The loneliness is very great, in the peace in which I am at present, and the peace is only as if I had buried myself in a tuft of grass on a battlefield wet with blood, for the cry of the earth about me is in my ears continually if I do not lay my head to the very ground.—John Ruskin, letter of 10 March 1863

It irked him to be here, he could not rest.
He loved each simple joy the country yields,
He loved his mates; but yet he could not keep,
For that a shadow loured on the fields,
Here with the shepherds and the silly sheep.
Some life of men unblest
He knew, which made him droop, and filled his head.
He went; his piping took a troubled sound
Of storms that rage outside our happy ground;
He could not wait their passing, he is dead.

Matthew Arnold, "Thyrsis" (1864–65), lines 41–50

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.—George Eliot, Middlemarch, chap. 20 (1871–72)
Darkness and Dawn

When he embarked on his career as a political writer, Ruskin believed that one of his chief qualifications for the struggle that lay ahead was his independence and detachment. "I have perfect leisure," he told Henry Acland, "for inquiry into whatever I want to know. I am untroubled by any sort of care or anxiety, unconnected with any particular interest or group of persons, unaffected by feelings of Party, of Race, of social partialities, or of early prejudice. . . ." His one seeming disqualification for writing about the affairs of the world was that he himself lived outside of it and could therefore know nothing about it. But anyone who alleged that Ruskin's detachment from society invalidated his speculations about it showed himself a poor epistemologist. The truth was, Ruskin maintained, that just because he lived out of the world, he knew more about it: "Who do you suppose know most about the lake of Geneva—I, or the Fish in it?"1

Subsequent events were to prove that wealth, leisure, and physical detachment were for Ruskin no more guarantees of spiritual detachment than they were obstacles to knowledge. Even as he was composing Unto This Last, in self-imposed exile in Chamouni, Ruskin felt that his independence of spirit and his happiness were about to be sacrificed irrevocably: "It may be much nobler to hope for the advance of the human race only, than for one's own and their immortality; much less selfish to look upon one's self merely as a leaf on a tree than as an independent spirit, but it is much less pleasant. I don't say I have come to this—but all my work bears in that direction."2

The publication of his papers on political economy in the Cornhill Magazine brought down a torrent of abuse on Ruskin's head. The Literary Gazette found them "one of the most melancholy spectacles" it had ever witnessed. The Saturday Review described Ruskin's on-
slaught on the prevailing political economy as "eruptions of windy hysteric," "absolute nonsense," and defiantly announced that the world was not ready to be "preached to death by a mad governess." The *Manchester Examiner and Times*, fearful that "his wild words will touch the spring of action in some hearts . . . and a moral floodgate may open and drown us all," held Thackeray, the editor, morally culpable for printing *Unto This Last*. Finally, as Ruskin himself wrote later, "the outcry against them became then too strong for any editor to endure," and George Smith, the publisher, succumbed to the pressure and told Ruskin, after the third paper ("Qui Judicatis Terram") that he could admit only one more essay. Warming to the challenge, Ruskin made his last paper his longest, and, in his words, most "incendiary production," "a smasher." 3

Ruskin, for all his spirit of contentiousness, was thrown into a state of severe depression and barely suppressed fury by the hostility visited upon him and upon the work that he considered his best to date. On the fourth day of November, the month of publication of the final essay, he told Norton: "I am resting now, and find myself in a general state of collapse. I hate the sight of pen and paper, and can't write so much as a note without an effort. . . . When I begin to think at all, I get into states of disgust and fury at the way the mob is going on . . . that I choke; and have to go to the British Museum and look at Penguins till I get cool." His fury resulted partly from the hostile reaction to what he had said, but even more from his feeling that he had forsaken his true work and turned himself upside down to no purpose. Leslie Stephen once described Ruskin as "a man of genius, placed in a pillory to be pelted by a thick-skinned mob, and urged by a sense of his helplessness to utter the bitterest taunts that he can invent." His fury in print was partly righteous indignation against callousness and stupidity, but partly too a way of striking back at "the world," which had lured him away from the work that suited and gratified him. At long last, he had turned away from pleasure toward duty and had spoken out clearly and forcefully on what most deeply troubled him; but his words were derided or ignored, and he seemed to have sacrificed his happiness for nothing: "The things I most re-
gret in all my past life are great pieces of virtuous and quite hero­
cal self-denial; which have issued in all kinds of catastrophe and dis­
appointment, instead of victory. Everything that has turned out well
I've done merely to please myself, and it upsets all one's moral prin­
ciples so."

Like Tennyson's Lady of Shalott, Ruskin had grown sick of shadow­
s and virtuously involved himself with the world that had cast the
shadows—only to discover that by doing so he had sacrificed life as
well as art, and was misunderstood by the world that had spurred
him to betray his calling in the first place. Ruskin was discovering,
to his despair, that for him there was no middle ground between
Olympian detachment from the world's sufferings and total immer­
sion in them. He was unable to make the descent into darkness as
a dispassionate observer; he moved with his sensibility wholly ex­
posed, and every increase in his knowledge exacerbated his grief and
fed his anger. By the end of 1860 he was telling his old tutor, the
Reverend W. L. Brown, that when he thought about wealth and eco­
nomics he became "so wild with contempt and anger . . . that I can't
write."

The shock that Ruskin's moral principles received from the rebuff
to Unto This Last was so great that the leisure and independence he
had boasted of before he set himself to compose it began to weigh
upon him as burdens: "I find it wonderfully difficult to know what
to do with myself. If only a little round-headed cherub would tumble
down through the clouds and tree-branches every morning to every­
body with an express order to do so and so tied under his wing, one
would be more comfortable." That Ruskin in 1861 should still find
himself at loose ends, undecided about his future, praying for deliv­
rance from an unchartered freedom, seems, from one point of view,
credible. With the wisdom of hindsight we can see him moving ir­
resistibly, over a very long period, almost under the guidance of
Fate, toward the great culminations of Unto This Last and Munera
Pulveris. But what looks to us like destiny looked to Ruskin like sui­
cide—and in one sense was; and no man approaches that destiny with­
out a great deal of reluctance. Ruskin himself admitted in the 1871
Preface to *Munera Pulveris* that after the violent reprobation of the *Cornhill* essays by the public, he turned the matter "hither and thither" in his mind for two years before resolving "to make it the central work of my life to write an exhaustive treatise on Political Economy."\(^6\)

In February of 1861 Ruskin, who had for so long maintained that work was to be judged by the pleasure with which it was done, said he took about as much pleasure in the writing of political economy as he would in the breaking of stones. So eager had he been during the previous winter to escape from the intellectual troubles surrounding him that "it seemed . . . no life would do for me but one as like Veronese's as might be, and I was seriously, and despairingly, thinking of going to Paris or Venice and breaking away from all modern society and opinion, and doing I don't know what." But Bohemia was no more possible a refuge for Ruskin than a monastery; and he had already discovered that physical detachment was no guarantee of spiritual detachment. Through 1861 and 1862 he struggled with illness, isolation, indolence, purposelessness, and paranoia. But, worst of all, he was plagued by his consciousness of the glaring contradiction that his present life offered to his philosophical principles. The relation between his work and his misery seems never to have been far from his mind at this period. In a letter of October 1861 to his father he squeezed what consolation he could out of the fact that "of the two Athenians, Pericles and Phocion, who had most universal and benevolent influence on their nation, it is recorded that neither were ever seen to smile from their youth up." In November he told Robert Browning, "I am . . . in a state of sick apathy, or dull resolution—plodding on with work which will probably be as fruitless as it is pleasureless." He had always maintained that all good and useful work was done with pleasure. Now he found that as soon as he attended to the suffering and pain of human creatures and sought means of alleviating it, he became miserable himself. "My only way of being cheerful is . . . to shut myself up and look at weeds and stones. . . ."\(^7\)

His conscience would not allow him to return to his artistic work—"of my intended work," he said in August 1862, "I have done noth-
ing”—and his realism would not allow him to take pleasure or satisfaction in his humanitarian work. Recounting for Norton some of his physical and emotional suffering in 1862, Ruskin wrote: “You say ‘does it give you no pleasure to have done people good?’ No—for all seems just as little to me as if I were dying (it is by no means certain I’m not) and the vastness of the horror of this world’s blindness and misery opens upon me—as unto dying eyes the glimmering square (and I don’t hear the birds). . . .” Ruskin’s tears, as well as his labors, seemed to him idle.8

Despite his doubts and his gloom, the disappointed philanthropist resumed his vendetta against political economists in the winter of 1862–63 in the pages of Fraser’s Magazine. The fourth paper of what was intended as a long preface to Munera Pulveris appeared in March 1863; but Ruskin never got beyond his preface, for a storm of criticism like that which had prematurely terminated Unto This Last forced J. A. Froude (Fraser’s editor)—or rather, his publisher—to discontinue publication. Now, after three years of living in a state of constant indignation and personal suffering, Ruskin retreated from “English brutal avarice and stupidity” to the little village of Mornex in High Savoy; but once again he found no real retreat, no real peace: “. . . The loneliness is very great, in the peace in which I am at present, and the peace is only as if I had buried myself in a tuft of grass on a battlefield wet with blood, for the cry of the earth about me is in my ears continually if I do not lay my head to the very ground.”9

The battlefield of which Ruskin spoke was more than a metaphor. Wars were raging in America and Austria, and Ruskin could hardly help hearing the cries and visualizing the blood of the combatants in those struggles. England, in his view, was in the throes of an industrial civil war, in which “that red ink” was recklessly shed over account books, and from whence came the noise and smoke that assaulted Ruskin’s eyes and ears every day.

