

CHAPTER THREE

CRITICISM AND LITERATURE: MATTHEW ARNOLD 1853-1888

In Chapter II I examined some of the items in Arnold's 1847 'German Note-book' and showed how Goethe's diagnosis of the failings of young poets seemed to Arnold especially relevant to his own case. But Arnold presumably did not laud Goethe as 'the greatest critic of all times' on the strength of the handful of maxims, the group of literary reflections from *Wilhelm Meister*, and the two or three short essays which comprise Goethe's contribution to the contents of the note-book. It would be a mistake to view Arnold's translations in the note-book as indications of the limits of his acquaintance with Goethe's criticism even at that time. Goethe's critical writings as such are the essays on literature and art contained in Volumes XXXVII-XXXIX and XLIV-XLVI of the *Ausgabe Letzter Hand*, and it is a reasonable assumption that Arnold had already read in these volumes more than he translated from them for his own personal use.

In spite of the prodigious extent of these writings Goethe was not primarily a theoretician. His views on the nature and function of poetry are not set out in lengthy essays devoted to these very topics but are implied in his judgements on specific writers or works. His statements of a more theoretical or general nature tend to be brief remarks suggestively tossed out in the course of a more specific discussion but rarely pursued or followed up in detail. Yet even the 'critical writings' proper do not contain the sum total of Goethe's criticism. Goethe's views on literary matters are also expressed in his autobiographical writings, in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* particularly, in correspondence with close friends like Schiller and Zelter, and of course in his conversations with Eckermann. As I have shown, Arnold was familiar with all these by 1853, so that it is true to say that Arnold had steeped himself in Goethe's criticism at a time when his own views on poetry were taking definite shape. 1853 was, of course, the year of Arnold's first important critical utterance, the 'Preface to the First Edition of *Poems*' and if only because the Preface is the fullest exposition of Arnold's views one would expect *a priori* that Goethe's influence would be there manifested most strikingly.

Indeed, the importance of Goethe's influence on the 1853 Preface is now generally recognized. W. A. Madden, for example, finds that the spirit which

informs the Preface ‘is the spirit of Weimar classicism, with its ideal of educating and liberating humanity through art’ and Allott writes that ‘Goethe and Aristotle are the most important critical influences on the Preface’.¹ But to consider the Preface in complete isolation would be unduly limiting: to clarify and illuminate the ideas which Arnold expresses there it is useful to refer not only to his letters to Clough (which contain some material, in a more outspoken form, that ultimately found its way into the Preface) but also to the lectures ‘On the Modern Element in Literature’ (1857) and *On Translating Homer* (1861) in which ideas found only in germ in the Preface are developed, expanded, and modified. So, taking the Preface as the basic framework for discussion, it now remains to consider Arnold’s poetic theory and to examine it in detail for Goethe’s influence.

It will be remembered that Arnold begins his Preface with the announcement of the withdrawal of ‘Empedocles on Etna’ from his 1853 collection. He then gives his reasons (which I have already examined, above pp. 55-57) and is at some pains to assure us that his decision to exclude the poem was not taken out of deference to the opinions of those who disliked any but modern subjects. Arnold specifically objected to a comment made by a critic of the *Spectator* (2 April 1853) who had written in a review of Edwin Arnold’s poems:

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 both of interest and novelty.²

Arnold quotes this passage and italicizes ‘therefore’ to point out the flawed logic of equating ‘modern’ with ‘interesting’. His point is valid for he is not attempting to assert the directly contrary proposition, namely, that only classical subjects are suitable, but simply that the ‘date of an action . . . signifies nothing’. He bases his contention on the claim that ‘the eternal objects of poetry’ are those ‘human actions’ which possess ‘an inherent interest in themselves’. The poet’s task, he argues, is to communicate these actions in an interesting manner. Arnold is plainly indebted to Goethe who likewise stresses the vital importance of selecting an excellent action. Arnold wrote:

Vainly will [the poet] imagine that he has everything in his own power; that he can make an intrinsically inferior action equally delightful with a more excellent one by his treatment of it. He may indeed compel us to admire his skill, but his work will possess, within itself, an incurable defect . . . A great human action of a thousand years ago is more interesting . . . than a smaller human action of to-day, even though upon the representation of this last the most consummate skill may have been expended . . .³

And a little later he proclaims again ‘“All depends upon the subject; choose a fitting action”’. Allott in his notes to this passage correctly draws attention to the parallel passage in Goethe that Arnold is echoing.⁴ In Book VII of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* Goethe wrote:

For the inner content of the subject treated is the First and Last of art. Of course, it will not be denied that genius, the fully developed artistic talent, can by its treatment of a subject make everything out of anything and subjugate the most intractable material. But then the result, seen properly, is a mere artistic trick rather than a work of art which should be based on a worthy subject, so that finally the treatment will . . . reveal to us all the more fully the worth of the subject.⁵

It is not, however, only Goethe's precept but its context that is relevant. The same section of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* contains a survey of many earlier works of German literature and in their discussion the inherent value of the subject matter is a constantly recurring theme. For example, Goethe speaks of a poem which J. G. Günther (1695-1723) began but failed to complete. Goethe explains this failure with the words 'Of course, the subject had an inner defect'.⁶

Arnold could not have failed to absorb Goethe's message on the importance of the choice of subject for it is emphasized continually by the German poet. There are, for example, two passages in Goethe's conversations with Eckermann which would serve equally well as sources for Arnold's argument.

'Yes', said Goethe, 'what is more important than the subjects and what is the whole theory of art without them. All talent is expended in vain if the subject is worthless . . .'.⁷

Eckermann also records a conversation in which Goethe had praised the French writer P. Dumont (1759-1829) for his choice of subjects:

Among the subjects which he has treated there is not a single one that is not inherently interesting and significant; and the choice of subject always shows what sort of man one is and whose spiritual heir.⁸

Unlike Goethe, however, Arnold explains what he means by 'excellent actions'; but in his Wordsworthian definition of them as those 'which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections: to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race . . .' he says nothing from which Goethe would have wished to dissent.

Arnold and Goethe were also in agreement on another point, namely in their approval of the practice of the Greeks in confining the dramatic poet to a small range of excellent actions 'eminently adapted for tragedy'.⁹ The merit of the 'terrible old mythic' stories on which these dramas were founded was that 'their significance appeared inexhaustible'. Goethe comments in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* that 'Greek mythology in general offers an inexhaustible wealth of symbols, human and divine'.¹⁰ Both poets saw too, that the merits of these subjects were still valid. Goethe wrote about the choice of subject in Spontini's opera 'The Women of Athens' that

. . . the advantages of such subjects [from the time of the Greek heroes] are very great for they offer significant circumstances, a great and noble culture which is yet still close to nature and an immense mythology for poetic development.¹¹

Goethe specifically recommended the use of frequently treated classical subjects for young writers of the modern period because this approach would be less taxing to their powers of invention.¹² Arnold, however, saw their merit simply in the fact that they offered great actions, nobler personages, and more intense situations than contemporary subjects.¹³

Arnold began by asserting that the date of an action was insignificant. Apparently therefore modern and ancient subjects were in principle equally appropriate. But by the end of the Preface he has subtly shifted his position. He now clearly favours ancient subjects because he finds the present time an age of 'spiritual discomfort' lacking 'moral grandeur'. Such an age, Arnold argues, cannot readily supply the poet with the kind of subject he requires. Sensing in advance the storm of protest which his disparagement of the present was likely to arouse, Arnold calmly points towards Goethe and Niebuhr and asks his readers to remember 'the judgments . . . [of] the men of strongest head and widest culture whom [the age] has produced'.¹⁴ The implication of Arnold's words—that Goethe's opinions in this matter coincided with his own—is fair, and it is interesting to observe that Arnold seems to think instinctively of Goethe in the role of 'physician of the iron age'.¹⁵ In fact, Goethe really conforms to this role only in the last decade of his life—the period of his conversations with Eckermann and of the majority of his letters to Zelter. Certainly if one turns to these late works one has no difficulty in finding many examples of dire foreboding and gloomy prophecy. Both Allott (*Poems*, p. 605) and Super (CPW I, 223) note an obvious example in Eckermann where Goethe identifies the modern tendency towards subjectivity (which he calls the 'universal sickness of the age') as a symptom of an age in cultural decline.¹⁶

There are equally impressive diagnoses of a similar sort elsewhere. The theme of mediocrity and cultural decline is sounded also in Goethe's letter to Zelter of 6 June 1825, which, as I have shown, Arnold knew.¹⁷ Goethe's letter, which is an impressive and rather moving document, is worth quoting at length. Written at a time when England was on the verge of massive industrialization, it casts a prophetic glance into the later years of the nineteenth century:

Young people become excited far too early and are then swept away in the Time Stream. Wealth and speed are what the world admires and what it strives for. Railways, quick postal services, steam-ships and all possible communication facilities are what the civilised world is after, to become over-civilised and thereby to persist in mediocrity . . . a middle culture becomes universal . . . This century is really made for the capable minds, for practical quick-thinking men, who, although they possess no talent for the highest things, are yet equipped with a certain ability and feel their superiority over the crowd. Let us cling to the sentiments in which we grew up; with a few others perhaps we will be the last representatives of an epoch the like of which the world will not quickly see again.¹⁸

In conversation with Eckermann, Goethe complained of the enervation of the present, the lack of manliness (*das Männliche*) and of a certain penetrating force

(eine gewisse zudringliche Kraft); he finds a weaker race (ein schwächeres Geschlecht) and an absence of great personalities in art.¹⁹ When Arnold sighed wearily to his 'dearest Clough' that '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, cities, light profligate friends . . . our own selves, and the sickening consciousness of our own difficulties', he was doubtless seeing himself in the guise of a gifted Roman fallen on the uninvigorating days of the declining Empire—but part, at least of the 'sickening consciousness' was due to his reading of Goethe.²⁰

More is at issue here than a simple question of borrowed ideas or attitudes. Few writers can have been more acutely aware than Arnold of the relationship between a poet's social and cultural milieu and his capacity to produce poetry. Arnold's interest in this topic ultimately bore fruit in one of his finest essays 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' (1864), but the seeds of these later speculations were planted much earlier. That this interest was closely linked with Arnold's uneasy doubts about the strength and resilience of his own poetic powers is evident from the figure of Empedocles. One of the main concerns of the poem is to account for the drying up of the hero's powers of imagination. Was the cause of this drying-up, the poem asks, 'some root of suffering within himself' or was it because he lived in an age lacking in moral grandeur—('Great qualities are trodden down, / And littleness united / Is become invincible')—an age with which he is out of sympathy?²¹ In some measure both causes appear to be responsible.

