reality which we can hold fast as positive matter of fact being this:—the impression made by John the Baptist ... was so powerful as to lead to the subsequent glorification of his birth in connection with the birth of the Messiah in the Christian legend'.[46] An absolute rift is thus created between the aesthetic and the historical account of Christ,[47] and hence Strauss concludes, 'God [is] divested of his grace, man of his dignity, and the tie between heaven and earth broken'.[48] The aesthetic is thus divorced from the material conditions of history.

Strauss' insistent division between historical event and the aesthetic purpose to which the telling of an event may be put suggests him as a ghost that haunts the aesthetic/historical antagonism of New Formalism; in so far as he firmly followed Strauss in denying the reality of miracles,[49] Arnold may be seen in a similar light. However, Arnold's important reservations about Strauss led him to assert the interpretive value of culture, which in his formulations is historically situated, thus refining and reframing Strauss' divisive model. Prefacing *Literature and Dogma* in 1873, Arnold claimed that Strauss 'want[ed] *power*' to move beyond the 'negative criticism' of what was 'unsolid' in the New Testament and on to 'deal with the reality which is still left', which 'requires a larger, richer, deeper, more imaginative mind than [Strauss']'.[50] Finding him lacking in 'justness of perception', Arnold bemoans its cause as being Strauss' need of '*culture* in addition to the knowledge of his particular study'.[51] This view comes to characterise the polemic of Arnold's most sustained post-Straussian writing on the Bible and literature as he lengthily interrogates the place of 'letters', used synonymously for culture and linking to the foundation of English Literature as a discipline that grew out of rhetoric and *belles-lettres* of the 18th century, in the pantheon of hermeneutic tools available to modern life. It is insufficient regard for 'letters' that characterises 'the friends of physical science' and, increasingly, 'the leaders of the religious world' who therefore fall prey to dogmatic thinking.[52]

So far, so predictable: it is hardly original to note that Matthew Arnold, author of *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) would turn to culture as remedy. But I want to pause here to note first that Arnold does not ask that culture replace the Bible, or that the Bible be read as literature *per se*, but that culture will allow us to access 'the reality which is still left' in the Bible, the residual remains left after Strauss' uncultured filleting knives have done their work. For Arnold, what is left to access via culture is importantly what can and should direct conduct—reading opens out onto the social—and, despite his reputation for cool irony, that comes via feeling. Notwithstanding Arnold's preference for archly avoiding either excessive effusion or pragmatic direction in the practice of criticism,[53] it is possible to track the work that culture does when it is specified as the reading of poetry. This is found if we follow the path of poetry as it is welded for Arnold onto and under the principle of God. Arnold's opening intention for *Literature and Dogma* was to assert the value—the necessity—of poetic thinking ('letters and history') as a means to gain 'useful knowledge' of those things that are not 'definite and ascertained' (and the mistake of 'people with a talent for hard, abstruse reasoning' is to think that God is) and yet still shape the world, experience, the times; a means to know the material touch of the ineffable.[54] Poetry becomes a way of feeling history; it makes manifest the effect of affect. It allows us to know the 'reality which is still left' in the Bible:

> But poetry is essentially concrete; and the moment one perceives that the religious language of the human race is in truth poetry, which it mistakes for science, one cannot make it an objection to this language that it is concrete. That it has long moved and deeply engaged the affections of men, that the Christian generations before us have all passed that way, adds immensely to its worth as poetry.[55]

The significance then emerges from this premise of Arnold's proposition that 'the word "God" is used in most cases as by no means a term of science or exact knowledge, but a term of poetry and eloquence, a term *thrown out*, so to speak, at a not fully grasped object of the speaker's consciousness, a *literary* term, in short'.[56] God thus partakes in the poetic action of making known the unknown, and still more significantly, that 'mankind mean different things by it as their consciousness differs',[57] by which route history enters in. In direct response to higher biblical criticism, Arnold formulates culture as a mode that gives access to knowledge and feeling as changing and therefore historicised: 'the language of the Bible is fluid, passing, and literary, not rigid, fixed, and scientific'.[58] As Arnold insists, and here we sense the influence of Spinoza,[59] 'to take this very first step, some experience of how men have thought and expressed themselves, and some flexibility of spirit, are necessary; and this is culture'.[60]