Through the first half of the decade of the sixties Ruskin tried repeatedly to lay his head to the ground, to shut his eyes and ears, to eschew benevolence and eloquence, and to cultivate his interests and himself. Between total immersion of his soul in the darkness of the
world about him, and entire withdrawal into solitude he saw no halfway house. Whereas in 1860 he had personally assumed the obligation not only to descend into darkness, to “stoop to the horror,” but also to arise from it into conceptions of triumph and beauty, he now believed that although the human spirit might ultimately regain the light, the lonely explorer of the underworld would die in bondage to the god of darkness. With this fate before him, he could conceive of no compromise between detachment and involvement; and even if he could have conceived of one, his hypersensitivity to human suffering would not have allowed him to execute it. “The least mortification or anxiety,” he confessed to the Carlyles, “makes me ill so quickly that I shall have, I believe, to live the life of a monster for some years and care for nothing but grammar. If I could make a toad of myself and get into a hole in a stone, and be quiet, I think it would do me good. My eyes . . . and ears are too much for me.”

Some years later, in *Middlemarch*, George Eliot, whose own moral sensibility was hardly what one would call underdeveloped, wrote, “If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel’s heart beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity.” But Ruskin was an exception; he most definitely lacked the protective wadding of stupidity (or of stoical armor) that George Eliot assumed to be a universal endowment. Perhaps Ruskin’s parents, albeit in their old-fashioned way, understood their son’s peculiar nakedness when they told him he was torturing himself in vain. His mother suggested that her son’s gloom was leading him into misanthropy, and his father suggested that Ruskin’s liver might be at the base of his problems. But Ruskin retorted that his grief was “no more biliousness than the Lamentations of Jeremiah was biliousness,” and that “there is no more chaos in my mind than there was in Hesiod’s or Virgil’s, but you will find neither of them were happy men.” The Ruskins were, of course, more concerned with their son’s physical and emotional well-being than with transforming English society. But Ruskin, with a kind of spiritual pride that must have reminded his father more of Byron
than of the Jesus with whom his son now claimed fraternity, insisted upon the need for the prophet or seer to sacrifice his happiness and even his life:

It is just because I am so clear-sighted, so just, and in many respects so unselfish, that I suffer in this way. There are not two men in the Parliament of England who would not be more angry if the Emperor of Russia stopped their partridge-shooting than if he murdered every soul in his dominions. These men are far happier than I. But they are neither better nor wiser. Depend upon it, though crime and folly bring grief, Wisdom and Knowledge bring it also. In much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow. There has been one man upon the earth of whom we believe, or profess to believe, that he knew all things, and did no sin. Of him it is recorded that he sorrowed constantly, fasted often, wept, and agonised. But it is only once said that he rejoiced. . . .

By a strange irony, the man who had once maintained that the sign of all good work was that it was done in joy, now asserted that the necessary sign of work done to alleviate human misery was the absence of joy in the worker. But Ruskin was no longer talking of workmen or of artists or even of social critics; for he had come to think of himself as a prophet martyring himself for the benefit of the human race. If his vision became fitful and his expression at times incoherent, that was to be expected. When in 1856 he had classified the four types of human perceivers, he had rated above all the rest "the men who, strong as human creatures can be, are yet submitted to influences stronger than they, and see in a sort untruly, because what they see is inconceivably above them." "This last," Ruskin added, was "the usual condition of prophetic inspiration." Toward this condition Ruskin now believed himself to be moving.

To his dismay, Ruskin was discovering that one might live out of the world and yet be only too much a part of it; nor did there seem for him to be any means of becoming involved in the affairs of the
world without surrendering to it the possession of his soul. In July 1863 he wrote to Charles Norton that he was "tormented between the longing for rest and for lovely life, and the sense of the terrific call of human crime for resistance and of human misery for help—though it seems to me as the voice of a river of blood which can but sweep me down in the midst of its black clots, helpless."  

It was at about this time that Ruskin and Matthew Arnold met for the first time. Arnold described the occasion, in June of 1863, in a letter to his mother:

On Sunday night I dined with Monckton Milnes, and met all the advanced liberals in religion and politics, and a Cingalese in full costume; so that, having lunched with the Rothschilds, I seemed to be passing my day among Jews, Turks, infidels, and heretics. But the philosophers were fearful! G. Lewes, Herbert Spencer, a sort of pseudo-Shelley called Swinburne, and so on. Froude, however, was there, and Browning, and Ruskin; the latter and I had some talk, but I should never like him.

We do not know whether the subject of the conversation that occasioned Arnold's (temporary) dislike of Ruskin was the nature of the critical character and the relation of the critic to his subject. But we do know that, since 1856, Arnold had seen in Ruskin's career an object lesson for critics, not as a model but as a warning. He undoubtedly knew of the storm of abuse that had befallen Ruskin with the publication of *Unto This Last* and *Munera Pulveris*, and it would be surprising if Ruskin's plight had not set him thinking about the manner of his own criticism and the relation between the critic's life and his work.

Ruskin's fate as a critic and a man may well have reassured Arnold of the rightness of a decision he had taken long before about the way he should see, and relate himself to, the world. In the title poem of his first volume, "The Strayed Reveller," he had, through the mouth of the young reveller, contrasted two ways of perceiving the world. The first way was that of the gods, who "turn on all sides / Their shining eyes, / And see below them / The earth and men." What they see
from Mt. Olympus includes the prophet Tiresias, the Centaurs, the Indian reaping his harvest of melons and cucumbers, the Scythian tethering his beast and making his meal, the ferry carrying merchants across the Oxus, and the Argonauts approaching the Happy Isles. These gods observe the world from the height and serenity of their detachment, and (like many other gods) pronounce it good. But when the poet looks at the very same world, he sees that it desperately needs to be improved; and unlike the gods he cannot see it at all without great pain:

These things, Ulysses,
The wise bards also
Behold and sing.
But oh, what labour!
O prince, what pain!
They too can see
Tiresias; but the Gods,
Who give them vision,
Added this law:
That they should bear too
His groping blindness,
His dark foreboding,
His scorned white hairs. . . .

(207–19)

Whereas the gods see all in peace and tranquility, the poet, looking deeper, sees the Centaurs speared by the Lapithae, the Indian’s melons gnawed by worms, the Oxus merchants overtaxed and robbed; and not only sees, but feels: "... such a price / The Gods exact for song: / To become what we sing." (232–34) Dwight Culler has suggested that Arnold is here contrasting classical poetry, "objective, serene, and rather shallow," with romantic poetry, "profound, inward, and tortured." At least, he is contrasting two ways of looking at the world, one of which causes the truth to suffer, the other of which causes the seeker of truth to suffer. Neither alternative was entirely attractive to the young Arnold, and he was determined to avoid both.

Arnold, like his own Empedocles, felt the need men have for joy,
but it had to be "joy whose grounds are true." In modern life the perspective of Olympian detachment was for gods and not for men; modern man was even too sorely tried, "too harassed, to attain / Wordsworth's sweet calm, or Goethe's wide and luminous view." As long as he was mainly engaged in writing poetry, Arnold could still express the romanticist suspicion that classical serenity, simplicity, and stability come from closing one's eyes to painful difficulties and evil circumstances and all the complexities of life; yet he was even more terrified of romantic instability and turbulence, and of the price exacted, in unsteadiness of eye and mind, in incoherence of thought and expression, and in personal suffering, for the concrete, immediate romantic vision. We have already seen how, in such poems as "Resignation" and "To a Friend," Arnold had formulated a poetic creed according to which the poet might steer a middle course between classical detachment and romantic involvement. To put Arnold's aim positively, he hoped to combine the romantic allegiance to concrete, felt experience with the classical love of form and universality; to see all of life but to see it steadily; to incorporate the experience of human suffering in his poetic vision and yet to keep himself at a distance from it.