Similar questions applied to himself are a constantly repeated theme throughout Arnold's most intimate letters to Clough and to his sister 'K'. 'Woe was upon me', he wrote to Clough in December 1852, 'if I analysed not my situation'. When Arnold is speaking of the contemporary situation, however, his comments hardly warrant the description 'analysis'. He has words in plenty to describe the times—'*blankness* and *barrenness*, and *unpoetrylessness*', 'Not unprofound, not ungrand, not unmoving:—but *unpoetical*' '*Arid*—that is what the times are'—but as yet he is unable to suggest any of the deeper causes of this state of affairs.²² On the other hand, when he is speaking of other periods of literature, his ideas are rather better developed and consequently more interesting. For example, when he asks himself what conditions in Elizabethan England made the time such a productive period for poetry, his answer looks forward to the argument of his essay on 'The Function of Criticism'. (Briefly, Arnold maintains in this essay that a necessary precondition for a flowering of poetic literature is a cultural atmosphere which provides the poet with an ordered system of ideas as the basis of his art.) One condition of the 'best poetical epochs' is quite simply that the writing of poetry should be 'the bent of the time', but there are other requirements too.²³ Clough appears to have held that the Reformation was the cause of Elizabethan literature, but Arnold was more inclined to see the Reformation and the new literature as effects of a common cause. In a letter to Clough of September 1853, he put forward the view that the

general upheaval in Europe which followed the collapse of the Roman Empire resulted in 'a vigorous crop of new ideas'.²⁴ The fertilizing effect of these ideas in due time produced the Reformation and England's Elizabethan literature.

In any attempt to account for Arnold's concern with these matters of cultural history the primary importance of his tendency to self-analysis, with its origins in his deficient confidence in his own powers, must of course be stressed. But other influences were also at work. Matthew's education by Dr Arnold, for example, must certainly have sharpened his historical consciousness. The editor of Thucydides had taught his pupils that history was mere antiquarianism if one did not learn to apply the lesson of past ages to the immediate present. Another influence could well have been Goethe, for in reading his criticism Arnold would have encountered numerous instances of the German poet's speculations about the effect on writers of their environment. Two such instances, both from Eckermann, must have impressed Arnold greatly. On 2 January 1824 the subject of discussion was Shakespeare.²⁵ Eckermann suggested that Shakespeare's greatness was more comprehensible and more accessible if viewed in the context of an age which also produced Marlowe and Ben Jonson, and that 'much of him lay in the powerful, productive atmosphere of his time' (daß vieles von ihm in der kräftigen produktiven Luft seines Jahrhunderts und seiner Zeit lag). Goethe concurred and went on to contrast the Elizabethan period with the present:

Furthermore if anyone doubts that much of Shakespeare's greatness belongs to his great, powerful age, let him just ask himself whether he thinks such an astounding phenomenon possible in the England of 1824 in these bad days of criticising, fragmenting journals.

That creative state, as undisturbed and innocent as walking in sleep, through which alone anything great can flourish, is no longer possible . . . The critical journals appearing daily in fifty different places and the nonsensical clap-trap they produce among the public will allow nothing healthy to grow. Whoever fails to detach himself forcibly, is lost . . . for a productive talent it is an invidious mist, a falling poison which destroys the tree of his creative life, from the green crown of the leaves into the deepest pith and most hidden fibre.

And then how tame and feeble life itself has become in the last few miserable centuries! Where will you find unhidden an original nature today! . . . This reacts on the poet, however, who has to find everything within himself while he is left stranded by everything outside.²⁶

Sentiments like these are echoed continually in Arnold's complaints about the blankness and dullness of contemporary life.

The second example concerns the French poet Béranger and the writers of the Paris journal, the *Globe*. Eckermann was surprised to learn that the writers for this magazine, whose judgements seemed to him so mature, were in fact still young men in their twenties. Goethe explained this by pointing out that Paris was a centre of national life without parallel in Germany. In Paris these young men were able to profit daily by contact with a historical past rich in associations of greatness. In the

Paris of the early nineteenth century an abundance of intellect (*Geist*) had been current (in *Kurs gesetzt*) for three generations through men like Molière, Voltaire, and Diderot. A talented writer could develop quickly there in a way which was unthinkable in any other environment. Goethe illustrates his argument by citing Béranger as a case in point. The son of a poor tailor became first a printer's apprentice and then a clerk in some office; he never attended a university. Yet he was still able to produce songs of such mature culture, such delicacy, so full of the finest irony and intellect, such perfect artistry and masterly control of language, that they were the admiration of the whole of Europe. Had Béranger been the son of a tailor in Weimar, such an achievement would have been impossible. Goethe sums up as follows:

So, my good friend, I repeat: if a talent is to develop quickly and happily it all depends on there being current in the nation much intellect and solid culture.²⁷

These lines contain embryonically one of the central insights of the essay 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time':

. . . the exercise of the creative power in the production of great works of literature or art . . . is not at all epochs and under all conditions possible . . . This creative power works with elements, with materials . . . the elements with which the creative power works are ideas; the best ideas . . . current at the time . . . And I say *current* at the time, not merely accessible . . .²⁸

On the basis of this premise Arnold builds much of his argument concerning the importance of 'criticism' and its function in making ideas current.

Another piece of evidence concerning Goethe's part in Arnold's interest in these subjects is revealed in an early letter to Clough in which Arnold considers the question of 'style'. He argues that the tendency to imitate the poetic expression of the founders of a national literature is a sign of decadence. He illustrates this with a comment on German literature:

The strength of German literature consists in this—that having no national models from whence to get an idea of *style* as half the work, they were thrown upon themselves, and driven to make the fulness of the content of a work atone for deficiencies of form.²⁹

Arnold's remarks seem to involve a recollection of, and to some extent a considered disagreement with, certain of Goethe's statements on the same topic. Goethe discussed the difficulties under which the German writers of his generation had worked on several occasions. In Book Seven of *Dichtung und Wahrheit* he wrote about the confusion which afflicted gifted young writers concerning what they were to aim for; theoretical criticism was unhelpful, foreign models were too far removed from their particular circumstances to be of use, and the merits of native models were too distinctively individual to be imitated. 'For anyone who felt something productive in himself', wrote Goethe, 'it was a hopeless state of affairs'.

Later in the chapter Goethe relates this condition more immediately to himself; his personal means were limited, his friends indifferent, his teachers reserved, men of culture lived in isolation. In such circumstances 'I was forced to search for everything within myself. If I wanted a true basis in feeling or reflection for my poems I had to go deep into my own breast'.³⁰ In the essay 'Literarischer Sansculottismus' (1795) Goethe asked, 'When and where does a national classic arise?' and answers that many circumstances must combine favourably for it to be possible. The basic necessity, however, is the existence of a national culture to which a writer can subordinate himself; this culture helps the writer, who might otherwise have to pay a high personal price for his self-development, to develop his talents easily and naturally. One element in this complex of requirements is the presence of works, whether perfect or imperfect, by those who have gone before, for an appropriate style (*dem Gegenstande angemessenen Styl*) can only be learnt from one's literary predecessors.³¹

Goethe may not have been the original influence behind Arnold's questionings about the poet's relationship to his age, but his role was nevertheless important. It is hardly necessary to prove that Goethe's comments on subjects so closely related to one of Arnold's deepest concerns must have had a special interest for Arnold. Even if he did reach his conclusions independently of the German poet, the similarity of their views must inevitably have constituted one of the sources of Goethe's attractiveness for him. It is more likely, however, that the similarities are not coincidental, and, if this is so, then it is no exaggeration to say that Arnold received from Goethe's critical writings a number of fundamental insights which he eventually developed more fully and in ways not directly suggested by his source.

In pursuing this line of enquiry we have moved a considerable distance from the 1853 Preface. It is now necessary to pick up the thread again. Arnold's defence of ancient subjects is closely related to the problem of the artist's relationship to his public. S. B. M. Coulling, in his excellent article 'Matthew Arnold's 1853 Preface: Its Origin and Aftermath' sensibly views the Preface as 'a defence of his use of classical subjects and of his refusal to regard poetry as a medium for addressing the age . . .' To many of Arnold's contemporaries the choice of ancient subjects seemed tantamount to an abdication of responsibility or concern for the needs and problems of contemporary life. The charge of irrelevance was persistently levelled against his work. Even Clough repeats the familiar complaint. As Coulling points out, the significance of Clough's article on 'Recent English Poetry' in the *North American Review*, 77 (1853), is 'that it reflected a general view of the age regarding the nature and function of poetry'. Arnold could not accept this view: not only was the poet supposed to choose 'subjects from contemporary life' which had 'a direct relevance to the people and their time', but he was also expected to accept the responsibility of being a 'moral guide and spiritual comforter' as well.³² Similar

assumptions about the poet's duty underlie hostile reviews of Arnold's poetry by Kingsley in *Fraser's Magazine*, 39 (1849), Coventry Patmore in 'Glimpses of Poetry', *North British Review*, 19 (1853) and J. D. Coleridge's 'unaccountably vicious' piece of work in the *Christian Remembrancer*, 27 (1854).

If sensibly and moderately expressed, the utilitarian demand for 'relevance' in poetry (provided that the word is understood in a sufficiently wide sense) cannot easily be ignored. Arnold knew this well enough. It is ironical that the reason which he gives for withdrawing 'Empedocles on Etna' is that the figure of Empedocles is so relevant to the modern age of spiritual discomfort that the play could not hope to 'inspirit' or 'rejoice', the reader. It is in his assessment of the age that Arnold differs from his critics, who were more enchanted than he by the 'great' aims of industrial progress and social amelioration. But in conceding the reader the right to be inspirited and rejoiced Arnold was in partial agreement with his critics. Coulling, therefore, appears to have missed one of the main points of Arnold's stand against the reviewers. Arnold was not saying that the artist may be permitted indifference to his age, but that, in assessing and interpreting both its needs and his own, the artist must have autonomy. In other words it is the artist who assesses and interprets the needs of his age, not the clamorous voices of the literary journals. These the artist can and must ignore: 'The present age', Arnold concedes, 'makes great claims upon us: we owe it service, it will not be satisfied without our admiration', but he also insists that the 'confusion of the present time is great, the multitude of voices counselling different things bewildering'. The poet, no less than his age, needs a 'guide' but 'the English writer at the present day' will nowhere find one.³³

In insisting upon the author's personal freedom Arnold was possibly influenced by Goethe. A maxim of Goethe which Arnold translated and copied into his 1847 note-book expresses one of the unspoken but underlying convictions of the Preface:

The highest care an author can have for his Public is that he never should bring them what they expect, but what he himself at any given stage of his own growth and that of others, holds to be right and useful.³⁴

Here lies the difference between an artist of Arnold's integrity and a nonentity like Alexander Smith whose verses Clough for a brief period preferred to his friend's and at whom Arnold jibes in the Preface.³⁵ As Trilling says, Smith and the other so-called 'Spasmodic' poets make 'a fine show of rushing out to meet the problems of life, but their endowment was limited enough to keep them safe and platitudinous'. 'Smith is being courageous in a trivial world of his own contriving' whereas 'Arnold is groping in the dark of modern Europe'.³⁶ This turns Smith into precisely the kind of dilettante of whom Goethe spoke so contemptuously:

—Art gives laws to itself & commands the world.
—Dilettantism follows the inclination of the Time.³⁷

By following the inclination of the time, by giving the public what it wants and telling it what it wants to hear, the dilettante is sure to gather applause at the expense of the true artist, but it is the independent artist who does the world genuine service; and in the long run it is his name that survives. This was the gist of Goethe's message, and for Arnold it must have been a call to stand firm in spite of misunderstanding.

