MATTHEW ARNOLD’S EPICS
Towards a Communicative Approach

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Abstract

This thesis is, on the one hand, an investigation into Matthew Arnold’s (1822-1888) literary communications and, on the other hand, an attempt to mediate between his writings and a twenty-first century readership. Arnold’s *oeuvre* is substantial and varied, but this study focuses on his epic poetry, which has remained a neglected part of his body of work despite its significance both to the author himself and to developing an understanding of Arnold’s development as a poet, cultural critic, and iconic ‘Victorian sage’. Furthermore, it is his epic poetry that seems to most fully address the theme of communication, and thus these longer poems function as points of orientation for a broader inquiry into Arnold’s communications. Arnold himself was keenly aware of the complicated status of communicative acts, but these complications have not always been acknowledged by the generations of criticism that have emerged since his death. Critics have thus produced images of Arnold which have not always done justice to the complexity of his communications. Based on an understanding of ‘communicative’ as a position of mediation between writers and readers, this thesis addresses the need for a more balanced communicative framework for mediating between Arnold’s writings in general – and his epic poetry in particular – his critics, and present audiences.

*Keywords:* epic poetry, literary communication, public image, literary stylistics, textual criticism, Victorian literature
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Tiivistelmä

Tässä väitöskirjassa tarkastellaan Matthew Arnoldin (1822-1888) kirjallista kommunikaatiota, pyrkien välittämään hänen kirjoitustensa merkityksiä 2000-luvun yleisölle. Arnoldin kirjallinen tuotanto on runsas ja monipuolinen, mutta tässä tutkimuksessa keskitytään erityisesti hänen runoepiikkansa tulkintaan. Tämä osa hänen työstään on jäänyt tutkimuksessa verrattain vähäiseen asemaan huolimatta siitä, että Arnoldin kaksi lyhyttä runoeposta olivat tärkeitä paitsi hänelle itselleen, mutta erityisesti osana hänen kehitystään runoilijana, kulttuurikritiikikona ja ikonisena viktorianen ajan julkisena intellektuellina.

Arnoldin runoepiikka vaikuttaa myös tutkivan kommunikaation teemaa laajemmin kuin hänen muut runonsa, ja toimii myös tällä tavoin keskiöön hänen oman kommunikaationsa laajemmalle tarkastelulle. Arnold oli varsin tietoinen kommunikaatiopyrkimyystä haasteista, mutta näitä ongelmia ei ole hänen kuolemansa jälkeen ilmestyneissä kritiikissä aina otettu huomioon. Näin on syntynyt monia Arnold-käsityksiä, jotka eivät välittämättä tee oikeutta hänen kommunikaationsa monivivahteisuudelle. Tämä välittömästi pyrkii tuottamaan tasapainoisemman kommunikatiivisen lähestymistavan toimiakseen välittäjänä Arnoldin kirjoitusten, eritoten hänen eepostensa, ja nykylukijan välillä.

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Juha-Pekka Alarauhio
List of original publications

This thesis is based on the following publications, which are referred to throughout the text by their Roman numerals:


Alarauhio, J.-P (Forthcoming). Sohrab and Rustum – Matthew Arnold’s Spectacle.
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1 Introduction

THE history of the Victorian Age will never be written; we know too much about it. For ignorance is the first requisite of the historian--ignorance, which simplifies and clarifies, which selects and omits, with a placid perfection unattainable by the highest art. (Strachey, 1918, p. vii)

More than a century after Lytton Strachey’s provocative suggestion about the relationship between historiography and ignorance, his estimate still seems convincing, if unintuitive. The sheer mass of cultural production of the last three quarters of the nineteenth century – even the volume of printed material alone¹ – defies the possibility of a single historical narrative of the age, even if we really aspired to produce such a monoglot history. The very abundance of the historical residue of the period – the art, the buildings, the cities, the language, the ideologies and the writing – seems to stand in the way of the kind of ignorance Strachey deems necessary for critical detachment. Yet one may just as well question the viability of more focused, limited, and selective approaches, even when it comes to a single author’s writings. The writer who is the focus of this thesis, Matthew Arnold, for example, is as multifaceted as was his age; he was not only a poet, essayist and school inspector, but also a ubiquitous figure in the broader culture of Victorian England, the force of which had a profound impact on many global developments throughout the twentieth century and, judging by the current intense interest in the Victorian era, is still highly relevant.

Within an Anglophone academic context, Arnold’s abundant and diverse writings have long been touchstones for discussion, routinely referred to in the fields of literary criticism and cultural studies and beyond. His work has served as a point of orientation, a backdrop against which generations of later critics have defined their positions, be it in admiration, respectful disagreement, or, just as frequently, determined opposition.

However, in Matthew Arnold studies there has been a persistent emphasis on biographical scholarship. The need for new approaches has been recognized and

¹ And here the technologies of our own time, in the form of digital publishing and distribution, are rapidly making vast amounts of Victorian writing available – and Strachey’s doubts easier to appreciate – as Josephine Guy and Ian Small point out, “the sheer volume of works now available is proving to be an obstacle to our ability to generalise about literary culture” (2011, p. 61) of that age.
voiced from the 1980s onwards (for instance, by Allan Dooley 1985), but the following decades saw a steady flow of biographical studies, albeit for a good reason: the publication of over 4000 of Arnold’s letters in the late 1990s. Furthermore, even when his poetry and prose is evoked in critical discussions, it is mostly in order to exemplify an argument made in relation to an image of Arnold as a symbol of one or another set of views on culture, politics or both. Rather than attempting to find a unified image in the multiple perceptions of Arnold, the purpose of the present dissertation is to make room for a renewed engagement with his writings as a form of communication between the author and his readers.

The first steps towards what became the present thesis were taken as part of such a basic effort of understanding. Many years ago, I encountered Matthew Arnold’s two epic poems, *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead*, and found them intriguing; they seemed fragments or echoes of greater, older epic narratives from other cultures and eras, but at the same time, they were clearly products of their own age. At least to a degree, I was able to see how these poems took part in the poetic discourse of the place and time in which Arnold created them, but some fundamental questions remained unanswered. Most importantly, there was a dimension in Arnold’s poems that remained alien to me: the poetic style of *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead* pointed to a literary tradition that was familiar to me only in general outline, yet the style itself seemed to place the poems within a frame of reference much wider than the stories they narrate. Such a vague awareness of something vast but undefined informing the poems made it very difficult for me to write about the poems with any degree of confidence. Having recognised my limitations, I decided to write my Master’s thesis on *Balder Dead* for the sole purpose of gaining a better understanding of the workings of Arnold’s epic style.

My inquiries into epic style provided some answers, but also so many more questions that I decided to continue along a path that continued to pose new challenges to understanding. The result of my response to these challenges, the present dissertation, is a wider inquiry into the ways in which Arnold communicated and continues to communicate through his writings. The original motivation, thus, has not changed; the ways in which Arnold’s texts can be understood by readers still remains the single most important reason for this study.
2 Objectives and scope

It is not by the direct method of a scrupulous narration that the explorer of the past can hope to depict that singular epoch. If he is wise, he will adopt a subtler strategy. [...] He will row out over that great ocean of material, and lower down into it, here and there, a little bucket, which will bring up to the light of day some characteristic specimen, from those far depths, to be examined with a careful curiosity. (Strachey, 1918, p. vii)

Although the present dissertation is a more intently-focused and less end-directed study than Strachey’s biographies perhaps were, even when considering a topic as comparatively restricted as Matthew Arnold, the picture presented here must rely on a sampling procedure not unlike Strachey’s. Arnold’s works reflect his “tangled and exuberant” age which was, as Richard Jenkyns goes on to describe it, “nothing if not complex and diverse” (1980, pp. ix - x). Even within the oeuvre of a single author, then, the selection of a restricted corpus of texts for study can be justified, particularly if the aim is to gain an understanding of these texts in their multiple, historically-effected contexts. Thus, my specific position with regard to this complexity could be labelled as philological as defined by Hans-Georg Gadamer:

[…] The philologist is a historian, in that he discovers a historical dimension in his literary sources. Understanding, then is for him a matter of placing a given text in the context of the history of language, literary form, style, and so on, and thus ultimately mediating it with the whole context of historical life. (2004b, p. 337)

Yet the objective of understanding itself serves a literary critical as well as a historical purpose: the communicative approach to Arnold's literary production carried out in this study is an attempt to reestablish a sense of critical and interpretative openness towards his work in order to enable a more balanced estimation of its significance and relevance. The role of the critic in this approach is ultimately to mediate between different perceptions of Arnold. Such views include not only those expressed by academic critics during the century and a half of Arnold scholarship, but also those of Arnold’s contemporaries, including reviewers and other commentators, the author of the present dissertation, and of course, Arnold’s own ideas about his work.
The general approach of the study can be described as broadly hermeneutic, but it is also profitable to place this approach into a more general philosophical framework. Such positioning can be achieved with the help of Gadamer's (1900-2002) philosophical hermeneutics, and its purpose is twofold. First, it enables a more critical view of literary stylistics, which can be seen as proposing a hermeneutical model of interpretation. Secondly, Gadamer's emphasis on the historicity of interpretation points towards methodological needs that arise from Arnold’s particular historical situatedness. These needs include not only a sensitivity to the cultural and historical specifics of Arnold’s life-world (as the mediating critic Roger D. Sell might put it), but the acknowledgement that the discursive habits of the Victorians were developed in response to their circumstances and according to their communicative aims, and that these may require a degree of historical mediation to become intelligible to twenty first century readers. Consequently, the analytical approaches used in the present thesis were developed to help the process of understanding by addressing specific hermeneutic problems ranging from concrete stylistic and genre-related topics to more abstract cultural phenomena and the history of ideas.

With its Gadamerian hermeneutic emphasis, my approach can be seen as aspiring to put into practice the main principles of Sell’s communicative theory of literature. Seeking foundations for his mediating criticism, a brand of scholarship aiming to open up channels of communication between writers and readers, Sell calls for an approach that would be based on a “historical yet non-historicist theory of communicative pragmatics” which over-emphasises neither the role of the writer, nor the text, nor the reader (Sell, 2000, pp. 8, 63). It is this interest in balance that makes Sell’s communicative approach particularly suitable for a study of an author like Arnold, around whose life and works a considerable interpretative tradition has developed. In Arnold, a present-day reader finds a figure whose writings have been subjected to intense critical attention for over a century, but this process has not resulted in agreement among the critics about almost anything concerning the author or his work. Rather, it is the disagreement about these topics that has become a critical commonplace, and this poses a particularly interesting case from a communicative perspective: what is it about Arnold’s work that makes it speak so differently to different readers?

Since the purpose of this study is to mediate between the past contexts in the midst of which the texts were produced, and past and present contexts of reading, the problems that the study must acknowledge are primarily hermeneutic. By this
I mean that each communicatively problematic situation can be seen as a hermeneutic stoppage or hitch in the interpretive work, an instance of negligence on part of the interpretive tradition, or a combination of these. Perhaps one of the most common experiences of shortcomings in communication in our present context—a globalized world in which multicultural societies have generated intense exchange between communities that would not often have come into sustained direct contact in earlier times—are those stemming from cross-cultural communications that take place with an immediacy that hardly leaves enough time for necessary steps of cultural mediation to take place. These experiences should, by now, have alerted us against taking successful communication for granted. At the very least, this implies that each communicative situation selected for a closer inquiry will need to be studied with methods that help us understand the communicative situation, its participants, messages, channels and contexts. The subject field of the present thesis is literary communication, and Sell (2000: 8) suggests that the efforts to mediate between the positionality of writers and readers can find vital support in literature’s own typology, hermeneutics, affect and ethics. The approach in this dissertation takes this suggestion as its main principle.

The relevant historical contexts of Arnold’s communicative strategies include, in addition to literary traditions and practices, his own views about his writings as well as their reception by different reading audiences. The emphasis on these communicative contexts is based on the basic notions of interpersonal communication, namely, that there is not only a sender, a message, a channel and a receiver, but that there is, as Michael Tomasello argues, “a certain communicative intention” which suggests that the piece of language used in the communicative act “has a certain function” (2003, p.3)\(^2\), and that it is only through awareness of the contexts of communication that we can properly acknowledge such communicative intentions and functions. The fact that there may be a centuries long gap between

\(^2\) Here I am following a model of communication theorized within cognitive-functional linguistics, or usage-based linguistics in which communication is thought to be performed through a symbolic language learned through social interaction, imitation, “in which the learner acquires not just the conventional form of the symbol but also its conventional use in acts of communication” (Tomasello, 2003, p. 12). In these fundamental principles, literary communication is not seen in this dissertation as different in any way from other forms of communication. Rather, it is the particular—and rather complex—cultural and historical circumstances of literary communicative acts that them seem so different from everyday communications. Attempts to establish a special status for literary communication as radically different from other forms of communication may, in part, result from the nebulosity of the cultural institution of literature itself.
the time of sending and the time of receiving the message merely serves to highlight the importance of the contexts of writing and reading for the understanding of the message as a whole.

Yet both Sell and Gadamer refrain from endorsing any particular methodological solutions to ensure dialogicality in interpretation. Ultimately, what is desired is a dialogic of interpretation in which the assumption that literary communication is unidirectional, a transmission from a writer to an audience of readers, is rejected and the idea that the readers often employ feedback channels to the author, even though this may remain an imagined version of the author, is given full credence. It is indeed difficult to formulate general principles for how to achieve the kind of dialogicality called for by Sell and Gadamer, but the work carried out as part of this thesis has indicated a number of basic practices. One starting point for my own study has been to consider a range of communications related to Arnold, rather than focusing on a single sub-set of the diverse corpus of available material: his private correspondence, his published prose and poetry, and public discourse about him, including reviews of his works, responses to his writings and obituaries. In this way, multiple perspectives are given a voice, which helps to construct an image of Arnold that is always in transition, ambiguous and irreducible to any one ideological commitment or cause. Simultaneously, the views of other Arnold scholars and critics need to be acknowledged – even when they present seemingly unjustified views – because they exemplify the communicative acts surrounding Arnold in the widest possible sense, even when this communication seems to have, in some ways, failed. Ultimately, it is the shortcomings of communication, which Arnold himself often generously comments on in his letters, that signal opportunities for reopening historical communicative events for reinterpretation and dialogue and release them from narrowing, final judgements. In other words, the disagreements in past discourses can be viewed dialogically so that the different positionalities of the participants are taken into account, thus revealing to what extent the participants are talking past each other, and hopefully making it possible for a new and fruitful discussion to commence.

In order to fulfil the aims of this thesis, I have implemented three inquiries, each focusing on a limited number of problems – the kinds of stoppages, hitches and negligence in communication discussed above – related to various responses to Arnold’s writings. Each article addresses these communicative themes with a different emphasis, starting from a historically-informed account of Arnold’s
authorial image, proceeding to a more textually-oriented communicative analysis of Arnold’s poetry, and finally, to a more complex and detailed analysis of Arnold’s literary communication in one of his epic poems, *Sohrab and Rustum*, which seeks to combine the previous two approaches into a more well-rounded, historical and textual analysis of Arnold’s literary communication. Consequently, each of the three articles named below represent an independent part of an interlinked inquiry into aspects of Arnold’s communication:

Article I: “Towards a Dialogical Approach to Matthew Arnold”
Article II: “*Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead* - Communicating about Communication”
Article III: “*Sohrab and Rustum* – Matthew Arnold’s Spectacle”

The main research question in this dissertation can be formulated as: how and what does Matthew Arnold communicate through his writing in general, and through his epic poems in particular, when literary communication is seen as no different from other forms of communication in that the contexts of the writing, the text and the reading should be sufficiently acknowledged? Each article explores this main question through a more specific and focused research question:

Article I: How can the myriad paradoxes in Arnold’s communicative outlook be reconciled with the need for a balanced and humanized basis for a genuine dialogue with him?

Article II: What are the implications of the ideas Arnold introduces in his 1853 *Preface* to his own communication through poetry as well as his other writings?

Article III: What are the communicative results from Arnold’s co-adaptation of the epic form in *Sohrab and Rustum*?

In a more concrete sense, my purpose is to reconsider Arnold's epic poems as a significant element of his *oeuvre*, and as an essential element in his communicative project, and to show that the critical neglect these poems have suffered has caused a bias in the study and understanding of Arnold's writings as a whole. Yet even before reaching this conclusion, I argue that Arnold’s status as a canonical figure in twentieth-century English literature has obscured some
important aspects in his communicative efforts. For instance, as I point out in the
first article written for this thesis, “Towards a Dialogical Approach to Matthew
Arnold”, the humour that was perceived as being an integral part of Arnold’s
community-making during his lifetime is no longer acknowledged as a part of his
communicative habits. This atrophying or simplification of Arnold’s authorial
image has resulted in interpretations of Arnold’s works that do not do justice to his
communicative attempts. Building on these perceptions, I seek to find a more
balanced image, or more properly, images of Arnold that help contextualizing the
findings of Articles II and III. For example, with regard to Article II, the notion of
philosophical pessimism, or the repeatedly evoked lack of ‘manliness’ in Arnold’s
thought (Caufield, 2012, pp. 65-67), that are often postulated as the main
underlying sentiment in Arnold’s poetry can be juxtaposed with a resolutely
pragmatic (if not philosophically hopeful), versatile, and intensely active author,
father and school inspector who was, to a high degree, free – to a remarkable extent
– from chauvinistically pride for the British Empire yet committed to the cultural
transmission of what he thought its best products in thought and writing. Article III,
on the other hand, expands the view of Arnold’s epic form, treating it as something
more than an academic exercise by contextualizing Sohrab and Rustum not merely
within the framework of Classicist aesthetics, but the cultural phenomenon of the
visual spectacle that had gained an unprecedented grasp on Arnold’s generation of
Victorians. Yet Arnold uses the traditional epic form, a highly visual Homeric
narrative style, to question the overreliance on outward perceptions.
3 Theoretical and methodological framework

Human beings are too important to be treated as mere symptoms of the past. (Strachey, 1918, p. viii)

Of course it is not the case that the central hermeneutic problem addressed in this thesis – how to do justice to a text as something that speaks from its own perspective but also enters into dialogue with a range of communicative partners – has somehow remained unacknowledged in the past. Indeed, the struggle for interpretive authority can hardly be younger than the activity of interpreting itself. In her famous essay, Against Interpretation (1966), Susan Sontag identified interpretation as the effort to assign a text a single, persistent meaning as a long-standing practice that takes place in certain circumstances:

Interpretation thus presupposes a discrepancy between the clear meaning of the text and the demands of (later) readers. It seeks to resolve that discrepancy. The situation is that for some reason a text has become unacceptable; yet it cannot be discarded. Interpretation is a radical strategy for conserving an old text, which is thought too precious to repudiate, by revamping it. The interpreter, without actually erasing or rewriting the text, is altering it. But he can’t admit to doing this. He claims to be only making it intelligible, by disclosing its true meaning. (1966, p. 6)

Sontag attacked what might be broadly labelled a conservative type of coercive criticism, an insistence on value to the point that the value, signification in this case, is supplied as through a ritualised act of interpretation that reaffirms the lasting importance of the text. Sontag explains that “[b]y interpretation, I mean here a conscious act of the mind which illustrates a certain code, certain ‘rules’ of interpretation” (1966, p. 5). Nor is this an exclusively conservative approach to interpretation. Pointing towards future cultural wars she describes Freudian and Marxist frameworks for interpretation as “aggressive and impious” (1966, p. 7). In later phases of these conflicts, dismissively critical forms of an approach Paul Ricoeur labelled hermeneutics of suspicion have eventually performed an almost identical task to the authoritatively conservative counterparts, but with a converse aim: to destabilise meaning in the literary work of art and, eventually, separate the two so completely that it becomes a suspect activity ever to read it again. As
Ricoeur explained – in a debate with Gadamer – the conflicting “obligations” of the modern reader are those of suspicion and recollection, the first being a questioning of values and meaning in Nietzchean-Marxist vein, the other an effort to “recover the past” motivated by a human interest in history and cultures different from ours (1991, p. 235). Ricoueur hopes to mediate between these opposites, but a singularly suspicious hermeneutics may easily set itself up as resistance to recollection – which may be portrayed as politically conservative – thus entering a mode of monological rather than dialogical interpretation. Paradoxically, this work can be carried out through a search for a single solution, a decodeable “Significant message”, to use Brigid Lowe’s (2007, p. 86) phrase, an activity that emerges as a close relative of Sontag’s notion of interpretation, namely that of Signification “[…]with a capital ‘S’, to refer to this type of secondary, generalizing meaning that lies behind the superficial details of fiction” (Lowe, 2007, p. 62). This activity, this quest for Signification behind textual epiphenomena, can underlie any approach to reading and interpreting. Lowe gives an example of a Marxist reading in this mode:

[… ] Daniel Cottom’s 1987 book on George Eliot, in which he systematically relates every aspect of her fiction to the project of bourgeois hegemony, has a predominately eulogistic foreword by Terry Eagleton. Towards the end of his comments, however, Eagleton remarks that Cottom’s ‘critical, powerfully distancing study’ has been almost ‘too successful’, prompting as it does the question: ‘Why, after this, read Eliot at all?’ (2007, p. 2)

It is worth noting here that it is not the critic himself, but Eagleton who feels (at least rhetorically) that Cottom’s exposition of the corrosive Significance behind the realist pretentions of Eliot’s writing is so effective that reading the material on which the interpretation is based is no longer recommended. That a professional reader of literature should wish for an outcome like this may seem perplexing, yet it is easier to understand in a context of cultural historical processes. Sontag modifies her attack on interpretation by claiming that the motivations and effects of interpretation are nevertheless relative:

In some cultural contexts, interpretation is a liberating act. It is a means for revisiting, of transvaluing, of escaping the dead past. In other cultural contexts, it is reactionary, impertinent, cowardly, stifling. (1966, p. 7)
The language in Sontag’s differentiation here is that of *mores*. If she criticises falsely-reverant idol-worship, Lowe on the other hand depreciates censorship, or symbolic book-burning, but both agree that the discussion is an ethical rather than a strictly literary-theoretical one. For Lowe, human sympathy is the appropriate corrective to dehumanizing practices in criticism, whereas, according to Sontag, the defense against the corroding effects of prescriptive criticism of *artistic content* is a descriptive criticism of its *form* (Lowe, 2007, p. 12; Sontag, 1966, p. 12).

In more practical terms, both reinstate the *sensuous* (Lowe, 2007, p. 20; Sontag, 1966, pp. 9-10, 13-14), in Sontag’s phrase, the ability to “see more, to hear more, to feel more” (1966, p. 14), that it is the experience of the literary work of art that must not be taken for granted, must not be read through for some kind of essential meaning. This is the combination of phenomenon – the ethical and the experiential – that I hope the combined forces of Gadamer’s hermeneutics and literary stylistics can both clarify and re-establish in relation to Arnold’s writings.

Before a presenting an elaboration of the theoretical approach in the present thesis, it should be stressed that, rather than denying the importance of ideological criticism, to use a general name for a broad range of critical positions, my purpose here is to make space for more primary efforts in understanding. I use the word primary here in the sense of immediate, or first in a sequence, with the suggestion that there are open-ended hermeneutic moves that a text deserves to encounter before more aggressively suspicious readings. In summary, the direction chosen in the present thesis is one that begins with Gadamerian propositions about hermeneutics as doing justice, as exemplified by Sontag’s, Lowe’s and Sell’s concern for the human value of literature and the act of reading, seeking to integrate multiple perspectives in dialogue alongside a sensual experience of the text.

### 3.1 Bridging Between Gadamer, Stylistics, and a Communicative Approach to Literature

The three articles in the present dissertation are based on principles related to the fields of linguistics and philosophy as represented by Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. This section outlines the principles which each article applies within a particular inquisitorial perspective.
3.1.1 Gadamer’s hermeneutics of art

In general terms, Gadamer’s philosophy of art is hardly a systematic theory ready to be translated into a method of literary criticism. In fact, after he presents his critique of the naïve adoption of the model of natural sciences to the study of human life and culture in *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (2004b) consciously resists the formulation of a consistent method for conducting the human sciences. He also points out instances in the history of philosophy in which art’s claim to truth has been unduly renounced by imposing a concept of truth analogous to the one propounded in natural sciences. Gadamer’s rehabilitation of art by showing its own claim to truth as a process of human understanding finally clarifies his thesis about the validity of the truth art offers us; the truth of art is simply not measurable with the standards of science but has an existence through generating human experience. In the previous section, the notion of an experiential basis for human understanding was differentiated from aggressive premises for criticism with tend to produce totalizing interpretations. Here, I further explore the implications of the idea of understanding as generated by experience.

A central place in Gadamer’s philosophy is taken by a hermeneutic principle of understanding. In Gadamer’s hands, hermeneutics is given the status of a universal manner of understanding, not merely of understanding texts (Gadamer, 2004b, p. 164). In relation to art, hermeneutics is relevant because every work of art – not only literature – is to be understood just as any text is to be understood (Gadamer, 2004b, p. 164), that is to say that while works of artistic communications may employ a different selection of rhetorical means from those of everyday communications, they nevertheless have something to say. Thus, hermeneutics begins to cover the domain of aesthetics, too, which in turn requires that hermeneutics should be able to “do justice to the experience of art” (Gadamer, 2004b, p. 164). In order to understand the meaning of this, we must turn to the ontology of art as presented by Gadamer.