Arnold's most ambitious attempt to resolve the dilemma posed in "The Strayed Reveller" was "Empedocles on Etna." Frank Kermode has argued that in this poem Arnold has dissociated the figure of the romantic poet into Callicles, who has the calm that comes from shutting one's eyes to evil, and Empedocles, who experiences suffering with an immediacy that deprives him of all hope of joy and makes him stop writing poetry. But it would be equally true to say that Callicles is precisely the image of classical art. As Warren Anderson has asserted, and very ably demonstrated, Callicles is none other than the "symbol of the classical ideal expressed through its most perfect medium." It is Empedocles who flings himself into Mt. Etna and leaves the field to Callicles, who says that the formal perfection and classical universality of poetry cannot afford to stoop to such subjects as Empedocles: "Not here, O Apollo! / Are haunts meet for thee." (What Apollo's view of the matter is, we do not know.)
Though many of his readers, then and since, might suppose that Arnold had temporarily resolved his dilemma by giving an ordered, objective form to his turbulent, subjective feelings, Arnold himself looked upon “Empedocles” as a failure. For it seemed to have proved to him the impossibility of uniting the romantic and classical modes of perceiving and organizing experience. The creed that Callicles celebrates at the end of the poem—poetry should deal exclusively with “What will be for ever; / What was from of old”—is the truncated classicism that Arnold will henceforward espouse. The very action of his own poem seems to have forced him, in the 1853 Preface, to choose between Empedocles and Callicles, between romantic immediacy at the expense of survival and survival at the expense of awareness of evil; and his choice was clear:

If we must be dilettanti: if it is impossible for us, under the circumstances amidst which we live, to think clearly, to feel nobly, and to delineate firmly: if we cannot attain to the mastery of the great artists;—let us, at least, have so much respect for our art as to prefer it to ourselves. 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 talks of sacrificing himself to his art, but actually he was sacrificing his art to himself. This is made abundantly clear by his correspondence of the next few years, and receives its most forceful expression in a letter of August 1858 to his sister Jane. In it he is attempting to justify his play Merope, that tepid experiment with a great classical form that had been published late in 1857. He had, of course, already offered a public apologia for his work in the form of a Preface. There he said that despite his “supposed addiction to the classical school in poetry” he had published almost nothing deserving of that honorific label. Still, he was sure that “even in England, even in this
stronghold of the romantic school," there was a curiosity about the classical school, even among those "who have been taught to consider classicalism as inseparable from coldness, and the antique as another phrase for the unreal," which deserved to be satisfied. For this purpose, and also to satisfy his own desire for "the power of true beauty, of consummate form" Arnold had written his "Greek" drama. This, at any rate, was his public justification; his private one was very different:

People do not understand what a temptation there is, if you cannot bear anything not very good, to transfer your operations to a region where form is everything. Perfection of a certain kind may there be attained, or at least approached, without knocking yourself to pieces, but to attain or approach perfection in the region of thought and feeling, and to unite this with perfection of form, demands not merely an effort and a labour, but an actual tearing of oneself to pieces, which one does not readily consent to . . . unless one can devote one's whole life to poetry.  

Arnold chose to retreat from art into life, and to pursue perfection of the life rather than perfection of the work. But "life" too required a choice between, or at least a reconciliation of, the way of detachment and that of involvement. We have already seen how, in 1849, Arnold felt himself being driven by "Fate" to forsake youth, romance, and poetry; to leave Obermann's mountains and enter the world. "A Summer Night," composed sometime between 1849 and 1852, finds Arnold contemplating the alternatives open to him. The speaker of the poem, who is no longer among lakes and mountains but in a "moon-blanch'd" city street, deplores his inability to achieve either romantic ecstacy or a restful acquiescence in the ways of the world; he is "Never by passion quite possessed / And never quite benumbed by the world's sway" (32–33). The majority, he knows, succumb to the temptations of restful ease and routine:

For most men in a brazen prison live,
Where, in the sun's hot eye,
With heads bent o'er their toil, they languidly
Their lives to some unmeaning taskwork give,
Dreaming of nought beyond their prison-wall.

(37–41)

A minority, however, reject the prison and take the more daring alternative of steering their own course on the "ocean of life." For them the speaker shows a guilty admiration; and yet he knows there is a preordained moral law that contradicts the untutored impulses of the heart and destines the individual adventurer to destruction:

And the pale master on his spar-strewn deck
With anguished face and flying hair
Grasping the rudder hard,
Still bent to make some port he knows not where,
Still standing for some false, impossible shore.
And sterner comes the roar
Of sea and wind, and through the deepening gloom
Fainter and fainter wreck and helmsman loom,
And he too disappears, and comes no more.

(65–73)

Having beheld the sorry fates that befall both the spiritually indolent and the rashly courageous, the speaker asks, in desperation:

Is there no life, but these alone?
Madman or slave, must man be one?

(74–75)

The answer to this question is found in the "pure dark regions" of the night sky. They follow, as do the stars of "Quiet Work" and of "Self-Dependence," an ordered course, and remain "untroubled and unpassionate." They represent the condition of serene labor toward which the man who wants to be neither slave nor madman must aspire. In the poem of farewell to Obermann, Arnold had imagined a select group of figures called "The Children of the Second Birth, / Whom the world could not tame," (143–44) and whose one bond was that they had been "Unspotted by the world" (156). Some of them
had been anchorites “who pined unseen” (153), some soldiers and men of action. Arnold knew he was destined neither for ascetic withdrawal nor for heroic action; and so he set himself to find a way to “share in the world’s toil,” and yet “keep free from dust and soil!”

Arnold’s strategy for remaining unspotted by the world in general, and by the little world of business documents and school books in which he moved, was to “hide” his life. In a letter of December 1856 he told his sister Jane that he had been escaping from the bustle of Eaton Place (his father-in-law’s residence) to the “profoundest secrecy” of a friend’s vacant apartment. At first this sounds like a lower-middle-class version of Ruskin’s retreats to Chamouni; but for Arnold it was something more, a principle rather than a mere habit: “‘Hide thy life,’ said Epicurus, and the exquisite zest there is in doing so can only be appreciated by those who, desiring to introduce some method into their lives, have suffered from the malicious pleasure the world takes in trying to distract them till they are as shatter-brained and empty-hearted as the world itself.”

We know from Arnold’s poetry that he conceived of man’s true life as “buried” out of reach of his consciousness and of his tampering. This buried life was for Arnold essentially a mystery that beat wild and deep in the “soul’s subterranean depth,” far beneath the level of consciousness. It rose to the surface only rarely, in love, and also—though Arnold does not say so explicitly—in poetry. Empedocles, the former poet who is about to fling himself into Etna, hearkens back to the time when he was a poet, and wonders whether, in the reincarnated state, “we will . . . at last be true / To our own only true, deep-buried selves” or “will once more fall away / Into some bondage of the flesh or mind . . . ” (Act II, lines 370–71, 373–74). Paradoxically, however, Arnold’s dissatisfaction with his own poetry arose in part from the fact that it brought his buried life to the surface too often, even when he least intended to bring it there. The buried life is, almost by definition, subjective, irrational, or “wild,” to use Arnold’s term; that is why it is inadmissible in poetry that claims to appeal only to “those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time.”
Self-effacement became Arnold’s code of conduct in life and in prose partly because he had so much difficulty adhering to it in poetry. Wordsworth’s grandson acutely observed in 1858 that the discrepancy between Arnold’s poems and his public personality was precisely the discrepancy between the poems and the 1853 Preface: “The preface to his earlier volume was curiously inconsistent with his practice: for I suppose few writers are so intensely introspective as he is: I do not know whether it is the result of a general law or not, but it seems to me that these young gentlemen who are as melancholy as night, and kick under the burden of life—seem sufficiently resigned and prosperous when one meets them.”

In any case, the notion of a hidden life seems to have been much in Arnold’s mind in the early sixties. In 1862 and again in 1863 he copied into his notebooks Lacordaire’s saying: “Se retirer en soi et en Dieu est la plus grande force qui soit au monde!” In the 1862 notebook we also find quoted Maurice de Guérin’s praise of “une vie studieuse et cachée” as a continual celebration. In 1863 Arnold quotes Lacordaire on the way to achieve Christian detachment. His final Oxford lecture of this year was on Joseph Joubert, “A French Coleridge.” In giving, as was his custom, a thumbnail biography of his subject, Arnold noted that Joubert cared more to perfect himself than to acquire a reputation, and stopped to explain the paucity of striking incident in his subject’s life: “He has chosen, Chateaubriand (adopting Epicurus’s famous words) said of him, to hide his life. Of a life which its owner was bent on hiding there can be but little to tell.” The same might, of course, be said of Arnold—or so, at least, he hoped. It was, according to his friend G. W. E. Russell, “Arnold’s express wish that he might not be made the subject of a Biography.”

Putting himself in Joubert’s place, he thought that he had kept his own life hidden, and that therefore a biographer could have but little to tell of it.

The decision to hide his life was for Arnold originally a method of self-preservation. In April of 1863, several months before delivering the “Joubert” lecture, he completed an article on Spinoza which asserted one of the two greatest doctrines of that thinker, who had lived
even more obscurely than Joubert, to be his doctrine of self-preservation: "Man's very essence is the effort wherewith each man strives to maintain his own being. . . . Man's virtue is this very essence, so far as it is defined by this single effort to maintain his own being. . . . Happiness consists in a man's being able to maintain his own being. . . ." Arnold clung to this decision to live obscurely, reminding himself of Epicurus's dictum throughout his life. The perfect life, he would write to his mother, is probably beyond the reach of most men, even such men as Plato, yet surely Plato would have been less perfect had he been a man of action. When he was in America, Arnold wrote home to comment on the American obsession with movement and publicity that "I thank God it only confirms me in the desire to 'hide my life,' as the Greek philosopher recommended, as much as possible." Gladstone found Arnold the most inaccessible man he knew, and acquaintances complained that his later elegies on persons who had been very close to him (like Clough and Stanley) were oddly lacking in "direct personal effusion." When in 1872 Henry Coleridge saw Arnold for the first time in years and expressed astonishment at not seeing a white-headed old man, Arnold said his white hairs "were all internal."