This now allows us to return to trace how Arnold works to fuse the historical with the affective potential of poetry, of form, and so contribute to present New Formalist debate. Gaining from Spinoza the principle that the Bible should be understood as the product of a particular time and cultural knowledge, Arnold does not go the way of Benjamin Jowett, for whom the author's original intentions must be accessed, stripping away all that has come between to obscure that intention, but rather sketches a principle in which poetry allows us to access the feeling rather than the intention of the past, and to experience it as a historicised moment in the present; in short, he presents an experiential notion of culture. To go back to *Essays and Criticism* (1865), poetry allows us to know the past via wonder: 'the grand power of poetry is its interpretative power; by which I mean, not a power of drawing out in black and white an explanation of the mystery of the universe, but the power of so dealing with things as to awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense of them, and of our relations with them'.[61] This allows not only that poetry can think things differently (and one senses from 'relations' here that this happens in spatial arrangements), but also that knowledge of the self does not occur self-evidently, but in dialogue and relationship with the past and, by extension, the future, and all principles of the other, via poetry: 'the real germ of religious consciousness, therefore, ... came to be clothed upon, in time, with a mighty growth of poetry and tradition, was a consciousness of *the not ourselves which makes for righteousness*'.[62] Liberal totality is undone here by the entry of the other. Although Arnold speaks in the language of elites when he addresses this action, as 'this faculty always has for its basis a peculiar temperament, an extraordinary delicacy of organisation and susceptibility to impressions',[63] to take this alone would be to overlook Arnold's sense that poetry can teach this faculty through appeals to feeling. Demonstrating his acutely social and contextual understanding of poetry, Arnold had offered in his essay on 'Pagan and Mediaeval Religious Sentiment' to 'translate [Theocritus idyll] that he may see the medium in which religious poetry of this sort is found existing, the society out of which it grows, the people who form it and are formed by it' (thus treating poetry as Spinoza did the Bible), illustrating by example what he would later claim as an ideal access to knowledge: 'a better way ... is to take their fact of experience, to keep it steadily for our basis in using their language, and to see whether from using their language with the ground of this real and firm sense to it, as they themselves did, somewhat of their feeling, too, may not grow upon us'.[64]

In the second half of this essay, I would like to attempt a version of this 'welded hermeneutic', by attending first of all to Arnold's tendency to speak of history not only as the series of sequential events (including changes of thought) before one's own time, and hence narrative, but in 'epochs'—fixed points in the reckoning of time, such as the birth of Christ or (to follow

Shaffer) the reinterpretation of the Bible. Perhaps most notably he uses this in 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1865) to suggest his own time as an epoch of criticism, rather than creativity. What interests me in Arnold's 'epoch method', is that it comprehends the past as shaped by shifts in understanding—an idealist view of history—but sees those shapes cast by literary, specifically poetic, language. Dispelling the notion that Arnold is cold-blooded, this is what excites him in 'The Study of Poetry'. He can only show, rather than prescribe, poetry's efficacy in the world; to prescribe would be to come between the reader and the aesthetic effect. Hence his use of 'touchstone' passages: in front of something like 'Chaucer's divine liquidness of diction, his divine fluidity of movement', for Arnold 'it is difficult to speak temperately'.[65] And it is precisely this diction and movement (the form in the aesthetic) that 'makes an epoch and founds a tradition':[66] poetry makes history by fixing points in the reckoning of time. To know an epoch is to become intimate with the shapes of poetry that sculpted it, perhaps answering LaPorte's question of why these poets are seen religiously and why it is to be found in verse specifically. Poetry, then, is history and experience shaped: 'the superior character of truth and seriousness, in the matter and substance of the best poetry, is inseparable from the superiority of diction and movement marking its style and manner'.[67]

To feel for that potential, I turn to Arnold's answer to his own question, 'how does one get to feel much about any matter whatever?':