The actual mode of being of a work of art is, in Gadamer’s thought, its realisation in an experience of art (2004b, p. 164). Such an experience may be, for instance, a viewing of a painting, a hearing of a piece of music, or a reading of a text. In fact, Gadamer suggests that the life of a literary work of art is in the readings
it produces rather than in the text itself (Gadamer, 1986, p. 25). Yet a reading, or an interpretation generated by a reading does not exhaust the work of art in any way. Instead, the reader finds merely one possible path in the work, or as Gadamer puts it:

It is important to note that all interpretation points in a direction rather than to some final endpoint, in the sense that it points to an open realm that can be filled in a variety of ways. (1986, p. 68)

The notion of filling suggests that the reader participates actively in interpretation by trying to find a direction in the text. Therefore, a correct interpretation must be understood as something less binding than the absolute meaning of the work of art – neither can a work of art simply cannot be reduced to an intention of meaning (Gadamer, 1986, p. 70). Consequently, in the place of a single, total meaning determined by the artist or an individual audience member or reader, we have a multitude of interpretations which we are supposed to accept as the existence of any work of art. This gives rise to the question of whether we can even speak about a particular work meaningfully. Is there indeed a *Dover Beach* that can be a subject of critical discussion or does every reader of the poem merely speak of their singular, subjective experience of its effects upon them?

Gadamer claims, however, that the reader’s – or readers’ – constructive participation does not disintegrate the unity of the work, since the act of understanding alone proposes that there is something to be understood in the text:

So it is the hermeneutic identity that establishes the unity of the work. To understand something, I must be able to identify it. For there was something there that I passed judgment upon and understood. I identify something as it was or as it is, and this identity alone constitutes the meaning of the work. (Gadamer, 1986, p. 25)

What makes this sort of recognition possible is Gadamer’s universalisation of the hermeneutic principle. According to this principle, hermeneutics is given a universal status as the manner of comprehension common to all human understanding, not, as I mentioned previously, merely as interpretation of written texts, as it is used in classical hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2004b, p. 164). Because of the hermeneutic universal, idiosyncratic interpretation does not lead to the
disintegration of the identity of the work of art; everyone understands in the similar manner and, in a text, understanding takes place according to the meaning relations that can be inferred in the text that is being interpreted. Therefore, Gadamer (2004b, p. 95) rejects interpretational nihilism in which each reading is a new work of art as there are qualifications to what constitutes genuine interpretation and understanding.

Interpretation has its limits – even while such limits may be historically effected. Gadamer claims that, when we encounter art and strive to understand it, we must let go of ourselves to certain extent and surrender to the play of interpretation with all our cognitive capabilities (Gadamer, 2004b, pp. 51-52). We no longer wish to understand art if we break the rules it poses, just as we cannot genuinely participate in a given game if we reject its rules (Gadamer, 2004b, p. 102). In a role play, for instance, the participants must bring about their creativity within the flexible limits of their roles and stepping out of one’s role constitutes a breach in the status of the play. Or perhaps this is more readily understood by looking at a system with more clearly defined rules such as the game of chess; the game comes to be in play, but not unless the rules are respected by the players, both of whom must be committed to them to create the experience of chess. New understanding of the game occurs as the players engage in the play, but there is no reason to claim that the match constitutes a new game that is not chess. In this way, Gadamer dissolves the claims of radically subjective interpretation of art by replacing the aesthetic object with ontology of art as play. An experience of art is not a subject’s free observation of an aesthetic object, as it is in Kant’s thought, as the work of art only comes into existence in a play of interpretation, a play that can only be fulfilled by following its rules (Gadamer, 2004b, p. 102). In its rules – understood as, for example, the structures of language, rhetoric and genre it employs – and the contexts of interpretation relevant to it, a work of art has its own life that is not reducible or disintegrated into individual interpretations, since it is always ready to be experienced once again within the framework of its rules. The subjective aspect of experience is not a threat to the existence of the work as a unity, but, from the viewpoint of an individual, it is the basis for a relevant art experience. It follows that, historically, a poem may live a life of an unlimited number of interpretations. A reading, however, does not constitute a work independent from the original work of art; it is instead a particular reader’s individual process through the text, always different in some respects from the experiences of other readers, but therefore enabling of comparisons, of enriching exchange on what the
experience has been like, or what insights or new perspectives the readers may have gained during the process. Therefore, it is possible to speak about the same work of art even when there are a multitude of interpretations, each, and this is highly significant, contributing to the total meaning of the work.

Based on what has been said so far, it can be established that Gadamer’s philosophy of art stems from a redefinition of the mode of existence of art. The rejection of the reconstruction of the original meaning of an artwork as the task of interpretation does not lead to the subjectivisation and thus arbitrariness of interpretation. On the contrary: ambiguity is the source from which art derives its force. Each historical situation will bring about interpretations that are possible only in those particular surroundings, and within this developing framework, works of art speak to every individual in a different way. A reader interprets a poem without the possibility to an absolutely shared interpretation with other readers, but the poem nevertheless points a direction for interpretation, and the readers may discuss their different journeys in the realm of the poem, thus expanding the totality of the poem’s meaning.

It is worth re-emphasizing the fact that in Gadamer’s thought, a work of art cannot be reduced to an object with a constant meaning that can be extracted by an aesthetic consciousness and an act of interpretation. If such an absolute content or meaning actually existed, it would be possible to interpret any work of art “correctly,” and to thus fix it in place once and for all. In such a view, art would be something mechanical and, once it had yielded up its correct meaning, largely irrelevant; it would be difficult to see any purpose in art conceived in this fashion. Gadamer’s hermeneutics, on the other hand, sees art as something to be filled; interpretation creates relations of meaning instead of discovering them, as has been the aspiration in idealistic hermeneutics (Gadamer, 2004a, p. 57).

In this way, art clearly has a communicative function in Gadamer’s thought. Insight, produced in interpretation, is perhaps the primary outcome of a genuine art experience, as opposed to entertainment, amusement, fright, or diversion for its own sake. For successful interpretation, meanings need to be created, and this requires one to acquaint with the otherness presented by the work of art and to confront oneself with this unfamiliarity, which will, after being understood, become a permanent part of the interpreter (Gadamer, 2004a, pp. 115, 234). Being in communication, in this model, suggests a growing or enriching of experience rather than a linear transmission of a message from an artist to an audience.
It is now possible to specify what aspects of Gadamer’s ontology of art are fundamental from the viewpoint of literary studies. Since the mode of being of a literary work of art consists of its readings, it is clear that the way in which texts define our reading experiences by providing our senses and minds with complex patterns of signification – through words, sentences, narratives, representations, genres, references to other texts – must be given a primary standing. Yet the markings on the page are only one of the ways the text effects and engages the reader. Furthermore, we must also take the reader into account: as readers, our task is to build the relations of meaning within texts in order to interpret and it follows that, in this task, our reading skills in the broadest sense are of the essence. It has been claimed that in a genuine art experience, the work of art speaks to the person committed to interpreting it. The idea of speaking is vital in understanding Gadamer’s dialogical conception of interpretation and understanding, as Małgorzata Przanowska explains:

The understanding, which is for Gadamer identical with interpretation and application, is like a living conversation between persons. The text is a special “other,” because it is the other with a voice without a possibility to react to an interpretation in statu nascendi of its voice. (2015, p. 387)

But it is obvious that it is not enough simply to listen (or to become enticed by the text) in order to understand – one needs to have a command of the language of art as well. In terms of encountering a literary text, this ‘language of art’ includes a number of factors, from competence in the language in which a literary work is written to an understanding of the generic conventions as work in a given text, to cultural awareness, a sensitivity to or a competence in recognizing cultural meanings, or to the fact that one might not be able to exhaustively decipher them. A communicative competence in the realm of literature is thus supported by linguistic, generic and cultural competencies, all of which remain idiosyncratic to each reader despite their communal origins.

Consequently, the language of art receives an important status in Gadamer’s model of interpretation, since it is, perhaps, the only plausible criterion by which we can justify and separate valid interpretations from those less justifiable. A genuinely experiential study of art therefore requires an understanding of the simultaneousness of the work of art’s claim to unity and the multiplicity of its interpretations. In order to give life to works of art, ambiguity must be accepted. If
a given interpretation is to justify its place in the broad field of genuinely dialogic interpretations, it must demonstrate a clear competence in the text’s own artistic language. However, we must now leave this subject in order to review the study of style and the way in which it contributes to this discussion.

3.1.2 Literary stylistics

Now that Gadamer’s notion of the work of art has been introduced in relation to the experiential aspect of reading, it is possible to consider these ideas in the framework of a more formalist approach to texts. In this dissertation, the interest in the experiential dimension of interpretation – the sensuous dimension, as Lowe might describe it – is primarily explored through the scope of literary stylistics. Furthermore, it should be noted that, contrary to Sontag’s notion of interpretation, what is meant by interpretation in the context of the present thesis is something that includes and engages with the sensory and imaginative experience of reading. As an approach to describe the effects gained through language use, stylistics can provide the kind of explanatory apparatus needed for the appreciation of the experiential dimension of interpretation.

That such experiences take place cannot, however, taken for granted. In Gadamer’s terms, the text must speak to the reader, and this is not an automatic process:

In our analysis of the hermeneutical process we saw that to acquire a horizon of interpretation requires a fusion of horizons. This is now confirmed by the verbal aspect of interpretation. The text is made to speak through interpretation. But no text and no book speaks if it does not speak a language that reaches the other person. Thus interpretation must find the right language if it really wants to make the text speak. (2004b, p. 397)

Thus, if Sontag’s suspicion of interpretation is taken as a genuine concern, the problem of genuine engagement with the text rises to prominence; her criticism seems to be aimed towards an intellectual dishonesty sometimes motivated by a wish to conserve the status of a text and, at other times, or even simultaneously, to prop up the status of the interpreter. Thus, what seems to be lacking is care for what
the text itself is saying. However, understood in the way Gadamer suggests, interpretation also involves what Lowe might identify as sympathy, that is, a concern over what the text could be saying. If a text has some kind of autonomous claim to meaning – even while the meaning is generated by readers – responding to such claim is not very different from approaching a person in a more immediate form of communication, in which ‘sympathy’ – in its now partially lost Humean sense as a “fundamental principle of radically intersubjective communication” (Lowe 2007, p. 10) – is usually readily given and reciprocated, at least when the aim of communication is to reach understanding rather than, for instance, to prove the another person wrong about some predefined issue. In an exchange between participants in a conversation, understanding can be upheld by questions and answers, but such bidirectionality is, of course, less obvious in textual interpretation. However, it is in the form of question and answer rather than through a monologic assertion by the reader that interpretation proceeds towards understanding. This is exemplified by the way in which critics, in their turn, lead their own readers into sharing their understanding through a language of criticism – of explication and analyses as shown in context of textual examples.

Here, it may be difficult to see the difference between a persuasive and a dialogical mode. If the critic is showing rather than telling, what is in the text can, however, be taken as an indicator that the attempt is to help the reader understand something rather than to convince them that no further inquiries need be made. In this context, the critic’s awareness of the workings of the linguistic form of the text they are discussing can further help building a sympathetic relationship between the author of the text, the critic and the readership of both the critic and the original text. In the end, it is the linguistic form through which the text is to be understood, and well researched explications of its workings can serve a dialogical purpose analogous to the questions and answers in a real-time discussion – it is, after all, as if the critic were asking the text: what exactly do you mean by this? This is when the hermeneutician’s task of listening to the speaking text becomes most acute, the task, as Przanowska suggests, of bringing “the voice of the other to live, to re-vive the other in the event of understanding each time differently” (2015, p.388).

However, in order to avoid simplistic and naïve postulations about a linguistic form as separable from literary content, these notions should also be examined critically, and it is for this purpose that the present thesis turns to the stylistic approach to literature developed by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short during the latter part of the twentieth century. It is perhaps a useful starting point to remark
that when Short refers to the linguistic form of a text, form is not given the separate, traditional counterpart of content, but points instead directly to interpretation: there is no content, Leech and Short indicate, that would exist independently from a detachable linguistic outer casing (1984, pp. 15-16). This is the key step Leech and Short used to distinguish themselves from what they identify as dualistic models in which it was thought possible to express the same content in different styles (1984, pp. 19-20). Instead, they stress the inseparability of form and content, and suggest that a change in form leads to change in content. It is clear already that their approach to texts comes close to Gadamer’s conception of the organic unity of the literary work of art, which proposes that every single word in a text is irreplaceable to some extent (Gadamer, 2004a, p. 245).

Leech and Short do not, however, endorse a highly radical form of the text as a unity, a view they refer to as monism, either, because such a view would overemphasise the autonomy of the work, and would render their approach unpractical when applied to longer texts such as novels (1984, pp. 25, 30). They also perceive a logical contradiction in exclusively monistic views:

The flaw of monism is that it tends to view a text as an undifferentiated whole, so that examination of linguistic choices cannot be made except on some ad hoc principle. One might even argue that the monist, if he followed the logic of his position, would not be able to discuss language at all: if meaning is inseparable from form, one cannot discuss meaning except by repeating the very words in which it is expressed, and one cannot discuss form except by saying that it appropriately expresses its own meaning. (Leech & Short 1984, p. 33)

Hence, they decide to label their view a pluralistic one, which they differentiate from dualism and monism on the basis of the idea that the reality represented by language stands outside of language itself, and is brought into an interpretation in the form of the interpreter’s experience of the world (1984, p. 35). In this way, pluralism takes into account the fact that language may have a multiplicity of functions simultaneously (Leech & Short, 1984, p. 30), meaning that, instead of a stable and direct relationship of correspondence between content and form, an expression carries the potential to generate numerous possible meanings out of which actualize those particular ones that are most emphatically validated by the contexts in which the expression appears. Therefore, it can be said that literary
stylistics focuses on the relationship between formal features and the meanings they may elicit; the relevance of the stylistic features lies in the way they affect the meaning of a text, their functions being potentially as unlimited yet simultaneously focused as the contexts in which they appear. Thus, for instance, repetition of identical syntactic structures in a classical epic poem signifies a commitment to the genre and supports interpretation within the tradition of classical epic, whereas similar structures in a modernist poem might attract, due to a different set of intertextual cues, a reading focused on the aesthetic effects such repetitions might enable a context for a highly readerly experience of the aesthetic effects of repetition – a mode of reading appropriate for modernist texts.

It is possible to see how this idea of context-driven signification strives, in the manner of pragmatics, to avoid the pitfalls of reductionism. An atomistic reduction can be seen as the consequence of the separation between language and its function and leads to aimless counting of words. This is the complete and utter deflation of the meaning of textual analysis. Since style is, for Leech and Short, a relational concept, they choose as the goal of their method “to relate the critic’s concern of aesthetic appreciation with the linguist’s concern of linguistic description” (Leech & Short, 1984, p. 13). In addition to this pluralist combination of aesthetics and linguistics, Leech and Short advance another pragmatic principle in stylistics: it is not applied only to describe language use, but in order to explicate the relationship between language and the artistic effect it achieves (Leech & Short, 1984, p. 13). In this pragmatic sense, it resembles Aristotelian rhetoric, which is, according to Gadamer, not really a technique for public speaking, but a philosophy about human life defined by speech (Gadamer, 2004a, p. 134). Language defines the literary work of art in its entirety, and it is the artistic effect achieved by language that stylistics sets itself to explore.

In their effort to explicate the workings of language, Leech and Short resort to traditional tools of linguistics, which can be divided into three levels according to the three levels of language: semantic, syntactic and phonological (which can be, to some extent, replaced by a graphological level when written texts are examined). On each level, it is possible to differentiate between variants of stylistic choice, which can be seen as a range of expressions from which the writer chooses in a particular writing situation; style is formed through this series of choices (Leech & Short, 1984, pp. 199-120). From the interpreter’s viewpoint, stylistic choices are significant because of their effect: they are reviewed in relation to their immediate textual environment as well as to the interpretation of the text as a whole. What
follows from this is the relation between form and artistic function: the examination of language on its micro level is always linked to its macro level. This macro level is formed by the communicative functions of language, which are divided into ideational, interpersonal, and textual functions of a message (Leech and Short, 1984, pp. 136-137). The result is a complex network of micro level stylistic choices, which are meaningful in relation to each other, and macro level functions which are in constant interaction with each other as well as with the linguistic events taking place on the micro level.

The emphasis placed on the relational nature of style has notable consequences when the language of literature as a whole is taken into account. Since stylistic choices are considered to obtain their significance and create style in relation to their surroundings, there is no reason why the style of a single text could not be contrasted with the background of its genre, or even literature in general. The better readers know their way around the world of literature, the easier it is for them to see the changes in its landscape – even subtle changes become visible to the trained eye. In this respect, there is a comparative aspect inherent in the stylistic approach, even though it is not an aspect of primary concern in stylistic theory; as was discussed in relation to Gadamer’s textual hermeneutics, knowledge of stylistic conventions, which can be seen as an aspect of a reader’s generic competence, informs and enriches interpretation. Consequently, a literary-historical multiplicity of interpretations impinges on the act of reading: the reader interprets from a unique historical situation which gives the interpretation a form that is relevant from the viewpoint of the given situation. Cervantes’ *Don Quixote*, for instance, may be read as a satire if the reader is familiar with the literature of Cervantes’s own age, instead of being read, as is sometimes done, as a precursor of the modern novel. In stylistic terms, this can be further explored by examining the way Cervantes employs stylistic features from the forms of romance and epic. Yet, as was explained in the previous section, in Gadamerian thought, the value of the work is by no means diminished as a consequence of such changes in understanding that historical changes bring to existence – on the contrary.

It is now clear that literary stylistics has qualities, such as the postulation of the form of the text as the starting point of analysis, that point to the direction of formalism, but it also has a context emphasising a reader-oriented model of interpretation which gives it momentum within the field of aesthetics of reception. Nevertheless, the approach I am adopting here pushes neither formalism nor impressionism of interpretation to their extremes but binds their radical forces into
a hermeneutic circle. Furthermore, acknowledging this interdependence between the objective and the subjective elements in interpretation will deny both of them the claim to excessive authority. Consequently, the common ground I undertook to explore between literary stylistics and Gadamer’s thought is offered by their shared foundation in the principles of hermeneutics and the converging notions about the simultaneous multiplicity of interpretations within the unity of the work of art.

I have suggested earlier that, in his writings about art, Gadamer aims to renew our ideas about how to approach art. The ontology of art he postulates, which claims that the realisation of art occurs in and through its interpretation poses a range of new challenges to the study of art. Yet even though Gadamer views Kantian aesthetics critically, he is reluctant to completely deny the validity of the evaluation of art performed by the aesthetic consciousness (Gadamer, 2004a, p. 111). As far as the study of art as art is concerned, it is crucial to appraise what the scrutiny of art performed by the aesthetic consciousness is capable of achieving from the point of view of the work of art itself. Gadamer concludes that, in its attempt to assume an objective distance from what is subjective in the artistic experience, the aesthetic consciousness has alienated itself from what is true in art (Gadamer, 2004a, pp. 111-112; Gadamer 1986, p. 129). Therefore, the aesthetic culture has grown alienated in its relation to art because it strives, for the sake of objectivity, to keep its distance from the work of art itself and to evaluate it without becoming enticed by it. Thus, the link between the work of art and the world is lost (Gadamer, 2004a, p. 112). In relation to the general theme of this paper, it is important to note that this sort of aesthetic consciousness is an objectifying approach to literature and is problematic insofar as it rejects the constructive role of the reader in the experience of literature as art. But if readers are not able or willing to listen to what a work of art has to say, it is not difficult to understand why aesthetic systems have proliferated and been summoned to interrogate works of art.

From the viewpoint of Gadamer’s conception of art, the literary stylistics of Leech and Short is relevant because it seeks to study literature specifically as art (Leech & Short, 1984, p. 14). In fact, they openly distinguish between the study of the styles of literature and the style of other texts in a manner that fits Gadamer’s views rather well. The work of art itself is central in the study of literature and there are no other functions to be imposed on it except its artistic effect on the reader, whereas there is always some external function – a practical end – that is involved in the examination of other texts (Leech & Short, 1984, pp. 137–138). In Gadamer’s terms, it could be said that in the stylistic approach of Leech and Short, the
examination of art concentrates on the means by which the text achieves an effect on the reader, rather than on any of the other uses of stylistics, such as identifying the stylistic fingerprint of an author (Leech & Short, 1984, p. 14).

It must be admitted, however, that the differentiation of stylistic features performed with the help of linguistics obviously implies a shift to a reflective rather than appreciative or experiential level. As a matter of fact, it is very difficult to see just how this could be avoided in studying art, since critical thinking is, by definition, an activity in which the object of examination is distanced from the examiner. Without this distance, it is difficult to point out the difference between a scientific study about art and a work of art about art. However, realising this does not lessen the impact of Gadamer’s insight on the study of art; it is still possible to maintain that the subjective response of the reader belongs to the art experience and must be disclosed in a study of art as well.

**Stylistics within Gadamerian hermeneutics**

Hermeneutic interpretation appears to be the connection between Gadamer and stylistics that we may use as a starting point for bringing these two lines of thought together. Leech and Short derive their version of the hermeneutic circle, usually conceived as the interpreter’s movement between parts and the whole, from Leo Spizer, who uses his philological circle to explain how linguistic-literary explanation proceeds by the “movement to and fro from linguistic details to the literary ‘centre’ of a work or a writer’s art” (Leech & Short, 1984, p. 13). In literary stylistics, the centre of the work can be seen as the overall interpretation of the work. The bridge to Gadamer’s hermeneutics is not very difficult to establish, but as First name Seung has noted, there is a particularly Heideggerian focus in his conception of the hermeneutic circle, as

> [h]e maintains that everything can be understood only in the context of the subject, whether it be a whole or parts, because no subject can jump out of his own historically given context (Seung, 1982, p. 200).

Gadamer, as we have seen, postulates the command of the language of art as a prerequisite for understanding art, and this implies there is more to the phenomenon of understanding than Leech and Short or Spizer’s circular models might seem to
indicate. Interpretation is not always an easy task; not only can be the reader’s move from text to meaning diverted, hitched or broken in myriad different ways, but it is often an effort in itself to become aware of a reading that has become short circuited in some way. Gadamer (2004a, p. 33) recommends that the interpreter should become aware of their prejudices before they step in the text so that they would be able to reappraise the justification of these prejudices, that is, their origins and validity. This is clearly something more fundamental than defining of one’s own position in the field of scholarly discourse. I believe Gadamer is referring to the language through which art speaks to us, meaning that we should become aware of our communicative limitations in relation to art. We may helpfully compare the language of art to natural languages – if a natural language demands that we must, in order to understand it, have a command of its parts, then we must be able to appreciate the parts of the language of art: its structure, vocabulary, usage patterns and so on. Naturally, we should not forget the history of the language, its roots in culture and their constant presence in any particular situation of language usage, while the significance of the living present has an impact great enough to be considered, too.

Thus far, it appears that literary stylistics must be able to offer a great variety of tools for interpretation in order to satisfy the needs of Gadamer’s hermeneutics. This holds in spite of its concentration on the text itself, which separates it to a certain extent from a plethora of phenomena discussed in the field of literary studies today. This is an appropriate place to turn to the question of how literary stylistics manages to answer to the problem posed by the speaking work of art, for if the stylistic approach of Leech and Short is to benefit from Gadamer’s philosophy of art, it needs to be able to tackle the issues Gadamer himself leaves open in some way. Since one of the most important characteristics of art in Gadamer’s thought is its ability to speak, and since this ability is not given a detailed definition by Gadamer himself, this characteristic presents a considerable hermeneutic challenge to literary stylistics.

In relation to the speaking aspect of art, Leech and Short borrow a concept from the Prague school of linguistics, foregrounding (Leech & Short, 1984, p. 28; Short, 1996, p. 36), which is also known as de-automatisation of the linguistic code. In foregrounding, the code of language is broken on some level so that the reader can be surprised
into a fresh awareness of, and sensitivity to, the linguistic medium which is normally taken for granted as an ‘automatised’ background of communication. (Leech & Short, 1984, p. 28)

Such foregrounding can take place in an unlimited number of ways, but one common element in this is deviation from an established convention, be it linguistic, generic, or semantic. It could argued that foregrounding takes place in the experience whenever it is novel in a way that it heightens the focus of the reader, so that it is not only the most groundbreakingly experimental poem that achieves this, but to a reader in the twenty first century, it may very well be a text from the past, since the conventions familiar to most readers at any period are always shifting. According to Short, foregrounding is a textual strategy by which the author signals, consciously or unconsciously, that a part of a text is “crucial to our understanding of what he has written (1996, p. 36).

In this way, foregrounding could be described as one of the ways in which a text makes a clear attempt to speak to the reader, in the sense that it appears to demand an active response on behalf of the reader. If the speaking text is to be responded to, this demand must be met, or as Gadamer puts it:

We must realise that every work of art only begins to speak when we have already learned to decipher and read it. The case of modern art supplies an effective warning against the idea that we can appreciate the previous language of art without first learning how to read it. (1986, p. 48)

Furthermore, in my view, there is a connection between, on the one hand, Gadamer’s notion of supporting agreement and the automatisation of language, and on the other between openness of prejudices and the de-automatisation of language. These terms are used by Gadamer in a specialised way and may require explication. Firstly, it is the familiarity of the text which supports the reader – providing a supporting agreement – and allows him to enter its world (Gadamer, 2004a, p. 124). Whenever reading and understanding is desired, the reader brings with them a supporting agreement to the act of reading (Gadamer, 2004a, p. 149). It is indeed possible to speak about the alignment of language with prejudices, since when the text answers to the prejudices of the reader in an expected way, the reader comes to an agreement with the text. Such an agreement is easily provided when a late
twentieth century Western European reader, for instance, reads a novel in the
detective fiction genre. Both the novel form and the main themes of crime fiction
can be seen as having become common cultural capital to this particular reading
audience of that period. Similarly, when a socially conservative reader, for example,
encounters a conventionally realistic text which valorizes heterosexual marriage,
agreement or alignment is easily achieved. Consequently, when prejudices are left
unchallenged in reading, the code of language may be called automatised.