Arnold had been thinking and writing about the "hidden life" as a means of protecting and ordering his existence for some years, then, when in October 1863 something came to his attention suggesting that the spiritual discipline of detachment and self-effacement that he had long cultivated for its own sake might prove valuable as a means of persuasion.

The October 1863 number of the Westminster Review carried an article entitled "The Critical Character," which purported to review the critical works of John Ruskin and Matthew Arnold and to define the role of the ideal Victorian critic by comparing the relative effectiveness of the two men as critics. The reviewer, a clergyman-journalist named Samuel Reynolds, begins by subscribing to Renan's assertion that criticism has been an outgrowth of the nineteenth century. It exists by virtue of a new temper, characterized by freedom of thought, sympathy with both past and present, "foresight of the fu-
ture," ability to distinguish the abiding from the transitory, and intellectual integrity. Having thus defined the critical character in the abstract, Reynolds chooses Arnold and Ruskin to illustrate his meaning, for Arnold, "in spite of some faults, . . . is the very best critic we possess" and Ruskin, "in spite of many great and noble qualities, . . . is one of the most deficient in the true critical temper."

Reynolds is far from hostile to Ruskin and anything but contemptuous of his intellectual power. On the contrary, he praises Ruskin for recalling the attention of his contemporaries to the civilization of the Middle Ages, which he refers to, in typical Victorian fashion, as if it were yesterday. What he takes to be Ruskin's entire distaste for the present is, to be sure, objectionable; but who—especially when he is under the spell of Ruskin's vivid contrast between a peaceful, contented past and a fevered, unsettled present—does not find it understandable and forgivable? Reynolds's deeper uneasiness is caused by the temper of mind revealed in Ruskin's writings. He is a reckless writer, whose ignorance of a subject never keeps him from formulating its theory and proclaiming the laws by which its study must absolutely be regulated. Furthermore, the disorderliness of his thought is perpetually at war with his stated intentions. "His sympathies and antipathies are often in ludicrous extremes; his whims and fancies are more than feminine in their number and absurdity. . . ." Whereas Arnold contents himself with judging the "adequacy" of the literature of each age, Ruskin must assume the role of the prophet and combine the function of the moralist and religious teacher with that of the critic. But his prophetic ardor moves Ruskin away from persuasion into a denunciation of sin that is so much the self-indulgence of the author that it can hardly be called criticism. Reynolds concludes that Ruskin's works are fatally flawed as criticism because they reflect too immediately and probably too accurately the personality of their author: "They have too deep an impress throughout of his self-will and eccentricity for us ever to accept his judgment without a degree of hesitation and mistrust. He is a thorough partisan; and appears to see no merit in what he dislikes, no faults in what he is pleased to admire."
Arnold, on the other hand, is the model of the critical temper. He is quite as bold and confident in his criticisms as Ruskin, "but he is confident without being self-willed, and bold without being paradoxical." Arnold always follows the rule of moderation and does justice to those whose wide differences from himself test his powers of sympathy. Having thus suggested the secret of Arnold's persuasiveness, Reynolds unwittingly attests to it by cheerfully accepting Arnold's classification of modern English literature in the third rank when two pages earlier he had chafed at Ruskin's undervaluing of modern English culture and civilization.\(^\text{30}\)

The *Westminster Review* essay was called to Arnold's attention by Lady Rothschild. He was so pleased that he wrote to her to disclaim authorship: "It contains so much praise that you must have thought I wrote it myself, except that I should hardly have called myself by the hideous title of 'Professor'." "I must send it to you," he wrote to his mother later the same day:

> It is a contrast (all in my favour) of me with Ruskin. It is the strongest pronunciamento on my side there has yet been; almost too strong for my liking, as it may provoke a feeling against me. The reviewer says, "Though confident, Mr. Arnold is never self-willed; though bold, he is never paradoxical." Tell Fan to remember this in the future when she plays croquet with me. I also keep it as a weapon against K., who said to me that I was becoming as dogmatic as Ruskin. I told her the difference was that Ruskin was "dogmatic and wrong;" and here is this charming reviewer who comes to confirm me.\(^\text{31}\)

Arnold did not, of course, so badly misconstrue the review as to suppose that it had complimented him for being dogmatic but right. Rather it confirmed and sharpened his conviction of the need to subordinate personality and indignation to the task of persuasion. He seemed suddenly to have recognized that the stoical detachment that purged the fire and life from his poetry might be the secret of success in criticism. Two weeks after reading the comparison between Ruskin
and himself, he told his mother: "I was in poor force and low spirits for the first ten days after I returned from [Fox How]; now I am all right again, and hope to have a busy year. It is very animating to think that one at last has a chance of getting at the English public."

Reynolds's contrast between his own critical stance and Ruskin's appears to have awakened Arnold to "the precious truth that everything turns upon one's exercising the power of persuasion, of charm; that without this all fury, energy, reasoning power, acquirement, are thrown away and only render their owner more miserable." Great energies thrown away and rendering their owner miserable—it is precisely the image of himself and of his powers that tortured Ruskin's spirit at this time; and it is easy to believe that Arnold sought consciously to preserve his happiness as well as his effectiveness by eschewing Ruskin's critical approach.

In prose as in poetry Arnold aspired toward a point of view from which he might contemplate the miseries of his world without being made miserable by them. He wanted, like Ruskin, to effect a great transformation of the English spirit and of English society; but in this effort he would not jeopardize his soul. He must maintain his own being, and recognize the primacy of the law of self-preservation. In November 1863 he told Jane that whereas her husband, the politician W. E. Forster, was destined to work for the "evolution" of English society in Parliament, "I shall do what I can for this movement in literature; freer perhaps in that sphere than I could be in any other, but with the risk always before me, if I cannot charm the wild beast of Philistinism while I am trying to convert him, of being torn in pieces by him. . . . "

Arnold was too good a psychologist not to know that the energies he had determined to suppress, first as a poet and then as a critic, were not obliterated but diverted. Yet he chose to keep this spring of vitality and of trouble buried, hidden from consciousness. In December of this year, the simultaneous arrival of his forty-first birthday and of the news of Thackeray's sudden death moved him to reflect upon this life he had buried; but he was determined not to reflect too deeply or too long: "... I can feel, I rejoice to say, an inward spring which seems
more and more to gain strength, and to promise to resist outward shocks, if they must come, however rough. But of this inward spring one must not talk, for it does not like being talked about, and threatens to depart if one will not leave it in mystery."  

The compartmentalized relation between the soul that abides in mystery and the conscious mind now seemed to Arnold a necessary condition not only of reaching toward the light but of diffusing it among others. In the first month of the new year he wrote to his mother to express his satisfaction with the way in which his lecture of the previous November had called attention to its subject rather than to the brilliance of the essayist. With the praise accorded him by the *Westminster* obviously still in mind, Arnold reveals his new awareness that the strategy of hiding one's life, valuable as it is in itself, is also a most effective device of persuasion: "I was sure you would be pleased with Joubert, and you say just what I like when you speak of 'handing on the lamp of life' for him. That is just what I wish to do. . . . In the long-run one makes enemies by having one's brilliancy and ability praised; one can only get oneself really accepted by men by making oneself forgotten in the people and doctrines one recommends. I have had this much before my mind in doing the second part of my *French Eton*. I really want to persuade on this subject, and I have felt how necessary it was to keep down many and many sharp and telling things that rise to one's lips, and which one would gladly utter if one's object was to show one's own abilities."  

The people who needed to be persuaded by *A French Eton*, it should be noted, were the very people whom Ruskin had attacked in *Unto This Last*: the opponents of state action.  

At the time he wrote this letter Arnold had in mind, and may have already begun to work on, the Oxford lecture called "The Influence of Academies on National Spirit and Literature." Between the time of its delivery on 4 June 1864 and its publication in the *Cornhill Magazine*, Arnold deleted from the lecture "two or three pages . . . about the limits of criticism."  

He also agreed, partly in deference to his new principle of self-effacement, but mainly in deference to his publisher, to delete or to temper some of his criticism of Ruskin. George Smith,
the *Cornhill Magazine*'s publisher, was not only a friend of Ruskin's but, as we have seen, had in 1860 subjected Ruskin to censorship; he no doubt now felt that he owed something to his friend and former contributor and therefore asked Arnold to take a softer line with his critical adversary. Arnold disagreed with Smith's judgment but acquiesced in it and deleted some of his criticism of Ruskin. I think we can say with some accuracy exactly what Arnold did delete, but for the moment let us concentrate on the criticism of Ruskin that remained. It is certainly harsh enough to serve the ends of denigration, since it holds Ruskin up as the chief living illustration of the "provinciality" of English criticism.