Arnold gives one example of the danger threatening any artist who pays too much heed to the demands of his age. A critic in the *North British Review* had made the following assertion: 'A true allegory of the state of one's own mind in a representative history, whether narrative or dramatic in form, is perhaps the highest thing that one can attempt in the way of fictitious art'.³⁸ Masson had supported his contention by pointing to Goethe's *Faust* as an example of the kind of work he meant. Arnold quotes this passage, in a rather garbled form, and proceeds to attack it:

An allegory of the state of one's own mind, the highest problem of an art which imitates action! No assuredly, it is not, it never can be so: no great poetical work has ever been produced with such an aim. *Faust* itself, in which something of the kind is attempted, wonderful passages as it contains, and in spite of the unsurpassed beauty of the scenes which relate to Margaret, *Faust* itself, judged as a whole, and judged strictly as a poetical work, is defective: its illustrious author . . . would have been the first to acknowledge it; he only defended his work, indeed, by asserting it to be 'something incommensurable'.³⁹

Perhaps the two most striking features of Arnold's attack are the slightly blustering indignation of its tone and the ineptitude of his reference to *Faust*. Arnold is, of course, correct in judging *Faust* to be an allegory of the author's mind (although the representative nature of the author's mind means that the play is simultaneously more than this), but he misses what could have been his most telling point, namely that the work is essentially a lyric poem in dramatic form and not a drama in the traditional sense. Goethe did in fact admit that the play's two main figures, Faust and Mephistophles, were the objective representatives of two aspects of his own nature, the gloomy, insatiable restlessness (Faust) and scornful, bitter irony (Mephistopheles).⁴⁰ But Goethe nowhere implies that this automatically relegates the work to an inferior artistic standing. Arnold is unable to establish any link between *Faust*'s allegorical character and its supposed defectiveness. The flaw in the argument is masked, however, for he switches to a totally unrelated 'defect': the play is undoubtedly beautiful in parts, says Arnold, but not equally and uniformly beautiful if judged as a whole.

The *non sequitur* in the argument is only compounded when Arnold attempts to claim Goethe's authority for condemning *Faust*. To say that Goethe only defended his work by asserting it to be 'something incommensurable' is quite misleading. Goethe does indeed say this about *Faust*—on two separate occasions:

But *Faust* is really something quite incommensurable and all attempts to make it

accord with reason are in vain. Also one has to remember that the first part proceeded from a rather dark condition in the individual. But the very darkness attracts people and they tire themselves out on it, as on all insoluble problems.

The second occasion is similar:

What is important with all such compositions is merely that the individual parts be clear and significant, while it always remains incommensurable as a whole and for this very reason, like an insoluble problem, it attracts people to repeated contemplation of it.⁴¹

Arnold would appear to have the second of these passages in mind for in this one Goethe makes Arnold's distinction between the play's parts and the play as a whole. However, Goethe's remarks offer no justification for Arnold's strictures. Goethe insists that all the parts be 'clear' and 'significant' and the inaccessibility is for him simply a testimony to the inexhaustible richness of meaning in the play. Furthermore, Arnold's charge is specifically refuted by Goethe in a letter which he wrote to Schiller (22 June 1797) at a time when he was working on the play:

Since, with respect to mood, the different parts of the poem can be treated in different ways, provided that they are subordinated to the spirit and tone of the whole . . . I am able to work at it in spare moments and am able to do something even at the present.⁴²

This letter shows that Goethe was fully conscious of the need to keep the various parts of *Faust* subordinate to a total unity of spirit and tone. Arnold was quite entitled to hold the opinion that Goethe had failed to do this, but it is a personal opinion, which has, from Goethe at least, no authority.

Arnold's reaction to the 'precious piece of cant' which he quoted from the *North British Review* was peculiarly sharp.⁴³ To account for this it is helpful to ask why he used Goethe, admittedly in a most inappropriate fashion, to attack it. Allott suggests that Arnold was irritated 'by the critic's assumption that he is expressing a Goethean view of poetry'.⁴⁴ Masson had claimed that,

. . . what is poetical in literature consists of the embodiment of some notion or feelings . . . in appropriate objective circumstances . . . Indeed, Goethe's theory of poetical or creative literature was, that it is nothing else than the moods of its practitioners objectivized as they rise. A man feels himself oppressed and agitated by feelings and longings . . .; if he is a literary man, then the uneasiness is but the motive to creation, and the result is—a song, a drama, an epic, or a novel. Scheming out some plan or story, which is in itself a sort of allegory of his mood as a whole, he fills up the sketch with minor incidents, scenes, and characters, which are nothing more, as it were, than the breaking up of the mood into its minutiae, and the elaboration of these minutiae, one by one, into the concrete . . . Such, at least, was Goethe's theory, which he said, would apply most rigidly to all that he had written himself.⁴⁵

To a generation familiar with T. S. Eliot's concept of the 'objective correlative' the point of view represented in this passage will seem to have much to commend it.

Nevertheless, Arnold's sharpness is understandable, for if Masson was correct in his argument then the direction of Arnold's poetic effort had been completely misguided for the last four years. Even before the second separation from Marguerite in September 1849 Arnold had expressed dissatisfaction with the personal, subjective tendency of his own poetry. As he told Clough in a letter of March 1849: 'Shairp urges me to speak more from myself: which I less and less have the inclination to do: or even the power'.⁴⁶ After the unhappy return from Switzerland dissatisfaction eventually became firm resolve; Arnold decided to renounce personal suffering as the subject matter of poetry. The classical notion of the poet as a 'maker', although clearly in opposition to the current of the time, began to have an ever stronger appeal. 'More and more', he wrote to his sister 'K', 'I feel bent against the modern English habit (too much encouraged by Wordsworth) of using poetry as a channel for thinking aloud, instead of making anything'.⁴⁷ Arnold's attempt to turn this sentiment into action can be seen plainly in his experiments with epic and dramatic form in 'Tristram and Iseult', 'Sohrab and Rustum', 'Balder Dead', 'Empedocles on Etna', and finally in *Merope*. Nor can there be much doubt that at least part of his dissatisfaction with 'Empedocles on Etna' stemmed from a feeling that the play had become, against his fixed intention and in spite of the objective mode of dramatic art, too much an allegory of his own mind. There is some humour in seeing the poem praised by one of Arnold's most intelligent and sensitive critics, W. A. Madden, in terms not unlike those used by Masson:

As a projection of his own central experience, 'Empedocles on Etna' is Arnold's greatest achievement. The various impulses at war within himself are successfully objectified in the three *dramatis personae*, each of whom has a poetic life of his own within the 'action' of the poem.⁴⁸

Arnold would not have appreciated the comment.

At the very period, therefore, when Arnold had been making great efforts to free himself from the tyrannical vagaries of his temperament he encountered in Masson's article a theory which made 'mood' the very basis of artistic creation. And as if with deliberate intention to provoke Arnold further, Masson had not only challenged the basic ideals and assumptions of Arnold's poetry but had done so in the name of Goethe on whose authority Arnold in his drive towards objectivity had chiefly relied. Superficially Masson appears to have a strong case and has won the support of at least one modern scholar. H. W. Garrod argues that the doctrine which Arnold refutes in the Preface belongs essentially to Goethe not to Masson.⁴⁹ Masson was certainly not speaking in total ignorance of Goethe's works; on the contrary, when he wrote of Goethe's theory of art as 'moods . . . objectivized as they rise', 'oppressed and agitated by feelings and longings . . . the motive to creation', a theory 'which would apply . . . to all that he had written himself', he seems to have had at least one, but probably two specific utterances of Goethe in mind. The first of these is the famous statement in *Dichtung und Wahrheit*:

And so began the tendency from which I have never been able to deviate throughout my entire life, namely to transform whatever delighted, troubled or otherwise occupied my mind into a picture or poem, and in so doing to bring the matter to a close . . . All my works are merely fragments of a great confession.⁵⁰

The second occurs in the conversations with Eckermann. Goethe had been giving Eckermann some advice. The young man, who had ambitions concerning a long poem that he intended to write, confessed that shorter pieces had begun to take second place to it. Goethe warned him of the dangers of this. 'What ever thoughts and feelings arise in the daily life of the poet must and should be spoken'. This, Goethe went on, had always been his own practice:

All my poems are occasional poems, they are prompted by real life and have their roots therein. I give nothing for poems invented out of thin air . . . Real life should provide the motifs, the salient points, the real kernel . . .⁵¹

Nevertheless a close examination of Goethe's words will show that Arnold had understood their significance better than Masson.

Goethe's admission that all his works were fragments of a great confession merely affirms their basis in autobiographical fact and hence in real experience. It cannot be interpreted as meaning that the novels *Wilhelm Meister* and *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, or the epic poem *Hermann und Dorothea* were merely the objectification of a 'mood'. The only portion of Goethe's works of which it is strictly true to say that they are 'the moods of the poet objectivized as they rise' is the body of short lyrical pieces which he called 'occasional' poems. In both the passages quoted above it is quite clear that Goethe is speaking essentially of these short 'occasional' works. Masson had unwarrantably extended the definition to apply also to 'a drama, an epic, or a novel' and it is this distortion of Goethe's views which must have rankled with Arnold.