Yet some texts may adopt a strategy of intense de-automatization, or
challenging prejudices by deviating from familiar patterns of language and
representation. Perhaps the best, and certainly the best-known, example of such a
strategy would be James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which evokes a tradition of Homeric epic
– and with it a range of linguistic, generic and cultural prejudices – through a
number of allusions to Homer’s *Odyssey*, but also challenges the expectations of
the reader on all these levels, language, genre and culture. What is held out as a
reward to the reader is a realization of a different kind of epic, one that is only
accessible to a reader able to recognize and dispense with such references.
Understanding thus becomes dependent on the reader’s willingness and ability to
overcome the frustrated prejudices and adjust or abandon them so that the
seemingly incoherent parts may be brought into coherence with the text as a whole
so that interpretation may commence. If the process of understanding is viewed in
this way, as a gradual, evolving ability to overcome each challenged prejudice in
their turn, it is no longer profitable to see prejudices as a limitation to new
experiences: being prejudiced – and in our limited, historically human condition
there is no other way to be – is the precondition of fresh experience, Gadamer
(2004a, p. 117) argues, and any meaningful meeting with the world depends on us
being committed to the world as the past shows it to us.

Gadamer has further illustrated the interplay between reading and
understanding in his discussion of the Heideggerian hermeneutic circle (2004b, p.
267):

A person who is trying to understand a text is always projecting. He projects a
meaning for the text as a whole as soon as some initial meaning emerges in the
text. Again, the initial meaning emerges only because he is reading the text
with particular expectations in regard to a certain meaning. Working out this
fore-projection, which is constantly revised in terms of what emerges as he
penetrates into the meaning, is understanding what is there.
Meanwhile, rival “projects” of meaning may emerge side by side until “it becomes clearer what the unity of meaning is…” (2004b, p. 267). Unity, in this perspective, merely means that the parts fit into a whole – at least for the time being. As an experience, this unfolding of meaning, the sense of perpetual becoming in time rather than an achievable, total wholeness, does not differ from our everyday life-experience, nor should it, as Gadamer proposes by emphasizing the universality of his model of understanding.

If we are ready to accept the status Gadamer gives to prejudice, we may elaborate on it in relation to the idea of the de-automatisation of the linguistic code. If we expect a text to speak to us, it must offer us something unexpected that challenges our prejudices. In other words, our awareness of the need for mediation between the meaning of the text and ourselves arises when we encounter something that is not readily understood; this can be seen as the event which awakens the sense of the presence of the other which may have become latent while our understanding has taken place with less intense effort. In this way, in a textual world, de-automatisation – which is something that challenges our prejudices about language and meaning – is the function through which texts makes its own claim heard, or speaks to the reader. If this is true, it must alienate the reader from the familiarity of the text, thus leading them to interpret away the unfamiliarity standing in the path to understanding (Gadamer, 2004a, p. 234). When we encounter an anomaly in a text, the text is speaking to us, demanding an answer to the question: why do I say this instead of something else? Search for an answer is what initiates our task of interpretation and the most important function of the work of art: that it speaks to us. If we eventually succeed in interpreting an anomaly so that our interpretation maintains the wholeness of what we are interpreting, we have not only been spoken to, but we have understood what has been said. The unfamiliarity has been familiarised: the horizon of the other has fused permanently into ours, as Gadamer describes the event of understanding (Gadamer, 2004a, p. 64). In this context, it is easy to appreciate Gadamer’s idea that the truth of art can only be reached in its realisation (2000, p. 51). In other words, its truth is born in its interpretation and has no life without the actual experience of art.

It should be stressed that the insight Gadamer offers into how a reader’s prejudices may function as a starting point for new experience does not, however, lead to an aesthetics of deviation or de-automatisation. Such an aesthetics – which modernist criticism might well find appealing – would be based on an assumption
of a universally shared set of prejudices, that is, a greater pool of common experience than is reasonable to imagine. Each reader will come to the text from their own perspective, and what is familiar to one reader may be completely new to another, and in this sense the past is not to be treated as inherited hermeneutic capital, but a vast repository of art ready to be encountered as new to us.

Finally, it should be remembered that since in Gadamer’s thought form and content cannot be separated in hermeneutic experience, efforts of understanding are crucially bound to the forms that create the experience (Gadamer, 2004b, p. 441). Thus, while literary stylistics has been selected as an inventory of analytical tools, it is what is to be understood – Arnold’s epic poems in the case of the present thesis – that determines what tools will be most suitable for the task.

3.1.3 Literature as communication

Thus far, the discussion of the theoretical and methodological framework of the present dissertation has drawn on the general principles of understanding as formulated by Gadamer, and on the other hand, a more technically language-focused approach of literary stylistics. In order to bring the insights gained from these two perspectives within the field of literary criticism, I will now turn to the third element in the overall approach in the present thesis.

The literary theoretical framework for the present thesis takes its general principles from Sell’s communicative approach to literature, which sees literary texts as acts of communication, developed by Åbo Akademi University’s Literary Communication Project between 1994 and 2012. Many literary scholars with a wide range of critical interests were involved in the project, yet a common aspect emerges in their work for this project: As Sell writes, their “turn towards linguistics and philosophy is unmistakable” (2013, p. 2). The three publications submitted as part of the present dissertation have, I hope, contributed positively to the development of communicative approaches to literature. All three do indeed take this turn towards linguistics, via literary stylistics, and philosophy as represented by Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics.

The main aspects of Sell’s theory that inform the critical approaches of the articles are literary communication, mediating criticism, and communicational criticism. These concepts are not highly technical in nature, but rather exemplify the effort in Sell’s approach to circumvent, in Gadamerian spirit, totalizing
interpretive habits through constant reminders of the reader’s (and critic’s) position in a dialogue.

**Literary communication**

In the communicative view of literature, texts in this category are not considered to inhabit a special aesthetic realm. Instead, similarly to the pragmatic conception of literature in Leech’s and Short’s stylistics, literature becomes named as such through its communicative functions. Its definition is thus, in Sell’s phrase, “nominalist and circular” (2007, p. 3):

> Literature is taken to be a body of texts to which readers have awarded the literary cachet. It is a social construct that is already in operation, then, and the starting-point for research is not speculation as to the property or properties which texts have to exhibit in order to qualify for this distinction, but rather an interest in the communicational dimensions of the texts already belonging to the category. (Sell, 2007, p. 3)

In the absence of a qualifying set of factors for determining whether or not a text should be considered literature, the conceptual weight thus falls on the notion of communication, for which I have already prepared the ground as a meaning-creating activity between different positionalities. Gadamer’s notion of the initially different horizons of the text and the reader which may become fused through the act of interpretation already proposes a way of perceiving the text as an act of human communication. However, Sell’s notion of communication is specifically designed to allow for differentiation between communicative models:

As for “communication”, the approach makes a distinction between communicational activity of two main types, the coercive and the non-coercive, except that the distinction is not absolute because communicators, including literary authors, tend to alternate between the two. Coercive communication corresponds to the theoretical model of most traditional work in the fields of semiotics, linguistics, rhetoric, and literary and cultural studies, where one communicant is thought of as sending message to the other, who interprets it in the light of a context that is also implied by the sender. So the sender is more
active, the receiver more passive, the communication uni-directional, and the context singular. (2007, pp. 3-4)

Yet this but one possible positional arrangement, as Sell argues that depending on the practical, theoretical, and ideological commitments of the critic or school of critics in question, the balance has seesawed between this author-privileged model and a more reader-centred bias in which

the reader, performer or interpreter, that is to say, seeks to be dominant in the writer-respondent relationship by viewing the text solely within his or her own context, so minimizing the agency of the writer and superimposing the respondent’s own meanings and significances. (Sell, 2013, p. 5)

Sontag’s attack in Against Interpretation and Lowe’s critique of the notion of ‘Significance’ as the totalizing truth about a text can both be seen as resistance to the kind of reader-centered coercion, which is domination not only of the interpretive situation, but the past, present and future reading communities through a coercive narrowing of the potential meanings of the text. The most extreme forms of such coercion can be seen in gestures towards a dismissal of such communities by means of invalidating the criticised text and even author as no longer relevant (or otherwise ‘harmful’ or suspect). The irony of this type of critical attitude is that it denies the communicative functions of literature in a way that has analogies in very concrete events in the recent past, as Sell reminds us:

The kind of intercultural non-communication so noticeable in the Rushdie affair, or more generally in the so-called culture wars of the mid-1990s, is not something we can want to see again. (2006, pp. 219-220)

The second decade of the twenty first century has, however, only seen the intensification of culture wars and proliferation of coercive practices in the increasingly polarized public and political discourses. In this development, it seems that a reader-privileged position has become an appealing one, which is not surprising, given that identity politics frames so many of the aggressively defensive positions adopted by various factions in the culture conflicts. This is symptomatic of a reaction to intensely expanding politicized approaches to literature and culture in broader terms, as Sell has proposed:
[...] feminist, queer, ethnic, religious, and postcolonial commentary have sometimes been too hard and fast, in that they allow positional variables a too strongly determining influence (Sell, 2007, p. 3)

It is the specific combination of a reader-privileged approach and identity politics that seems to create the most incurious engagement with art, if any engagement really even sought. As the discussion on Arnold criticism in the next section demonstrates, it appears to be of less import which particular politics are marshalled to support such denunciations, but the resulting criticism tends towards reducing the targeted text into irrelevance. Thus, the corrective must be placed within the critic rather than any particular theory or method, and in Sell’s approach it is genuine communication that is set to work against coercive tendencies:

[...] the approach does not see the bi-directionality of genuine communication as dependent on a feed-back channel. We can be in genuine communication with people we shall never see or make direct contact with. (2007, pp. 6-7)

As the complications in communication through social media have repeatedly demonstrated during the past decade and a half, a lack of direct contact with the people we communicate with places special demands to the participants in the discussion, and genuine communication can easily become precarious. At least some degree of vulnerability seems to accompany even sincere efforts. Building on Gadamer’s and Jürgen Habermas’ work, Sell indeed calls for conduct in good faith, a form of intellectual humility with a basis in communicative ethics that begins with the literary scholar’s own admission of their limited perspective, and that there is no justification for reducing the human interest of a writer into a historical curiosity any more than there is for projecting “our own values on a writer’s there-and-then” (Sell, 2006, p. 217). Sell, however, suggests that it is the spirit rather than the literal form of dialogue that is crucial here, that it is the responsibility of the critic, both as a writer and a reader, to recognise the “human autonomy of listeners or readers” (Sell, 2007, p. 7) as well as the responsibility of the critic as a reader in a situation in which the writer may not step in to clarify themselves. Lowe gives an illuminating example of the contrary:
Much contemporary criticism works from what Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt have recently held up as the ‘core hermeneutical presumption’ that we can and must ‘discover meanings that those who left traces of themselves could not have articulated’. Regarding ‘explication and paraphrase’ as an activity infinitely beneath the contemporary critic, it considers the only authentic goal ‘something more, something that the authors we study would not have had sufficient distance upon themselves and their own era to grasp’. This approach excludes the converse realization that the past might be just as capable of opening up perspectives on our views that, without its guidance, we might not have sufficient distance enough upon ourselves and our own era to grasp (and here I mean us critics, in our critical function, not the wider society we look down upon). It is in pursuit of that perspective that I invoke the notion of sympathy. (2007, pp. 8-9)

The call for sympathy in Lowe’s work closely resembles the Sell’s demand for genuine communication. This is not surprising, as Lowe’s approach is developed as a counter to the kind of hermeneutics of suspicion she sees as having caused severe problems for the understanding of the works of Victorian novelists. Given the position of power assumed by critics in the situations described by Lowe, the lack of dialogicality can be deemed unjust. A sympathetic approach, on the other hand, would try to do justice to the texts. In other words, the historicity of interpretation as the historicity of both the author’s and the reader’s positionalities could be brought into a balance in which the text is approached in a fair and balanced fashion. Sell startlingly but effectively compares the interpretative situation to reading a will:

Most obviously, a dead person’s last will and testament demands of survivors a response that is ethical in a full sense, and there is even a whole corps of lawyers specially devoted to interpreting such documents, a professional role that is closely analogous to that of a mediating literary scholar. (Sell, 2007, p. 7)

Understood communicatively, literature thus gives rise to tasks that can be included in the duties of a mediating critic.
The mediating critic

A critic guided by the kind of communicative ethos described above can be said to practice mediating criticism. As Sell describes the approach, this is not a novel revelation in literary theory, but “[…] the Åbo label for all those types of criticism which over the centuries have tried to ensure that readers, performers and interpreters do not strain the writer-respondent relationship by disregarding the human autonomy of writers” (2013, p. 4). The act of mediation may take many forms as each individual text will pose different set of challenges, but on a fundamental level, the role of the critic remains the same:

A Mediating critic acts as a kind of go-between, basically helping respondents to appreciate and relate to the full richness of a writer’s otherness. This is not intended to deprive respondents of their own standards of judgement. It merely reminds them that their experience will be much more humanly rewarding if they also make an effort to understand the writer in his or her own terms. A mediating critic offers the various kinds of historical, literary-historical, and biographical commentary by which such empathetic responses are most naturally promoted. (Sell, 2013, p. 4)

This is an important reminder of the experiential basis of Sell’s literary criticism, or rather, of the fact that any literary criticism that pays respect to the way literature communicates must be grounded on the critic’s experience. Yet the critic’s reading is also a highly active one, in which understanding is enriched by inquiries into the various aspects of the text’s and writer’s communicative contexts.

The practical implications of mediating criticism can be further clarified through Gadamer’s notion of tradition as the reservoir for preconditions for understanding. As T.K. Seung has suggested, in a Gadamerian vein, it is that tradition that supplies the communicative expectations, or prejudices that carries our efforts to understand:

On the other hand, we do not have the right kind of prejudices for reading classics of some non-European cultures, because we do not live in the same tradition as their authors had and do not share the same prejudices with them. (1982, p. 203)
Seung suggests that the prejudgements – or prejudices to use Gadamer’s term – that support understanding are adopted or developed by living in a culture that has maintained, through its traditions, the prejudices necessary for understanding. He continues by proposing that “[…] tradition plays the central role in Gadamer’s program of historicist hermeneutics, namely, the role of securing the right kind of preconditions for understanding” (Seung, 1982, p. 203). Seung may give too much weight to the idea that tradition provides the “right” kind of preconditions instead of, for instance, the idea that adequate preconditions would be a more likely outcome from such polyvocal, decentralized, unpredictable and adapting entities as cultures. However, Seung points out a crucially important direction to the mediating critic, that is, towards cultural traditions.

Understood as cultural practices, the preconditions can have an impact on all levels of communication, and successful communication in any situation will depend on a degree of competence in such conventions, which could be “[…] stylistic, genre- and text-type expectations, and in norms of politeness” (Sell, 2007, pp. 7-8). Thus, the task of a mediating critic, as understood in the present dissertation, is to map such vital preconditions and make them more transparent to other readers. This is both a precise and completely open-ended task: on one hand, each text will pose a unique set of hermeneutic challenges, and on the other hand, the communicative contexts relevant for overcoming these challenges can be highly diverse and complex, always opening new paths of inquiry as earlier ones become understood.

In the end, however, the mediating critic examines and explains preconditions for understanding for the main purpose of facilitating communication. In Gadamer’s view of communication, this is not understood as

[…] the passing of information from one person to another. Rather, in communication some subject matter becomes mutually accessible for two or more people, while the medium which gives us this access withdraws from prominence. (2004b, p. xv)

Paradoxically, the process of making the medium withdraw from sight involves making it first the focus of examination. The existence of a hermeneutical problem – an obstacle that stops the process towards understanding – already suggests that language has become obtrusively visible to the reader by virtue of its opaqueness; in other words, in its inexplicability, it stands in the way of clarity until properly
understood as a part of the overall meaning. Consequently, the success of mediation on the level of textual hermeneutics is gained through explication, and any account of the workings of literary language will necessarily involve accounts of effects created through language. This is broadly the approach applied in the textual analysis in Articles II and III, in which the how of representation in language is discussed alongside the more abstract questions of what is being said and why.

Finally, the sort of practical criticism that is thus created triggers a process of mediation of another kind. Highly specialized works in the fields of genre criticism and philology, for instance, become mediated as their findings are applied to individual texts, thus illuminating not only the communicative particularities of the studied text, but also the results from scholarship that might otherwise remain outside the horizons of a general reader. One example of such two-directional mediation can be seen in Article III in the present dissertation, in which Egbert J. Bakker’s fascinating work in classical philology is used in order to demonstrate how Arnold co-adapts features of the positionality of the Homeric narrator.

**Communication criticism**

The view of literature as communication also involves a more evaluative critical dimension. This is referred to in Sell’s model as communicational criticism,

[. . .] by which Åbo scholars mean all those types of criticism, both old and new, which have raised the question of whether or not particular writers have respected the human autonomy of their addressees [. . .]. (Sell, 2013, p. 4)

The attribution of value to literature in this view is not dependent on potentially arbitrary and always shifting aesthetic norms, but is linked, on one hand, to the communicative intentions of the author, and on the other hand, to the efforts of the mediating critic in contributing to the success of such communication. Furthermore, the significance of the critical tradition – including the reception by wider reading audiences – provides a historical backdrop for estimates of a text’s communicative potential. The example of Milton criticism illustrates this in a compelling way: centuries of reading have generated reader communities of *Paradise Lost*, including prominent literary figures like John Dryden, William Blake, Shelley, and Byron, and critics like C.S. Lewis and William Empson, which have been sometimes labelled Satanists and anti-Satanists (Carey, 1999). The debate on
whether or not Satan is the true hero of the epic has become an impressive literary critical tradition in itself; as John M. Steadman puts it, “for three hundred years, readers have demanded justice for Satan” (1976, p. 253). The poem’s complex treatment of classical models in an amalgam of Christian mythology and Puritan theology seems to offer so many possible perspectives on the topic of heroism alone that its appeal to audiences has remained steady throughout its history.

In Gadamerian terms, this approach to valuation directly addresses the ontology of art as experience; elevating a text’s capacity to speak its human meaning to new readers as its core quality focuses attention of the perception that reading and understanding are an event rather than some kind of aesthetic object, some sort of ideal essence that would exist without real readers. Totalising interpretations, on the other hand, cannot claim total authority in Gadamer’s paradoxical formulation of understanding, in which understanding is finite because of the historicity of the interpreter, yet infinite in its potential for historically emerging meanings. As James Risser has noted “[…] dialogical understanding enacts a kind of finite infinity whereby understanding lacks completeness and constantly defers its end without deferring understanding” (2002, p. 88).

In addition to making any totalising interpretation seem rather futile activity, this emphasis on the historicity of understanding and interpretation is vital in the reformulation of basis for literary value, as it suggests that its source may be in the emerging significance rather than in some universalism of a single meaning for all times. In sympathy with this, Sell proposes a “communicative narratology” which would offer “[…] ways of distinguishing between a fiction which is coercively didactic and one which encourages a growth of a large and heterogeneous community, not by answering questions but by raising them. (Sell 2007, p. 9)

Sell’s phrase coercively didactic indicates another way to arm the critic against unidirectional communication, this time a variant in which the reader is made the passive object of the author’s rehabilitative efforts, but perhaps more importantly – and this side of Sell’s mediating criticism seems more prominent – there is a positive attempt to identify works that seek to generate an expanding dialogue rather than a silently or awestruck audience. As will be seen in the following section, Arnold’s readership has been nothing if not heterogenous, and this is a situation in which communication criticism may well offer further insights. Reminiscent of Gadamer, Sell also points towards a growth of significance that emerges as generations of reading communities discuss the questions raised by works of literature. This notion can be further elucidated with reference to Kathleen Wright’s
notion of the “speculative structure of language in Gadamer”, as elaborated by Martin Jay:

“That one and the same text can be different and mean more,” she notes, “is because language in the interpretive conversation, like the mirror image, reflects back into the text and brings more of its meaning and truth into being” (1986: 211). In other words, in a true dialogue, the mirroring effect of question and answer, or give and take, produces a richer and more developed truth than was there before. Contrary to the model of the divine word spoken to the passive listener defended by Ellul, Gadamer’s more specular notion of language allows for a less authoritarian, less past-oriented hermeneutics, which recognizes the moment of what he calls application as an essential dimension of the production of truth. Here the non-logocentric, non-Hegelian specularity he finds in language is a source of its strength, not its weakness. (1988, p. 321)

In Wright’s reading of Gadamer, meaning in language does not disintegrate despite the nonexistence of stable, transhistorical signifiers. In use – whether in writing or reading – words are put into ever new contexts and relations, and for a mediating critic, the task may be to shift through such contexts to find those that help the dialogue move forward.

As the function of mediating criticism is to support the critic’s endeavours in becoming an active listener, communicational criticism tends towards the celebration of texts that respond to such efforts in kind:

A communicational critic tends to spotlight texts which allow respondents a certain freedom of manoeuvre. This type of generosity on the part of writers can take many different forms, and may well be a necessary – though hardly sufficient – condition for a text’s accession to the canon of long and widely admired works of ‘literature’. In praising a literary text for such fair dealing with respondents, a communicational critic is in effect holding it up as a good example for anyone attempting fruitful communication within society at large. (Sell, 2013, p. 4)

In the end, the notion of a communicational criticism thus situates the critic’s work in the context of a community, perhaps even a community-in-the-making, as opposed to totalising criticisms of exclusion, in which the community of readers is
asked, by a critic with self-invested authority, to disperse with the assertion that there is nothing more to see there. Genuine communication, therefore, becomes both the means and the end of the communicational critic, as

\[\text{[t]his is communication in which the parties retain their human equality and are not concerned to dominate or persuade [...]. Those participating in genuine communication are making what is demonstrably an honest attempt to come into dialogue with the full otherness of the other person. (Sell, 2013, p. 5)}\]

Sell’s turn to the reading community involves the main elements of his approach; in summary, it can be said that as a focus for literary scholarship, \textit{literary communication} always becomes a matter of mediation, one between the past in which the text was written and the present of reading. But the mediating efforts may become more outwardly communicative than the scholar’s solitary interpretation of texts, as the work becomes that of a \textit{mediating critic}, who makes available their insights into the communicative habits of the authors they have studied, thus hopefully enabling a dialogical engagement between the author and new reading audiences. The premise for this kind of mediating work is that the ongoing dialogue marks a non-coercive literary communicative environment, which is what \textit{communicational criticism} seeks to promote. In the following section, I will present the communicative contexts – or necessary preconditions – for such an approach towards Arnold’s writings.

\subsection{Communicative Contexts}

As I point out in Article I, Arnold’s prose writing won him the audiences his first collections of poems had failed to attract at the time of their publication in the late 1840s and early 1850s. However, by the time of his death in 1888, both his poetry and his prose writings had garnered critical and popular interest. The early twentieth century was an active time for Arnold critics, with the peak of twentieth century Arnold scholarship occurring in the 1970s (Mazzeno, 1999, p. 105). The interest was maintained during the during the following decade as critical writings for Arnold’s centennial were published in multiple volumes. The intensity of interest in Arnold’s person and writings shown by critics during the past twenty years seems to suggest that Arnold is still relevant today. Arnold’s work and reputation has already inspired three generations of academic study during the last
century, but as Dooley implies (1985, p. 55), until the 1980s scholarly interest has been mainly directed to subjects in biographical, literary historical and ideological inquiries. Isobel Armstrong (1993, p. 2) has suggested that biographical study has flourished, but other approaches have been less commonly seen. In his review article of 1985, Dooley anticipates the emergence of a new direction in Arnold studies, which would “enable us to see Arnold, not as our systems or tastes would like to see him, but as he really is” (1985, p. 55). With the kind of communicative approach presented in the previous sections, the present dissertation is an attempt to contribute to such new directions, not by trying to settle a single question, but by loosening Arnold’s work from some of the narrow and narrowing views that accumulated over the years.

The biographical emphasis in Arnold studies has not yet abated, and is still very active for a valid reason: the half-a-century effort, first by A.K. Davis, then by Cecil Y. Lang (Mazzeno, 1999, p. 102) to edit Arnold’s letters into a six-volume series containing almost four thousand letters was finally complete in 2002. This resource is clearly becoming a key that can open many of the padlocks inherited from over a century’s worth of Arnold criticism. It is difficult to estimate how much the disarray of Arnold’s letters, held in individual collections scattered in many countries on four continents (Brooks, 1962, p. 273), predating these volumes hindered the production of more balanced approaches to Arnold, but the appearance of studies such as James Caufield’s *Overcoming Matthew Arnold: Ethics in Culture and Criticism* (2012) represent a balancing (rather than corrective) approach to Arnold that has been so scarce until the publication of the letters, suggests, at least, that it has had a humanizing effect on Arnold’s authorial persona.