"The Literary Influence of Academies," as Arnold's lecture was entitled in the *Cornhill*, is the quintessential expression of the authoritarian side of Arnold's classicism. He is addressing himself in it to the question of whether there should be an established authority, such as the French Academy, to impose a high standard in matters of intellect and taste. Some men, he states, "submissively follow the law of their nature," whereas others, recognizing the importance of a *modus* and an *ordo*, a measure and an order, in human life, seek for a standard of conduct external to, and above, themselves. This is true not only in moral but in intellectual and artistic life; and nowhere has the need for such external and objective standards been more fully and formally recognized than in France: "'In France,' says M. Sainte-Beuve, 'the first consideration for us is not whether we are amused and pleased by a work of art or mind, nor is it whether we are touched by it. What we seek above all to learn is, whether we were right in being amused by it, and in applauding it, and in being moved by it!' "37 The French, according to Sainte-Beuve's disciple, Arnold, have a conscience in intellectual matters, a sensitiveness of intelligence that is analogous to sensitiveness of conscience in the moral sphere.

The English have nothing like the French Academy because the essential characteristics of the English spirit are energy and honesty rather than an open mind and a flexible intelligence. This does not at all mean that England is inferior to France in the realm of intellect—far from it, since "of what we call genius energy is the most essen-
tial part." But since energy demands, above all things, freedom from authority, prescription, and routine, it does mean that England will be resistant to the establishment of fixed, authoritative intellectual standards and will therefore remain weak in those aspects of intellectual work that depend upon open and flexible intelligence, form, precision, proportion, "the relations of the parts to the whole." These are also the elements of intellectual work that can become traditional, that can be communicated by one generation to another. In poetry, where "energy is the first thing," it is just possible to achieve greatness without them, but in prose they are indispensable. That is why the power of English literature has been in its poets, that of French literature in its prose-writers.\textsuperscript{38}

An institution like the French Academy, Arnold continues, cannot endow a national literature with the qualities of genius, which are individual, but it can cultivate and communicate the qualities of intelligence in literature: form, method, precision, proportions, arrangement. It does so by establishing standards of correctness in intellectual matters and by rebuking those who fall below these standards. French intellect and French literature, policed as they are by the Academy, do not fall into the errors, extravagances, and eccentricities that characterize English intellectual prose. French literature may be inferior to English in energy, but it is superior in urbanity, because it has in its Academy a recognized center, an intellectual metropolis whose authority in matters of fact, of tone, and of taste is recognized by all writers. In nearly all intellectual (as distinct from creative) writing done in England, according to Arnold, there is heard the note of provinciality: "Now to get rid of provinciality is a certain stage of culture; a stage the positive result of which we must not make of too much importance, but which is, nevertheless, indispensable, for it brings us on to the platform where alone the best and highest intellectual work can be said fairly to begin. Work done after men have reached this platform is classical; and that is the only work which, in the long run, can stand."\textsuperscript{39}

Arnold offers in illustration of the provinciality of English prose
passages from such earlier writers as Jeremy Taylor, Joseph Addison, and Edmund Burke; his chief example from among his contemporaries is John Ruskin. Nor is this at all surprising. For whereas Ruskin had taken for granted that the basic human dualism is a simultaneous consciousness of power and weakness—"Do what you can, and confess frankly what you are unable to do"—Arnold assumed that reason and emotion were in natural opposition unless some external power reconciled them. He therefore urges his Oxford audience to

think of the difference between Mr. Ruskin exercising his genius, and Mr. Ruskin exercising his intelligence; consider the truth and beauty of this:

"Go out, in the spring-time, among the meadows that slope from the shores of the Swiss lakes to the roots of their lower mountains. There, mingled with the taller gentians and the white narcissus, the grass grows deep and free; and as you follow the winding mountain paths, beneath arching boughs all veiled and dim with blossom,—paths that for ever droop and rise over the green banks and mounds sweeping down in scented undulation, steep to the blue water, studded here and there with new-mown heaps, filling all the air with fainter sweetness,—look up towards the higher hills, where the waves of everlasting green roll silently into their long inlets among the shadows of the pines. . . . "

In such a passage, Arnold remarks, one sees the genius, the feeling, and the temperament of John Ruskin at work; these are the qualities that originate and culminate in Ruskin the individual artist and that could neither be communicated by others to him, nor to others by him. What flows from Ruskin’s genius is exquisite, and the only possible objection that a critic might make to such a passage is that in it Ruskin is trying to make prose "do more than it can perfectly do," that he is reaching out beyond what he can grasp, reaching out, in effect, toward poetry.

But now, says Arnold, let us look at another passage by Ruskin, a
passage about Shakespeare’s names, in which not Ruskin’s individual genius but his intelligence and judgment, “the acquired, trained, communicable part in him,” are operative:

“Of Shakespeare’s names I will afterwards speak at more length; they are curiously—often barbarously—mixed out of various traditions and languages. Three of the clearest in meaning have been already noticed. Desdemona—‘δυσδαμονία,’ miserable fortune—is also plain enough. Othello is, I believe, ‘the careful;’ all the calamity of the tragedy arising from the single flaw and error in his magnificently collected strength. Ophelia, ‘serviceableness,’ the true, lost wife of Hamlet, is marked as having a Greek name by that of her brother, Laertes; and its signification is once exquisitely alluded to in that brother’s last word of her, where her gentle preciousness is opposed to the uselessness of the churlish clergy:—‘A ministering angel shall my sister be, when thou liest howling.’ Hamlet is, I believe, connected in some way with ‘homely,’ the entire event of the tragedy turning on betrayal of home duty. Hermione (ἐρμα), ‘pillar-like’ (ἡ ἔδος ἔχε ἀρρητής Ἀρρητής); Titania (τιτάνη), ‘the queen;’ Benedick and Beatrice, ‘blessed and blessing;’ Valentine and Proteus, ‘enduring or strong’ (valens), and ‘changeful.’ Iago and Iachimo have evidently the same root—probably the Spanish Iago, Jacob, ‘the supplanter.’”

The passage Arnold quotes comes from the “Government” chapter in Ruskin’s then recently published attack on political economy; since it is a mere note to a passage in defense of slavery, one is tempted to guess that it is at this point that Arnold truncated his criticism of Ruskin in deference to George Smith. At any rate, Arnold proceeds to quarrel not with Ruskin’s ideal polity, but with his eccentric, nonsensical etymology. For Arnold, this passage, which Northrop Frye and other twentieth-century critics have applauded as a rare example of “genuine” criticism in the Victorian age, is an impertinent extravagance because it assigns to the meaning of Shakespeare’s names an im-
possibly exaggerated importance. To indulge, as Ruskin does, in these etymological eccentricities is “to throw the reins to one’s whim, to forget all moderation and proportion, to lose the balance of one’s mind altogether. It is to show in one’s criticism, to the highest excess, the note of provinciality.”

The source of Arnold’s distinction between urbane and provincial criticism appears to have been a review essay on the French Academy published in 1858 by Sainte-Beuve. In it the French critic celebrated “urbanité” at the expense of “provincialisme” or “quelques habitudes de province, au moins dans le goût.” He seemed always to provide Arnold with a potent club for chastising Ruskin’s romanticist deviations from the classical norm of criticism, whether (as in 1860) toward “tender pantheism” or as now, in 1864, toward “provinciality.” This is hardly surprising in view of the fact that Sainte-Beuve, who was himself a convert from romantic poetry to classical criticism, virtually presided over Arnold’s own translation from romanticism to classicism. As he wrote to Mme de Solms in 1860: “Je connais Arnold; il nous aimait beaucoup dans sa jeunesse; il est allé voir George Sand à Nohant; c’était un Français et un peu romantique égaré là-bas. C’était piquant chez le fils du respectable Arnold, le grand réformateur de l’instruction publique en Angleterre. Depuis, il s’est marié, s’est réglé, et, dans ses poésies, il reste fidèle au culte des anciens et de l’art. . . . ”

We tend to find Sainte-Beuve an acute and reliable observer of Arnold’s career partly because his own career was in some sense the paradigm for Arnold’s. As early as January 1854 Arnold had expressed to the French critic his belief that, since the death of Goethe, “vous êtes . . . le seul guide et la seule espérance de ceux qui aiment surtout la vérité dans les arts et dans la littérature.” Sainte-Beuve was for Arnold the perfect critic because he thought of himself as a humble workman rather than a fierce gladiator. He was measured, not exuberant; urbane, not provincial; amiable, not pugnacious. But “the root of everything in his criticism is his single-hearted devotion to truth.” Whereas Ruskin was the purveyor of “le faux” in criticism, Sainte-Beuve was the avowed enemy of “fictions,” whether in litera-
ture, politics, or religion; and the basis of his devotion to truth was his scientific spirit. A born naturalist, he carried into letters "the ideas and methods of scientific natural inquiry." His exclusive study was "to find the real data with which, in dealing with man and his affairs, we have to do. Beyond this study he did not go. . . . "