> By dwelling upon it, by staying our thoughts up it, by having it perpetually in our mind. The very words *mind*, *memory*, *remain*, come, probably, all from the same root, from the notion of staying, attending. Possibly even the word *man* comes from the same; so entirely does the idea of humanity, of intelligence, of looking before and after, of raising oneself out of the flux of things, rest upon the idea of steadying oneself, concentrating oneself, making order in the chaos of one's impressions, by attending to one impression rather than the other.[68]

Arnold's affective principle of experiential culture can be felt by conducting this kind of meditation on his poem, 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse' (1855),[69] a lyric that charts such a process of 'raising oneself out of the flux of things' ('The bridge is cross'd, and slow we ride, | Through forest, up the mountain-side', ll. 5–6) to observe a community of Carthusian monks who 'steady [themselves], concentrate [themselves]' on the image of the tormented Christ ('the suffering Son of Man | Upon the wall—the knee-worn floor', ll. 45–46). Arnold visited the mountain monastery during his honeymoon in September 1851, but the opportunity resonated with his reading of the French writer, Maurice de Guérin, whose work Arnold 'fell in with' in the early 1840s. In Arnold's handling, the visit reprises de Guérin's own period of

retreat in Brittany, recalled by Arnold in his essay on the writer, published in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1863: 'I am extremely fond of this little oratory, where one breathes a twofold peace,—the peace of solitude and the peace of the Lord'.[70] I turn to this lyric not, as does Tucker (albeit reluctantly),[71] as a 'touchstone' best example of Arnold's verse (to do so would be to perpetuate the problematic and ahistorical version of Arnold's legacy), but to read it through the strikingly imaginative view that Arnold suggests in his de Guérin essay: 'poetry interprets in two ways; it interprets by expressing with magical felicity the physiognomy and movement of the outward world, and it interprets by expressing, with inspired conviction, the ideas and laws of the inward world of man's moral and spiritual nature'.[72] The poem has long been read as a melancholic reflection on Victorian challenges to orthodox faith, but I want to spend time with the poem, in the Arnoldian mode suggested above, to feel for the precise co-ordinates of this reflection, thereby uncovering the material conditions of faith in this mid-Victorian moment and, by extension, the historical moment of lyrical expression it adumbrates. This responds to the New Formalist attention to the aesthetic via the Arnoldian sense that understands form as historically situated.

From its opening lines, the poem sketches its sense of place through a synaesthesia that intimates touch through sound: 'Through Alpine meadows soft-suffused | With rain, where thick the crocus blows' (ll. 1–2). Gently disrupting expectation, the poem's sibilance leads to rain first and then to breeze, both qualified by the haptic-resonant terms, 'soft' and 'thick', igniting a method in which the feel of a place is intimated by sound manipulation, such as assonance (the 'o' sounds circle throughout the first stanza) that stages the contrasting pierce of the 'a' in 'rain' (the 'diction and movement' that Arnold recognises as poetry's method). It continues to unfold in this way, with sensory flashes leading the more cognitive understanding that follows, as modelled in stanza three's process of revelation, where transient and fragile glimpses anticipate a sustained view:

> Swift rush the spectral vapours white
> Past limestone scars with ragged pines,
> Showing—then blotting from our sight!—
> Halt—through the cloud-drift something shines!
> High in the valley, wet and drear,
> The huts of Courrerie appear.
>
> (ll. 13–18)

This movement between unknowing and knowing, between the unseen and the seen, between anticipation and delivery, between instinct and empiricism, becomes the dynamic that propels the whole lyric, focused exquisitely when the speaker enters the 'Carthusians' world-famed home'