Conversely, it seems clear that Arnold’s image has suffered from the lack of such a balancing act for a strikingly long time, so much so that Caufield’s study – as well as Laurence Mazzeno’s (1999) – can trace an entire tradition of what might well be described as Arnold-bashing extending from Charles Kingsley, Walt Whitman, and Theodore Roosevelt to T.S. Eliot and Terry Eagleton – a diverse assemblage indeed, yet often strangely uniform in an insistence on Arnold’s weak, “effeminate” intellect (Caufield, 2012, 9, 64, 162-3).

More theoretically totalizing interpretations of Arnold’s writings and ideas have also become a part of the arsenal of the cultural wars of different periods, as Caufield writes, quoting an unusually sympathetic Arnold scholar, Stefan Collini:

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At the same time, engaged scholars such as Terry Eagleton and Edward W. Said also people their academic interventions with rather tendentious accounts of Arnoldian “Culture,” a kind of all-purpose bogey that illustrates Collini’s claim that “Arnold, or a convenient parody of what he is supposed to have stood for, has been the target of some unusually violent criticism” in recent decades. (2012, p. 4)

Caufield’s study proceeds to examine the different origins of the various straw-Arnolds, or, dividing the caricaturing of Arnold into five “manifestations” or “critical milestones” that he labels “the Victorian logicians, the Strachey-Eliot interlude, the moment of Scrutiny, the New Left turn, and the postcolonial Arnold” (2012, p. 49). What makes the issue ever more convoluted is that some of the Arnold-bashing has been directed towards images of Arnold that were originally appreciative, albeit even then misinformed. Perhaps the irony here stems from Arnold’s conscious avoidance of commitments to ideological systems, as this was later (mis)interpreted as a resistance to one particularly totalizing system, communism, as Caufield suggests:

[...] one could also argue that the literary Cold Warriors draft Arnold as their free-world standard bearer in order to deploy him as the leading exponent of a depoliticized, elite, highbrow cultural centrality, although again Armstrong reminds us “that this extrapolation of Arnoldian thought ignores some of the best and the worst in it.” The left critique of Arnold then reacts to and crystallizes around this very caricature. (Caufield, 2012, pp. 83-84)

According to Caufield, the lasting effect of these portrayals has not necessarily been that Arnold’s works have been interpreted as continuous with these caricatures, but that they have become irrelevant:

[t]aken together, these polarized partisans converge so forcefully on their shared image of Arnold that it has come to seem almost superfluous to talk about him in the academy, since we presumably already know all that we need to know (and that none too heartening) about the “Arnoldian project,” the “Arnoldian programme,” and the “Arnoldian problematic.” (2012, p. 30).
Caufield thus perceives an avoidance of “a direct confrontation with Arnold’s thought […] in several discursive registers” (2012, p. 54). Surely, it seems like the kind of dismissive attitude Lowe discusses in relation to George Eliot – including the glibly triumphalist judgement, “[w]hy, after this, read Eliot at all?” (Lowe 2007, p.2) – has been only one instance of a more widespread cultural climate in which literary figures come to be deployed as weapons on ideological struggles rather than studied for their complex and varied bodies of work.

Indeed, this kind of reaction to a studied text begins to look rather alarming, particularly when accompanied with an attitude adopted by some literary critics, imbued in their practice of criticism as a special discourse for venting aggression (Lowe, 2007, p. 41). This can appear as a kind of presentist blindness to a communicative imbalance in which the present is given full moral authority to identify and condemn past fallacies entirely from its own perspective, thus amounting to a cultural insensitivity comparable, in principle, to colonization:

If the past, not only of the colonized but also of the colonizer, is another country, intercourse with it is ethically complicated by cultural difference. Earlier historicist critics like Kathleen Tillotson grappled with history’s distance. They saw the task of the literary critic as a strenuous application of historical evidence for the elucidation of the literary text. For much recent historicist criticism however, the task is not to complete the hermeneutic circle of (ideological) ‘understanding’, but to disillusion through misunderstanding. While it recognizes the urgency and difficulty of hearing the voices of history’s silenced Others, it underestimates the alienness of those voices which, even as they appear to address us more directly, are nevertheless also fragile and liable to slip into incomprehensible silence. (Lowe, 2007, p. 39)

If this is how the past is viewed, it is not difficult to see why aggressive forms of presentism might be willing to employ ready-made condemnations of past writing. This also increases the urgency of ethics of reading.

In a search for a more balanced, yet historically-informed approach, this dissertation benefits from Caufield’s work in two ways. First, through the exposition of a series of unjust portrayals of Arnold’s work, Caulfield opens up a space for new assessments:
His image starts to seem a mere suppositious representation, almost a stock stage villain—the chief apologist for high-culture exclusivity and the high priest of academic canonicity and Eurocentric racism. This largely moralized Arnoldian inheritance obscures, among other things, the considerably more interesting role that Arnold plays in prefiguring the twentieth-century critique of Enlightenment and its postmodern reverberations […] (2012, p. 123)

This is an important observation since not only has the press-ganging of Arnold’s persona into the service of various partisans in the trenches of perpetual culture wars caused him to appear in a strange light, but it has made reading his works seem like an irrelevant part in this process. Sometimes there has been a remarkable avoidance of engaging with his writing instead of some version of his authorial image:

One might even suppose that a certain institutional convenience resides in avoiding too direct an engagement with the potentially countercultural, oppositional energies in Arnold’s thought, as if merely accepting as the received wisdom one of the readymade caricatures of Arnold were sufficient to refute him. (Caufield, 2012, p. 11)

Resisting such an instinct for convenience can produce very impressive results. Wendell Harris’s textual-ecological historicism, for example, which combines an interest in speech act theory with Jaussian ideas of historical understanding, demonstrates through an intensely contextualised reading of Culture and Anarchy the untenability of portrayals of Arnold as an authoritarian elitist. Harris argues, rather convincingly, that

in the long view Arnold was a socioeconomic leveler […] In such matters Arnold’s prophetic position has been vindicated. His views of the place of dogma, of a poetic approach to the Bible, of the necessity of controlling population growth, and of the necessity of reducing the wealth and power of the aristocracy are those toward which the world has for good or ill been marching. (1990, p. 464)

Harris’ approach is a highly sophisticated variant of historicism, an effort to preserve “the role and place of the author in his own time alongside the
significances that preoccupy a later period” (1990, p. 464), and Caufield’s work can be seen as performing a contextualizing service to Arnold in an analogous manner on a larger scale. This is the second point at which his study offers a support for this dissertation, showing that the distortions in Arnold’s image often result from a lack of genuine interest in understanding the writer or his work.

3.2.1 Arnold’s epics – a blind spot in the critical tradition

However, there is an interesting lacuna in Caufield’s work with regard to Arnold’s epic poems; as with so many earlier critics, he does not seem interested in them despite the relevance of the themes explored these poems to his own examination of Arnold’s thought. In this way, Caufield takes part in a critical discourse that, rather inexplicably, neglects the epics or does not seem entirely confident in commenting on them, even though these poems would be relevant to his exploration of Arnoldian notion of “renunciation” (2012, p. 1-2). Nevertheless, Caufield’s delineation of the types of critical biases accumulated within Arnold scholarship offers a thorough investigation into the subject, while still leaving this dissertation the special case of Arnold’s epics. Therefore, I will now turn to the scholarly reception of Arnold’s poetry, in order to survey the academic reception of his poetry in general and his epic poems in particular.

There have been many inquiries into the development of Arnold’s poetics, and it has been argued, for instance, by Warren D. Anderson (1965) and Joseph Carroll (1982), that his thinking in this field is flexible rather than monolithic, as some scholars are apt to suggest (see: Peltason, 1994). One example of Arnold’s readiness to revise his views is the development of his early idealism into an intellectual relativism (Carroll, 1982, p. 64) which could be characterised as pragmatic post-Darwinian cultural adaptation, as can be seen in the following passage in which Carroll (1982, p. 64) cites Arnold’s The Function of Criticism at the Present Time (1865):

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3 Both Balder Dead and Sohrab and Rustum have been subjects for several article-length studies, some of which have been highly relevant in the analysis and discussion of the articles in the present dissertation. Rather than giving a survey of these articles here, I will leave any commentary on them to the articles, in which the specific, relevant issues can be directly discussed in detail and in their proper contexts.
The purpose of criticism is “to establish an order of ideas, if not absolutely true, yet true by comparison with that which it replaces, to make the best ideas prevail” (III, 261).

Yet Arnold himself pointed out in his 1853 Preface, that his own poetic practice did not always succeed in reflecting his critical ideas. What can be said, however, is that but they indicate a persistent involvement with issues of tradition and style.

One notable work on the topic is Warren D. Anderson’s Matthew Arnold and the Classical Tradition (1965), which is an investigation into Arnold’s classical sources and their functions in his poetry. (Anderson 1965, p. 54) The achievement of Anderson’s study is undeniable, but his readings – part of his quest to discover a “true” classicism in Arnold’s poetry – find that very material of Victorian poetry conflicts with classical ideals. However, the rather exclusive notion of classicism which Anderson uses as a frame of reference for his value judgements often leaves no room for Arnold’s poetry to live its own life. Therefore, despite Anderson’s efforts to demonstrate how Arnold’s poetry gains meaning in relation to the classical tradition, his uncompromising view of the tradition itself frequently inhibits him from acknowledging the significance of Arnold’s efforts to take part in the tradition. Thus, for Anderson, classicism may hand down meaning for Arnold’s poems, but the poems will have no reforming impact on the defined meanings of the classical tradition. Anderson goes as far as to claim that “[t]he classical heritage as a process of historical transmission never held any interest for Arnold” (1965, p. 117), but particularly with regards to the epic, Arnold seems to have had a rather keen awareness of such processes, and even wished to play a part in it via his own epics and criticism of the form in On Translating Homer and the public debate in connection to this essay.

Alan Roper’s Arnold’s Poetic Landscapes (1969) begins with a confession by the author: he admits to having attempted to draw a conceptual map of Arnold’s poetic landscapes as a system of moral meanings, but then having come to the realise its “inadequacy and, from one point of view, its fallaciousness” (1969, p. 1), he decided that this map of “Arnold land” could not account for the individual poems, only a very general chart for his “total oeuvre” (1969, p. 3). Roper goes as far as to warn against totalising understanding of any study of Arnold’s œuvre. He also offers a curious exposition of J. Hillis Miller’s practice of examining Arnold’s poetry through a special kind of critical “purity”:
Professor Miller’s reading of Arnold constitutes a pure and self-denying appreciation of what can be achieved by oeuvre criticism. It is pure because it does not contaminate the exposition of a sensibility with readings of particular works. It is self-denying because it does not indulge itself with evaluation of individual works. (Roper 1969, p. 4)

This excoriatingly ironic praise of Miller’s monkish avoidance of worldly particularities is worthy of Arnold himself, but this description of the manner with which Miller treats poetry also seems highly consistent with a wider “post-structuralist hostility” (Mazzeno, 1999, p. 102) towards Arnold, much of which seems to be inspired by an impulse towards critical hygiene manifested in a general reluctance to read particular works. Interestingly, some of the conjectures in Miller’s The Disappearance of God: Five Nineteenth-Century Writers show how the clinical distance he maintains between the poetry and himself nevertheless enables him to implant a totalising sense of despair into Arnold’s poetry that might not be able to survive were the poetry brought out to speak for itself. Roper, on the other hand, lets both Arnold and his poetry speak for themselves, and impressively mediates between the two and a reading audience. Once again, though, the epic poems are given only incidental attention, and Roper even decides to summarise them with the help of textual proxies:

We can describe these poems in terms of other poems by saying that Sohrab and Rustum is a tragic rendering of an enislement in the sea of life, Balder Dead is an epic version of the Empedoclean move from joy to strife […]. (1969, p. 242)

Given Roper’s sober reliance on explication of and quoting from particular poems, it seems surprising that he would resort to such abstract analogues of Arnold’s longer poems, which would seem prime subjects for an investigation of signification through more voluminous expression. One explanation for this may be that Roper considered the Arnoldian epic as a failure resulting from a misconception of Homeric epic as a genre depicting events contemporaneous to the poet (1969, p. 244), but this argument is not adequate as far as the language – and thus the poetic potential – of the poems is concerned. Yet whatever the reasons may
be, Roper does not give the epics the kind of detailed and rich explication many of the other poems receive despite the (hedged) admiration he grants them.

In his important study, *Imaginative Reason: The Poetry of Matthew Arnold* (1966), A. Dwight Culler devotes an entire chapter to *Balder Dead* and *Sohrab and Rustum* (and *Merope*), and in his account of the development of Arnold’s poetics that preceded the composition of the epic poems is detailed and intensely documented. After a very informative contextualisation of the poems within Arnold’s developing poetics and the related conditions of their composition, Culler provides a lucid general explication of *Sohrab and Rustum*, but is content to give a brief summary of *Balder Dead*. Neither account, however, delves into the language of the poems in any great detail.

Such interpretive exclusions have been performed on philosophical grounds as well. Alan Grob’s *A Longing Like Despair: Arnold’s Poetry of Pessimism* is one of the most fascinating and illuminating studies on Arnold’s poetry published in recent decades, yet the fact that Grob proposes that an overall bleakness should be employed as “the interpretator’s key” (2002, p. 19) for Arnold’s poetry is somewhat reminiscent of the totalising tendencies of earlier critics. Indeed, Grob dismisses some major poems of Arnold because some of the more hopeful elements in them stand against Grob’s thesis, which is based on a modernist aesthetics of pessimism, and this despite Arnold’s own comments revealing that he valued the same poems highly (2002, pp. 216-220). It is through a combination of this interpretive principle of pessimism and neglect of the epics that Grob discovers in Arnold something of a misogynist (2002, pp. 38-39). Another result of this interpretive strategy is the untenable suggestion that the “personal values promoted” in Arnold’s poetry “tend to be largely inward looking and self-concerned” and that Arnold would somehow instruct us “to insulate ourselves from the cares and needs of others and turn our island into a fortress, or rather a star where we can acquire and practice detachment, autonomy, and self-dependence” (2002, p. 86). It is true that such values and instructions were put forth by many Victorian writers and thinkers, but as I argue later in this thesis, it is precisely the subversion of these ideas that Arnold’s epics work towards.

In summary, it can be said that attempts to mediate between Arnold’s epic poems and a twenty-first century reading audience must address two interpretive traditions, both of which pose specific challenges. On the one hand, there is an established habit of discussing Arnold as a kind of a cipher for presumed political views, which may vary to some extent, but which cannot, on closer inspection, be
linked to Arnold with any plausibility. Such biases are, however, so widespread that some kind of return to Arnold as a communicator – a counterbalance to the dehumanizing effects of the critical tradition – is needed to make room for a more evenly dialogical approach to his writings. On the other hand, more sympathetic voices are often heavily-invested in their own academic, theoretical and critical positions, the effect of which seems to be, in many cases, that these critics ignore or neglect element of Arnold’s oeuvre which do not seem to fit their particular frameworks. In some ways, however, these gaps in Arnold studies have opened up the research space for my project, and even the most openly dismissive criticisms have proven useful in highlighting complexities and problems in the ever-accumulating discourse on Arnold’s works. In order to clarify the discursive context for the present dissertation, next section of this dissertation will explore the notion of literary tradition in general and epic poetry in particular as Arnold’s communicative contexts.
3.2.2 Communicative preconditions: tradition

Gadamer’s proposition that a text speaks from its tradition, or that reading within tradition is not as much learning the reading habits of the past as it is taking part in a dialogue can be further clarified through an explication of the notion of tradition in general. As a concept, tradition is a very problematic one to define adequately. In the following passage, T.S Eliot acknowledges the vagueness of the meaning of tradition in literature:

In English writing we seldom speak of tradition, though we occasionally apply its name in deploring its absence. […] Seldom, perhaps, does the word appear except in a phrase of censure. If otherwise, it is vaguely approbative, with the implication, as to the work approved, of some pleasing archaeological reconstruction. You can hardly make the word agreeable to English ears without this comfortable reference to the reassuring science of archaeology. (1919, p. 13)

It seems that the immediate associations of the word ‘tradition’ are far removed from the domain of vigorous poetic creation and more readily attributed to works of archaeological reconstruction, implying that an author has reconstructed something like a piece of pottery. This sense of the term will benefit the present study as little as it pleases Eliot. It is the objectification of tradition that here works against its dialogical understanding; in Gadamer’s view, at least, understanding does not come about through the method of objectification – in effect, domination – but through “subordinating ourselves to the text’s claim to dominate our minds” (Gadamer, 2004b, p. 311). This does not suggest an abandonment of a reader’s autonomy for, as Gadamer proposes,

[…] the miracle of understanding consists in the fact that no-likemindedness is necessary to recognize what is really significant and fundamentally meaningful in tradition. We have the ability to open ourselves to the superior claim the text makes and to respond to what it has to tell us. (2004b, p. 311)

Here, the idea of response points towards the re-emerging of significance through tradition; the reader receives the text through tradition, but stands autonomously in relation to it, and it is this positionality that helps understand Gadamer’s proposition
that “tradition means transmission rather than conservation” (1986, p. 48). The crucial difference between these two types of cultural continuity can be linked – with good reason – to the non-objectified conception of communication discussed previously; just like in Sell’s model of a historical yet non-historicist communicational pragmatics, this is a model of tradition as something that transmits meanings across human generations rather than conserves an immutable object. Gadamer does, in fact, formulate a similarly non-objectified view of literary tradition as a function of transmission and interpretation. As an answer to the question of what the hermeneutic phenomenon is about – if it is not about gathering knowledge à la natural sciences – Gadamer claims that it is still “concerned with knowledge and with truth”, as it is about understanding and “[i]n understanding tradition not only are texts understood, but insights are acquired and truths known” (2004b, xxi). Gadamer’s important (hermeneutic) question is “what kind of truth and what kind of knowledge?” (2004b, xxi). Answers to these questions, as far as Arnold’s writings are concerned, will have to be consigned to the actual analysis in the articles in this dissertation, but as a broad postulation, it seems clear now that these are truths mediated by human efforts at understanding.

The significance of tradition in this sense of a dialogical continuity should not be underestimated, since a tradition hereby frames all discourse in a deep temporal dimension by providing to the ongoing dialogue the meanings generated within it until the event of a new reading or writing. Thus, instead of being a relic fixed in the past, tradition is ongoing, or as Kathy Psomiades puts it, it means “that succeeding generations of poets assert their dynamic engagement with the poetic past” (2000, p. 34). Thus, seems to be in agreement with Gadamer when he stresses that the bond between a reader and a text is upheld by tradition since a text always speaks from its tradition (2004b, p. 295).

Yet when making the claim that certain kinds of traditions can be perceived in literature, there must be some means of recognising their existence; in other words, works of literature must somehow be marked by tradition. The word tradition itself carries the suggestion that something can be done according to, or against it. Within the scope of this study, both options may show themselves to be equally interesting, but it is obvious that the evidence of tradition must be found. In this pursuit of evidence, D. A. Russell’s notion of imitation in classical literature becomes very helpful. According to Russell, the practice in early antiquity was that writing skills were learned by imitation, that is, by imitating the example set by earlier authors.
(1979, pp. 1-3). This practice influenced the writers of the period in a profound manner:

One of the inescapable features of Latin literature is that almost every author, in almost everything he writes, acknowledges his antecedents, his predecessors – in a word, the tradition in which he was bred. This phenomenon, for which the technical terms *imitatio* or (in Greek) *mimēsis*, is not peculiar to Latin; the statement I have just made about Latin writers would also be true very generally of Greek. In fact, the relationship between the Latin genres and their Greek exemplars may best be seen as a special case of a general Greco-Roman acceptance of imitation as an essential element in all literary composition (Russell, 1979, p. 1).

The first thing to note in the passage is how the use of the word ‘imitation’ is not in concordance with the meanings given to it in Wales’s dictionary of stylistics (1989). The common usage of the word is in the Aristotelian sense – meaning that imitation (or the Greek *mimēsis*) “is seen as the characteristic function of literature; the imitation, or the illusion of a realistic representation of the world and human action” (Wales, 1989, p. 236). This Aristotelian view is something different, but not entirely different, from what Russell says about imitation. Russell’s notion of imitation concerns the mechanics of writing, ranging from the learning of writing techniques to borrowing scenes and characters (Russell, 1979, p. 2). The objects of imitation are texts, not the world or human actions (Russell, 1979, p. 4). For Russell, imitation is not the representative function of literature, but a device, one of the means of composition and storytelling an author has at his disposal when writing.

The second entry given for ‘imitation’ in Wales’s dictionary is slightly closer to Russell’s notion of the word:

Advocated by Cicero, Longinus and Horace, in rhetoric and in the later Renaissance and neoclassical literary traditions, imitation (*imitatio*) was a kind of translation exercise much favored by ‘advanced’ students and poets. As Johnson explains in his Dictionary (1755), it is a method of translating poetry ‘looser than paraphrase, in which modern examples and illustrations are used for ancient, or domestick for foreign’. The skill is to find apt equivalences, and also to capture the style and form of the original as far as possible. (Wales, 1989, p. 236)
In this definition of imitation, it is the authors who are imitated, especially the style and form in their works. However, this view is too rigorous to provide the continuation of a living, creative tradition, since the function of imitation is, in this classification, limited to translation, although in a loose sense. This kind of imitation is bound to preserve rather than create. Therefore, Russell’s definition of imitation adheres itself very well to the notion of tradition; it covers the kind of creative action within tradition that imitates and creates, and resorts to traditional models, but does not copy blindly. It must be stressed that the underlying idea of imitation was not to steal the best parts of a poem, but to follow a prestigious model and exceed the artistic qualities in it. Russell, as we have seen, stresses that “the true object of imitation is not a single author, but the good qualities abstracted from many” (Russell, 1979, p. 5). This suggests criteria for evaluating imitation; it is acceptable when it is not slavish or superficial, and successful when it combines good qualities of several authors into something new.

It was during the Hellenistic period that imitation finally became the “imitation of the ancients” rather than imitation of the earlier generation of authors (Russell, 1979, p. 2). After the decline of the Greek and Roman civilisations, examples of this kind of revivalist attitude towards the Greco-Roman tradition are to be found in the Renaissance and enlightenment, whereas romantic movements – and national romantic movements in particular – tended to imitate both Greco-Roman and vernacular traditions. Consequently, it is not surprising that in the course of centuries, early European written epics, mainly Virgil’s Aeneid and Homer’s Iliad and Odyssey, were used over and over again as models for composition (Bowra, 1945, p. 10-11).

William Blake claims in his annotations of Reynolds’s Discourses that “imitation is criticism” (1967, p. 780). This is a critical perspective for this study, and in order to fully understand its relevance, we must look to what Arnold says about criticism. According to Arnold, criticism is “a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world” (Arnold, 1865, p. 156). When combined, Blake’s remark on the relationship between imitation and criticism, and Arnold’s view on criticism as understanding and application result in a synthesis very similar to Russell’s notion of creative imitation. Russell (1979, p. 5) concludes that “the imitator must always penetrate below the superficial, verbal features of his exemplar to its spirit and significance”. This task of the imitator is indeed very similar to the critic’s, “to learn and propagate the best that is known.
and thought in the world”. Therefore, when striving to meet the standards of an acceptable and artistically successful imitation, the imitator needs to assume the role of the critic in order to abstract the good qualities from his model authors.

Sell’s concept of communicative co-adaptation, which can be described as the way in which acts of communication form a historical continuum, is a particularly useful tool in defining this approach. Human beings are always communicating within a framework of received social conventions but are also capable of adapting the conventions to their own “more individual perceptions, desires and goals” (Sell, 2000, p. 282). From the viewpoint of co-adaptability, a literary tradition, for instance, can be seen as an ongoing dialogue on particular issues by particular participants, who signal their participation in such a dialogue through their commitment to its communicative conventions, one of which, in this study, is the Homeric epic. Thus, it is co-adaptation by which a tradition is kept alive, or as Gadamer has put it “[t]he historical life of a tradition depends on being constantly assimilated and interpreted” (2004b, p. 397).

To sum up, in this thesis, tradition is understood as a discourse in a broadest possible sense, a series of co-adaptative turns taken throughout the history of a particular form, concept, or set of artistic techniques. It does not constitute the “handing down” of the same in any objectifying sense. Rather, it enables a platform for discussion, a set of themes and topics that form a common grounding for interpersonal significance. Studies in the epic tradition – exemplary works such as Greene’s Descent from Heaven (1963), Quint’s Epic and Empire (1993), and Fenik’s Homer and the Nibelungenlied (1986), and those by Sir Cecil Maurice Bowra (1898-1971) – testify to the potential such a discourse has for maintaining a frame of reference for sophisticated disagreement expressed through a traditional medium – a communicative practice which maintains a level of sympathy even at points of deep divergence of opinions. Hence, we find the co-existence of interpretive traditions such the already-mentioned dialectic between Satanist and Anti-Satanist readings of Paradise Lost.