Sainte-Beuve's dispassionate scientific curiosity was kept pure by his refusal to enter the realm of action, particularly political action. "In that sphere," wrote Arnold in 1869, only months after the publication of *Culture and Anarchy*, "it is not easily permitted a man to be a naturalist. . . . " English writers, says Arnold, tend to assume that they already possess the data required for dealing with men, and "have only to proceed to deal with human affairs in the light of them." Because they have the courage of their ignorance, the English are keen for political action and strife. Sainte-Beuve, by contrast, "stopped short at curiosity, at the desire to know things as they really are, and did not press on with faith and ardour to the various and immense applications of this knowledge which suggest themselves, and of which the accomplishment is reserved for the future. . . . "

Once Arnold had assimilated the critical naturalism of Sainte-Beuve, "the father and master of us all," it remained for him to unite this code of disinterestedness with a personal strategy of stoical detachment that would enable him to avert the calamities that had befallen Ruskin. It is important to remember that between 1856, when Arnold first criticized Ruskin for lacking orderliness and coherence, and 1864, when he came to formulate his critical creed in the Oxford lecture "The Functions of Criticism at the Present Time," Arnold had discovered in Ruskin nearly every shortcoming of temper and intellect that he pronounced baneful to criticism. Ruskin was febrile and irritable; he was subjective and sentimental; he was dogmatic and paradoxical; he was eccentric and extravagant; he tended to become obsessed with particulars at the expense of coherence and wholeness. Now, Arnold was to discover in Ruskin the most fatal flaw of all in the critic, the absence of the "Indian virtue of detachment."

Arnold delivered his lecture "The Functions of Criticism at the Present Time" within two months of the publication of his lecture
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on academies. It is as paradoxical a production as Arnold ever was to bring forth. On the one hand, it urged and exemplified the obliteration of all distinction between literary and social criticism; on the other, it insisted that the true critic must remain detached from practical affairs. On the surface, Arnold was continuing his search for the means to strengthen and purify English intellectual life; but simultaneously he was composing his apologia, justifying his own desertion of poetry for criticism and distinguishing his role as a critic from that of his predecessors.

The beginning of the essay—which in Essays in Criticism bears the slightly altered title "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time"—implies, though it does not state, a comparison between Arnold and those writers of the past whose careers prompt us to ask whether creative activity is in all circumstances preferable to critical activity. Granted that the inventive faculty is in an absolute sense higher than the critical faculty, "Is it true that Johnson had better have gone on producing more Irenes instead of writing his Lives of the Poets . . . is it certain that Wordsworth . . . was better employed in making his Ecclesiastical Sonnets than when he made his celebrated Preface . . . ?" Is it true, we are invited and tempted to ask, that Arnold had better have gone on producing more Meropes instead of writing his Essays in Criticism? But then we recall that the real question for Arnold was a much harder one: not whether to produce more Meropes but whether to produce more poems like "Empedocles on Etna." Yeats was later to assert that "we make out of the quarrel with others, rhetoric, but of the quarrel with ourselves, poetry." But for Arnold the dialogue of the mind with itself was not adequate poetry; criticism, the quarrel with others, would have to do its work before the poet could once again do something better than quarrel with himself.

Criticism, however, if it is to establish the order of ideas and of society in which poetry can again flourish, must be "disinterested." Arnold's disinterestedness is the public, external side of his stoical detachment; it is his old strategy for self-preservation transformed into an instrument of science—and of persuasion. We recall how, as long
ago as 1848, while reading the Bhagavad Gita, Arnold had told Clough, "The Indians distinguish between . . . abandoning practice, and abandoning the fruits of action and all respect thereto. This last is a supreme step. . . ." By 1864, when he came to write "The Function of Criticism," Arnold had himself entered the realm of action, but was trying to keep his soul "unspotted" by it, trying to learn how to "share in the world's toil" and yet "keep free from dust and soil"; and so he thought he saw in the Indian secret of self-preservation the secret of persuasion as well: "It will be said that it is a very subtle and indirect action which I am thus prescribing for criticism, and that, by embracing in this manner the Indian virtue of detachment and abandoning the sphere of practical life, it condemns itself to a slow and obscure work. Slow and obscure it may be, but it is the only proper work of criticism."54

What had once been recommended to Clough as a means of saving the soul was now recommended to all would-be critics as a prerequisite of disinterestedness. Disinterestedness meant the ability to remain aloof from the "practical" view of things and to heed the scientific commandment "to see the object as in itself it really is." The duty of the critic is to engage in a free play of the mind on all the subjects he touches and never to subordinate this activity of mind to ulterior, political, or practical considerations, however high-minded these may be. Arnold saw, perhaps more clearly than any social critic ever has, that the commitment to truth cannot for very long survive the commitment to active citizenship and philanthropy. Even though he knows that works of literature and philosophy have no defense against the uses to which they may be put, he makes it the duty of the critic "to leave alone all questions of practical consequences and applications."55

But disinterestedness was not just a means of protecting truth from partisan commitments; it was also—somewhat paradoxically—a means of persuading the practical man. If the man of action were not convinced of the critic's integrity and disinterestedness, if he believed that the critic was merely invoking the protective authority of "science" in order to forward his own practical, party schemes, he would pay no attention to the critic:
Where shall we find language innocent enough, how shall we make the spotless purity of our intentions evident enough, to enable us to say to the political Englishman that the British Constitution itself, which, seen from the practical side, looks such a magnificent organ of progress and virtue, seen from the speculative side,—with its compromises, its love of facts, its horror of theory, its studied avoidance of clear thoughts,—that, seen from this side, our august Constitution sometimes looks... a colossal machine for the manufacture of Philistines?

Other men whose philanthropic instincts had led them from letters into social criticism had, Arnold believed, vitiated their criticism by scorning the Indian virtue of detachment, by taking sides and letting themselves be sucked into the "vortex" of practical affairs. None of them could now persuade the political Englishman that the British Constitution is a machine for manufacturing Philistines: "How is Cobbett to say this and not be misunderstood, blackened as he is with the smoke of a lifelong conflict in the field of political practice? how is Mr. Carlyle to say it and not be misunderstood, after his furious raid into this field with his *Latter-day Pamphlets*? how is Mr. Ruskin, after his pugnacious political economy?" The example of Ruskin was the most relevant to Arnold and certainly the one of greatest immediacy to his audience. Cobbett had been dead since 1835, and Carlyle's *Latter-day Pamphlets* had been published in 1850, whereas Ruskin's *Unto This Last* and *Munera Pulveris* (as the *Fraser's* essays of 1862–63 would later be called) were still new in the world and still the subject of intense controversy.

Thus, for the second time within a period of less than five months, Arnold had used John Ruskin, a son of Oxford, as an object lesson for an Oxford audience in what a critic should not be. Spurred on by the *Westminster Review*'s October 1863 comparison between them, he had, in fact, begun to use Ruskin as a kind of foil in whom he could identify and stifle the very temptations he felt to be latent in himself, just as he had once used Arthur Hugh Clough. Or rather, as he was still using Clough. Arnold's old Oxford friend had died late in 1861, and Arnold had promised early in 1862 to work on an elegy. Yet he
was unable to begin composition of the poem until late November or early December of 1863 and unable to bring himself to work continuously on the poem that became "Thyrsis" until 1864, or roughly the period when he was writing and delivering his lectures on academies and on the functions of criticism.  

The fact is more than coincidental; for Arnold was now in the process of transforming the personal and poetic advice he had given in the forties to Clough into critical doctrine; the "Indian doctrine," which he had once recommended to Clough as a means of saving the soul, he was now recommending to all would-be critics as a prerequisite of disinterestedness. Much of the immediacy of "Thyrsis" comes from the fact that it is not merely an expression of Arnold's satisfaction that he had avoided, fifteen years earlier, the suicidal idealism of Clough, but a forceful depiction of the self-destructive path of the prophet that such contemporaries as Ruskin were taking and that Arnold was doing his best to avoid.

Why was it, Arnold asked in "Thyrsis," that he had survived and Clough had died? Superficially, their fates seemed to have been identical; for both left Oxford and the Scholar-Gipsy and poetry for life in the world (and in fact for equally boring jobs in the Education Office):

Ah me! this many a year
My pipe is lost, my shepherd's holiday!
Needs must I lose them, needs with heavy heart
Into the world and wave of men depart;
But Thyrsis of his own will went away.

(36–40)

What Arnold means by saying that whereas he was forced to enter the world of men, Clough went willingly, may be understood by hearkening back, momentarily, to the year 1848. We have already seen how Arnold and Clough differed in their reactions to the political upheavals of that year. Arnold tried to balance involvement with skeptical detachment; but Clough, heedless of Arnold's prescriptions of the Bhagavad Gita, resigned his Oriel fellowship partly out of his
“morbid conscientiousness” over subscribing the Thirty-Nine Articles, but partly too out of concern over the suffering and oppression of “men unblest,” as Arnold labels the objects of Clough’s sympathy in "Thyrsis." He traveled to Paris in the spring of 1848 to witness the Revolution and went to Rome in April of the following year—armed with a cigar-case sent by Carlyle for Mazzini—for Garibaldi’s struggle against the French. He identified himself with the Republicans to the extent that he could write to Tom Arnold in May, “You will have heard of our driving back the French.” By November, Arnold knew that he must eventually separate himself from Clough’s intensity of idealism and social conscience, for he would rather part from such friends as Clough altogether than “be sucked for an hour even into the Time Stream in which they . . . plunge and bellow.”