Arnold probably had no objection to the definition of art as 'the moods of its practitioners objectivized as they rise', provided that it referred only to lyric poetry. At any rate, his indignant exclamation of denial allows this interpretation: 'An allegory of the state of one's own mind, the highest problem of an art which imitates actions! No . . .' The crucial phrase is surely 'an art which imitates actions' for it shows clearly that Arnold was thinking exclusively of narrative or dramatic art; lyric poetry certainly does not fall within its scope.⁵² As S. Coulling has pointed out, Arnold's negligence in failing to state clearly and explicitly that his insistence on the objective basis of art was not intended to apply to lyric poetry constitutes an obvious weakness in the Preface's case. Not surprisingly this omission drew down upon the Preface some valid adverse criticism. In the 'Preface to Second Edition of *Poems*' (1854) Arnold rather grudgingly conceded the defect in his argument—if it is taken to apply to all poetry—but elected to leave his text unchanged (see CPW, I, 16). Arnold's apparently unconscious oversight is, however, highly revealing for it shows how totally his poetic thinking was dominated by the

idea of dramatic and epic poetry.⁵³ It is in this light too that Arnold's fondness for the abortive drama *Merope* must be seen—as also his preference for 'Sohrab and Rustum' and 'Balder Dead' above his undoubted achievements in lyric poetry. 'The Scholar-Gipsy' he disparaged (see *Clough Letters*, p. 146) and about 'Dover Beach' he remained silent.

Masson was clearly mistaken in the interpretation which he put upon Goethe's remarks. The German poet would never have approved a theory of drama which made a play into a mere vehicle for a poet's mood. Arnold, who had studied his Eckermann diligently, knew this well. Goethe's comments on Byron's drama *Marino Faliero* are sufficient to show that he made far different demands on a dramatic poet.

. . . more strength and genius is required for the objective treatment of a subject than is commonly thought. Even Byron, in spite of his hugely prominent personality occasionally had the strength to deny himself completely as can be seen in some of his dramatic pieces and particularly in 'Marino Faliero'. When one is reading this play one completely forgets that . . . an Englishman wrote it. We live in Venice and at the very period of the action. The characters speak completely out of themselves and their situation, without any trace of the subjective feelings, thought, and opinions of the poet. That is the right way!⁵⁴

Goethe's writings on literature abound in statements expressing hostility towards subjectivity in art. During the years that preceded the writing of the Preface Arnold had immersed himself in the German poet's criticism and its effect on his poetic creed is unmistakeable. The Preface is nothing if not a repudiation of subjectivity, and as such it is also an attempt to vindicate the choice of poetic course on which Arnold had embarked. Goethe's role in this respect is so crucial that a correct understanding of his 'neo-classic' poetic theory is indispensable if one is to penetrate the underlying assumptions on which the arguments of the Preface are based.

Since Arnold flatly denies that any work of narrative or dramatic poetry ought to be an allegory of its creator's mind, one is prompted to ask what relationship exists, in Arnold's view, between a poet's mind and the work it creates. Does 'objectivity' signify the total exclusion of the poet from his productions? To answer these questions one must begin by pointing out an apparent paradox in Arnold's relationship with Goethe. In his discussion of Goethe's significance to modern European thought written some ten years after the Preface, Arnold made this statement: 'Goethe's profound, imperturbable naturalism is absolutely fatal to all routine thinking; he puts the standard once for all, inside every man instead of outside him . . .'.⁵⁵ Arnold is obviously remembering the essay 'Noch ein Wort für junge Dichter' which he had translated and copied into his 1847 note-book. There Goethe had written that 'every man must without fail learn to know and judge himself, because no foreign standard out of himself can come to his aid' (Arnold's translation). Arnold may well have re-read Goethe's essay in preparation for his

own piece on Heinrich Heine, for a few lines before the passage cited above, Arnold quotes openly from it:

'Through me the German poets have become aware that, as a man must live from within outwards, so the artist must work from within outwards, seeing that, make what contortions he will, he can only bring to light his own individuality.'⁵⁶

It would appear from this (and Arnold expresses no disapproval) that subjectivity is unavoidable in literature; that when a man writes poetry he expresses his individuality regardless of his intentions—'make what contortions he will'. It is not immediately obvious how one is to reconcile this with Goethe's praise of Byron for 'denying himself', for keeping *Marino Faliero* free from his personal thoughts and feelings, or indeed with his other strictures on subjectivity—in conversation with Eckermann for example:

There is nothing wrong with the majority of our young poets except that their subjectivity is not significant (bedeutend) and that they cannot find material in the objective. At best they find material which is similar to them and which suits their subjectivity; but to take material for its own sake, because it is poetical, even if it is repugnant to their subjectivity—such a thing is never thought of.

Similarly, on another occasion Goethe criticized a young poet, O. L. B. Wolff (1799-1851) for his subjective tendency. He had asked Wolff to describe his return to Hamburg, but instead Wolff described his feelings as a son returning to his parents, relatives and friends; Hamburg did not enter into the description at all. Goethe was stimulated to remark:

As long as a poet expresses only his few subjective feelings he may not properly be called a poet at all: but as soon as he is able to take possession of the world and to express it, then he is a poet. Then he is inexhaustible and can always be new, whereas a subjective nature has soon expressed its little bit of inner self and eventually goes to ruin in mannerism.⁵⁷

Here Wolff and his contemporaries seem to be criticized for doing the very thing which, Goethe said, all poets do by necessity—namely bring to light their own individuality (Individuum).

To resolve this dilemma one must return to the essays 'Für junge Dichter' and 'Noch ein Wort für junge Dichter'. It is apparent from these essays that Goethe believed subjectivity to be a consequence of the high pitch of cultivation which the German language had attained. Everyone was capable of expressing himself easily and well; thus everyone who had reached a certain stage of cultivation and self-awareness felt himself 'impelled to communicate his thoughts and feelings'. But, said Goethe, 'it is hard, almost impossible for the young to see, that by this nothing has been done in the higher sense'. The reason why self-expression is in itself of little consequence is made clear by Goethe's 'earnest' advice to young poets 'that as their facility of rhythmical expression increases they must ever be gaining more and

more in *content* (Arnold's italics).—But poetic content is content of our own life'.⁵⁸ In one sense, therefore, Masson was correct in believing that works of art reveal their creator's personality and Goethe would not have argued against this for, as he remarked to Eckermann, 'in art and poetry personality is everything'.⁵⁹ But Masson was fundamentally in error in making self-expression the poet's aim; the poet's aim should be to express the world outside of him, and in doing this he will inevitably express and reveal his own self. The process of self-revelation is a necessary consequence of artistic creation but to establish it as a principle of artistic intention is misleading. Young writers then believe that they have done enough if they express their own personal mood and thoughts. They are encouraged to be looking perpetually inward upon themselves when their attention should really be directed outward at the world. It is this outward direction of vision and activity that constitutes 'objectivity' and not any futile attempt by the poet to exclude his ego from his work. Subjective introspection necessarily encourages morbidity and this is unhealthy for through it the poet cuts himself off from the external world. Yet it is only through contact with the external world that the poet can enrich the content of his own life and ultimately of his own poetry. To improve as a poet is not simply a matter of increasing technical competence; it is also necessary to improve one's personality, one's inner self, by making it ever richer in content and meaning. Goethe's advice to young poets to dwell on no experience that troubled without furthering them can now be seen in its full importance. To act on this advice, as Arnold, for whom it had been specially relevant, knew better than anyone, entailed a conscious effort at self-improvement which was essentially moral in nature, but for the poet the processes of artistic and moral self-development could be identical. The basic defect of most young writers, therefore, lay in this: that the inner life which they expressed lacked any important content and was consequently insignificant.

It could, of course, be objected that although Arnold had a detailed knowledge of the works in which Goethe's theory is elaborated, there is yet no proof that he understood it in this specific way. At any rate, it will be said, there is very little in Arnold's refutation of Masson's statement to suggest that such ideas were particularly important to him. To some extent this is true; the reviewer seems to have irritated Arnold by falsely representing as Goethe's a view of poetry, which was in fact hostile to the ideals of both Goethe and Arnold. But Arnold's answer to Masson's claims is, as I have said, inadequate and can hardly be called a refutation; it is no more than an outraged expression of disagreement. The reason for the reference to Goethe in his answer is not difficult to discern—their mutual integrity was at stake—but why the answer was so inadequate can only be a matter for conjecture. On the other hand, Arnold's own dissatisfaction with the Preface—'far less *precise* than I had intended' he told Clough—begins to make sense.⁶⁰ In an unpublished letter (28 March 1855) to his brother Tom in Tasmania Arnold wrote that:

We have numbers of young gentlemen with really wonderful powers of perception and expression, but to whom there is wholly wanting a 'bedeutendes Individuum' so that their productions are most unedifying and unsatisfactory.⁶¹

In these few words Arnold has summed up the essence of Goethe's attitude to subjectivity in poetry and the reference to a "bedeutendes Individuum" (two key words) proves that he was fully conscious of the source of his idea.⁶² At the same time one is struck by the fact that the point Arnold is making is not one which is made in the Preface. Arnold must surely have been aware that his reply to Masson was incomplete, and this may, in part, explain his feeling that the Preface was not precise enough. If by 'precise' Arnold meant the naming of names his motives for remaining silent are obvious. As an almost completely unrecognized poet himself it would have appeared insufferably arrogant of him to denounce anyone as an 'insignificant individual'. The weakness of Arnold's reply, therefore, may be due to his feelings that for discretion's sake his lips had to remain sealed, or may simply represent an unwillingness to become involved in a public dispute with another writer.

Although the Preface itself is undoubtedly a piece of polemical writing Arnold preserved a lofty theoretical stance which kept him at a distance from literary squabbles. His dislike of such things was in part a temperamental aversion to rancorous emotions, but it was never strong enough to keep him out of controversy for very long. The Preface paints a gloomy picture of the position of a young practising talent: he lives in an age which is hostile to all qualities of spiritual greatness and nobility and is assailed by voices prescribing false artistic aims. The possibilities of conflict are therefore almost limitless. Given such circumstances the question of what attitude to adopt to the contemporary situation presents itself to the poet with particular force. In dealing with this question Arnold was again influenced by his reading of Goethe, and again it is the conversations with Eckermann and the essays of advice to young poets which play the central role. A young poet, said Arnold, meaning of course himself, will not

. . . maintain a hostile attitude towards the false pretensions of his age; he will content himself with not being overwhelmed by them. He will esteem himself fortunate if he can succeed in banishing from his mind all feelings, of contradiction, and irritation, and impatience . . .⁶³

In the same year as the Preface Arnold wrote to Clough with a few words of advice which shed some useful light on the frame of mind which produced the passage just quoted:

As to conformity I recommend it in so far as it frees us from the unnatural and unhealthy attitude of contradiction and opposition—the *Qual der Negation* as Goethe calls it. Only positive convictions and feelings are worth anything—and the glow of these one can never feel so long as one is pugnacious and out of temper.⁶⁴

The reference to the 'Qual der Negation', which Arnold has taken from Goethe's

letter to Schiller (7 December 1796) is completely apposite. The 'torture of negation' is felt by the 'malicious spirit' of those who had run foul of Goethe and Schiller in the distich-cycle of *Xenien*; they were condemned to negative action while Goethe and Schiller were able to continue their positive work (unsere positiven Arbeiten fortsetzen).