(l. 30). As the dynamic has established, the lyric feels its way into this space (cold water splashing in stone-carved basins heralds an entrance into a world of religious ritual), with sensory awakening coming before cognitive explanation. So, as the monks' cowls flutter and brush past each other ('ghostlike in the deepening night, | Cowl'd forms brush by in gleaming white', ll. 35–36), the lyric encounters what feels to the speaker like the last community of believers, the last vision he will have of a faithful group after 'rigorous teachers seized [his] youth, | And purged its faith' (ll. 67–68). This encounter is, like so much of the poem, half-seen/half-hidden and it proceeds in terms that meditate repeatedly on moments of sensory engagement and then veiled occlusion: 'Passing the Host from hand to hand; | Each takes, and then his visage wan | Is buried in his cowl once more' (ll. 42–44). It is at this moment that the speaker's eyes rest on 'the Suffering Son of Man' that forms the focus of the monks' meditation, and so recollects Isaiah 53's anticipation of the features by which the Messiah will be recognised, emblematised as the 'man of sorrows'. As one of the typological hinges that higher biblical criticism came to destabilise, this passage stands in for the larger project that put older accounts of biblical veracity into question, but what is remarkable is that Arnold's lyric picks up the residue of that belief (one could say the reality that is left over) and focuses on the bodily expression of suffering, which is crying. Following stanzas 12 to 15, in which the poem lays out its explicit context (the state of faith following empirical investigation of biblical claims), the speaker comes to know 'what am I, that I am here?' (l. 66) through the action of responsive weeping: 'Their faith, my tears, the world deride— | I come to shed them at their side' (ll. 89–90). In this way, the speaker stands on the line between Isaiah 53's man of sorrows and John 11's weeping Christ, two pivotal moments that present the divine as experiencing human, emotional pain, and materialising it in bodily, tearful terms.

The poem thus emerges as a meditation on the feeling and then expressing body (the preserve of the lyric mode) in the wake of higher critical interrogation of precisely the feeling, expressing body that seemed miraculously to constitute the ground of Christian faith (a moment in historical time). Imaged as the encounter between an individual whose faith is 'purged' and 'trimm'd' and a collective whose ritual belief is ongoing regardless of historical process, the lyric brings the historicised individual into relief with the epochal time of faith. This becomes figured in the painfully expressive trope of crying couched in the steadying, repetitive, almost narcotic effect of the regular iambic rhythm, the stanzaic rhyme scheme (a-b-a-b-c-c) that gently alternates and then reverberates in each grouping[73] and the constant use of onomatopoeia, assonance and alliteration. The speaker's pain draws him to the monks, not so much as figures of faith, but as figures of ritual order—the timekeeping, prayers, rituals, spatial arrangements and clothing found at the monastery

each become hooks for the speaker's meditation—allowing then that this is religion as aesthetic arrangement, and the speaker's tears are an emotional recognition of the performance of faith. But it goes further than this, because the tears also vitally indicate suffering. For all the poem's sense of containment and regularity at the level of form, it is also riven by images of excess, residue, uncontained hurt: 'take away, | At least, the restlessness, the pain' (ll. 103–4). The crying registers an excess of response that can't be absorbed by rational explanation, but continues to have a material effect on the world through the speaker's sense of isolation and the implied disordering of historical progression indicated by the poem's loss of faith in the teleological unfolding of rational explanation, as a generation is returned to childhood: 'We are like children rear'd in shade | Beneath some old-world abbey wall' (ll. 169–70). As such, Arnold makes a poem of his reading of Strauss.

Under the rubric of bodily expressed distress, the lyric points to the 'golden thread' of vicarious suffering that Hermann Schultz, in his commentary on Isaiah 53, understands to give unity to the 'Godward' and 'manward'[74] sides of history and from there to inculcate community through recognition of 'the close relation existing between man and man'.[75] But without faith in the miracle of Christ's divine body and the cohesiveness of typological readings of the bible, what is half-revealed as comfort is rather the *poetic* continuity between older and newer forms of understanding. The speaker turns to the monks for their undertaking of collective, rhythmic ritual, a mode that resonates with Arnold's sense of poetry's capacity to express 'the physiognomy and movement of the outward world',[76] and asks that the pain of his individually felt (lyrical) historical moment ('the inward world of man's moral and spiritual nature'[77]) be brought into community with the ongoing tick of faithful time:

> Oh, hide me in your gloom profound,
> Ye solemn seats of holy pain!
> Take me, cowl'd forms, and fence me round,
> Till I possess my soul again;
> Till free my thoughts before me roll,
> Not chafed by hourly false control!
> (ll. 91–96)

Poetry thus remains as a structural principle, presenting the world differently—it arranges things in patterns that become available for recognition, it alters the passing of clock- or commercial-time, becoming an intervention in the material conditions of history—and the poetic staging of suffering may inculcate communal feeling, an ethical response to the pain of others. The implied dialectic between the isolated individual and a community of meditative believers—a rocking back and forth between communal faith and

individual doubt—releases the lyric to reflect on the emotional experience of gaining knowledge and changing faith in a particular historical moment. The higher criticism becomes one of the material conditions that do, in fact, shape either aesthetic or faithful expression.