By immersing himself in the world when he could have remained detached from it, Clough had in 1848 "of his own will" gone away. Arnold, writing fifteen years later, still cannot resist the impulse to blame his friend in the capsule biography he provides in the fifth stanza of his elegy:

It irked him to be here, he could not rest.
He loved each simple joy the country yields,
He loved his mates; but yet he could not keep,
For that a shadow loured on the fields,
Here with the shepherds and the silly sheep.
Some life of men unblest
He knew, which made him droop, and filled his head.
He went; his piping took a troubled sound
Of storms that rage outside our happy ground;
He could not wait their passing, he is dead.

(41–50)

It seems at first astonishing, for more reasons than one, that Arnold should berate the dead Clough for transgressions (if that is what they were) committed so many years earlier; especially when we recognize that Clough’s transgressions consisted of a tendency to be moved by social problems, to become miserable over other people’s miseries and
allow them to disturb the calm of his poetry, and to be incapable of patiently waiting out transient political storms. Arnold, we should remember, was hardly a recluse in 1864–65 when he composed "Thyrisis"; he was certainly not indifferent to the "life of men unblest," and he surely did not believe that the political storms of 1848 were going to turn out the only bad weather of the nineteenth century. Rather, it seems likely that he was using the figure of the dead Clough just as he had once been accused of using the living one, "as food for speculation." The temptations to which Clough had supposedly succumbed were still very real to Arnold, and that is why he is so severe in condemning them. If we keep in mind the fact that "The Function of Criticism" and "Thyrisis" were being written concurrently, we can see this more clearly. It was not only Clough whose "rustic flute" lost its "happy" tone because its owner insisted on playing the "stormy note / Of men contention-tossed, of men who groan." Arnold tells his Oxford audience that the lack of the Indian virtue of detachment has cost Cobbett, Carlyle, and Ruskin their effectiveness as social critics; but he says in "Thyrisis" that Clough's inability to grasp the Oriental wisdom had cost him his life.

Whether or not Arnold knew it, his verse biography of "Thyrisis" was a more accurate description of Ruskin than of Clough. Ruskin had truly left the "simple joy" of natural beauty in obedience to an irresistible urge to help those "men unblest" whose plight cast a lowering shadow before his eyes. His "piping" had indeed, in the sixties, taken the troubled sound and his eyes the horrific vision of what he was later to call the storm cloud of the nineteenth century. His lack of the patience and detachment that Arnold had prescribed to Clough "made him droop," cost him his happiness, and may have contributed to the loss of his sanity.

Yet Ruskin and Arnold faced similar problems in the sixties. The movement from creative, artistic work to social and moral criticism was not made without deep misgivings. For both men it seemed to involve the sacrifice not only of true vocation but of youth and joy. Arnold, even when he had become deeply embroiled in social and political controversies, felt himself recoiling and "disposed to touch
them only as far as they can be touched through poetry." Yet even as he pledged himself in 1861 to finish with his critical writings and devote the next decade to poetry—"It is my last chance"—he would recognize the futility of his wish and the impossibility of ever following his natural bent: "At forty, how undecided and unfinished and immature everything seems still, and will seem so, I suppose, to the end." Ruskin in 1862 admitted that he was "in a curiously unnatural state of mind in this way—that at forty-three, instead of being able to settle to my middle-aged life like a middle-aged creature, I have more instincts of youth about me than when I was young. . . . "

He felt himself torn between following his natural bent toward the study of beauty, and using his social influence to curb misery, knowing that if the latter gave him no pleasure, it also caused him no guilt, whereas the former brought joy, but joy followed by remorse: " . . . I neither like to give up my twenty years' cherished plans about Turner on the one side, nor to shrink behind the hedges from the battle of life on the other. The strange thing of all is that whenever I work selfishly—buy pictures that I like, stay in places that I like, study what I like, and so on—I am happy and well; but when I deny myself, and give all my money away, and work at what seems useful, I get miserable and unwell. The things I most regret in all my past life are great pieces of virtuous and quite heroical self-denial; which have issued in all kinds of catastrophe and disappointment, instead of victory." Thus both men in the 1860s recognized what they had lost in forsaking their artistic vocations in order to redirect the energies of a society that made the production of great art impossible. But Arnold, recognizing that he had alienated himself from his own soul—"Too rare, too rare, grow now my visits here"—was determined to make the best of a diminished personal life and to find happiness in self-denial: " . . . The gray hairs on my head are becoming more and more numerous, and I sometimes grow impatient of getting old amidst a press of occupations and labour for which, after all, I was not born. Even my lectures are not work that I thoroughly like, and the work I do like is not very compatible with any other. But we are not here to have facilities found us for doing the work we like. . . . "

"Darkness and Dawn" 243
Ruskin, on the contrary, felt that stoical reconciliation to one's plight was the privilege of a spectator of, not a participant in, life:

It is not that we have not the will to work, but that the work exhausts us after the distress. I stopped at this Bishop's Castle to draw, and if I could have drawn well, should have been amused, but the vital energy fails (after an hour or two) which used to last one all day, and then for the rest of the day one is apt to think of dying, and of the "days that are no more." It is vain to fight against this—a man may as well fight with a prison wall. The remedy is only in time, and gradual work with proper rest. Life properly understood and regulated would never be subject to trials of the kind. Men ought to be severely disciplined and exercised in the sternest way in daily life—they should learn to lie on stone beds and eat black soup, but they should never have their hearts broken—a noble heart, once broken, never mends—the best you can do is to rivet it with iron and plaster the cracks over—the blood never flows rightly again.  

Earlier in life, Ruskin had always been able to dispel regret and melancholy by work, but now, it seemed, the old expedients were no longer effective.

As for expedients of the kind adopted by Arnold in order to remain detached from the world, Ruskin found them either irrelevant or contemptible. Long before Arnold thought of using the dispassionate observation of science as a thought model upon which to base criticism, Ruskin had been a highly knowledgeable devotee of science, yet in the sixties the sciences afforded no balm for his perturbed spirit. "I have fallen back into the physical sciences," he wrote to Elizabeth Browning in 1861, "but they are hard and cold, and I don't care about them." In addition to being useless as an emotional balm, science had begun to subserve the malignant social forces that Ruskin was contending against. As late as 1859, he could praise science as "the source of utmost human practical power, and the means by which the far-distant races of the world . . . are to be reached and regenerated." But the American Civil War and his observation of industrial squalor
crushed his hopes and led him to predict that future ages would hate his own age for nothing so much as for its scientific and technical achievements: "Perhaps no progress more triumphant has been made in any science than that of chemistry; but the practical fact which will remain for the contemplation of the future, is that we have lost the art of painting on glass, and invented gun-cotton and nitro-glycerine."

Science pursued for its own sake, rather than for use or beauty, and in isolation from moral considerations, seemed to Ruskin one of the most insolent and dangerous enterprises of the modern spirit.

Not surprisingly, therefore, Arnold's exemplars of value-free, scientific detachment, like Sainte-Beuve, were Ruskin's abhorrence (just as Arnold's villainously unscholarly critics like Colenso were Ruskin's heroes of sincerity and forthrightness). What seemed to Arnold, when he studied Sainte-Beuve, the salutary caution of a scientific investigator who would not go beyond the study of data, seemed to Ruskin the cowardice of one who dared not look beneath the surface, who never allowed his reach to exceed his grasp, and who preferred smooth minuteness to noble imperfection. Writing in August 1869 to Charles Norton, a great admirer of Sainte-Beuve's criticism (and of Matthew Arnold's), Ruskin expressed his contempt for Sainte-Beuve:

I came yesterday on a sentence of Ste.-Beuve's, which put me upon writing this letter (it is he who is your favourite critic, is it not?): "Phidias et Raphael faisaient admirablement les divinités, et n'y croyaient plus." Now, this is a sentence of a quite incurably and irrevocably shallow person—of one who knows everything—who is exquisitely keen and right within his limits, sure to be fatally wrong beyond them. And I think your work and life force you to read too much of, and companion too much with, this kind of polished contemplation of superficies, so that I find I have influence over you, and hurt you by external ruggednesses. . . .

Subsequent discussion between Ruskin and his American friend, and the coincidence of their reading Sainte-Beuve's Virgil at the same time, seem to have brought Ruskin a year later to change his outright
condemnation of Sainte-Beuve to damning with faint praise: "I like Ste.-Beuve much, and see why you spoke of his style as admirable; but he is altogether shallow and therefore may easily keep his agitation at ripple-level."