Essentially, however, the letter to Clough is of interest only in so far as it indicates that Arnold consciously associated these ideas with Goethe, for it is a long way from a passing remark of Goethe's in a letter to Schiller to the elaborated code of behaviour advocated by Arnold in the Preface. The link is provided by Goethe's essay 'Noch ein Wort für junge Dichter'. There the German poet offered his contemporaries the following advice:

Let the young poet utter only what has in it life and progression under whatever form it may be: let him firmly put aside all spirit of opposition, all evil wishing and evil speaking, and what can only *deny* [Arnold's italics] for out of this comes nothing.⁶⁵

In Goethe's opinion, Byron was an example of a talented poet who had ignored this wise counsel and perished in consequence:

That he cut himself off from tradition and patriotism not only destroyed him personally as an excellent man, but his revolutionary purpose and the constant agitation of mind which attended it prevented his talent from developing properly. Also, this external opposition and condemnation is highly damaging to his excellent works as they are. For not only does the poet's discomfort communicate itself to the reader but also his opposition has a negative direction and the negative is nothing. What is achieved if I call the bad bad? But if I call the good bad then a lot of harm is done. *Whoever would have a positive effect must never scold, never bother about the absurd but only ever do right himself.* For it does not matter that something is demolished but that something should be built which men can take pure joy in.⁶⁶

Goethe's influence here may well be of a subtle kind. It is not a case of Arnold expressing in the Preface an idea which but for Goethe he might not otherwise have expressed. Clearly, Arnold's temperamental bias against rancour and quarrelsomeness made him receptive to Goethe's advice; in a sense they shared a common outlook. Nevertheless, Goethe's influence on the terms in which Arnold expresses his conviction, terms like 'negation', 'contradiction', 'opposition', seems unmistakable. If attitudes based on a certain orientation of temperament remain frequently unarticulated, then Goethe's influence can be seen as consisting in this: that he helped Arnold to define, to bring to conscious formulation attitudes which Arnold had previously held only unconsciously and in doing so strengthened the attitudes and helped him to justify them to himself.

In the presence of false prophets like Masson and the absence of any reliable

'guiding hand' Arnold's purpose in the Preface is to recommend 'excellent models' so that the artist may fix his attention upon them and hence, hopefully, 'be taught to product what is excellent independently'.⁶⁷ The models which he proposes are the works of the Ancients. He ventures to suggest that Shakespeare is a dangerous model for a young writer, but he is careful to stress that in saying this he is not claiming that Shakespeare is inferior to the Greeks; the Greeks are merely a safer model. (The very tentativeness and circumspection with which Arnold puts forward his argument shows that he knew full well what patriotic protests it was likely to arouse.) In broad outline Arnold's argument would have had Goethe's complete agreement. There are so many instances of Goethe recommending the Greeks as models that it would be futile to catalogue them all. A few typical examples will suffice. In his essay 'Anforderungen an den modernen Bildhauer' Goethe speaks of the Greeks 'to whom we must always look up as our masters'. In 'Deutsche Sprache und Verwandtes' he speaks with approval of a young man who was 'convinced that the source of true culture is only to be found among the ancients'.⁶⁸ In a letter to Zelter of 1827 Goethe said that if he were young again he would submit himself completely to the study of the Greeks (würde ich mich dem Griechischen völlig ergeben).⁶⁹ And finally, in conversation with Eckermann, 'when we need a model (etwas Musterhaftes) we must always turn to the ancient Greeks in whose works lovely humanity (der schöne Mensch) is portrayed. All the rest we must consider historically . . .'.⁷⁰

Arnold was criticized in the *Leader* by G. H. Lewes for recommending 'imitation' of Greek models. (Lewes approved of 'emulation', but he condemned imitation as an 'enervating practice'.)⁷¹ In effect Lewes is splitting hairs for it is quite plain from Arnold's description of the process which he is envisaging, that emulation is precisely what he has in mind, not a slavish copying. The worst Arnold can be accused of on that point is a poor choice of word. Goethe saw clearly that in one respect the argument about 'classical' and 'modern' was futile, since a return to Greek antiquity was impossible anyway: the argument, he said, could easily be settled 'if people would remember that anyone who, from youth on, owes his culture to the Greeks and Romans will never be able to deny his classical ancestry, but will rather always acknowledge thankfully his debt to his dead mentors, even when devoting his fully developed talent to the living present, and without knowing it will end "modern", where he began "ancient"'.⁷² These words could be interpreted as a justification of Arnold's advocacy of classical models and as a reply to Lewes.

Shakespeare had no greater admirer than Goethe, but, like Arnold, the German poet realized that for young writers he was a dangerous model, and an unkind observer might well remark that Goethe's play *Götz von Berlichingen* (1771) is the finest proof of this. Allott points out the parallel between Arnold's argument in the Preface and Goethe's comment on Shakespeare in conversation with Eckermann: Shakespeare 'is far too rich and powerful. A productive nature can only read *one* of

his plays a year if it is not to be ruined by him . . . Shakespeare offers us *golden apples in silver bowls*'.⁷³ One must point out, however, that although Arnold is probably echoing this passage when he speaks of the young writer being 'vanquished and absorbed' by Shakespeare's talent, the details of Arnold's argument against the advisability of using Shakespeare as a model are his own.⁷⁴ Goethe does not elaborate the suggestive image of golden apples in silver dishes, but one will see from the following discussion how easily Arnold could have interpreted it to suit his own point of view. Arnold delivers his warning because a young writer will tend to notice Shakespeare's 'curious', highly-wrought style of expression and imitate only that, without also imitating Shakespeare's powerful sense of construction and form. It is true that the word which Arnold uses to characterize this sense of form, *Architectonicé*, is borrowed from Goethe's essay on dilettantism, which Arnold had in large part translated and copied into his note-book in 1847.⁷⁵ Arnold's definition of the term falls into two parts, what *Architectonicé* is and what it is not. It is 'that power of execution, which creates, forms, constitutes; not the profoundness of single thoughts, not the richness of imagery, not the abundance of illustration'.⁷⁶ In the first part he reproduces a correct translation of Goethe's words; in the second he adds his own thoughts. Nevertheless, his definition does no injustice to Goethe's meaning. It is only in the application of the term to Shakespeare that Arnold goes further than Goethe. The application is quite fair, but Goethe does not in fact speak of Shakespeare in the essay on dilettantism. Arnold's citation of Goethe at this point in the argument, therefore, tends to make it appear as if his entire account of Shakespeare's value as a model is derived from Goethe. An important and substantial part does indeed have Goethe's authority, but not all.

It is in Arnold's account of the virtues of Greek art and its significance, however, that Goethe's influence on the Preface is greatest. One of the fundamental precepts of Arnold's critical theory is the distinction between the 'Whole' and the 'Parts'. With the Greeks, Arnold says,

. . . the poetical character of the action in itself, and the conduct of it, was the first consideration; with us, attention is fixed mainly on the value of the separate thoughts and images which occur in the treatment of an action. They regarded the whole; we regard the parts.

This distinction resolves itself basically into Arnold's insight, that, given subject-matter of high inherent quality, the essential stature of a work of literature depends upon the power of 'Architectonicé' which the author has expended upon it and not upon the poet's gift for felicitous expression. The notion of fine writing with its emphasis on the value of 'separate thoughts and images', 'richness of imagery . . . abundance of illustration', is the bane of modern poetry because it distracts attention from the importance of form and construction. There are modern critics, says Arnold, whose attention is directed solely at the language of a work and who believe that the merit of a piece depends upon brilliant single lines and passages. The Greeks, apparently, understood all this perfectly:

With them, the action predominated over the expression of it . . . Not that they failed in expression, or were inattentive to it; on the contrary, they are the highest models of expression, the unapproached masters of the *grand style*. But their expression is so excellent because, it is so admirably kept in its right degree of prominence; because it is so simple and so well subordinated . . .⁷⁷

This is Arnold's first public use of the phrase 'the grand style', but it already contains in embryo the distinctive association with which Arnold was later to endow it in his piece *On Translating Homer* (1861)—simplicity, severity, and plainness.⁷⁸

W. A. Madden has pointed to the words of Serlo in *Wilhelm Meister* as a source of Arnold's ideas: 'Few Germans perhaps few men of any modern nation have a proper sense of an aesthetic whole: they praise and blame by passages; they are charmed by passages'.⁷⁹ Madden's example is a good one, revealing obvious affinities between Goethe's judgement and Arnold's. But individual instances of parallel opinion are less important here because Arnold, who had absorbed Goethe's writings and had been exposed to their influence for almost five years before writing the Preface, would have encountered numerous passages of the kind Madden cites. Arnold's distinction between the whole and the parts is taken directly from Goethe where it occurs with such regularity in letters, conversation, and criticism that it can justly be called a basic Goethean idea. However, in Goethe's writings the idea is not, as in the Preface, deliberately and consciously established as a critical dictum in opposition to other critical dicta, but is taken completely for granted and used unquestioningly as a basis for making aesthetic judgements. In conversation with Eckermann, for example, Goethe spoke of August Hagen's poem *Olfried und Lisena* (1820) in this way:

There are parts in it which could not be better . . . But they are only beautiful parts, as a whole it would not satisfy anyone.⁸⁰

Or again in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* he passes judgement on a painting which was 'quite successful in details, but poorly composed (componiert) as a whole'.⁸¹ Furthermore, in Goethe's writings the idea does not quite have the specific application which it has in Arnold's namely to 'construction' (the Whole) and 'expression' (the Parts) in works of literature. Arnold has isolated and taken over the general case and has applied it to the condition, as he saw it, of modern English poetry.⁸²

Even the phrase which Arnold uses to characterize what he considered the distinctive quality of Greek epic and dramatic poetry—'the grand style'—is borrowed, as Allott has pointed out, from Goethe.⁸³ (For Goethe, however, it never had the pregnancy of implication that it had for Arnold. Indeed, Goethe's fullest account of 'style' with respect to Greek drama does not even approximately resemble anything Arnold has to say on the subject.)⁸⁴ Consider, for example, the interesting description of the grand style in the letter to Zelter of 25 August 1824.