The concept of tradition is clearly a problematic one, and since it is one of the central concepts in this study, a need arises for a clearer idea of the practical implications of literary tradition. For the purposes of this study, the concept of tradition can be made slightly easier to deal with by following Wesley Trimpi’s notion of stylistic imitation within a tradition (as developed in his book on Ben Jonson):
The persistence of stylistic qualities reflects a persistence of attitudes towards experience. When both are rediscoverable at various intervals of time, they may be called a literary tradition. In tracing the origins of that tradition, one can discover the connections between attitudes which on the surface seem incompatible. The entire tradition, for example, is reflected in the relation of Jonson’s first epigram and those of his last. In order to describe that relation it is necessary to describe the historical origins of the style. (1962, p. viii)

Hence, it must be noted, that the rules within a tradition or even a genre of literature are not always rules in a very rigorous sense, but are closer to conventions and preferences in composition and, in practice, are often disregarded (Wales 1989, p. 207). It is also interesting that Trimpi connects style with attitude. Taking this idea as a point of orientation, a further remark can be made on the aims of this study: by finding occurrences of stylistic imitation in *Balder Dead* and *Sohrab and Rustum*, it becomes possible to link the poems with literary traditions on a thematic level in addition to the stylistic one. This being said, another problem emerges: the problem of recognising these occurrences. Therefore, at this stage, we must consider how a tradition or several traditions can be thought to exist in the history of the epic form. Since, once acknowledged, any tradition, be it literary, stylistic, generic or interpretive, may cast a new light on interpretations of Arnold’s writings, the following sections will present a brief survey of those closest to his epic poems.

### 3.2.3 Tradition and epic

The question of how the tradition of epic poetry may inform attempts to understand *Balder Dead* and *Sohrab and Rustum* cannot be discussed plausibly before the term ‘epic’ is clarified. As with ‘tradition’, the word ‘epic’ has accumulated many different meanings, and in current usage an entirely new level of ambiguity: it is now popularly used in various contexts as a synonym for high drama or to indicate anything grand or spectacular. We may hear of *Hollywood epics*, *television epics*, *epic video games*, as well as an extraordinarily wide range of colloquial usages too numerous to be showcased here. To make the discussion ahead as clear as possibly, it should be emphasized that, in the present dissertation, ‘epic’ is used as a broad generic category as well as a label to differentiate between Arnold’s two longer poems composed in the classical epic style and his other poetry.
To make the relationship between tradition and the genre of epic poetry clearer, they can be considered as two interrelated historical tendencies. A literary tradition can be discussed, in Gadamer’s, terms as something that is handed down to us, as the written matter accumulated in the past that can be grasped in our present only through interpretation. In our effort of interpretation, we can perceive dialogical turn-taking, or co-adaptation, between different works of literature. From this point, it is possible to trace continuities and discontinuities between them and thus make it clearer how these discourses evolve. Thus, the traditions that inform the reading do not show the “correct” way of reading but, form a contextual backdrop against which the particular meanings of an individual text become clearer.

These co-adaptations, which signal to us that something is being discussed within a tradition, can be the constitutive elements of literary genres. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (2012) gives the formal criteria for the epic as “[…] a long narrative poem of heroic action” (Gregory, 2012, p. 439). While the actualization of heroism varies greatly in the traditions of epic, the heroic deeds are such that they have “consequences for the community to which the hero belongs” (Gregory, 2012, p. 439). What is explored, then, in epics, seems to be the theme of the heroic action of the individual as reflected on the community and its values. There is also an element of distancing involved, as the events of epic are usually set in the distant past, whereas the language of narration is “elevated and rhetorical” (Gregory, 2012, p. 439). This stylistic element that is commonly recognized as grandness, also indicates, perhaps, a degree of impersonality and seriousness, which further contributes to the idea of epic as a genre that carries and represents greater communal values and world views. A literary form that aims for grand narratives, epic poetry has shown a tendency of incorporating a wide range of other textual forms to itself. Thus, we may recognise, for instance, the dramatic forms of comedy and tragedy, history writing, travel writing, natural philosophy, prophetic writing and didactic forms in a single work of epic poetry. This encyclopaedic nature of epic is, perhaps, one of its most salient characteristics, but more importantly here, there is a thematic bond between works of epic poetry that may give a more restricted and useful focus point within the multitude of worlds depicted in this genre.

The most commonly recognised convention of epic poetry is its involvement with heroism. Therefore, what John Hainsworth has to say about epic heroism has twofold interest for us, first, because he himself sees the categorising of literary form exceedingly problematic and, secondly, since he is nevertheless willing to
invest the notion of heroism a great deal of importance when discussing epic. The idea of heroism, as represented in epics, is not, according to Hainsworth, uniform, stable, or essentialist, but “exploratory besides being celebratory; that is, they are concerned with something beyond themselves, with examining heroism as well as exemplifying it” (1991, p. 39). This, argues Hainsworth, has become a central element in the more contemplative aspects of the epic tradition, as: “in beginning to philosophize about heroism, the Iliad sounds a note analogous to those sounded in the Aeneid and in the best epics of the medieval and modern times, a note that came to separate the epic from the romance and give the secondary epic much of its raison d’être” (1991, p. 39).

Here Hainsworth begins to differentiate between epics as exploration rather than an unambiguous praise of heroism. Heroism, in Homeric epics, is not propagated as a fully realized, unambiguously definable ideal, but as ever renewed question. Each name in the epics becomes connected to their deeds, and while the narrative style makes few claims about the appropriateness of those deeds to any specific standard of heroism, simply being mentioned suggests that the individual has at least been considered to have some kind of role in this complex constellation of heroism. Hence, the turn in representation Hainsworth claims Homer takes is a philosophical move towards questioning and revaluing accepted values. This is directly linked to another idea in the passage above; it is an important observation by Hainsworth that there is a heroic world in Homer’s epics, meaning that the poetry represents the world, interprets it in terms of a vision. This leads us reconsider the encyclopaedic expansiveness of epic: since the whole world is there to be represented in an epic, there arises a need to see the relationships or causes behind the events that take place in the world, especially when heroism, that is, human possibilities in the world, are considered as a representation of a philosophical aspiration. Thus, it is possible to view some of the conventions of epic as answering to this need, be it in the realisation of a divine plan, will, and sense of justice, or indeed the absence of such metaphysical forces, these worldviews form a backdrop before which epic action takes place and against which the consequences of action are evaluated.

Within a general category of Western epics, there are significant turns of co-adaptation; the Iliad and the Odyssey are often seen as a representative of a point between the oral epic and written epic (Parry, A., 1987; Jensen, 1993), whereas Virgil’s Aeneid has been most influential as far as the generic conventions of the tradition are concerned (Gregory, 2012, p. 440). The main difference between these
two categories is in mode: oral epic exists only through oral presentation, whereas a literary epic is presented in written form. Another division is sometimes made between an initial, or primary and a secondary epic (Hatto, 1980, p. 2). In the present study, Arnold’s are treated as literary epics, thus avoiding any pejorative connotations of secondariness which would suggest and valorise a greater originality of the works categorised as primary epics, which are themselves dependent on intertextuality and traditional models. However, as the work of Milman Parry and Albert Lord has demonstrated, many features of oral composition – formulaic expressions, methods of versification and generic composition to mention the prevalent ones – have been co-adopted as elements in literary epics (Parry, The Traditional Epithet in Homer, 1987; Lord, 1962).

A crucial part of the involvement with the epic tradition is thus performed through partaking of its conventional themes. This practice may extend from the smallest units of narration, such as epithets, to entire scenes. Sometimes referred to as *koinoi topoi*, or simply *topoi*, genres, or commonplaces (Curtius, 1973; Cairns, 1972; Hardison & Behler, 2012), these can be used as a framework for most if not all the action and narration in an epic, be it “sacrifice and eating, journeys by sea or land, arming and dressing, sleep, hesitation before decision […], assembly, oath and bath” (Parry M., On Typical Scenes in Homer, 1987, p. 404). These stock scenes are, in the tradition of classical epic in particular, the literary surroundings to which the discourse of a text takes the reader. Therefore, it can be argued that the communicative success of an actualization of a *topos* by a poet depends on the way in which it reforms traditional subject matter; as with imitation in general, the audiences may consider slavish adoption of topics as a failure in presenting a fresh viewpoint on the subject, whereas a radical departure from the tradition may remove the topic from the interpretational framework of the tradition altogether.

Co-adaptive turn-taking can thus reform the traditional form to accommodate new subject matter, as each new epic can also add to the way conventional epic themes are applied and explored. For instance, as David Quint has shown, Virgil’s depiction of the Roman civil war via the battle of Pharsalus is subverted in Lucan’s *Pharsalia* (Quint, 1993, p. 147), which also reworks many other epic conventions to question Virgil’s creation narrative of the Roman Empire. Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, on the other hand, co-adopts the conventions of the descent to the netherworld, or communication with the dead, (*katabasis, nekyia*) into the main subject of his epic, after which this severe thematic content becomes co-adapted into a travesty by Ariosto (Gregory, 2012, p. 441) – a rhetorical pulling of the rug.
from under moral and intellectual gravity – the effects of which can only work against the backdrop of the existing tradition. In fact, Quint argues that, after Lucan, there are two main directions in European epic: one originated by Virgil, in which there is the motif of justifying an empire, the other, which begins with Lucan, critiquing or resisting imperial projects (1993, p. 8).

In summary, it can be said that the epic tradition in Western literature is heavily based on the imitation of traditional elements of versification and narrative, most likely owing to the widespread and long-lasting perception of Homer’s epics as the models for composition (directly or via Apollonius, Virgil or some other early successor). The roots of the practice are in oral composition, in which such themes provided the singer of tales with a conceptual framework for narration:

We may say that any song is a grouping of themes which are essential to the telling of the tale plus such descriptive or ornamental themes as the singer chooses either habitually or at the moment of performance to use as decoration for the story. (Lord, 1962, p. 191)

In a literary work, however, we cannot look at themes as ornamental or decorative in this way. Parry suggests, in relation to the function of epithets, that the way the modern reader interprets literary language has been fundamentally affected by the reading habits of our age: "[…] nothing can keep the modern reader from following his own literary habits and looking for the specific motivation for the use of the epithet" (The Traditional Epithet in Homer, 1987, p. 172). This observation seems to reflect modern habits of reading in general, and it can certainly be seen at work in the idea we have of poetic composition as work in which all stylistic choices matter. As Leech has suggested, poetry has become a “hypersemanticised” (1969, p. 225) medium, meaning that our response to it – with our expectations in a literary culture – is to start seeking meanings with intense focus on the smallest detail. As can be seen in the following overview of the perceptions of epic in the Victorian period, this shift from a predominantly oral culture to an increasingly literate (and literary) one may also be one of the reasons why, in the modern era, the epic became such a problematic form.
Epic aspirations in the Victorian period

Perhaps it was partly due to such shifts in ways of reading towards modern problematisations of meaning that, for Victorians, the general sentiment regarding the possibilities of an epic of their age was one of doubt, yet as the many epics written by Arthur Hugh Clough, Alfred Tennyson, Coventry Patmore, William Allingham, Elizabeth Barret Browning, and others attest, this did not prevent poets from attempting to produce one (Jenkyns, 1980, p. 36; Moore, 2013, p. 402). The doubts as to the possibility of a contemporary epic were not due to a sense of lost know-how or lack of audience, as Victorian poets and readers alike were, as Moore suggests, aware of epic generic signals to the point that they were used and recognized as such, particularly when overused (Moore, 2013, p. 412). The real problem was more likely caused by the intimidating prospect of resurrecting “the epic instinct for the macroscopic view” (Moore, 2013, p. 417), which would require the incorporation of an increasingly complex and fragmented modern age into a unifying narrative. Of course, Homeric epic, for instance, can be seen to offer more microscopic perspectives as well, but that was not what was needed, as Moore explains:

In the face of a growing suspicion that the social and cultural totality of a bygone age and the unified worldview of a faith in crisis were irrecoverable, commentators called urgently for a cultural spokesman who might explain the age to itself, render whole and meaningful that which was beginning to seem irreducibly complex. (2013, p. 398)

What was desired, then, was not an account of a heroic past, but something like a Virgilian overview of the present from an epic vantage point, a work of art that would, if not heal the stresses and fractures of the age, at least present them in comprehensible relation to each other.

Like many other Victorians, Arnold himself did not seem to believe in the possibilities of such an epic as a “Poem of the Age”, or a work that would “serve as summation of the period as a whole” (Moore, 2013, p. 398):

Matthew Arnold is representative of one not uncommon reaction in the increasingly resolute neo-classicism of his poetry, accompanied by his repeated complaints and warnings to old friend and fellow-poet Arthur Hugh Clough of
Moore argues that, for nineteenth century poets, “his encyclopedic function” (2013, p. 416) was the basis for epic, and combined with the growing historical consciousness of the period, reconciling the complexity of the age with the “totalizing will” (2013, p. 417) of the epic must have seemed a project born with an unsolvable contradiction at its core.

In these circumstances, Arnold’s choice of mythic and legendary settings for his epics seems like a reasonable response, a means by which to relieve the form of its most immediate difficulties. It also reflects an unease about his own time’s suitability for a narrative in the grand style. A projection of subjects to realms outside history can be seen as a way to avoid perceived contradiction between aesthetic values and his subject matter. At the same time, as A.H. Harrison has argued, this choice can also be inched to a wider Victorian practice of historical displacement, which sought to use an imagined middle ages, for instance, to cast a critical light on a “tumultuous present moment” and did it routinely enough to give birth to a “[…] well-established discursive field, one often occupied with social, moral, and political critique” (2009, p. 19).

Yet it is characteristic of Arnold’s thought that he turned to less than revolutionary solutions to the problems historical consciousness and modern life posed. At the time of the composition of *Sohrab and Rustum* (1853) and *Balder Dead* (1855), Arnold already seems to have been convinced that any work of literature should be evaluated as a part of tradition, and that an awareness of tradition enriches the experience of literature. He also had a clear idea as to how tradition should be kept alive:

> Let us not bewilder our successors; let us transmit to them the practice of poetry, with its boundaries and wholesome regulative laws, under which excellent works may again, perhaps, at some future time, be produced, not yet fallen into oblivion through our neglect, not yet condemned and cancelled by the influence of their eternal enemy, caprice (Arnold, 1853, p. 15).

Even though it has been already said that Arnold’s way of thinking evolved from these rather prescriptively stated positions to more historically relativistic ones, the
idea of a past success in literature that should be maintained seems to have been a rather important point for him to emphasize. There is hardly anything revolutionary in this passage in which Arnold expresses his rigorous view of poetry as a practice that has unchanging “laws”. This view, of course, differs greatly from the literary conventions (or the seeming lack of them) of the twenty-first century, but Victorian poets were, of course, testing the boundaries of poetic traditions rather intensely as well. Arnold, however, came to see the lack of such governing principles as a threat to the success of literary aspirations; in his most important critical work concerning the epic, *On Translating Homer* (1860), “arbitrariness” and “eccentricity” (1860, p. 140) figure as the main weaknesses in the English literature of his age. Tradition, in this sense of a repository of models of high achievement in poetry, is the foundation on which Arnold set to build his own epic compositions, but contrary to some of his later, more abstract assertions about unchanging laws, the examination of Arnold’s co-adaptation of the epic form in the present thesis shows that his own appropriation of the tradition is based on pragmatic considerations – as opposed to some of his critical idealisations – of epic forms of the past as a communicative resource.

That Arnold chose to distance his epics from the Victorian present is not an uncommon choice in the tradition of epic, in which the narrated events are rarely contemporaneous with the poet. Of course, the search for subjects from the distant past, or remote cultures was not uncommon among Victorian authors and poets in general, and Arnold, of course, used a variety of sources, from the antiquity to middle ages and more recent history, for the subjects for his lyrical and dramatic poetry as well. A more detailed commentary on the sources for *Sohrab and Rustum* can be found in the articles, so it suffices to say here that Arnold’s approach to the Persian legend was only slightly different from that to Eddaic mythology; the verse forms in the poems are of the same type, and the most notable structural difference is the episodic structure in *Balder Dead* which does not appear in *Sohrab and Rustum*. As in to *Balder Dead*, the characters in *Sohrab and Rustum* are employed as seen fit by Arnold, and the same is true of the setting and the plot, as I have noted in Article II:

In marked contrast to Firdousi’s version of the same legend, there are no foreign conquerors, no symbols of a national claim to a territory, and no natives to be conquered. (Alarauhio 2007, p. 58).
It has been pointed out by Culler, with ample reason, that the theme of *Sohrab and Rustum* is “that of many a Greek tragedy or heroic poem” (1966, p. 208), perhaps even a return to the theme of Empedocles on Etna, whereas *Balder Dead* is, with its emphasis on Balder as a “type of Arnold’s Jesus” (Culler, 1966, p. 217), a step away from the original themes in Edda.

Arnold’s main source for the story and background for *Balder Dead* was Snorri Sturluson’s *Prose Edda*, or *Snorra Edda*, but there is no evidence that Arnold was familiar with the *Poetic Edda* at the time when he composed *Balder Dead*. However, the English translation of the *Prose Edda* which Arnold used was actually included in Bishop Percy’s edition of M. Mallet’s *Northern Antiquities* (1770), which is “an historical account of the manners, customs, religion and laws, maritime expeditions and discoveries, language and literature” (Mallet, 2002, p. title page). This historical account served as a secondary source for *Balder Dead* (Allott, 1965, pp. 350-351). While it could be said that Arnold did not make extreme changes to the narrative elements he discovered in his sources for *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead*, the form he chose makes subtle, but profound changes to how these narratives are experienced. Articles II and III in this thesis focus on particular aspects in Arnold’s epics, but in order to situate these specific inquiries within an overall outline of Arnold’s version of the epic form, the following two sections explore two main areas in epic composition: the epic verse form and the traditional epic subject matter.

### 3.2.4 Arnold’s co-adaptation of epic verse

Arnold’s notions concerning epic poetry are easier to appreciate in the context of his education, which was strongly, if not exclusively, committed to upholding the Classical tradition. Latin and Greek authors were the focus of Arnold’s school days at Winchester in the 1830s, to the extent that Classical texts completely dominated the curriculum (Anderson 1965, p. 5). Recitation from memory of Greek and Latin verse was a one of the main pedagogical methods, and each boy would be expected to stand up and deliver up to several thousands of lines of poetry (Anderson 1965, p. 6). Even though the principles of Homeric oral composition had not yet been studied with the systematic intensity of Parry and Lord, this practice of memorizing in the original Latin and Greek would have given young Arnold a hands-on understanding of the workings of Greek and Latin verse which may be difficult even to imagine in the educational circumstances of the twenty-first century.
Perhaps it is this school experience of recitation that gave Arnold the deeper insights into the special features of Homeric language, since as Bowra suggests “[t]he Homeric clarity rises directly from the needs of oral performance” (1962c, p. 47). In this way, perhaps, he was familiar with what Lord calls the “poetic grammar” (1978, p. 36) of Homer, which as I have proposed in Article III, is visible in the language *Sohrab and Rustum*.

Yet it is not only through Homer that the epic comes to Arnold. Regarding the periods in traditions of epic poetry, other scholars, namely Allott and Highet, have identified three stylistic sources for *Balder Dead* and *Sohrab and Rustum*: the Grecian, the Roman and the Renaissance. Similarly, Warren D. Anderson (1965, pp. 52-53) mentions Homer, Virgil and Milton as the classical models for the style in *Sohrab and Rustum*. Yet Christian tradition intrudes into this Classical lineage, as Arnold himself later expressed an interest in the King James Bible as a stylistic model for the epic in English, or in Arnold’s words “a grand mine of diction for the translation of Homer” (Arnold, 1860, p. 156). The sources of the poems’ topics, on the other hand, Persian and Norse, play a marginal role as models for imitation, probably due to the fact that, having read only translations of his sources for Persian and Germanic legend, Arnold was not closely familiar with the stylistic conventions of these traditions.

For Arnold, the epic verse form was not, however, a perpetually or purely Classical one, and by his time, the English epic was available to him as a tradition of its own. After Milton, during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the prevailing verse form in epic had been the heroic couplet (Hobsbaum, 1996, p. 27), but it is worth noting that the Miltonic variety of blank verse came to be the prominent form used throughout the nineteenth century (Hobsbaum, 1996, pp. 17-19). Some of Arnold’s contemporaries, Tennyson and Swinburne, for instance, experimented with classical prosody and classical quantitative verse, yet despite his Classicist leanings, Arnold avoided “the hexameter mania” (Prins, 2000, p. 101) of his day; in *Balder Dead* and *Sohrab and Rustum*, Arnold turned to an established tradition in English identified by David Keppel-Jones as the “strict iambic pentameter” (2001, p. 5) of Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, an epic which employs a version of iambic pentameter Shapiro & Beum deem “the strictest in English” (1965, p. 144). There is no single model identifiable for Arnold’s blank verse in English, although Milton is a strong candidate. Contemporary models would have been available, in Wordsworth, for instance, but Arnold deemed his blank verse to be a failure (Gottfried, 1963, p. 47). As epic poets, both Milton and Arnold pursue
the impersonality of the epic voice, which demands a degree of strictness in metre, since “highly regular meter tends to establish a formal tone” (Shapiro & Beum, 1965, p. 36).

The general differences between Arnold’s and Milton’s epic verse – both of which can show great variation in their movement – are, however, apparent. It could be said that Milton’s epic verse is interlaced, meaning that there are multiple imbedded clauses intertwined, whereas Homer’s and Arnold’s verse is more directly forward moving and accumulative, adding one phrase after another by means of conjunctive patterns. Thus, in Homeric verse, the audience is not required to keep in mind lengthy passages, as the Homeric narration, which is sometimes called additive, sometimes paratactic, (Hainsworth, 1991, p. 19, Wace & Stubbings 1962, pp. 155-156) rarely refers back in the complex, literary manner as Milton’s. The example below illustrates this accumulative versification as practiced by Arnold; note the prevalence of lines starting with ‘and’:

And all the Gods and Heroes came
And stood round Balder on the bloody floor,
Weeping and wailing; and Valhalla rang
Up to its golden roof with sobs and cries
And on the tables stood the untasted meats,
And in the horns and gold rimm’d skulls the wine.
And now would night have fall’n and found them yet
Wailing; but otherwise was Odin’s will.
And thus the father of the ages spake: -- (i, l. 9-17)4

The accumulative syntax here certainly suggests more than verse movement; naming the specific foods, drinks and other festive paraphernalia adds to the sensuous experience of the decadent luxury surrounding the tragedy, but this is a technique used in many other contexts in the poem. But the example also shows how the image unfolds without any great effort demanded of the reader to keep the details in their mind – a good example of the paratactic style of presentation. Conversely, Leech and Short (1984, p. 228) have argued that a periodic sentence

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structure makes it easier for the reader or listener to keep all the elements simultaneously in the mind, and Leech (1969, p. 127) identifies Milton’s syntax to be periodic in a particularly Latinate manner.

In addition to the obvious differences in production, one originating in oral composition, the other more dependent on writing, Homeric and Miltonic verse forms do of course serve different narrative ends. Homer’s epics depict action, whereas Milton sets out to “to justify the ways of God to man” (I: 26), which implies intellectual reflection on matters of Theology rather than depictions of martial heroism in Homer’s verse, in which the immediacy of the presence of the objects depicted unfolds, one description at a time. Arnold seems entirely correct when he describes Homer’s direct expression and Milton’s “grand style severe” (1860: p. 189). J.D. Jump describes Sohrab and Rustum as Miltonic rather than rapid in the Homeric manner, as form of “academic” verse (1965, p. 111). Gottfried has expressed similar doubts as to the Homeric qualities of Sohrab and Rustum

[…] which represents Arnold’s most successful attempt in the ‘grand style’ [but] is very far, for all its Homeric trappings, from exemplifying the rapidity and the plainness and directness of expression which Arnold marked as two of the four leading characteristics of Homer’s style. (1963, p. 20)

This may be true in certain passages and the density of epic similes in the poem may contribute to a sense of reflectiveness and academic imitation of a model. It can also be pointed out that the time of its composition was many years before the lectures on Homer, and the development of Arnold’s Homeric verse is evident when Sohrab and Rustum is compared with Balder Dead. Arnold uses similes more sparingly in the latter, thus freeing the movement of the verse from the regular patterns created by the line/half-line formulas of the similes, and keeps a more external view, as the action is not weighed down by internalising digressions. Yet the verse movement in Balder Dead is modified – as it is in Sohrab and Rustum and Milton’s Paradise Lost – according to the events in the poem. But it is worth quoting Arnold himself on Homer here:

he is eminently rapid; that he is eminently plain and direct, both in the evolution of his thought and in the expression of it, that is, both in his syntax and in his words (1860, p. 102).
Arnold is making notes of the general tendencies of Homer’s verse, and the fact that he says that Homer is eminently rapid does not imply that he is absolutely so. Homer’s verse, while formulaic in the extreme, sometimes employs elaborate syntax, as G.S. Kirk has noted in his corrective to Parry’s analysis, despite the underlying presentation style of “simple and progressive accumulation of ideas” (1985, p. 31).

Iambic pentameter verse is, of course, a highly flexible form, and Arnold’s versification varies greatly, even within a single poem, which may be one reason why he adopted this form – that is, because it allowed for a variety of effects that could be produced by using the adaptive verse form as a communicative resource. One indicator of this is how sentences are arranged in the lines in variegating patterns by ample use of enjambment. According to Short, “this allows rhythmic variation effects involving tone groups and lines, with the tone group carrying over a line boundary” (1996, p. 156). The enjambments allow flexibility of expression and help break monotonously regular rhythm, as fewer lines endings coincide with the end of a sentence. In many cases (e.g. lines 48, 49, 56, 64, 66 in Balder Dead), a heavy stress shifts to the beginning of a line, resulting in numerous trochaic substitutions in initial feet and acceleration in the middle of such lines as the iamb take over the rhythm. These modifications give the passage a more flowing and varying rhythm. In addition, the overflow of sense over several lines in a row causes a “surging forward of the narrative” (Quinn 1969, p. 422), an effect which is apt for depicting the energetic movement and action in the passage. This technique also makes it possible to use the caesural unit in order to avoid monotony in a short verse form such as the pentameter.