I end by suggesting that the emotional hermeneutic thus accessed has its own residual effect, helping us to read the work of postmodern visual artists such as Sam Taylor-Wood and Bill Viola in more recent decades.[78] Both artists also centre on the image of weeping men as a focus for meditation and a prompt to emotion in the historical present, demonstrating a fascination with the emotional power of crying as spectacle and, even in a secular context, a residual figuration of faith through the remembered image of the 'man of sorrows'. Indeed, Viola's 2001 video work, depicting a man crying for 11 minutes, bore that name and, as several critics have recognised, continues an ongoing preoccupation in Viola's work with 'spiritual beliefs'[79] as they are conditioned by, and conditions of, time. Perhaps most resonance though is with Viola's 1976 work, *He Weeps for You*, an installation in which viewers are confronted with their own image, seen in a water drop that grows and grows until the water's weight causes it to quiver, and then fall, only to reappear in another drop, and so on. Otto Neumaier's reading of this piece, seen through Viola's own insistence that it is a reflexive engagement of all elements involved in expression, emphasises its prompt that 'we should experience ourselves as elements of a greater unity'.[80] Viola's work proves a sensitive articulation of the mediations involved in the seemingly natural expression of crying, labelled very clearly by the technological innovation engaged here (the water dropping machine, the video tape, the screen, the installation room and so forth). Seen through this filter we can look back at Arnold's apparently 'naturally' expressed lyric and see it too as a tool of mediation, see poetry as a filter (an 'interpretress') through which the world is presented to the individual and the individual presented to the world; a screen on which is projected the historical circumstances of expression and, in this case, of faith. The lyrical license given to the speaker to cry, to be bodily expressive, thus becomes the point at which Arnold's body does enter the cognitive field,[81] as God was believed to have entered the human sphere, and tears irrigate a dry-eyed tradition,[82] allowing the lyric to reveal the new conditions of subjectivity in the historical moment when Christ had been presented as either *only* flesh or *only* 'ideal truth', instigating the split between history and affect.

We might say, then, that Arnold's poem, as he had recognised in Chaucer's, 'founds a tradition' and 'makes an epoch',[83] where the epoch is one in which Christ—and by extension the male expressive body—sits uneasily between being a figure of divine or of aesthetic power. The speaker's tears don't usher in silence and an end to resonance, but rather anticipate a changed aesthetic

landscape that now contains 'the sunken history of religious experience'.[84] The lyric mode becomes a bridge to the future, a locus for marking historical shifts at the level of the individual body, which means the collective body, including how Christ's body is regarded. This simultaneously dissolves the liberal notion of the body as a coherent and self-defined entity under the auspices of the rational mind and puts it into dialogue with history, with faith, with community and with the future. To read Arnold for the theological in his thinking, rather than the secular, transpires to reveal the material conditions of expression: a trajectory that fits with Žižek's determination to reclaim the Christian legacy as the Left's revelation of the 'mysterious region of non-existent entities which none the less *persist*, continue to exert their efficacy'.[85] Finally, what emerges as hermeneutic is something like Armstrong's 'radical aesthetic': reading Arnold thus might constitute a secular re-visioning of Christ's distinctive humanity, and it might also be a way of feeling for the touch of history on form.

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2 Arnold opened the essay by quoting his own words from the introduction to the 'Poetry' section of Wallace Wood's *The Hundred Greatest Men: Portraits of the One Hundred Greatest Men of History* (1879).

3 Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. III, p. 379.

4 H.F. Tucker, 'Arnold and the Authorization of Criticism', in S. Anger (ed.) *Knowing the Past: Victorian Literature and Culture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2001), p. 114. See also S. Collini, *Matthew Arnold: A Critical Portrait* (Oxford: OUP, 1994).