In the course of a comparison of the *Iliad* with Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*. Goethe wrote: 'The Greek poem is in the grand style, self-sufficient, making use only of what is essential, rejecting all decoration in description and simile, resting upon a basis of ancient myth.'⁸⁵ Goethe included these comments verbatim in his essay 'Über die Parodie bei den Alten', which Arnold probably knew also. There the expression, 'the grand style' occurs several times, being twice used in a way to which Arnold must have responded. Goethe spoke of the Greek poet's success in treating even low objects and actions (die niedrigsten Gegenstände und Handlungen) in the grand style, and this is one of the characteristics of Homer which Arnold cites as a major problem for translators.⁸⁶ The unity of total impression produced by a Greek work of art, which in the Preface Arnold recommends to modern poets as an object of emulation, is a feature of antiquity noticed by Goethe too. 'With the Greeks', said Goethe in the essay just referred to, 'their work is all of one character and all in the grand style', and in conversation with Eckermann he made a similar observation: 'in the higher tragedies of the Greeks . . . a certain ground-tone (ein gewisser Grundton) pervades the whole'.⁸⁷

The question of 'unity of impression' produced by a work of Greek art brings one back again to the distinction between the Whole and the Parts. Arnold's emphasis on the importance of 'Wholeness' is more than a mere quirk of preference for one kind of literature over another: Greek over Elizabethan, classical over romantic. In a letter to Clough (of uncertain date, but 1848-49) Arnold makes the suggestive remark that poets 'must begin with an Idea of the world in order not to be prevailed over by the world's multitudinousness'.⁸⁸ This belief is central to Arnold's thinking; it recurs in both 'Empedocles on Etna' and 'On the Modern Element in Literature'. Arnold's conception of the world at this time could fairly be described as pessimistic atomism. His *Weltanschauung* is atomistic because it conceives existence as composed of an infinitude of detached elements confronting the human mind. The complexity or multitudinousness of existence is such, however, that the human mind cannot cope with the load imposed upon it without the help of what Arnold calls, for want of a more suitable term, 'Ideas'. These Ideas are the interpretative principles which help the mind to account for the facts of its experience. They must not be understood, however, as innate organizing principles of human intelligence, nor even as a philosopher's propositions about the world, but rather as the particular 'myths' of any given civilization or culture. ('Myths' must here be understood in the widest possible sense to include related cosmological, religious, and philosophical notions; in this sense Christianity, for example could be regarded as an 'Idea'.)

A degree of historical relativism is naturally involved in such a view. The absolute 'truth' of an Idea is unimportant; an Idea is true only in so far as it is appropriate to any given stage of cultural development. Hence Arnold is able to write, in his essay 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time', of the need for

'an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it displaces'.⁸⁹ A more important criterion than truth, therefore, for judging an Idea is the concept of 'adequacy'—the interpretative strength and capacity inherent in it.⁹⁰ As human knowledge increases the interpretative capacity of any given Idea will begin to dwindle and, ultimately, it will fail completely. Arnold's pessimism stems less from the fact that he existed at a time when, because of the failure of Christianity and the absence of an Idea to replace it, the individual was more exposed than ever before to the world's incomprehensible multitudinousness, than from his belief in the progressive nature of the world's complexity.⁹¹ The number of facts with which an Idea has to come to terms and which the mind has to comprehend is perpetually increasing. The inescapable conclusion of this is that the number must inevitably pass beyond the range of both mind and Idea. At least, this seems to be the tendency of Arnold's argument in the lecture 'On the Modern Element in Literature'. The literature of the Greeks is more adequate, and consequently more perfect, than the literature of the Romans, but this is really because the world which confronted the experience of the Greeks was far less complex than the world of the Roman Empire. Whether an adequate literature is even remotely conceivable in a world as complex as the modern one is a question that looms large in the background. Perhaps no individual Idea can ever again be adequate to account for all the facts of human experience and knowledge. Wholeness seems to have passed for ever from the world. Although this pessimistic conclusion appears to be the only logical outcome of the argument, Arnold refrains from drawing it—he chooses to leave it implicit and unspoken. He sensed, perhaps, that the belief in an inevitable cultural decline was too closely related to a barren historical necessitarianism which would rob all human activity of purpose and meaning, and was, therefore, essentially debilitating.⁹² The need for a joyful activity within the limits of his proper sphere—now Criticism—triumphed with Arnold, and by the 1880s the gloom had quite receded: the essays 'The Study of Poetry' and 'Literature and Science' radiate a joyful optimism. It is necessary to investigate how Arnold effected this change, and by what stages it occurred.

In the sonnet 'To a Friend' Arnold said of Sophocles that 'he saw life steadily, and saw it whole' (l. 12).⁹³ This does not mean that Sophocles saw the whole of life, or even that he saw life more completely than those who came before or after him. Arnold's description of Sophocles seems, in fact, to have two implications. Firstly, it means that the part of life which he saw, he saw as a whole; he was not, like Empedocles, prevailed over by the complexity of the individual elements (the Parts) which make up experience, but had an Idea of life which enabled him to discern it as a unity (the Whole). (Similar considerations seem to play a significant role in the seclusion which Arnold counsels for the poet in 'Resignation'; from his high vantage point on the hill above the town the Poet is able to survey at once a wide span and see it as a whole.) Secondly, however, the wholeness is a quality of the seer rather than of the thing seen. In the lecture 'On the Modern Element in

Literature' Arnold refers to the earlier sonnet thus:

. . . the peculiar characteristic of the poetry of Sophocles is its consummate, its unrivalled *adequacy*; that it represents the highly developed human nature of that age—human nature developed in a number of directions, politically, socially, religiously, morally developed—in its completest and most harmonious development in all these directions; while there is shed over this poetry the charm of that noble serenity which always accompanies true insight . . . And therefore I have ventured to say of Sophocles, that he 'saw life steadily, and saw it whole'.⁹⁴

Although the inclusion of 'politically' and 'socially' in this account presages the widening of Arnold's interests in the 1860s and anticipates the social orientation of *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), it is still the integration of individual human needs and faculties with which Arnold is here concerned. Sophocles saw life whole because the elements of his humanity were perfectly and harmoniously developed; in other words Sophocles himself was a whole. The root of modern man's unhappiness lay, Arnold thought, in the fragmentation of his being. Sophocles, like the Scholar-Gipsy, inhabits a world of pristine wholeness and innocence (though perhaps a world only of Arnold's imagining), but modern man finds that he cannot simultaneously reconcile the claims of intellect and religious faith, religion and morality, intellect and emotion. Undue prominence is given to individual parts of human nature: the head rules the heart tyrannically, the service of reason chills the religious instincts, a precarious truce exists between morality and emotion. These human faculties cannot easily be made to operate as a harmonious whole, and in consequence modern man finds himself thrown into a state of uncertainty, confusion, doubt, and despair. Such at least was Arnold's provisional diagnosis in 'Empedocles on Etna', 'The Scholar-Gipsy', and the 1853 Preface, but now, with the application of the concept of *adequacy* to literature itself, rather than to Ideas alone, a faint ray of hope is able to penetrate the gloom.

A letter which Arnold wrote to his brother Tom in 1857, the year of his inaugural lecture, is interesting for the light it sheds on the lecture and the concept of adequacy.

Pope's poetry was *adequate* (to use a term I am always using) to Pope's age—that is, it reflected completely the best general culture and intelligence of that age; therefore the cultivated and intelligent men of that time all found something of themselves in it. But it was a poor time, after all so the poetry is not and cannot be a first-class one. On the other hand, our time is a first class one—an infinitely fuller, richer age than Pope's; but our poetry is not *adequate* to it; it interests therefore only a small band of sectaries; hundreds of cultivated and intelligent men find nothing that speaks to them in it. But it is a hard thing to make poetry adequate to a first-class epoch. The eternal greatness of the literature of the Greece of Pericles is that it is the *adequate* expression of a first-class epoch. Shakespeare again is the infinitely more than adequate expression of a second-class epoch. It is the immense distinction of Voltaire and Goethe, with all their shortcomings, that they approach near to being adequate exponents of first-class epochs.⁹⁵

Several features of the argument in this letter are worth commenting on. The most striking feature is, perhaps, the description of his age as a first-class epoch, infinitely fuller and richer than Pope's. This marks not merely a definite reversal of his point of view in the 1853 Preface, but more significantly a striking change of attitude to the complexity of modern life. Whereas previously this complexity had been a multitudinousness which threatened to prevail over the poet and to extinguish his talent, it now appears as a positive quality and a stimulating challenge to Poetry. Arnold, was of course, quite entitled to change his mind, but it is noticeable that in this letter he overlooks the reason for the superiority of Greek literature which he advanced in his lecture 'On the Modern Element in Literature': Greek literature was able to be adequate primarily because the Greek world was less complex than succeeding ages. In other words Arnold has suppressed the insight which involves the pessimism—the progressive fragmentation of the world caused by the advance of knowledge in all fields of human enquiry, and particularly in the natural sciences. Even the extension of the concept of adequacy from Ideas alone to literature represents a significant development, for it will now become possible for Arnold to cast poetic literature in a new role, no longer the victim of the world's complexity which makes adequate poetry impossible, but the redeemer of the modern world, a surrogate religion, and the only adequate interpreter of the world for contemporary man. Signs of this happening are apparent even in the inaugural lecture:

... it is to the poetical literature of an age that we must, in general, look for the most perfect, the most adequate interpretation of that age,—for the performance of a work which demands the most energetic and harmonious activity of all the powers of the human mind.⁹⁶

The crucial question, namely whether any poetical literature adequate to the modern age is at all feasible, is here in abeyance, and eventually its worrying insistence was to be completely ignored.