In general, it can be said that Arnold uses syntactic deviation to a lesser degree than Milton, but that his verse is more lenient towards metrical deviation than Milton’s. In spite of the abundant use of enjambment and dependent clauses, Arnold does not venture to Miltonic lengths in syntactic ambiguity, complexity or deviations from normal usage. Ricks (1964, p. 35) describes Milton’s syntactic movement as having two directions: forward and spinning. It is this spinning that Arnold, quoted by Ricks (1964, p. 36), perceives as a “self-retarding movement” in Milton’s diction. Furthermore, Ricks acknowledges that “there are times when Milton deviates from the usual word-order for the habit of it” (1963, p. 23), and it is clear, judging by the strong emphasis Arnold puts on simplicity and directness, that a technique that would hinder the movement in an epic poem for no relevant reason would remain unused by Arnold. As a result, with regard to syntax, Arnold’s
epic verse does not bear a close resemblance to Milton’s, even though Mil tonic blank verse is his main model in English language. On one hand, Arnold’s views on Homeric verse are not all compatible with the qualities of Milton’s verse, but on the other hand, Milton – having lost his eyesight by the time he was composing *Paradise Lost* – may have preferred a more varied tempo for its musical effects, whereas Arnold’s interest seem to have been more pictorial, as is proposed in Article III.

In many ways, Arnold’s stylistic choices suggest a tendency towards a Classical idea of verse movement in epic, since the preferred features in Virgil’s sentences in the *Aeneid* are “directness and simplicity” (Quinn, 1969, p. 429) despite the “avoidance of the syntactical patterns of contemporary prose” (Quinn, 1969, p. 428). Similarly, in Arnold’s syntactic arrangements, semantic directness is often due not to the ordinary word-order in English language, but to a careful syntactic rearrangement of the sense into the framework of metre, line and rhythm so that the meaning of a sentence does not become obscure, but its sense becomes modulated or highlighted by the rearrangement.

> Rather it fits you, having wept your hour,
> With cold dry eyes, and hearts composed and stern,
> To live as erst, your daily life in Heaven. (i, l. 34-36)

The enjambments in this passage are of an *integral* type – more common in Milton’s and Virgil’s epics than in Homer’s – in which the main sentence elements appear on different lines (Kirk, 1985, p. 33), thus forcing the reader or listener to keep in mind utterances that may often, in a written discourse, be rather long. However, in Arnold’s verse, the narrated event seems to motivate the stylistic choices related to verse movement. For instance, in *Balder Dead*, the procedure of the burial, a stock event in epic poetry, is presented with a very direct, step by step, accumulative sentence structure, but the motive – the responsibilities of the living to the dead, the performing of proper rituals – is only given at the end of the Odin’s speech:

> Meanwhile, to-morrow, when the morning dawns,
> Bring wood to the seashore to Balder’s ship,
> And on the deck build high a funeral pile,
> And on the top lay Balder’s corpse, and put
Fire to the wood, and send him out to the sea
To burn; for that is what the dead desire.’ (i, l. 40-45)

The passage is an example of the kind of syntactic iconicity that was already examined in the previous example depicting the sensuous richness of the abandoned feast through accumulation of parallel structures conjoined with ‘and’. The lines run on in Homeric enjambments, labelled *progressive* by G.S. Kirk (1985, p. 31), meaning that a sentence that becomes grammatically complete at a line ending is “extended by the addition of adjectival, adverbial or verbal ideas […] or by an ‘and’ or ‘but’ addition” (Kirk, 1985, p. 32). This time, the example shows not only a combination a paratactic, chronological syntax to highlight the commanding tone in Odin’s speech – with, as Earl R. Anderson (2001) has noted, interesting parallels with a similar structure used in Old English poetry depicting divine speech– but also a reflective, Miltonic conclusion on line 45. However, this reflective composition, or involution, is not taken to such extremes as it frequently is in *Paradise Lost*, as can be seen in the famous opening lines of the poem, the invocation of the muse, where it takes 38 words until the main verb of the first sentence, ‘sing’ is finally given (Ricks, 1962, p. 28). Furthermore, the Miltonic layering of embedded clauses is almost completely absent from Arnold’s epics. In his usage of involution, Arnold may refer in a line to actions or events that have taken place in the several preceding lines, but he does not compel the reader to keep in mind everything that has been said in them in order to understand what is being said now. This is because of the accumulative and direct syntax, in which each of the coordinate clauses beginning with the conjunctive ‘and’ adds to the previous clauses rather than making an intrusion into or modifying them.

In fact, it is from this coordinate structure that is much more prevalent in Arnold’s epic verse, and it appears to be Homeric syntax that was the model for it. As Jenkyns has explained, this co-adaptive measure creates more than one effect:

> It is a Greek habit to begin each sentence with a connective; at the same time the repetitions of ‘and’ sound vaguely biblical; so at once Arnold sets an archaic, epic tone (1980, p. 37).

Regarding this, it is interesting to note the freedom Arnold allows for the syntax in his verse; his composition tends to evade the compulsions of the formal poetic metre whenever strict adherence to the metre would make syntax complicated or
excessively indirect. The chief aim of this kind of flexible verse structure is that it should be idiomatic rather than distant from ordinary language. Indeed, the expression in *Balder Dead* is idiomatic to the extent that J.A.K. Thomson (1962, p. 242) claimed it to be “almost prosaic” and “humdrum”. Bearing in mind Arnold’s aspirations towards rapidity, this criticism has some support in the general principle regarding tempo, as enunciated by Philip Hobsbaum, that “any reading that quickens the rhythm will trivialise the meaning” (1996, p. 13).

Yet, as the textual examples from *Balder Dead* demonstrate, the movement in the poem certainly cannot be called uniform. In fact, the monotony such a stylistic conformity would lead to is one of the very things Arnold tries to avoid by variegating tempo. Moreover, the verse form in *Balder Dead* satisfies, as has been pointed out, the formal demands of the iambic pentameter even though the idiomatic purity in diction and syntax place demands of their own. The result is that, instead of the line, the caesural unit, the number of syllables between caesuras, becomes the principal unit in creating a varying rhythm that adheres easily to idiomatic expression. Bearing this in mind, the argument Christopher Ricks (1964, p. 38) formulated to defend Milton’s complicated diction can be reversed to defend Arnold’s direct and simple style. Ricks argues that, in *Paradise Lost*, “the complication not only prepares the way for an energetic simplicity, but is also dramatically apt” (1964, p. 38). So it could be said that Arnold’s aims in movement are rapidity, simplicity and directness; these may be dramatically apt, as can be seen, for instance, in the narrative passage in *Balder Dead* in which the movement of the gods cutting wood in preparation for Balder’s funeral pyre is depicted with a surging and energetic movement, but this tendency also prepares the way for a contrasting background of slower passages and dramatic pauses in the verse.

The characteristics of the verse movement in Arnold’s epic poems can be summed up by returning to his three models of imitation. Blessington suggests that, since Milton was composing a literary epic, he “had to follow Virgil’s verse paragraph rather than imitate Homer’s verse which falls into units of one or two lines” (1979, p. 79). Judging by the widespread use of enjambment, Arnold relies on it in narrative structures as well as in speeches. However, there is no absolute preference for either the verse paragraph or the Homeric line composition in Arnold’s verse; he does not imitate Milton or Virgil alone. It is very common in *Balder Dead* and *Sohrab and Rustum* that the verse uses grammatical units of one or two lines. More importantly, the rapidity of the passage, as well as the main bulk of the verse in *Balder Dead*, is due to the accumulative Homeric syntax. However,
complex sentences are not frequent in Homer (Thomson 1962, p. 54), whereas they were found to be very common in many of the examples from Balder Dead. This difference between the techniques used by Arnold in his imitation of Homeric style and techniques used in actual Homeric verse constitutes a paradox; Arnold diverges from direct imitation of Homer to achieve a verse style that has the qualities Arnold regarded as Homeric, rapidity of movement and directness of expression. The reason behind the paradox might be as simple as the differences between the English language and Homeric Greek. The kinds of effects Arnold seeks are possible in modern English only through techniques that are different from those that were used in Greek of Homer’s period, if they are at all possible (Thomson, 1962, p. 43). However, Arnold manages the speed of his verse by relying on Homeric syntax for rapidity, and Miltonic heavy stresses and involution whenever a slower pace is needed. In conclusion, Arnold’s epic verse can be described, in general terms, as a traditional English iambic pentameter blank verse form that employs a predominantly paratactic syntax, yet employs simple periodic structures as well. In other words, it can be seen as a combination of Homeric directness and moderate literary complexity as exemplified by Virgil and Milton.

### 3.2.5 Formulaic style in Arnold’s epics

Sohrab and Rustum and Balder Dead consist of literary co-adoptions of a wide range of traditional epic themes. More in-depth analyses of how Arnold employs these narrative units in the poems can be found in the articles compiled in this thesis, whereas this section will provide a more general overview of the primary stylistic elements in Arnold’s epics which can be discussed under the broad notion of formulaic language.

The smallest unit of generic composition in Classical epic is the stock phrase, or formula. The idea that the origins of Homeric epic are products of oral composition was first systematically studied by Parry and Lord, who proposed that oral epic songs consist of a special language created by generations of singers (Lord, 1978, p. 4). This theory of oral formulaic composition is based on the idea that the epic singer can draw upon a special traditional language, a vast array of narrative building blocks, formulae that are both semantic units as well as metrical ones. As Parry explains, learning this poetic language enables the singer to compose while singing rather than memorizing an existing text:
In the diction of bardic poetry, the formula can be defined as an expression regularly used, under the same metrical conditions, to express an essential idea. (Parry, 1928, p. 13)

A formula of this type can be, for instance, a noun + epithet formula, which is “of a given metrical value and is made up of particular parts of speech” (Parry, 1928, p. 17). In oral composition, the singer can use the formula whenever convenient for the purpose of maintaining the poetic metre, which would have been its primary function in Homeric composition. Parry and Lord use the term formula widely to discuss expressions consisting of anything between one or two words to longer descriptions of several lines (Parry, 1928, pp. 76-77). Whole line formulas may include introductions to speeches, movements in the narrative space, and references to passage of time.

Yet while this function of the formula may have been lost once oral epics have been committed to writing, Homer’s epics became the models for the classical epic tradition, as did the formulaic style. Lord has estimated that this development from oral to literary transmission generally leads to the use of fewer formulas (Lord, 1978, p. 130), but, if a more functional definition of formula is accepted, the quantitative difference in formulas between oral and literary epics is not necessarily dramatic. Lord has suggested, that “[f]ormulas and groups of formulas […] serve only one purpose” in that they “provide a means for telling a story in song and verse” (1978, p. 68) and, while the specific function of metrical convenience is less necessary for a poet composing in written form – and thus not under the pressure of negotiating a strict poetic meter in real time – the narrative and stylistic functions of the special language of the epic can be seen fully exploited in the traditions of the literary epic. Many if not most scenes in the best-known literary epics are expanded and modified formulaic passages, and in this way, the formulaic compositional technique has continued to inform the traditions of literary epics (as was already suggested about the works of Virgil, Lucan and Dante, for instance).

In this looser sense, at least, Arnold’s epic style is highly formulaic, and in this respect, Arnold clearly imitates Homer instead of Milton, who used fewer stock figures of speech, possibly because, as Blessington has pointed out, “the use of repeated epithets, phrases, and even whole speeches that we find in Homer would not suit Milton’s audience who were attuned to Shakespeare and Spenser” (1979, p. 79). By comparison, Arnold’s epics may seem highly repetitive as formulas
appear on all levels of composition, from epithets such as those for Hermod – “the nimble”, “the fleet-footed” – or “ray-crowned” for Balder, to the numerous epic similes, and also in the form of larger narrative building blocks such as the duel in Sohrab and Rustum, which can be further analysed into its smaller traditional parts.

However, there is a significant qualitative difference between the use of formulas and formulaic passages in oral and written epics. In a literary epic, we may still perceive formulas as such, but as the medium changes, the formulas begin to signify in a different way. In the reading habits of a post-oral culture, the role of the formula becomes literary, and thus becomes subject to a more intense hermeneutic interest. In Lord’s description, such cultural development increased some of the communicative dimensions of the epic form:

As the audience becomes literate and therefore cognisant of ideas beyond the scope of oral tradition, there may be greater emphasis on the religious, philosophical and didactic. (1962, p. 210)

This is clearly the case with the Aeneid, Divine Comedy and Paradise Lost and finally with Arnold's epics. A written text allows a return to the language and thus removes temporal limits from interpretation in close detail: each choice of words becomes subjected to a much more intense scrutiny than would be possible in oral performance, each of which would be a different rendition of the chosen tale. One example of a literary version of a well-known Homeric formula, the rosy-fingered dawn, can be found in Balder Dead in an expanded evocation of day-break:

FORTH from the east, up the ascent of Heaven
Day drove his courser with shining mane;
And in Valhalla, from his gable-perch,
The golden-crested cock began to crow.
Hereafter, in the blackest dead of night,
With shrill and dismal cries that bird shall crow,
Warning the Gods that foes draw nigh to Heaven;
But now he crew at dawn, a cheerful note,
To wake the Gods and Heroes to their tasks. (ii, l. 1-9)

This lengthy deviation from or expansion on the ordinary convention of including the morning rise in the narration has a function beyond simply invoking the
temporal setting for the events to be narrated. The passage is the introduction to the second episode of the poem and begins a new day after the darkness and sorrow of the night in the first part. This is a part of heroic action in which Hermod rides to Hela's realm, but even the daybreak in Valhalla is foreshadowed by the closing destruction. The foreshadowing is achieved not only through the allusion to the coming Ragnarok, but a juxtaposition between darkness and light, joy and horror, as in day, shining, dawn, and cheerful versus blackest, dead, night, shrill and dismal. This is a literary technique difficult to imagine being used in oral composition, in which small formulaic elements such as epithets are used on the basis of their metrical convenience rather than their semantic fittingness in their immediate context.

The epic simile

Like some young cypress, tall, and dark, and straight,
Which in a queen's secluded garden throws
Its slight dark shadow on the moonlit turf,
By midnight, to a bubbling fountain's sound—
So slender Sohrab seem'd, so softly rear'd.
(Sohrab and Rustum, ll. 314-318)

The verse form and formulaic expressions are not, of course, the only aspects of literary co-adaptation of the classical epic form in Sohrab and Rustum and Balder Dead. As William C. Scott has shown, the narrative structure in Homeric epics includes a range digressive passages including the ekphrastic depiction of Achilles’ shield, exemplary descriptions of a character’s behaviour, tales within tales, parables, and songs (2009, pp. 2-4). Scott includes epic similes in these structures that stand parallel to the main narrative, providing emphasis and elaboration to the exploration of the central themes (Scott, 2009, p. 4). This may at first seem counter-intuitive. Ziva Ben-Porat suggests that, formally, an epic simile is, firstly, “an explicit comparison of different things” in which the comparison is metaphorical rather than literal by virtue of the “semantic difference” (1992, p. 738) between the two things compared. In epic similes, however, an important feature is their expansiveness, and the means by which epic similes achieve this quality is the
inclusion of an “abundance of superfluous or even disturbing objects” (Ben-Porat, 1992, p. 738) that are offered in the comparisons. These concrete items seem ideal for inciting the kind of defamiliarizing event that invites the reader or listener to make a hermeneutic effort to reconcile their differences and achieve the necessary understanding.

In the classical epic tradition, the epic simile – whether it is seen simply as a comparative device, or as an opportunity for elaboration and digression – is a central metaphorical structure. Arnold’s use of the device thus merits inquiry. The articles in this dissertation present detailed analysis of selected traditional epic scenes and passages, including many epic similes (in Sohrab and Rustum in particular) which are discussed within the wider contexts of the poems and Arnold’s writings as a whole. However, since the epic similes are a highly conventional yet highly significant element of epic poetics, this section will provide a brief overview of the possible functions and co-adaptations of epic similes, beginning with the traditions of epic poetry in general, and moving on to Arnold’s poems.

According to Scott, the functions of epic similes in the Iliad and the Odyssey are intimately linked to outward description: they are “the most common expository digressive elements in the Homeric epics” (2009, p. 6). Yet there has been considerable disagreement among critics over the function of the epic simile in Homer’s poetry. Ancient criticism saw them as ways to make the narrative more vivid and to help avoid monotony through digression, whereas modern criticism, preceding the oral-formulaic theory, proposed a number of notions regarding the purpose of the epic simile, including the simile as a device for narrative structuring, for heightening various moods, or for emphasizing some particular aspect of action (Bassett, 1921, pp. 133-134). However, understanding the epic simile as a device produced by an oral tradition – as Scott does – makes it easier to appreciate a less precisely delineated function for it; like all other elements of oral composition, the epic simile originated as a resource for communication, an asset in traditional poetic language that could be used for a variety of purposes related to the interaction between the poet and their audience. Scott’s depiction of the communicative situation illustrates the difference between an experience of live storytelling in a traditional poetic language and the modern (or post-modern) experience of reading:

Homer’s epic was a joint creation of a trained poet and an experienced audience, in which the skill of the poet was judged not on the basis of free invention but
rather on the effectiveness of his choices from among known alternatives. (2009, p. 32)

This “co-creative” experience, as Scott (2009, p. 8) refers to it, thus relies on a communicative situation of semi-improvised drama rather than that of close, contemplative, solitary reading in which communication is not conditioned by the demands of an immediate, linear, forward-moving narrative. In this light, the proto-oral-formulaic views – mostly voiced after late antiquity until the work of Parry and Lord in the early twentieth century – of the functions of epic similes in Homer’s epics seem to be too narrow. Even though Homeric songs are – true Homeric singers being absent – now primarily read, we may benefit from appreciating a plurality of functions rather than judging the success of similes on the basis of prescriptive literary aesthetics rooted in modern reading habits.

Since the literary tradition of the classical epic begins, in the situation described above, with a rich Homeric model of the epic simile, more than 200 individual similes appearing in two very different epics and with a wide range of possible functions, some of them more or less lost to poets no longer trained in oral composition – it is not surprising that the ways epic similes are employed in subsequent epics are diverse, in spite of the superficial conventionality of the device. The variance in co-adaptations of epic similes have not gone unnoticed by critics either. For instance, Quinn has proposed that in Homeric similes there is often “little organic connexion between them and their context” (1969 p. 432), whereas Milton, represents a development towards a highly literary use of the device; James Whaler has claimed that “Milton’s similes are organically related to a degree beyond those of his epic predecessors” (1931, p. 1037). Whaler’s thorough examination of the homologation – the degrees of logical connection between the compared items in a simile – in Paradise Lost results in his conclusion that “[t]he key to fundamental difference between complex simile as found in Homer and in Milton lies in Milton's predominant method of exact homologation” (1931: 1065). C. A. Martindale (1981) has argued that this view is somewhat exaggerated, yet Whaler’s claim – and the more than ample evidence he presents for it – can surely be taken at least as a validation of a reading strategy that seeks such homologation in Milton’s epic similes simply because such an interpretive strategy is so often rewarded. It has certainly been widely applied, and considering Milton’s prominent position in the tradition of epic in English, one might justifiably speculate whether post-Miltonic readers and critics have been trained, by Paradise Lost, to expect or look for
homologation without acknowledging that this is but one possible approach to epic similes. This may indeed be what Martindale has in mind when he asserts, with regard to the insistence on Milton’s homologation, that “[i]t is also widely believed, whether as tacit assumption or as positive assertion, that such homologation (all other things being equal) of itself confers extra merit” (1981, p. 224).

In order to create more interpretative space for a twenty-first century reader of epic similes, we may, again, turn to traditional compositional models that offer clues to alternative interpretive strategies. Quinn’s and Ricks’ observations highlight a long development in the genre from a highly formulaic and traditional form towards more idiosyncratic forms involving metaphorical, symbolic and allegorical innovation. This is not to say that the Homeric simile does not connect with the events of the main narrative on various levels of meaning, but that rather than being organic, the connection might be more accurately described, as Scott does, as a gesture towards interpretation, as “the poet seeks parallels for full scenes in the narrative rather than creating tight comparisons to individual actions or words” (2009, p. 30). As has already been suggested, the urge to discover these close comparisons is perhaps something the modern reader has acquired from reading Milton, as *Paradise Lost* invites readings that are sensitive to an organic, and often allegorical, correspondence between the similes and their narrative context. Interestingly, however, Ricks argues that the similes in *Paradise Lost* also partake in the construction of complex and subtle literary effects, such as foreshadowing, or *prolepsis*, meaning that they “refer beyond the immediate context to the wider action of the poem” (Martindale, 1981, p. 236):

It may at first seem that a particular simile has no special point to make – but again and again we find that it anticipates a later development of the fable. Of course this was made possible by the nature of his story, which is one of the most famous in the world. (1963, p. 119)

According to Whaler (1931, 1034), this is Milton’s innovation: he was “the first epic poet to add to simile the function of prolepsis” (1931, 1034). Paradoxically, the familiarity of the Biblical subject matter – as well as that of classical mythology – to Milton’s contemporary audiences made this highly intertextual and polysemic approach to the epic simile viable, but Whaler proposes that the choice of a rich but well-known subject matter also narrowed Milton’s options for novelty and surprise. As the principal story was familiar to the audience, Milton “has to depend on his
skill in unfolding what is already known, in revaluing events, redistributing critical moments, laying the train for new inevitabilities” (1931, p. 1049).

Yet even with *Paradise Lost*, the disparities between several of the epic similes and their context the poem has attracted much criticism (Ricks 1963 p. 121-122). This criticism is generally based on the assumption that similes are relevant, or functioning, only if they correspond with their immediate context, that is with the object of comparison. As Whaler (1931), Martindale (1981) and Ricks (1963), convincingly demonstrate, *Paradise Lost* itself challenges this view, as closing off the simile from its wider interpretive effect is a strategy that fails to integrate the similes into an understanding of what the poem is saying. The anticipations, prolepsis or foreshadowing – whichever term one wishes to use for this technique – are so central to Milton’s vision of Biblical history that treating similes as isolated, decorative lyrics or riddles leads to a lack of engagement with one of the poem’s central themes. Milton’s co-adaptation thus shows that, rather than creating an epic simile that always adheres to unaltering, exact homologation, *Paradise Lost* maintains the expansiveness – and thus the most important quality – of the epic simile through the medium of an emerging, early-modern literary art.

The example of the divergent critical reception of Milton’s co-adaptations of the epic simile signals an opportunity for a mediating critic to intervene. Two contrasting – but not mutually exclusive – views can be seen in operation here: one of *homologation*, which prescribes a close analogy between the newly introduced elements in the simile and the point of comparison given in the narrative itself, and another one that could be labelled *heterologation*. The homologative view of epic similes bears a strong resemblance to a figure that could be referred to as the Renaissance extended conceit, in which “the poet forces fresh points of likeness upon us” (Gardner 1985 p. 20) through comparisons, whereas the heterologative view allows, and invites, a departure from tight analogies towards a greater freedom of interpretation. Interestingly, Helen Gardner (1985 p. 20) has proposed that the epic simile is “the diametrical opposite” of the extended conceit, and T. M. Greene seems to be in agreement with her when he describes the epic simile as a device which should, when “permitted to fill out space to its natural limits, [...] include not one, but many living things, to detail with leisure the various aspects of its selected scene” (1963, p. 11). However, since there is no reason why a simile could not evoke a close analogy between two descriptions and accompany the comparison with a more abstract, even allegorical correspondence to wider themes, or, in other situations, create an overall impression of an event, action or even an experience,
there is no reason to close off readings that would be enriched by this plurality of communicative functionality.

This approach does, however, shift the focus from local textual contexts – from individual scenes and series of events – to the wider view of the epic world as a whole. For instance, the assumption of a shared cultural heritage is, according to Scott, a central contextual element in how traditional Homeric epic language was understood:

The expressive power of Homer’s language is increased by its continual evolution within a narrative tradition. The broad background of tales and heroes, which was developed over centuries, enriched the meanings of the repeated words and phrases and kept them fresh in the minds of poet and audience. (Scott 2009, p. 21)

This implies that the compatibility between a simile and its immediate object of comparison can be relaxed in order to evoke a correspondence between the larger context of the simile and the world of the epic. Consequently, the manner of correspondence, or the degree of homologation, cannot be the sole determinant for the interpretational relevance of an epic simile. In addition, a tendency to read similes allegorically – so that each particular item in them represents an item in another, structurally identical, system of meanings – inevitably renders a large portion of epic similes unsuccessful because they do not build a system of such compatibility, but are based on the idea that we may, with the help of our experience of the world, perceive some correlations between different things which, nevertheless, foreground only some aspects of the object represented. This proposition can be clarified by the notion of heterologous correspondence.

The direction of this kind of simile is clearly different, as Gardner says, from the extended conceit that may “start from a comparison which the speaker owns is far from obvious and then proceeds to establish” (Gardner 1985, p. 20), as the type of epic simile Greene sketches departs from a point of resemblance to explore different aspects of the depicted phenomenon rather than narrowing it to something more specific. In other words, while the extended conceit functions to restrict association, the epic simple functions to expand it. According to Greene, this expansiveness is actualized with particular intensity in the less restricted space of the Odyssey, which is more dependent on similes than the Iliad when it tries to achieve the “sense of amplitude and liberty” which is a “hallmark of epic space”
This is an interesting claim since the number of similes in the Iliad far outnumbers those in the Odyssey (Bassett 1921, p.132). It might be that the focus on battle in the Iliad might also be one reason why its similes tend to depict action through relatively simple and direct comparisons. However, what exactly is meant by expansiveness and how this quality comes to existence in language are questions that are rarely explored.