5 Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. IX, pp. 161–2.

6 On this Arnold, see the first four issues of the Oxford English Limited's journal, *News from Nowhere*, and particularly the special issue, *Matthew Arnold and the Fate of Critical Humanism,* 1888–1988 5 (1988). See also S. Collini, 'Afterword to the Clarendon Paperback Edition', in Collini, *Matthew Arnold*, pp. 125–38.

7 M. Dickstein, 'Arnold Then and Now: The Use and Misuse of Criticism', *Critical Inquiry* 9 (1983) 487.

8 Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. IX, p. 161.

9 D. Jasper, 'Biblical Hermeneutics and Literary Theory', in Rebecca Lemon et al. (eds) *The Blackwell Companion to the Bible in English Literature* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), p. 22.

10 Dickstein, 'Arnold Then and Now', p. 487.

11 T. Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), pp. 20–23.

12 S. Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London and New York: Verso, 2000), p. 2.

13 I. Armstrong, *The Radical Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 2.

14 R. Williams, 'Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory', *New Left Review* 82 (November–December 1973) 3–16.

15 Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute*, p. 3.

16 D. Jasper et al., 'Editorial', *Journal of Literature and Theology* 1 (1987) iii.

[17] The affinity between Rabbinic and postmodern theoretical reading practices is seen in their absorption in the 'mesh and interweave' of text, which releases open-ended plurality. S.A. Handelman, *The Slayers of Moses: The Emergence of Rabbinic Interpretation in Modern Literary Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982), p. 50; see also D. Jasper, *Rhetoric, Power and Community: An Exercise in Reserve* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993); D. Jasper (ed.), *Postmodernism, Literature and the Future of Theology* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993).

[18] Jasper, 'Biblical Hermeneutics', p. 29.

[19] D. Jasper, 'The Study of Literature and Theology: Five Years On', *Journal of Literature and Theology* 6 (1992) 5, paraphrasing Handelman's position.

[20] E.S. Shaffer, *'Kubla Khan' and* The Fall of Jerusalem*: The Mythological School in Biblical Criticism and Secular Literature,* 1770–1880 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 2.

[21] Suzy Anger, *Victorian Interpretation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005), p. 19.

[22] *Ibid*., p. 4.

[23] Charles LaPorte, *Victorian Poets and the Changing Bible* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2011).

[24] *Ibid*., p. 10.

[25] Anger, *Victorian Interpretation*, p. 17.

[26] LaPorte, *Victorian Poets*, p. 13.

[27] He uncovers the notably different content of the two anthologies that Arnold nevertheless used the same words to introduce (Wood's *The Hundred Greatest Men* and Ward's *English Poets*); the former lists under 'Poetry' authors known mostly for prose, whereas Ward's includes verse alone. LaPorte concludes that Arnold's second use of his words in Ward's volume 'might be read as a retraction of Wood's more flexible conception of poetry', *Victorian Poets*, n. 37, p. 241.

[28] D. Strauss, in P.C. Hodgson (ed.) *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (London: SCM Press, 1973), p. 776.

[29] Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. VI, p. 188.

[30] LaPorte, *Victorian Poets*, p. 13.

[31] Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. III, p. 30.

[32] Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. VI, p. 171, italics in the original.

[33] I. Armstrong, *Radical Aesthetic*, p. 59.

[34] M. Levinson, 'What is New Formalism?', *PMLA* 122 (2007) 559. I share Levinson's regret that the latter term is used as a 'catch all' for a range of, in fact, distinct engagements with history, politics, context and material production.

[35] *Ibid*., p. 561.

[36] Shaffer, *'Kubla Khan'*, p. 2.

[37] *Ibid*., p. 6.

[38] The complex distress—which must nevertheless be pursued—in this conjunction was beautifully expressed by Theodor Adorno when he spoke of how 'the tenderest, most fragile forms must be touched by, even brought together with precisely that social bustle from which the ideals of our traditional conception of poetry have sought to protect them'. (T. Adorno, 'Lyric, Poetry and Society', trans. Bruce Mayo, *Telos* 20 (1974) 56).

[39] Strauss, *Life of Jesus*, p. 39.