In 'Literature and Science' (1883) Arnold reconsidered the atomistic position implied in his inaugural lecture, and investigated the consequences for poetry of the new prestige enjoyed by the natural sciences:

Following our instinct for intellect and knowledge, we acquire pieces of knowledge; and presently, in the generality of men, there arises the desire to relate these pieces of knowledge to our sense for conduct, to our sense for beauty,—and there is weariness if the desire is balked. Now in this desire lies, I think, the strength of that hold which letters have upon us.⁹⁷

The argument is, of course, familiar. Basically, Arnold is repeating what he had said in his inaugural lecture about 'intellectual deliverance'—that state of mind which comes of comprehending those general Ideas which are 'the law of this vast multitude of facts'. Intellectual deliverance is

... that harmonious acquiescence of mind which we feel in contemplating a grand spectacle that is intelligible to us: When we have lost that impatient irritation of

mind which we feel in presence of an immense moving, confused spectacle which, while it perpetually excites our curiosity, perpetually baffles our comprehension.⁹⁸

And it is to poetry, Arnold maintains, that man must turn for intellectual deliverance. In the inaugural lecture, as I have argued, there is an implied doubt about the capacity of the human mind to deal with any spectacle as complex and confused as modern life. In 'Literature and Science' there is no such doubt. In essence, the argument runs: Man cannot do without intellectual deliverance, therefore he shall have it, and since neither Science, nor Philosophy, nor Religion can provide it, Poetry must do the task itself. Hope is responsible for the dubious logic. Arnold faced up to the problem of the spread of 'knowledge'; he saw that the natural sciences were 'accumulating items of fact' which were quite isolated and could not easily be related to the human sense for conduct and beauty. But this is no longer seen as an insuperable obstacle to the wholeness of mind which he called intellectual deliverance, for these innumerable pieces of knowledge which the natural sciences accumulate can be safely disregarded both by poets and the mass of mankind; in other words, scientific research can be left to the specialists. Science only impinges on the masses when it has distilled from the mass of facts with which it deals some governing law, some general principle or some 'interesting proposition':

And one piece of natural knowledge is added to another; and others are added to that, and at last we come to propositions so interesting as Mr. Darwin's famous proposition that 'our ancestor was a hairy quadruped furnished with a tail and pointed ears, probably arboreal in his habits'.⁹⁹

Thus, the task of poetry is the 'harmonize' the findings of science with men's 'sense for conduct', 'sense for beauty'. Science will provide knowledge, satisfying our instinct for intellect, but only poetry will be able to relate this knowledge to our other instincts, and hence, the argument runs, only poetry will satisfy the mass of mankind which would otherwise be 'wearing', baffled and confused by the multitude of facts with which science confronts it.

The conception of a culture in which literature would be central had always had a strong attraction for Arnold. In a crucially important letter to Clough (28 October 1852), he makes a statement about poetry which looks forward beyond the 1853 Preface to the essay 'The Study of Poetry' of 1880:

More and more I feel that the difference between a mature and youthful age of the world compels the poetry of the former to use plainness of speech as compared with that of the latter: and that Keats and Shelley were on a false track when they set themselves to reproduce the exuberance of expression, the charm, the richness of images, and the felicity, of the Elizabethan poets. Yet critics cannot get to learn this, because the Elizabethan poets are our greatest, and our canons of poetry are founded on their works. They still think that the object of poetry is to produce exquisite bits and images . . . whereas modern poetry can only subsist by its *contents*: by becoming a complete *magister vitae* as the poetry of the ancients did:

by including, as theirs did, religion with poetry, instead of existing as poetry only, and leaving religious wants to be supplied by the Christian religion, as a power existing independent of the poetical power. But the language, style and general proceedings of a poetry which has such an immense task to perform, must be very plain direct and severe: and it must not lose itself in parts and episodes and ornamental work, but must press forwards to the whole.¹⁰⁰

Arnold's comments imply that modern poetry has been unfitted for the interpretative task proper to it, because the prevailing Christian culture has isolated man's religious instincts and ministered to them as a separate item in his constitution, unrelated to man's instincts for intellect and knowledge, or to his sense for beauty. In other words English poetry has failed to reflect 'completely the best general culture and intelligence of [the] age' and in consequence, it interests only 'a small band of sectaries'—'. . . hundreds of cultivated and intelligent men find nothing that speaks to them in it'. The wholeness of the poetic office had in this way been impaired, but the difficulty could be regarded as simply a local problem, that is, the particular condition of English poetry did not imply any fundamental incapacity in the poetic office to carry out its interpretative function. Arnold did discern, however, as the letter of 1857 to his brother Tom shows (above, p. 87), the magnitude of the task: 'it is a hard thing to make poetry adequate to a first-class epoch'.

I have implied that Arnold's disregard of that insight which threatened to justify a fatalistic despair over the future of civilization—namely, the Poet's need for an Idea of the world in order not to be prevailed over by its complexity, and the impossibility of attaining such an Idea—was a conscious act. Although this conclusion is inescapable—Arnold was never actually able to refute his earlier position—it is not the whole truth. The optimism of his late essays 'The Study of Poetry' and 'Literature and Science', although subsequent history has not proved it to be justified, is not to be condemned as a crass evasion of unpalatable facts, but is, at least, one logical possibility inherent in his previous attitude. The letter to Clough blames Christianity for the cultural isolation of poetic literature, and Arnold came to believe that as Christianity declined, losing its hold over men's belief, poetic literature would regain its supremacy. This was the view which he maintained in 'The Study of Poetry' (1880):

The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialised itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea *is* the fact.¹⁰¹

It is not hard to see what Arnold means. The ethical teachings of Christianity had

been for so long attached to the biblical stories that when the *Zeitgeist* made it impossible to deny the mythical, i.e. non-factual, nature of these stories confidence in Christian morality was shaken; the supernaturalism of Christian doctrine was likewise undermined by new criteria of proof established by the natural sciences. Arnold's attempt, so much resented by T. S. Eliot, to confine religion to a certain set of emotions and to strip it of any intellectual 'pretensions'—doctrinal theology—may or may not be sound, but it is clear that the decline of Christianity in Arnold's time was indeed due, in large measure, to the causes which he had specified. Eliot's remark that nothing in Arnold's prose work 'will stand very close analysis' is too harsh, but there is some truth in his stricture that Arnold had not the power of 'connected reasoning at length' and 'little gift for consistency or for definition'.¹⁰² At any event it is difficult not to feel that if Arnold had given a more precise explanation of the concept of 'adequacy' and its relation to his cultural milieu, he would have found it less easy to abandon his youthful pessimism and to prophesy joyfully a central role for poetic literature in civilization.

The role which Arnold envisaged for poetry of relating the facts of science to man's moral, emotional, and aesthetic life was more ambitious than at first sight appears. Poetry was no mere anodyne for the troubled agnostic mind of Victorian England, giving it a comforting sense of comprehending existence. Of course, Arnold would not claim that this 'sense' gives us a truth to rest on: in 'Maurice de Guérin' (1863) he admitted that it might well be 'illusiv', and even his phrase denoting poetry's capacity for inducing it—'natural magic'—hints at a sort of divine conjuring trick.¹⁰³ The 'intellectual deliverance' offered by poetry at any given historical moment was no more than provisional. It was nevertheless indispensable, particularly in Arnold's time when the Christian religion was no longer the cohesive force it had once been. Thus, in *On the Study of Celtic Literature* (1867), Arnold was able to define the task facing modern poetry by reference to Goethe's achievement:

Our great, our only first-rate body of contemporary poetry is the German; the grand business of modern poetry—a moral interpretation, from an *independent* point of view, of man and the world—it is only German poetry, Goethe's poetry, that has, since the Greeks, made much way with . . . Dante's task was to set forth the lesson of the world from the point of view of medieval Catholicism; the basis of spiritual life was given, Dante had not to make this anew. Shakespeare's task was to set forth the spectacle of the world when man's spirit re-awoke to the possession of the world at the Renaissance. The spectacle of human life, left to bear its own significance and tell its own story, but shown in all its fulness, variety, and power, is at that moment the great matter; but, if we are to press deeper, the basis of spiritual life is still at that time the traditional religion, reformed or unreformed, of Christendom, and Shakespeare has not to supply a new basis. But when Goethe came, Europe had lost her basis of spiritual life; she had to find it again; Goethe's task was,—the inevitable task for the modern poet henceforth is . . . not to preach a sublime sermon on a given text like Dante, not to exhibit all the kingdoms of human life and the glory of them like Shakespeare, but to interpret human life

afresh, and to supply a new spiritual basis to it.¹⁰⁴

The telling word (which I have italicized for convenience) in this account is, of course, 'independent': for Arnold, the new spiritual basis to life which poetry was to provide could not be the discredited supernaturalism of orthodox Christianity. Poetry's imperative duty was to do for mankind what (until that time) Christianity had done and therefore, in effect, to replace the old religion. From this imperative 'must' it is only a short distance to Arnold's confidently prophetic 'will' of 'The Study of Poetry' (see the quotation on p. 90), and the prediction that 'the majority of men will always require humane letters' with which he concludes 'Literature and Science'. The central place of literature in education is not really threatened.

. . . I cannot really think that humane letters are in much actual danger of being thrust out from their leading place . . . in spite of the array of authorities against them at this moment. So long as human nature is what it is, their attraction will remain irresistible.¹⁰⁵

Human nature requires a spiritual basis to its life and a moral interpretation of its apprehension of experience; only poetry *can* supply these adequately, therefore, it *will* supply them, and thus the primacy of literature is assured. This is the gist of Arnold's argument.

Such were the reflections on poetry which over the years grew out of the rudimentary distinction between the Whole and the Parts, wholeness and fragmentation. It now remains to relate Arnold's thinking in these matters to his reading and understanding of Goethe. I have already suggested that Arnold had learned the crucial distinction between the Whole and the Parts from Goethe, but I have still to show that for the German poet, too, this distinction had wider implications than a mere preference for one literary style over another, and that some of the ideas which Arnold develops and gives prominence to are also present in Goethe.

Like Arnold, Goethe applied the concept of 'Wholeness' to human culture in general, and for both men the example of the Greeks was of prime significance. In his essay on 'Winckelmann' Goethe wrote:

By the expedient use of individual powers Man is capable of much; by the combined use of several powers he is capable of extraordinary things; but he will only achieve the truly unique, the wholly unexpected when his total powers combine simultaneously. This last was the happy lot of the ancients, particularly of the Greeks in their best period; we moderns are fated to exist in the first two states.

If the healthy nature of man were to function as a whole, if he felt himself in the world as in a grand, lovely, noble, and precious whole; if harmonious contentment granted him a pure and free delight, then would the universe, if it were conscious of itself, leap with joy at having arrived at its goal, and gaze with admiration at the culmination of its own life and development.¹⁰⁶

But the conditional ‘if’ shows that for the moderns wholeness cannot be attained. Modern man exists at a time when it is no longer possible to exercise in complete harmony all the elements which constitute full humanity. In outline, therefore, Goethe’s diagnosis was very similar to Arnold’s.

Arnold had observed that the predominance of intellect at the expense of feeling had impaired wholeness of being in the modern era. Goethe made a similar observation. Looking back at the ‘best period’ of the Greeks he saw that something had occurred since that time (rather like Eliot’s dissociation of sensibility) to separate thought and feeling: ‘Then feeling and contemplation were not fragmented, that perhaps incurable schism in healthy human nature had not yet happened’.¹⁰⁷ And in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* he remarked that in the poetry of the ancients religion, poetry, and philosophy were all gathered in one entity.¹⁰⁸ For Goethe, as for Arnold, art represented a sphere in which Wholeness was essential to perfection:

... man is not merely a thinking being but a feeling being too. He is a whole, a unity of many inwardly connected powers, and the work of art must speak to this human wholeness and must correspond to this rich unity and this unique multiplicity within him.¹⁰⁹

In other words, since art is itself the product of the harmonious activity of all human powers, it is uniquely fitted to engage the spectator’s being as a total entity, instead of addressing individual elements of that whole—the reflective, the emotional—separately. Goethe was, of course, speaking here of the visual arts, but the similarity of the idea to Arnold’s view of poetry is nevertheless striking.