Here, we can return to Ben-Porat’s idea of expansiveness as something the epic simile brings into being through a structure that invites intuitive rather than logical mapping of meanings from one term of comparison to the other. A simile, in its more everyday usages and even in most poetry, usually compares a single term to either another term or a more expanded cluster of terms, but in epic similes, as Ben-Porat argues, both terms are expanded so that the mapping of the two terms difficult, and the results of such mapping unclear (Ben-Porat 1992, pp. 740-745). The “unclear” that results from an expression like this does not mean that they are unintelligible; the readerly expectation of exact homologation is rooted in a particular habit of interpretation, one that seeks to symmetrically equate the two compared terms by constructing a reconciling paraphrase, a “tertium comparationis” (Ben-Porat 1992, p. 747), and which seeks to close a simile into a logically and semantically leak-proof whole. Ben-Porat proposes that this insistence on closing the simile, possibly “a symptom of a linguistic-cultural fixation”, does not really do justice to the expansiveness of epic similes, which draw their “richness and concreteness” (1992, pp. 747, 750) from unclarity rather than tautological homologation. Ben-Porat also suggests that it is unclarity that enables another expansive hermeneutic movement in addition to the aesthetic effects: conveying thematic messages (Ben-Porat 1992, p. 750). As has been suggested, in Milton’s epic similes, such expansiveness is achieved through prolepsis, as the greater degree of homologation is coupled with allegorical interpretation – which Milton’s subject matter and intertextual cues rather plainly invite – in which layers of signification may open up and expand as the simile is decoded. The other alternative, heterologation, triggers a different response, in which “[t]he incompatibility of the related elements pulls [the] comparison toward higher levels of abstraction and figurativity” (Ben-Porat, p. 767). It should not be imagined, of course, that homologation and heterologation form a strictly binary system, but as we now turn towards Arnold’s epic similes, it is good to have these two possible directions – or better ends of a continuum – in mind when exploring their communicative functions.
Arnold’s epic similes

While acknowledging the many possible functions of, and the diverse interpretive tradition concerning, the epic simile, it is nevertheless worth setting a baseline for a discussion of Arnold’s co-adaptation of epic similes. It has already been suggested that similes are a traditional deviation from the main narrative of epic, and Scott reminds the critic of the double task involved in the interpretation of epic similes:

Yet when the poet does use a simile, he has made a significant narratological move in choosing an indirect mode of presentation over a simpler, more straightforward description. In both modes he calls special attention to an action or an object, but in choosing indirectness he is inviting his audience to blend their familiarity with the narrative item and their understanding of the removed world of the simile in order to judge how each affects the presentation of the other. As a result, a responsible critic must not only be conscious of the poet’s goals in choosing to use a simile within a tight narrative structure—but must also consider his reasons for avoiding a more direct presentation. (Scott, 2009, p. 16)

Assessing Arnold’s goals in this way – divining reasons for his narrative choices – is rather difficult without a reference to a particular example, but before presenting such examples, there are some general points that can be made regarding Arnold’s epics and the narrative choices they indicate. Taking into account Arnold’s insistence on Homeric qualities in epic, his idea of plainness in particular, and his choice of subjects, which were not the best-known subjects to his audiences, the use of epic similes begin to look like a particularly problematic undertaking. On one hand, having chosen the classical epic, a literary form traditionally associated with an encyclopedic presentation of its narrative worlds, and combined this form with narratives that were hardly integral elements of – or even remotely familiar to, in the case of Sohrab and Rustum – the cultural heritage of the Victorians, Arnold was certainly running the risk of producing mere academic curiosities rather than poetry that could engage its audiences. On the other hand, used in narrative surroundings in which the larger mythological and symbolic environment is
unfamiliar to the audience, epic similes may become a device that conceal and complicate—rather than presenting direct and illuminating comparisons, as would be indicated by Arnold’s own poetics. Therefore, what one might expect from Arnold’s similes on the basis of this would be a great degree of immediate relevance to the surrounding narrative, but also an aversion to allegory, or tightly organic correspondence as a poetic device, since it adds an additional mediating level between an idea and its representation.

An individual simile is a highly complex unit of meaning even when only its internal contexts, the poem and other similes in the poem, are brought to the analysis, and since there are as many as 22 similes in Sohrab and Rustum and 10 in Balder Dead, a detailed analysis of each is not feasible within the scope of the present study. However, a brief description of the main features of the similes can be given by comparing them to existing models in the epic tradition.

In a passing, but insightful comparison between Milton’s and Arnold’s epic similes, Whaler has made a series of extremely insightful observations about the degrees of homologation and heterologation in the composition of Arnold’s similes:

Sohrab and Rustum contains 22 complex similes; 13 of these [...] are logically digressive; and in all but four of the twenty-two the terms are heterogenous, a fair Homeric proportion. Now consider the simile-patterns in the later poem, Balder Dead, into which Arnold has wrought ten complex similes [...] in two of these similes there is anticipatory homologation, just as skilfully, as beautifully anticipatory as ever in Milton. [...] And what about term-heterogeneity in Balder Dead? It is relatively less than in Sohrab and Rustum [...]. In Sohrab and Rustum Arnold deliberately imitates Homer in placing as his first principle of simile-technique term-heterogeneity, letting homologation take care of itself, with the result that over half the similes in that poem have details which find no logical correspondents in the fable; and in one of those similes he introduces digressive details to an extent without precedent in any other Homeric epigonus. (1931, p. 1072)

The co-adaptative strategies of the epic simile in Arnold’s epics thus seem to be of two different kinds: in Sohrab and Rustum, the similes tend to digress away from the immediacy of the narrative to create an overall effect rather than a direct comparison, and hence, reading a simile like the one below is an effort of grasping
a momentary overall effect rather than mapping logical correspondences between individual elements:

But as a troop of pedlars, from Cabool,
Cross underneath the Indian Caucasus,
That vast sky-neighbouring mountain of milk snow;
Crossing so high, that, as they mount, they pass
Long flocks of travelling birds dead on the snow,
Choked by the air, and scarce can they themselves
Slake their parch'd throats with sugar'd mulberries--
In single file they move, and stop their breath,
For fear they should dislodge the o'er hanging snows--
So the pale Persians held their breath with fear.
(Sohrab and Rustum, l. 160-168)

The action depicted in the simile, a Persian army waiting in formation for events to unfold, is in no way related to the immobility of the scene, except that the movement in the simile is brought to a halt by a collective sense of terror comparable to that caused by the threat of an avalanche. It is thus the inward action, the fear that causes them to hold their breath, of the Persians that is depicted, despite the overtly outward description of the travelling merchants. Once this meaning has been achieved and established, there does not seem to be further connection to the narrative, in which the fear is actually caused by the presence of Sohrab, a champion of the opposing army, and due to Rustum’s refusal to fight the absence of a champion of equal standing on the Persian side.

In Balder Dead the second principle, anticipatory homologation, is employed without a Miltonic, complex intertextual networking, but with looser, pictorial forms of prolepsis, in which it is the overall image or experience – rather than a code of symbolic representations – that casts its interpretative shadow over things to come. One of the similes in Balder Dead evokes a pictorial correspondence without a human or animal presence, and also provides an interesting example of foreshadowing of events that will come to pass after the death of Balder and his funeral:

The bodies were consumed, ash choked the pile.
And as, in a decaying winter-fire,
A charr’d log, falling, makes a shower of sparks—
So with a shower of sparks the pile fell in,
Reddening the sea around; and all was dark. (iii, l. 202-206)

The image is that of the moment of descending darkness, which signifies the loss of Balder – who now lies on the pyre with his wife Nanna – as the source of light and warmth in Valhalla, but in combining fire, the sea and darkness, it also alludes to the final events of the universe, the cataclysmic Ragnarok, in a miniature spectacle that foreshadows the final moments of the world’s end. Another example of anticipation is found in the flower simile (I, 230-235) in which Hermod, who does not recognise Hoder who brushes by him in the dark, is compared to a traveller who mistakes honeysuckle flowers for a ghost. Hoder is not, of course, a ghost yet, but is on his way to his house in order to throw himself on his own sword. The next time the character appears, he is one of the ghosts in the realm of the dead.

Despite the difference in the frequency of the epic similes in *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead*, a shared feature in them is their strong reliance on imagery instead of historical or mythological exemplars and symbolism. Therefore, the interpretation of the similes is, as a general rule, more intuitive and less laborious than in *Paradise Lost*, for instance. It can be also said that Arnold does not establish direct symbolic correspondences between his epic similes, as Lucan, for instance, sometimes does in his *Pharsalia* (Braund 1999 p. xxi). In this respect, Arnold follows Virgil, of whom Quinn (1969 p. 436) says that “commoner than this challenge to the reader’s responsiveness is Virgil’s technique of representing mental states in terms of visual or aural imagery,” and, on the other hand, Homer since “the general run of the lines, which substitutes vividness and spontaneity for rigid observance of the syntactic structure, is entirely in the Homeric tradition” (Quinn 1969 p. 433).

Due to the traditional choice of topics, the similes Arnold composed for *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead* are congruous with Ricks’ (1963 p. 58) idea of the epic poet as a historian; many of the topics in the similes are gathered from ancient poetic genres, namely the bucolic, the georgic, and the piscatory – or topics related to the lives of herds, peasants and fishermen and their families – thus asserting a feature usually associated with epics: inclusiveness (Fowler 1982 p. 179). Added to this in epic similes are animals and natural phenomena, and one important effect achieved by this choice of topics is the partial inclusion of classical imagery, thus perhaps mitigating the defamiliarizing effects of Arnold’s unconventional choices.
of subjects. Finally, Arnold employs the traditional method of comparison, which is found in Milton, Homer, and Virgil, as Blessington (1979 p. 88) explains:

Most aspects of the Miltonic simile [...] reflect both Homeric and Virgilian elements, such as the comparing of great things to small without any loss of grandeur, the danger of such similes being that the smallness of the thing to which the subject is being compared will lower the subject rather than elevate it by understatement.

Ultimately, just as Milton’s similes come into their own within the framework of the Greco-Roman-Judeo-Christian universe he narrates into ordered, logical being, Arnold’s do so in the more precarious climate of lost certainties of the Victorian era. For example, one of the ways in which the aesthetic standards of Arnold’s time become visible in his work is the way his epic similes operate as a sort of landscape poetry that stands in marked difference from the Homeric model. Scott has noted that the observations of nature in Homer’s similes are not elaborated, but draw from formulaic references to the natural environment (2009, p. 31), but also that “[s]imiles cannot simply be regarded as impressionistic creations of an actual landscape developed by an individual poet; rather, they are rooted deeply in the resources provided by the traditional diction” – so much so that “[t]he two epics even contain six repeated longer similes that do not seem to have been designed to provide long-range linkages between artfully echoing passages” (2009, p. 184). This use of the simile as a relatively generic asset – ready to be inserted with minimal changes whenever its effects are desired – seems logically continuous with the notion of the oral-formulaic composition theory introduced in the previous section, but as with the traditional verse form, Arnold’s co-adaptation of the epic simile shows a shift towards a modern, post-romantic literary understanding of the device as landscape poetry. This can be shown through an example from Balder Dead: the simile here is one of the more complex ones in the poem.

And as in winter, when the frost breaks up,
At winter’s end, before the spring begins,
And a warm west-wind blows, and thaw sets in--
After an hour dripping sound is heard
In all the forests, and the soft-strewn snow
Under the trees is dilled thick with holes,
And from the boughs the snowloads shuffle down;
And, in fields sloping to the south, dark plots
Of grass peep out amid surrounding snow,
And widen, and the peasant’s heart is glad –
So through the world was heard a dripping noise
Of all things weeping to bring Balder back; (iii, l. 307-318)

The imagery reflects both external (melting snow) and internal action (the peasant’s joy), and the aspect of the comparison is similarly dual; the simile delivers an image that is easily associated with both the physical, as well as the emotional aspect of the situation. This duality is due to the choice of the relationship of a peasant with nature as a topic for the simile. The simile shows the Homeric and Virgilian elements that have been discussed earlier: the comparison of great to small, the inclusion of everyday world, and finally, visual and aural imagery – the sibilants, for instance, which are exceedingly onomatopoetic representations of some of the sounds in the depicted scene, but which also add to the coherence of the image.

In addition to the mimetic impression the sounds in the simile create of a warm wind rushing through a wintry forest, melting the snow in its path, the recurring diphthongs and sibilant sounds allow the reading to flow, thus creating a sense of relief in sound as well as in meaning. Considering how the images themselves are built, however, the elaborate detailing in Arnold’s similes suggest a technique different from Virgil’s, whose simile, according to Quinn (1969 p. 433),

shows in fact that concentration on bold, clear strokes which is so characteristic of his imagery, amounting sometimes to a degree of stylization that suggests he is describing a work of art rather than reality.

The fact that Arnold does not forget to mention that snow melts faster on fields facing south implies a degree of realism, even pedantry, rather than stylization. While this manner of representation might be rooted in Arnold’s notion that Homer composed with his “eye on the object” (as cited in Greene 1963 p. 36), Roper sees it as problematic:

Herein lies the danger of composing with the eye on the object: it too readily leads to the kind of description in a poem which has full significance only outside the poem, in the poet’s originating experience. The advantage of
keeping the eye off the object and on a stock diction is that a stock diction is often rich in epithets of established significance which the poet can re-use in ways which not only describe but compose his landscape into significance. (1969 p. 36)

However, in *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead*, the epic form supports a particular reading strategy; the description in the epic similes can be linked to the immediate context by means of the human element: epic similes often place living beings in the landscape, such as the peasant in the thawing simile above, through which it is possible to give firmer grounds for an interpretation of the landscape – the peasant’s emotional response to the thaw guides or endorses the reader’s. For Arnold, this is also a way to universalize the significance of the similes despite a well-known mythological or historical narrative framework. In this usage of the epic simile, Arnold nevertheless follows Homeric storytelling, since his epic similes offer insights into the emotional responses of characters, thus adding subjective content which is, nevertheless, externalised in the similes as they describe the outward signs of the inward action. According to Eric Auerbach, there is a need in “the Homeric style to leave nothing which it mentions half in darkness and unexternalised” (1953, p. 5). But, in spite of this externalisation, or perhaps because of it, the problem of objectivity and subjectivity has an important role in Arnold’s poetry and thinking. In relation to this problem, Roper offers an interesting view of the interpretation of landscape poetry:

Landscape poetry which is worth considering is so either because it embodies an interpretation of the landscape which it describes or because it uses the description to of landscape to interpret something else. (1969, p. 27)

Roper suggests that in Arnold’s poetics a successful coexistence of both types of interpretation which characterises great poetry (1969, pp. 28-29), yet the balance between the two interpretative attitudes, which could be called, in Arnold’s (as cited in Roper 1969, p. 28-29) words, “moral profundity” and “natural magic,” can be seen as dilemma between the objectivist aspiration, in Arnold’s phrase “to solve the universe” and a subjectivist “dawdling with its painted shell”. Both attitudes are, according to Arnold, incapable of producing great poetry when the other is missing (Roper 1969, p. 27). It may be impossible to reconcile the two, yet one attempt to solve this problem can be seen in the analogies of epic similes that are offered in
order to represent subjective, inward action in terms of outward, objective
description. Perhaps it is this connection to what Lowe calls “feminine fiction” –
“after the Victorian association of women with what is material, immediate and
particular” (2007, p. 19) – that made some of the more muscularly positioned
Victorians doubt Arnold’s commitment to their program of manliness, but in
Arnold’s own thought, this aspect of representation seems to have been a vital
counterbalance to rigid forms acquired from tradition. Not that this approach would
have been unfamiliar to Arnold’s Victorian audiences. The poetry of the preceding
generations of Romantic poets and the dominant form of sensuous description, the
novel, would have given Arnold’s contemporaries appropriate models for reading
his epic similes. As Lowe puts it, detailed descriptions “incite us to imagine,
sensuously and emotionally, an experience not our own […] through the diversity
of subjective positions that these fictions allow us to inhabit (2007, p. 20). In
Arnold’s hands, the rhetorical function of similes of this type appears to reintroduce
the notion of a sympathetic reader in a way that seems fitting for both the tradition
of the epic and the efforts of Victorian writers.

Another example of a simile of this kind is the description of heaven in Balder
Dead. In this simile, there is hardly any image-likeness between the actual heaven
and the imagery in the simile. Rather, such likeness is suspended through a very
lenient homologation, since the observer, Hermod, does not see what the traveller
sees, but something that might evoke a comparable feeling through sensory
experience:

    And as a traveller in the early dawn
    To the steep edge of some great valley comes,
    Through which a river flows, and sees, beneath,
    Clouds of white rolling vapours fill the vale,
    But o’er them, on the farther slope, descries
    Vineyards, and crofts, and pastures, bright with sun--
    So Hermod, o’er the fog between, saw Heaven. (ii, l. 295-301)

What makes this simile particularly illustrative of Arnold’s use of similes is the way
it represents subjective experience through comparison with something that is
supposed to be a more familiar and thus more universal experience. Not all readers
have seen anything similar to what the traveller sees, but it is still possible to
empathize with his visual delight, his aesthetic awe, and via this emotion, imagine
what Hoder might experience at the sight of heaven. This is why — in Milton’s as well as Homer’s epic similes – the peasant, the traveler, the shepherd, the reapers, or the rich woman are inserted into the scene depicted in a simile; not as an element of correspondence, but as a communicative gesture that “persuades us to take the point of view of the human figure introduced” (Whaler, 1931, p. 1057) and thus gain an experiential grasp of the scene rather than attempting to solve a logical problem. Arnold makes use of this Homeric feature in many of his similes. According to Blessington, “the inclusion of the everyday world in the epic poem: the simple plowman and the goatherd remind us of the world of peace that is being destroyed in each poem” (1979, p. 88), but in Arnold’s usage, there also seems to be an emphasis on what and how the person (or sometimes animal), might experience or feel in the situation. Therefore, we can see the image in the simile not as an image of heaven as something prosaically less than an earthly paradise, but rather as something familiar, safe, and cultured. The simile allows a very imaginative, empathetic reading, a reading that allows the epic space to unfold. In addition, it also offers a subtle representation of heaven as something familiar, soothing for the gods and therefore desirable in comparison to the unknown results of change.

Finally, although *Balder Dead* and *Sohrab and Rustum* follow the same concept of epic style, the degree of difference between the representations of the worlds in the poems is striking. This is most apparent in the way in which the representation in *Sohrab and Rustum* is, in a way, more intimate and subjective in comparison to the public and objective manner of *Balder Dead*, and an important factor in this is Arnold’s use of epic similes.

It is now time to sum up the observations on Arnold’s imitation of the classical epic form. The most important general conclusion is that Arnold’s communicative co-adaptations of different compositional elements of the epic indicate an approach to poetic imitation that does not seek simply to produce the likeness of the imitated form, but modifies the traditional models so that they may function in new communicational situations and fulfil Arnold’s communicative aims. This approach is demonstrated by the functionality of his stylistic features, but may be seen also in the qualities Arnold abstracts from Homer. Since he does not simply imitate Homer, but formulates a system of abstract Homeric qualities and follows them when possible without excluding other poets as models, Arnold may be seen to employ the main principle of classical creative imitation, which is that “the true object of imitation is not a single author, but the good qualities abstracted from
many” (Russell 1979, p. 5). In *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead*, Arnold is quite consistent in producing what he considers to be Homeric qualities, but these are amended by the more literary versions of epic form, chiefly Milton’s.

The brief inquiries into Arnold’s co-adaptation of classical epic verse and formulaic expression – with special emphasis on epic similes – has brought to light interesting differences in the communicative aims and means by which epic poets have sought to fulfil these aims. Criticism of Arnold’s epic poems has largely been based on the notion of imitation in which the communicative model – the relationship between the poet and their audience – has been considered to be more or less unchanging despite the vast temporal and cultural distances between representatives in the tradition. Thus, we have dismissive evaluations of Arnold’s classicism as an academic exercise doomed to exhibition as antiquarian curiosities – like Victorian replicas of medieval swords – impressive on the surface, but in essence anachronistic and functionless. In Article II, I propose that Arnold’s epics do, despite the distancing effect created by Arnold’s choice of subjects and classical compositional models, address issues that were of immediate relevance to himself and many of his contemporaries. Furthermore, in Article III, it is shown how even the aesthetics of Arnold’s epic style were not so far removed from the fashions of the mid-nineteenth century as it may seem from the perspective of later observers.
4 Article summaries and findings

The articles in this thesis are listed according to a thematical principle rather than their order of writing or publication. Each article addresses a particular topic within a broader theme of Arnold’s communication. Article I is presented first as it engages the theme on a more general level – from the point of view of Arnold’s communicative ethos – than the later articles, which can be seen as more detailed studies of the communicative pragmatics that grows out from this ethos. Thus, while Article I explores the formation of Arnold’s poetics of communication, Article II is a more complex and detailed analysis of Arnold’s literary communication in his epic poems, *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead*. The approach here contextualizes Arnold’s epic composition within the cultural history and ideology of the nineteenth century spectacle, whereas Article III returns on a more general topic with a historically-informed account on Arnold’s authorial image with a special purpose of juxtaposing the findings from Articles I and II with a more varied account of Arnold as a communicator. The theoretical approach described in the previous sections has been applied in the articles with varying emphasis, each article addressing a set of issues rising from a particular communicative challenge. These three inquiries also differ in their scale, albeit with overlapping foci, as presented here:

a) Biographical level, authorial image, personal history (articles II, I & III)

b) Textual level, thematic and textual analysis (articles II & III)

c) The level of reception and literary institutions (articles I, II & III)

The articles mainly operate on the biographical level (a) to situate the examined communications within Arnold’s personal history. This helps in maintaining an interpersonal channel as the discussion moves on the more analytical level of Textual level, thematic and textual analysis (b), and the more generalized level of reception and literary institutions (c). Involving the biographical and historical dimensions in the articles also serves the purposes of both mediating criticism and communicational criticism – as defined in Section 3.1.3 – by offering insights into Arnold’s communicative aims.

Level b), the analysis of the textual and thematic dimensions of Arnold’s communication is based on the theoretical tradition of Anglo-Saxon literary stylistics, as well as genre studies and other detailed analyses of the relevant text
forms. However, veering away from the common practice of cataloguing stylistic devices found in texts, my study employs a more contextualised approach, whereby literary style is understood as a wide-ranging phenomenon that is both socially and historically effected. For instance, as my aim in this study is to exemplify Arnold’s communicative strategies through inquiries into his epic poems *Balder Dead*, and *Sohrab and Rustum*, the results of these inquiries are seen as one particular channel in Arnold’s literary communications.

Level c) is represents another interpersonal dimension by involving a community of real readers of Arnold into the critical discussion. This level serves to remind us that the communication on many of the topics dealt with in this dissertation has been ongoing since the texts were first published – and even sometimes before they were published as Arnold’s correspondence attests. As was already discussed, Arnold’s reception has varied dramatically, with sympathetic and hostile readers making their voices heard during over a century of critical exchange. In the present study, the aim has been to give human communication a primary importance, leaving ideological considerations (even in the broadest possible sense) in a secondary position. This is not to diminish the importance of discussion on a more abstract dimensions of meaning, as that is what works of literature will have us do, but as Lowe suggests, to enrich that discussion with content from Arnold’s own standpoint, to see him not as our systems of thought would have him, but as we might encounter him in human communication.

Finally, it must be pointed out that political and social issues, while obviously relevant within the context of communicated themes, are throughout this thesis commented on only as they emerge from the communication that is first understood on its own terms. They are not treated as pre-set task or an interpretative given, as has been a widespread approach in much literary criticism in the recent decades, but this is a choice aligned with the aims of the communicative approach, and could, perhaps, seen as a corrective to a critical disposition which Lowe has described as a tendency to “too eager and facile taxonomizing of the politics” (2007, p. 11) in literary criticism.

### 4.1 Article I: Towards a Dialogical Approach to Matthew Arnold

The first article juxtaposes reader responses with Arnold’s self-portrayal and addressivity, thus illuminating his community-making efforts and the results thereof. The aim is not merely to historicize, but to familiarize with an ongoing
dialogue between Arnold and his readers. This approach can be seen to work under the assumptions of communicational criticism as it seeks to alleviate accumulated distortions in Arnold’s image that have made him appear far more authoritarian than would be justifiable.

Article I therefore examines some of the different positionalities in the reception of Arnold’s writings and relates them to some of the stances Arnold himself assumed as a writer towards his audiences. The perspective taken in this paper brings to focus many of the paradoxes hovering around Arnold. The diversity of his writings has ensured that in public debate his name has been evoked in relation to a myriad of issues, but what is even more disorienting is that this has been done to support (and often to attack) various opposing positions, whether radical, liberal or conservative, religious, agnostic or atheist. This is not where the paradoxes end. On a more private level, there are stories about Arnold’s sizeable ego contrasted with bouts of self-derision, his youthful enjoyment of both vulgar language and polite company, and his tendency to attract polemic in spite of his dislike for interpersonal conflict.