[40] *Ibid*.

[41] *Ibid*., p. lii.

[42] *Ibid*.

[43] *Ibid*., p. 546.

[44] *Ibid*., p. lii.

[45] *Ibid*., p. 546.

[46] *Ibid*., p. 107.

[47] Jasper notes briefly that for Strauss the 'division here is absolute', 'Biblical Hermeneutics', p. 26.

[48] *Ibid*., p. 757.

[49] See M. Arnold, 'A Comment on Christmas', *Contemporary Review* 47 (1885) 457. See also Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. VII, p. 164.

[50] Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. VI, p. 158.

[51] *Ibid*., italics in the original.

[52] *Ibid*., p. 165.

[53] Dickstein, 'Arnold', p. 483; Tucker, 'Arnold', p. 116. These preferences have arguably made his legacy problematically

undemocratic, even if this was not his intention.

54 Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. VI, pp. 168–9.

55 M. Arnold, 'Preface' to *God and the Bible: A Sequel to 'Literature and Dogma'*, Popular Edition (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1897), pp. xxvii–xxviii.

56 Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. VI, p. 171.

57 *Ibid*.

58 *Ibid*., Vol. VI, p. 152.

59 See M. Arnold, 'Spinoza and the Bible', Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. III, pp. 158–82. Arnold wrote to Huxley to say that the latter had 'put the saddle on the right horse, and made me indebted to Spinoza and not to the Germans' (Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. VII, p. 440n.) indicating that Spinoza had effectively saved him from drowning when reading German biblical criticism.

60 Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. VI, p. 152.

61 *Ibid*., Vol. III, pp. 12–13.

62 *Ibid*., Vol. VI, p. 196, italics in the original.

63 *Ibid*., Vol. III, p. 30.

64 *Ibid*., Vol. VI, p. 200.

65 *Ibid*. Vol. IX, p. 174.

66 *Ibid*., 174–5.

67 *Ibid*., 171.

68 *Ibid*., Vol. VI, p. 179, italics in the original.

69 M. Allott and R. H. Super (eds) *The Oxford Authors: Matthew Arnold* (Oxford: OUP, 1986), pp. 159–65.

70 Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. III, p. 18.

71 Tucker, 'Arnold', p. 109.

72 Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. III, p. 33.

73 Arnold's sense of poetry as a mode that requires we dwell and stay in it remembers the etymology of stanza as *stopping place*, encouraged in the regular arrangement of this poem rather than the quasi-free verse of 'Dover Beach'.

74 H. Schultz, 'Vicarious Suffering', *Journal of Sacred Literature* 2 (October 1867) 81.

75 *Ibid*., 82.

76 Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. III, p. 33.

77 *Ibid*.

78 See Bill Viola, *He Weeps for You* (1976) and *Man of Sorrows* (2001); Sam Taylor-Wood, *Crying Men* (2004).

79 Jean Wainwright, 'Telling Times', in C. Townsend (ed.), *The Art of Bill Viola* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2001), p. 122.

80 'O. Neumaier, 'Space, Time, Video, Viola', in Townsend (ed.) *Bill Viola*, p. 67.

81 Tony Pinkney includes the body as one of the features that 'Arnoldianism' 'banishes to the cultural margins' (T. Pinkney, 'Matthew Arnold and the Northern Sea: Goths and Gender in the Poetry', *News from Nowhere* 5 (1988) 9).

82 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse' remembers Etienne de Sénancour's hero Obermann in line 146, who 'needed tears but ... could only shudder ... nothing is left to me, I have no more tears', qtd in J. Elkins, *Pictures and Tears* (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 197–98. See also E. Mason and I. Armstrong, 'Introduction: ''Feeling: An Indefinite Dull Region of the Spirit?'' ', *Textual Practice* 22 (2008) for discussion of tearful, emotional responses and their concern that historicism threatens to produce a damaged and 'lacrymogenically-challenged academia' (14). I am indebted to this essay for inspiring me to think again about Arnold's weeping.

83 Super, *Complete Prose*, Vol. IX, p. 174.

84 J. Elkins, *Pictures and Tears*, p. 195.

85 *The Fragile Absolute*, p. 3.