No less striking is the correspondence of their ideas about ‘style’ in a literary work. In the letter of 28 October 1852 to Clough (quoted above p. 89), Arnold argued that poetry which had to become a ‘magister vitae’, satisfying the religious as well as the aesthetic and moral needs of man, ‘must be very plain direct and severe’, not losing itself ‘in parts and episodes’ but pressing forwards to the ‘whole’. Poetry must be plain, direct and severe not because that is what a complex age requires as a sort of antidote to its ills, but rather because the immense task of organizing and unifying experience is one which demands ‘wholeness’ of the practitioner of poetry; as the poet, so the style. This relationship of poet to style is stated more explicitly in an earlier letter to Clough:

... there are two offices of Poetry—one to add to one’s stores of thoughts and feelings—another to compose and elevate the mind by a sustained tone, numerous allusions, and a grand style . . . Nay, in Sophocles what is valuable is not so much his contributions to psychology and the anatomy of sentiment, as the grand moral effects produced by *style*. For the style is the expression of the nobility of the poet’s character, as the matter is the expression of the richness of the mind.¹¹⁰

A noble style, such as Sophocles possessed, is the expression of the nobility of the poet’s character, but such a style is also a morally educative experience for the

reader. In the 1853 Preface Arnold returns to this point again:

I know not how it is, but their commerce with the ancients appears to me to produce, in those who continually practice it, a steadying and composing effect upon their judgement . . . They are like persons who have had a very weighty and impressive experience.¹¹¹

Arnold was not interested in the psychological mechanism by which the educative effect was produced; that it was produced was for him a matter of experience. In the essay 'On the Literary Influence of Academies', for example, Arnold remarks *en passant* on the 'ethical influences of style in language,—its close relations, so often pointed out, with character'.¹¹² This belief in the intimate relationship between style and character was a fundamental one in Arnold's poetic. It underlies, in my opinion, his insistence on wholeness in an ideal poetical genius:

Of an ideal genius one does not want the elements, any of them, to be in a state of weakness; on the contrary, one wants all of them to be in the highest state of power; but with a law of measure, of harmony, presiding over the whole.¹¹³

With this demand in mind—a demand which above all others Sophocles satisfied—one is in a better position to understand some of the implications of some of Arnold's typical literary judgements: Dante, for example, was in his view guilty of an excessive cultivation of his spiritual nature at the expense of 'the outward life', and Byron, in spite of his considerable poetic gifts, was regarded as deficient in intellectual power.¹¹⁴ One can be fairly confident that Arnold's belief in the effects of style on character is derived, in part at least, from Goethe. In conversation with Eckermann, for example, Goethe said: 'On the whole an author's style is a true reflection of his inner life; if a man wants to write a *clear* style, then let him be clear beforehand in his own soul; and if a man wants to write a *noble* style, then let him have a noble character'.¹¹⁵ Goethe also insisted that the style of treatment accorded to a work of art produced in the spectator a state of mind similar to that felt by the artist during creation:

. . . every artistic production puts us in the same state of mind that the author was in. If that state of mind was calm and easy then we shall feel free; if it was narrow, anxious, and uncertain then it makes us feel constricted in the same degree . . . every work will give us pleasure which the author produced with ease and facility.¹¹⁶

Arnold must certainly have known that he was following Goethe closely when he noted in the 1853 Preface the 'steadying and composing effect' upon men's judgement which resulted from their 'commerce with the ancients', for here he was echoing a passage from Goethe's *Campagne in Frankreich* which he also translated for his 'general note-book':

The study of Art, like the study of the ancient writers, gives a certain steadiness [*einen gewissen Halt*], a satisfaction within ourselves; in that it fills our inner man with great objects and thoughts, it overpowers all wishes which were struggling

outwards, but nourishes every worthy desire in the silent bosom.¹¹⁷

The notion of steadiness was, we remember, associated with that of 'wholeness'—Sophocles and Goethe were poets who saw life steadily and saw it whole—and, like 'wholeness', it was usually connected in Arnold's mind, through the word 'Halt', with Goethe.¹¹⁸ In his later work Arnold came to apply the idea, in a way which had no direct parallel in Goethe's writings, to ethnological speculations about the dominant moral traits of Germanic peoples, but even as late as 1880, when Arnold wrote of poetry as a worthy object of study because it is more of a 'stay' to us than science or art, one can still hear an echo of his argument of the 1853 Preface.¹¹⁹

Arnold's usual emphasis on the morally educative function of poetry would perhaps have made Goethe slightly uneasy. Arnold does, of course, insist that a work of poetry should 'inspire and rejoice' the reader, but this 'joy' seems distinct from 'pleasure' in being an ethical rather than an aesthetic concept. In a passage from *Dichtung und Wahrheit* quoted in Arnold's note-book for 1884 (see *Note-Books*, p. 406) Goethe wrote that a 'good work of art may and will have moral results; but to require of the artist a moral aim is to spoil his work'.¹²⁰ Arnold presumably agreed with this view, but even if we grant that his ideal of personal ennoblement through poetry is a far cry from any crudely utilitarian demand for the inculcation of edifying moral principles, he nevertheless comes close to requiring of his own work beneficial moral results before he gives it his approval. 'The Scholar-Gipsy', for example, awakes a pleasing melancholy, but does it inspire and rejoice the reader? 'Empedocles on Etna' was repudiated for its failure in this respect. If, as he and Goethe believed, a work of poetry induced in the reader a state of mind not unlike that out of which the work grew, then he owed it to his readers to withhold from them whatever seemed to him morbid. Such considerations could well have been in Arnold's mind, even though the ostensible reasons for suppressing the poem were rather different. Goethe would undoubtedly have disapproved the morbid state of mind out of which the poem arose, but one suspects that he would have been willing to concede 'Empedocles on Etna' an artistic validity which its creator refused to acknowledge.

My primary intention in this chapter had been to show how the formation of Arnold's critical ideas in the decade 1847-57 was influenced by his reading of Goethe. There is, of course, no surprise in the conclusion that Goethe's influence at this time was both extensive and profound. We know from independent sources that Arnold was deeply immersed in Goethe's life and works during the very years when he was working out his own ideas about poetry and life. We know also that Goethe had immense authority with him: a close friend of Arnold's, J. C. Shairp, tells us that to 'Matt' Goethe was an 'oracle'.¹²¹ In pursuing my intention I have been at pains to stress the many striking parallels and similarities between their

views, and to emphasize that these are not random borrowings but are part of a consistent pattern of influence, no chance likeness but the result of Arnold's intimate knowledge of Goethe's writings. In addition, I have traced certain of Arnold's ideas—on 'wholeness', adequacy, and the function of poetry—through their developments in the literary criticism of his middle and late years.

There is a danger, perhaps, that by adopting this method any sense of the direction or total shape of the arguments put forward will have been obscured by the mass of details concerning Arnold's borrowings from Goethe. A very brief attempt to remedy this is therefore called for. To see clearly the extent of Arnold's indebtedness, one need only call to mind the essential outline of the 1853 Preface. There Arnold establishes a poetic theory, which, for the sake of brevity, one may term neo-classical. He repudiates romantic subjectivism and rejects personal emotion as the basic concern of art. The dramatic and epic poet, Arnold affirms, is a maker; his art is also a craft in that it is governed by sound principles which can be learned and ought to be followed. In the place of emotion Arnold puts 'actions'; events taken from the external world and imitated in the work of art. The inherent quality of the subjects treated in a work of art becomes in consequence a matter of prime importance. The Greeks are models of sound practice, and the poet who would produce anything of worth ought to study and learn from them. There can be no question that in asserting all this Arnold was more or less consciously following Goethe. Furthermore, underlying the Preface are several ideas and assumptions, not always complete or consistent, which are at first expressed explicitly in his private correspondence, but which are eventually aired in the lecture 'On the Modern Element in Literature'. Around the central concept of 'wholeness' Arnold weaves a web of ideas which nearly amounts to being at once a theory of literary style, a theory of moral psychology, and a historical theory of culture. In Goethe Arnold appears to have found not only the germ of some central insights and an essential framework of ideas, but also much of the terminology and vocabulary of criticism.

The method I have adopted has another danger. By constantly drawing attention to similarities of thought, 'parallels' and borrowings I have perhaps created an impression that Arnold's relationship to Goethe was passive. This would be the reverse of the truth, for Arnold was not a mere receptacle for Goethe's ideas. Even when the German's influence was at its height Arnold's attitude was never one of slavish dependence. He brought to Goethe's works an independent mind fully capable of selective reading. It may, of course, be possible for one man to shape the thought of another by generating a kind of stimulating and fertile antagonism towards him, but there can be no doubt that Goethe's influence on Arnold was so deep and extensive because Arnold was predisposed, through temperament and training, towards Goethe's classicism. For example, it is clear that no amount of recommendation by Goethe of the Greeks would have had the slightest effect on Arnold if he had not already been convinced of the excellence of Greek literature.

Furthermore, there are many crucial ideas in Arnold's criticism, such as, for example, the concept of adequacy or the notion of Ideas, as unifying principles in the mind's approach to experience, which have no parallel in Goethe. And even when Arnold did borrow an idea directly from Goethe it does not follow that their thinking was in all respects identical. When Arnold takes over an idea he usually bestows on it a degree of prominence quite different from that which it possessed in its original context. (The 'Part-Whole' dialectic, for example, occupies a more central position in Arnold's thinking than in Goethe's.) Arnold acted quite consciously:

We are accustomed to interpret generally the expressions of a Poet, of whatever kind they may be, and to apply them to our own circumstances, as they may happen to fit. By this means many passages come to have quite a different sense from what they had in the connection out of which we have torn them.¹²²

In these words is contained the theoretical justification of Arnold's eclectic method. He wrote them into his 1847 note-book, and it should surprise no-one to learn that they were taken from Goethe.

I have already followed out some of Arnold's ideas on literary matters as they developed in the years after 1857. In the following chapter I will turn my attention to the period from 1857 until 1888, the year of Arnold's death, and enquire how Arnold's attitude to Goethe altered during this time. I will also investigate what new meaning Goethe's works had for Arnold, whose interests now extended into the fields of social, political, and religious criticism, and indicate how these interests affected the nature of the relationship between the two men.