It is not only because of the diversity of his writings that it is difficult to decide how to approach him in the twenty-first century; the authorial image of Matthew Arnold has varied tremendously for less conspicuous reasons than his supposedly effortless switching between different literary genres, topics, and forms. For instance, some of the early editors of his letters were worried that his reputation as a playful and humorous man would blot out his more serious side, but it appears that the corrective for this – de-emphasizing his joyful side – later resulted in perceptions of him as a solemn or dull figure, and even as an imposing establishment elitist.

In Article I, the starting point for reconciling these paradoxes is to view them in relation to Arnold as a communicator. In such a view, it is relevant to consider what sort of community-making – to use Sell’s phrase – he aimed at with his writings and by what communicative stratagems he hoped to achieve his goals. One example used in the article of a communicative event is when Arnold seems to have realized a failure in his own efforts at communication:

With Literature and Dogma, which was reprinted in both the cheap Popular Edition and an American pirated edition, he acquired a mass audience of tens of thousands of readers during his own lifetime (Arnold 1979: 44). But many critics found in his manner a mean-spirited betrayal of his own principles of
sweetness and light, and from later editions he left out some of the offending passages [...]. (Alarauhio, 2012, p. 137)

This and many other cases suggest that Arnold’s relationship with his reading audiences was dialogical to a high degree in the sense that he often seemed ready to adjust his communication when the problems in it were signaled back to him.

By retrieving something of the perceptions of Arnold’s contemporaries and relating them to his own ways of communicating in both private and public spheres it can be shown that, instead of using Arnold as a cipher for a (pre)fixed set of ideas, it is possible – and worthwhile – to engage him in dialogical exchange.

4.2 Article II: *Sohrab and Rustum and Balder Dead*: Communicating about Communication

The starting point in the second article is Arnold’s choice to omit a poem, *Empedocles on Etna*, from his 1853 collection of poems. At the same time, Arnold published two epic poems, and the approach in this article is to mediate what kinds of communicative motivations and consequences this generic preference possibly entailed.

Article II maps a recurring theme of communication in Matthew Arnold’s writings, a communicative ethos imbedded in his later view of literature as well as in his own poetry. This theme has a continuous and important presence in a number of Arnold’s prominent poems, including *Empedocles on Etna*, *Dover Beach* and *Sohrab and Rustum*. The article also argues that the idea of literature as communication had a particularly significant impact on Arnold’s prose writings since the 1853 Preface to his poems, after which a persistent involvement with the idea manifested itself as a series of famous essays such as *The Function of Criticism at the Present Time* (1865), *On the Modern Element in Literature* (1869) and *Culture and Anarchy* (1883).

The article approaches this topic through Arnold’s poetry and poetics; it identifies a fundamental shift in Arnold’s thought after his dissatisfaction with and rejection of *Empedocles on Etna* in 1853 Preface. First, it is shown that Arnold’s departure from the literary lineage of Faust, Hamlet, Manfred and Empedocles is a rejection of what he perceived as a self-destructive, introspective despair – a kind of a solipsist “self-culture” (Armstrong, 1993, p. 175–6). After this, the article explores the first phases of a new line of thought that emerges in Arnold’s poetry
immediately after the rejection of the old. This new direction is an ethos of communication, comprehension and “intellectual deliverance” (Arnold, 1869, p. 20). The epic form figures in this shift with particular importance, as I have pointed out in the article:

But as Quint also suggests, in some epics a more questioning or even critical voice can be heard, when the features of epic proper begin to be interwoven with features we associate with romance. […] This dialectic within the epic tradition itself is something with which Arnold engaged so strongly that the grand style became as much as anything else a moral issue. Threatened by the spiritual discouragement so common among his contemporaries, he did not try to fill the metaphysical void with an individualist religion, or to express his anxiety in private language. Nor, in his view, could he improve the situation by pontificating authoritarian certainties. The only hope lay in communicational gestures more inclusive of the viewpoints of other people, some of them potentially different from his own.

This combination of philosophical pessimism combined with a communal ethos takes effect as one of the most important forces behind Arnold’s later writing, thus being seminal to some of his major theoretical concepts, for instance, the cultural dialectic of Hebraism and Hellenism. However, in the poems of the 1853 edition, Arnold’s new ethos creates poetry which is full of tensions and doubt. Yet it is often overlooked that this work is not altogether devoid of hope.

4.3 Article III: Sohrab and Rustum – Matthew Arnold’s Spectacle

The third article combines many of the analytical approaches from the two other articles in order to create a widely contextualized yet detailed examination of Sohrab and Rustum from a perspective that could be described as communicative narratology. The focus is on generic communication via a broad understanding of the spectacle as a Victorian cultural phenomenon as well as an artistic principle in Arnold’s epic.

Article III thus embarks on an analysis of Arnold’s poetic language and the thematic structuring of Sohrab and Rustum. By co-adopting what he perceived as the form of Homeric epics, Arnold created a highly visual form of narrative discourse, which nonetheless casts a critical eye on the hegemony of vision in the
nineteenth century British culture. This mixture of old and new provided Arnold and opportunity to compose a complex representation that co-adopted traditional literary conventions of the epic to explore phenomenon that were of immediate relevance to him and his fellow Victorians, or as I propose in the article:

It might be, however, that Arnold’s spectacle is not altogether pessimistic, either. It can be seen, at least, as an attempt to relocate vision within the Western cultural tradition rather than as a wholesale rejection of it. In a way, Sohrab and Rustum could be seen not as a mere academic exercise in Homeric composition, but as an attempt to inject the increasingly vacuous forms of spectacle and melodrama with a degree of seriousness and sincerity. Arnold’s epic – despite the extreme visualisation – elevates the spoken word, which was becoming scarce even at the theatre, where spectacle was replacing spoken drama. (Alarauhio, 2018, p. 26)

Thus, the article argues that Arnold aligned the aesthetic form of his epic poem with certain aspects of post-enlightenment visual aesthetics that were becoming ubiquitous in the Western world. This rhetorical move places his poem in two important communicative contexts: that of the tradition of Homeric epic, or in broader terms, the Classical epic, and that of the nineteenth century spectacle.

Arnold’s express wish that the poem would ‘animate’ (In Lang, 1996, pp. 281-282) suggests that he was not trying to recover what is identified in the article as a contemplative observer, but perhaps rather to jar his reader out of the state of a spectator, or in Jonathan Crary’s terms, a “passive onlooker of a spectacle” (1992 p. 87) into a state of active participation – just as a Homeric poet might have done. Seen in the context of the rapidly expanding and shifting visual culture of the nineteenth century, Arnold’s artistic choices seem to support this view: his sources for Sohrab and Rustum reveals an affinity with many of the principles and features associated with Victorian aesthetics of vision in general, and the spectacle in particular: melodrama, abundance of visual detail, scenes involving masses of people and depictions of grand, exotic landscapes. Yet, while presenting such a powerfully visualized representation, Arnold seems to cast suspicion on the reliability of the connection between visual observation and truth. The poem’s tragic ending results from a father’s belated recognition of his son, yet throughout the poem, the underlying irony seems to be that vision – when divorced from empathy and imagination – turns out to be a much less trustworthy basis for truth.
than the metaphor of *enlightenment* might suggest. The article thus places *Sohrab and Rustum* within a historical and cultural context in the nineteenth century in order to illustrate how Arnold’s communicative act both appropriates the hegemonic aesthetics of vision while questioning an epistemology based on it.
5 Conclusion

The purpose of this dissertation has not been to present a corrective in the sense of proposing a real Arnold behind the accumulated noise of supposedly erroneously critical opinions. Individual responses to particular texts or parts of Arnold’s oeuvre have, nonetheless, emerged as a result of his communication, and an attempt to consign the implications of such communicative events to a generalized authorial persona would overlook the significance of those events. Conversely, and in the spirit of communicative criticism, where my questioning of past critical assessments, interpretations and begins is where Arnold’s communications are too firmly or one-sidedly categorized into totalizing labels that narrow down or discourage future engagements with his work.

The three Articles in this dissertation have opened up many more topics for critical discussion than has been possible explore to greater depth in a single study. The further critical and political implications of the findings have been consciously limited in order to allow a less end-directed hermeneutics to run its course, and thus the main focus has remained on themes broadly related to communication. Yet this broad perspective has brought to view many focal points for further inquiry; Article I, for instance, proposes that acknowledging the multiple sides of Arnold’s persona makes it possible to recover some of his communicative complexity necessary for a more balanced approach to his writings. Thus, awareness of his understanding of the special functions of poetry – that his idea of high seriousness appointed to it seems to refer to a position of sympathy, good faith, vulnerability and spiritual outlook comparable to religious devotion rather than assertive graveness and pessimism – makes it easier to see how, in his other writing, other rhetorical strategies can be wildly different from the poetry, but nevertheless continuous with the developing thought behind it. Article II, on the other hand, delves into one particular aspect of this development, the extent of Arnold’s pessimism and his reconciliation between such an outlook on the world and his active involvement in it. In the article, it is suggested that Arnold’s epics express communicative concerns that are, perhaps, less perceptible in Arnold’s other poetry, but more clearly visible in his later prose writings.

The findings of the articles thus highlight a problematisation of communication itself. While the political implications of Arnold’s co-adaptations of the epic form – discussed to some extent in Articles II and III – have not been in the centre of focus in this dissertation, at least three potential areas for an analysis can be
identified in *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead*. The problems represented in the poems seem to arise from the dichotomies between 1) the *state and domestic life* 2) the *feminine and the masculine* 3) what have often been labelled the *subjective* and the *objective* views of the world. These are all closely related to the central problems Armstrong (1993: 6) identifies in Victorian poetry, particularly through the notion of the self in relation to society, nature, language and the lover. Guy and Small have made an interesting observation about these themes in connection to what Arnold referred to as “domestic epics” – as opposed to classical ones – of the period, and despite his own classical models, Arnold’s own epics seem to partake in this aspect of these long poems to a significant degree. As Guy and Small put it, many of these longer poetic works, such as Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* (1859-1885) and Elizabeth Barrett Browning’s *Aurora Leigh* (1856), “self-consciously addressed social concerns, particularly gender roles and the relationship between desire, love and social and moral responsibility – the same concerns, that is, as those which were preoccupying contemporary novelists” (2011, p. 66).

Sharing the goals of these composers of domestic epics “to develop a more discursive, objective and socially engaged poetry” (Guy and Small, 2011, p. 66) Arnold delved into the topic of the problematized relationship between the self and the world with a form that seeks to represent these binaries through objective language. This approach creates the tensions of the kind of poem Armstrong (1993) labels Victorian double poetry. This double status of a poem refers to a problematisation or deconstruction of binary oppositions. Assumed binary oppositions between object and the subject or male and female identities, for instance, can become destabilized through a manipulation of traditional literary forms through deviations from the norms they set. Thus, in a double poem, “a second poem emerges which dissolves and interrogates the fixed positions and oppositions of the first and redefines its aesthetics and politics” (Armstrong 1993: 84), which, in the case of Arnold’s epics, became the double poem of a classical epic that casts doubts upon its own premises of heroic action and the description of such deeds in objective language. In many cases in past criticism (whether based on an intent to point out Arnold’s classicism or unclassical Victorianism), Arnold’s poetry has been read within the classical or as predominantly Victorian. However, it could be argued that it is only by reading the poems as speaking from both of these traditions, addressing Victorian issues through co-adaptations of classical epic, that the double poem can be construed and appreciated in its full, enriching significance.
With regard to theme 1) the state and domestic life, it is particularly via the family in Arnold’s epics through which the state and the individual are held in juxtaposition. In *Sohrab and Rustum*, the disruption of the family is depicted against the background of an ultimately uncaring social environment, a feudal aristocracy, whereas the divine patriarchy in *Balder Dead* constitutes, as a monarchy, the state as a social organism which destroys itself through the injustices towards its own members. The end of the inflexible aristocratic, martial patriarchy looms over both poems, but there seem to be no individuals, not even Balder, who would seem to fully understand the historical forces that are driving them towards doom. Even less understanding is shown to reside in what Arnold depicts as the masses led by these aristocrats, the various armies in *Sohrab and Rustum* or the warriors in Valhalla. The conspirators of the end times in *Balder Dead*, Lok and Hela, who could be seen as representatives of agitators for an underclass rebellion and revolution, seem to have no future in mind other than one filled by vengeful destruction. Thus, Arnold’s distrust in the idea that any one layer of the class society could deliver it from its ills – so famously expressed in *Culture and Anarchy* – seems to have an early iteration in *Balder Dead*.

The juxtaposition between the individual and the state, or the domestic and the public life, also leads to the second principal topic, gender roles. Thaïs E. Morgan has suggested that the “feminized masculinities” (2000: 220) in Arnold’s poetry partake in a resistance to the narrowing gender expectations of the mid-nineteenth century. Morgan focuses on the notions of melancholy and an (intellectual) vagrancy in *Tristram and Iseult*, *Dover Beach* and *The Scholar Gipsy* as touchstones for accusers doubting Arnold’s manliness, but far more explicit and consistent analyses of masculinity can be found in Arnold’s epics. In *Sohrab and Rustum*, this is presented via the *topos* of the duel, in which the obsessively martial aspect of self-insulating heroic masculinity is deconstructed and presented as ultimately self-destructive. The alternate masculinity, represented by the cultured, mild-mannered Sohrab, is subjected to the rhetorical assaults of his father’s mockery. The insults suggest not only comparisons femininity as a weakness, but some more implicitly made references to failures in the muscular virtue of puritan restraint – an enjoyment of the senses in dance, poetry and wine:

“Girl! nimble with thy feet, not with thy hands!
Curl'd minion, dancer, coiner of sweet words!
Fight, let me hear thy hateful voice no more!”
Thou art not in Afrasiab's gardens now
With Tartar girls, with whom thou art wont to dance;
But on the Oxus-sands, and in the dance
Of battle, and with me, who make no play
Of war; I fight it out, and hand to hand.
Speak not to me of truce, and pledge, and wine!
Remember all thy valour; try thy feints
And cunning! all the pity I had is gone;
Because thou hast shamed me before both the hosts
With thy light skipping tricks, and thy girl's wiles.” (ll. 458-470)

It is perhaps the truly pessimistic aspect of the poem that Sohrab’s attempts to communicate are not reciprocated by Rustum; rather, Arnold grants Rustum’s truncated, self-denying masculinity a seeming victory over Sohrab’s reasonable invitations to make peace. Yet tragedy follows soon after Rustum’s martial triumph, and it is particularly the ever-present river in the poem, an “emblem of flux” (Quint 1993: 30), that makes the failure of the martial patriarchy evident in Sohrab and Rustum. As the poem ends with the father holding his dead son, the narrative departs to follow the river Oxus on its path to the sea. The river flows in time, past the pair, in an uncaring, continuous procession of natural time, and in stark contrast to the discontinuity that is now the lot of Rustum’s patrilineal succession. It is in this image that Arnold most clearly depicts the end of a Hegelian “masculine state” (Lootens, 2000, p. 258), which shows itself in the constant displacement of the feminine into the margins in Rustum’s words, in which femininity is applied as an insult to discredit the challenge to Rustum’s masculinity – the cultured, gentle and communicatively more open Sohrab, who is, tellingly, described as having been brought up by his mother. In symbolic terms, the family has been disrupted, and this disruption and alienation from the family allows a closure of Rustum’s mind, so much so that it leads to the ending of his lineage. Yet it is true that the perspective of women is not portrayed in Arnold’s epics, or remains isolated or domestic, except in Hela, who seems to represent the antithesis of Sohrab’s mother in having birthed, among other things, the mendacious, manipulative and murderous Lok. Thus, one of the few roles appointed to women in militantly patriotic imagination – as the women mourning for their sons killed in war – is now cast to Rustum, whereas Sohrab’s mother remains a fleeting, unnamed memory in her husband’s mind. Yet this absence of female presence seems to grow into one of the significant
forces in the tragedy. In Rustum’s bitter reflections, at a moment when he is
reminded about his own youth by his son’s dying words, there emerges a
recollection of a fuller life:

So deem’d he; yet he listen’d, plunged in thought
And his soul set to grief, as the vast tide
Of the bright rocking Ocean sets to shore
At the full moon; tears gather’d in his eyes;
For he remember’d his own early youth,
And all its bounding rapture; as, at dawn,
The shepherd from his mountain-lodge descries
A far, bright city, smitten by the sun,
Through many rolling clouds—so Rustum saw
His youth; saw Sohrab’s mother, in her bloom;
And that old king, her father, who loved well
His wandering guest, and gave him his fair child
With joy; and all the pleasant life they led,
They three, in that long-distant summer-time—
The castle, and the dewy woods, and hunt
And hound, and morn on those delightful hills
In Ader-baijan. (ll. 616-632)

The vision of the past shows Rustum as uninhibited by a life in the wilderness of
puritan masculinity into which his son has now arrived to die. This memory of the
life which he has repressed enables a sudden awareness of beauty represented by
the flower simile that represents the Rustum’s emancipated senses:

[…] And he saw that Youth,
Of age and looks to be his own dear son,
Piteous and lovely, lying on the sand,
Like some rich hyacinth which by the scythe
Of an unskilful gardener has been cut,
Mowing the garden grass-plots near its bed,
And lies, a fragrant tower of purple bloom,
On the mown, dying grass—so Sohrab lay,
Lovely in death, upon the common sand. (ll. 632-640)
The dehumanizing aspects of the masculine-feminine binary are thus demonstrated almost solely within the domain of warlike masculinity. In *Balder Dead*, however, prominent female characters, two of whom, Hela and Frea, wield significant power. Frea, in particular, is portrayed as an arbiter, whose word remains the final advise in the scenes in which the Gods in Valhalla determine their course of action. An interesting exchange between Frea and Odin shows how Frea, a prophetess and Odin’s counselor in the same character, reprimands the Father of the Gods for his impulsive plan to invade Niflheim:

> But Hela into Niflheim thou throw’st,  
> And gav’st her nine unlighted worlds to rule,  
> A queen and empire over all the dead.  
> That empire wilt thou now invade, light up  
> Her darkness, from her grasp a subject tear?--  
> Try it; but I, for one, will not applaud.  
> Nor do I merit, Odin, thou should’st slight  
> Me and my words, though thou be first in Heaven;  
> For I too am a Goddess, born of thee,  
> eldest, and of me the Gods are sprung;  
> And all that is to come I know, but lock  
> In mine own breast, and have to none reveal’d. (III, ll. 276-286)

Odin offers no counterargument to this impressive rhetoric, and Frea’s authority is unquestioned in other parts of the poem. Frea does, however, express a fatalistic view of the universe, most clearly perhaps in her words to Hoder, who comes to ask her advice:

> On Balder Death hath laid her hand, not thee;  
> Nor doth she count this life a price for that.  
> For many Gods in Heaven, not thou alone,  
> Would freely die to purchase Balder back,  
> And wend themselves to Hela’s gloomy realm.  
> For not so gladsome is that life in heaven  
> Which Gods and heroes lead, in feast and fray,  
> Waiting the darkness of the final times,
That one should grudge its loss for Balder’s sake,
Balder their joy, so bright, so loved a God.
But fate withstands, and laws forbid this way.
Yet in my secret mind one way I know,
Nor do I judge if it shall win or fail;
But much must still be tried, which shall but fail.’ (I, ll. 117-130)

Here, the resolutely stoic attitude seems heroic, yet it also seems futile in the
shadow of the predestined doom. Freya, on the other hand, seems to carry a similar
role in smaller scale, as she performs the rites in Balder’s wake, and thus the
spiritual aspect of the Gods seems to be an aspect of the feminine. The implication
is not, however, a division of roles according to the division lines between reason
and emotion, but the voice of reason belongs to the women and Balder, who is
unlike the other males in Valhalla in his reluctance to enjoy perpetual conflict. For
instance, the restraint only to Odin’s violent passions is Freya, who ultimately
determines the foreign policy of Valhalla as one of diplomacy instead of the assault
to Hela’s realm. Hela, on the other hand, emerges as the dignified and rational face
of the resistance, and thus stands in contrast to Lok, whose petty tactics of insult
function as a counterpart to the rash violence of the male gods in Valhalla. In the
end, however, all of these characters appear to be prisoners of their own historical
situation, and as I propose in Article II, Balder is the only one who can envision a
future, even if it will not be possible without the destruction of the old order.
Against this background, the individual masculine or feminine identities begin to
look less significant; even tough it seems that the unimaginative and violent
versions of masculinity are the source of much of the suffering, there is no
deliverance from any idealized femininity either.

The fact that Arnold chose to examine masculinity in this way – as suffering
from a narrowing and dehumanizing demarcation of it – suggest that, like with so
many other issues, Arnold may have treated the topic of gender within a symbolic
and psychological framework rather than in direct reference to the more practical
aspects of the gender politics of his time. To the extent that Sohrab and Balder can
be considered Arnold’s heroes, they are also representatives of a view of
masculinity that seems to reconnect with what the notion of a more fully rounded
human being which Victorian gender and family politics was pulling apart. The
implications of this amalgam can, and probably should, be examined within a
framework of gender studies, but in the context of Arnold’s own thought, it seems
to look backwards, again, to the rationalists and romantics. Thus, the focus seems to be less on actual, historical gender roles, but archetypal ones, ones in which the supposed aspects of masculinity and femininity may, and perhaps should, occupy all individuals, and exclusions caused by strict gender roles can only cause humanity to wither. The extent to which such anti-essentialist views informed Arnold’s thinking remains to be explored, but the epic poems conjure up an interesting vision of his alternate masculinities.

The third dichotomy, the persistent Cartesian rift between the subjective and the objective that the Victorians had inherited and adapted into a model of public and private spheres. It is perhaps this dichotomy from which Victorian double poetry most effectively emerge. For instance, the conclusions presented in Article III further illustrate the quality of doubleness in Arnold’s epics by examining the creative co-adaptation of the epic form in combination with a cultural fascination with the spectacular. In this case, the tensions emerge from an application of objectifying aesthetics to express deep suspicion of the validity of what can be understood by a solely outward observation. The sense of undecidedness – and thus **doubleness** – is further heightened through the equal exposition of the limits of the subjective point of view; as I have proposed in Article II, “[i]t was precisely Arnold’s fear of slipping into isolated subjectivity through private language which made him so keen on descriptive objectivity” (Alarauhio, 2007, p. 53).

Thus, when Lionel Trilling suggests that Arnold’s poetry is an attempt to synthesize the “traditions of romanticism and rationalism” (1963: 79), the attempt does not result in healing, but a somber realization of the dangers of maintaining a strict separation between the two. The voices of romanticism and rationalism, which echoed the central philosophical binary between subjectivism and objectivism in the eighteenth century thought, are incorporated in the composition of Arnold’s epics, which is poetry of action, albeit it is the futility of the action that is underlined in the poems. Following the classical epic tradition, the action is conveyed through objectively descriptive language, but it is the subjective experience related to the action that Arnold takes so much care to represent through his similes. As the outward action in *Sohrab and Rustum* and *Balder Dead* results in tragedy and irresolution, it is the inward, subjective action that becomes central. This condition of inward suffering without outward release in action – which Arnold saw as a culture-wide problem – finally connects with Arnold’s vision of history, and can in part illustrate his approach to the past. According to Guy and
Small, Arnold’s application of history as an example for the present was not uncommon in nineteenth century writing:

This tendency to seek answers for present-day social problems in the past, or to use the past to critique the present, has often been explained in terms of a reaction to the increasing pace of change in the nineteenth century – stasis becomes more appealing when change seems inexorable. (2011, 47)

But for Arnold, the stagnation – albeit in a spiritual rather than material sense – was the existential problem of the present. His most powerful formulation of this problem in verse can be found in Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse (1855):

Wandering between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere yet to rest my head,
Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.
Their faith, my tears, the world deride –
I come to shed them at their side (ll. 85-90)

Here is a dark counterpart to Northrop Frye’s suggestion of the symbolism of regeneration as the “victory of a younger generation” (1976, p 147) over the past ones; yet it is in Arnold’s epics where this darkness is explored in richer detail than in any other of his poems. However, as I have suggested in Article II, even in this darkness Arnold identifies consolation, whereas Article I reminds us how this more hopeful aspect can be fully appreciated by acknowledging Arnold’s own, more hopeful if not optimistic engagement with the world.

Thus, by incorporating the idea of double poetry with the exploration of the poems in this dissertation, it is now possible to interpret and appreciate Arnold's epics – which, until now, have received little critical attention and understanding – as significant turns in the tradition of English epic poetry. Since Arnold's epic poems have remained in the margins of critical discussion even in the context of Matthew Arnold studies, I believe that this study may open up new perspectives to Arnold's poetry as well as illustrate an early phase in the line of thought that came into being as Arnold's famous cultural dialectic between Hebraism and Hellenism, which is traditionally accredited to Arnold in his later years, in other words, to Arnold the prose writer. If doubleness indeed figures as an important element in
Arnold’s poetry, it would suggest, by its association with the dilemma and the unresolved conflict, a dialectical tendency already in the thought of the younger Arnold. Thus, the present study takes part in a wider project of giving Victorian poetry its proper place beside Victorian prose by demonstrating how poetry, too, was within the project of finding an expression to the moral, aesthetic and cultural problems posed to the Victorians by modern life.


Original publications


III Alarauhio, J.-P (Forthcoming). Sohrab and Rustum – Matthew Arnold’s Spectacle.

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Original publications are not included in the electronic version of the dissertation.
With aching hands and bleeding feet
We dig and heap, lay stone on stone;
We bear the burden and the heat
Of the long day and wish't were done.
Not till the hours of light return
All we have built do we discern.

Matthew Arnold, *Morality* (1852), ll. 7-12