The success that came from the ability to keep one's agitation "at ripple-level" was for Ruskin the ultimate failure, in life as in art; and his criticism of Sainte-Beuve to Norton was but an indirect way of chastising Norton himself. During the years when Ruskin was being entrapped into an unnatural occupation and spiritually enveloped by the misery of the world, his friend Norton was witnessing the bloody Civil War raging on the other side of the ocean. Yet Norton, to Ruskin's way of thinking, had succeeded in keeping himself aloof from the struggle that was tearing his community apart, and by so doing had isolated himself from Ruskin. In August 1864 Ruskin told Norton that whereas he was engrossed in "all sorts of problems in life and death," he envisioned his American friend "washing your hands in blood, and whistling—and sentimentalizing to me. I know you don't know what you are about, and are just as good and dear as ever you were, but I simply can't write to you while you are living peaceably in Bedlam."

Men living peaceably in the midst of a lunatic asylum—this is the image by which Ruskin had come to conceive of those who sought to live by reason in the midst of madness, to balance themselves in a world of agitation, to detach themselves spiritually from the chaos in which they were obliged to live and move. Ruskin had begun to judge the detachment of others by the standard of his own passionate involvement and righteous indignation, just as Arnold had begun to judge the practical involvement of others by the standard of his own detachment. Ruskin had come to feel that the world was too horrible to permit him to find pleasure or happiness in even the best thing that happened in it. "That a child is born—even to my friend—is to me no consolation for the noble grown souls of men slaughtered daily through his follies, and mine." Pope, he thought, had given the most lofty expression and accurate description of moral temper in English literature: "Never elated, while one man's oppress'd; / Never
dejected, while another's bless'd.' Yet the fury with which Ruskin now drove himself into a dark world of sorrows from which he could not, he knew, emerge into the light, arose not only from a moral compulsion but from a belief that true sympathy and understanding were denied to those who did not become a part of the suffering they contemplated. "I daresay if ever I get any strength again," he wrote to Norton in 1866, "I shall find I've learned something through all this darkness. Howbeit, I fancy Emerson's essay on Compensation must have been written when he was very comfortable."  

Arnold, though he often stated that the individual could not perfect himself in the midst of an imperfect society, was nevertheless determined to salvage his happiness while he worked in the midst of men who suffered. He had, long before his involvement in social criticism, pondered the fate of those poets eulogized by Wordsworth, who began their youth in gladness, only to end in despondency and madness; and he had always sought to learn some lesson of endurance from contemplating the fate of Obermann or Heine or Clough—or, for that matter, Cobbett, Carlyle, and Ruskin. He had sought this help in comprehending, and accommodating himself to, a world whose secret was not joy but peace. Even in Bedlam, Arnold believed, one might seek, and could find, peace. One had to be conscious of the demonic element that surrounded one, without being engulfed by it. "One gains nothing on the darkness by being . . . as incoherent as the darkness itself." Arnold was determined, in his criticism, to avoid irritation, envy, and contentiousness; by doing so he would not only charm the wild beast of Philistinism but keep his soul hidden and remote from the tumult in which he was forced to participate.  

On a practical level, Arnold's means for achieving order in the midst of disturbance was work. "Nothing," he repeats tirelessly through the sixties, "saves one in this life but occupation and work." If the work of school inspection was "a little too much as the business half of one's life in contradistinction to the inward and spiritual half of it," it brought unexpected rewards in the form of knowledge of society and of oneself. When Arnold claimed that his experience as a school inspector was the source of all he had written on religious,
political, and social subjects, he meant that this routine work had not only provided him with information but taught him a lesson in self-denial. On the one hand, school inspection enabled him to see and know places and people he would not otherwise have seen and known, gave him an immediate practical motive for advocating culture and deploring anarchy, and endowed him with a knowledge of practical affairs that made for the patience and detachment of his critical temper; on the other hand, it firmly disciplined his ego by forcing him into prosaic, businesslike relations with indifferent persons through many hours of the week. From observing them, Arnold learned that his own sacrifice of poetry was but a paradigm of the sacrifice that the majority of men are called on to make: "I met daily in the schools with men and women discharging duties akin to mine, duties as irksome as mine, duties less well-paid than mine, and I asked myself, Are they on roses? Would not they by nature prefer . . . to go where they liked and do what they liked, instead of being shut up in school?"  

Arnold learned, from watching his fellow workers, that renunciation is the lot of all men, not just of poets. "To no people, probably, does it so often happen to have to break in great measure with their vocation and with the Muses, as to the men of letters. . . . But perhaps there is no man . . . however positive and prosaic, who has not at some time or other of his life, and in some form or other, felt something of that desire for the truth and beauty of things which makes the Greek, the artist." Like Ruskin, Arnold felt that he had forsaken his vocation and wandered from the inward life of imagination into a storm of contention and strife. But where Ruskin, fluctuating between the artistic work he guiltily loved and the political controversy he hated but virtuously embraced, longed for a cherub to emerge from the clouds "with an express order to do so and so tied under his wing," Arnold's circumstances obliged him to live and work in the world and to learn there the conditions in which man must shape his own fate and make his own good. George Eliot, in Silas Marner (1861), had written of Nancy Cass's addiction to self-punishment that "this excessive rumination and self-questioning is perhaps a mor-
bid habit inevitable to a mind of much moral sensibility when shut out from its due share of outward activity and of practical claims on its affections . . . [and when] there are . . . no peremptory demands to divert energy from vain regret or superfluous scruple" (chap. 17). Ruskin, lacking such diversions from suffering, vented his rage in his criticism against those whose follies had drawn him away from art; Arnold decided that he, like other men who had never been artists at all, would have to find his happiness in self-denial. He observed his fellow workers "making the best of it," wondered at "the cheerfulness and efficiency with which they did their work," and posed for himself the question, "How do they do it?"73

In his idea of the relation between a workman's happiness and his product Arnold was a more devout Ruskinian than Ruskin. In "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" he says that the exercise of creative power is proved to be the highest function of man by his finding in it his true happiness. Yet, he maintains, men may have the feeling of free creative activity in other ways than by producing great art and literature. By 1864 he knows that were this not so, "all but a very few men would be shut out from the true happiness of all men." Arnold had learned from grim experience that all work is not, indeed, cannot be, creative. Men may and must have happiness apart from the inward, imaginative, creative life. "They may have it in well-doing, they may have it in learning, they may have it even in criticizing." That, at least, is where Arnold was now determined to have it. Nevertheless, he is obliged to admit, at the conclusion of "The Function of Criticism," that the fullest measure of creative activity belongs to literature and not to criticism; and therefore his own readiness to forego the great happiness that comes only with creation, in order to bring about a better social order through criticism, may be viewed as a sacrifice on the altar of the future: "The epochs of Aeschylus and Shakespeare make us feel their preeminence. In an epoch like those is, no doubt, the true life of literature; there is the promised land, towards which criticism can only beckon. That promised land it will not be ours to enter, and we shall die in the wilderness. . . . "74
We do not, unfortunately, possess any evidence of Ruskin's reaction to Arnold's critical formulations of this period. Yet it seems the duty of the critic to try to imagine what this might have been. Inevitably, a comparison between Arnold's and Ruskin's conceptions of criticism proceeds from Arnold's point of view. This is true for the same reason that comparisons between Arnold's and Clough's conceptions of poetry generally proceed from Arnold's point of view (and produce the kinds of distortions regarding Clough that Walter Houghton has enumerated): Arnold developed his conception of the critic partly in reaction to what he considered the errors of Ruskin, and having defined his own role as critic in contradistinction to that of his erring predecessors, hypostatized that role as the standard to which all criticism should adhere.

If, then, we try to lend Ruskin a voice in this dispute, it does not seem to me farfetched to suppose that a man who had all his life been obsessed by the implications of the gospel dictum that whosoever will save his life shall lose it, and whosoever loses it shall find it, must have found Arnold's representation of his desertion of poetry for criticism as a kind of exemplary, stylized martyrdom almost blasphemous. Ruskin too recognized that society would not be transformed in his lifetime, but unlike Arnold he could squeeze no consolation from a belief that his own jeremiads would show others the way to the promised land: "I have no hope for any of us but in a change in the discipline and framework of all society, which may not come to pass yet, nor perhaps at all in our own days; and therefore it is that I do not care to write more, or to complete what I have done, feeling it all useless." As for the future resurrection of art, it was folly even to think of it at present. "I utterly disdain to speak a word about art in the hearing of any English creature—at present," he wrote in 1867. "Let us make our Religion true, and our Trade honest. Then and not till then will there be even so much as ground for casting seed of the Arts."75

Ruskin's frustrations in his battles with political economy led him to view the world as a place of deepening gloom; in a gigantic pathetic fallacy he projected the darkness of his mind on the external world
(which greeted it, to be sure, with plenty of its own darkness). Paradoxically, the more he saw, the darker his vision became. The Death in Life of Tennyson's "Tears, Idle Tears" appears again and again in his letters in the years 1862–63, when, as he tells his friend John Brown, "All good and knowledge seems to come to me now 'As unto dying eyes / The casement slowly grows a glimmering square.' " The "death" that seemed to descend on Ruskin in the form of literal and metaphorical darkness in the wake of storms raised by Unto This Last and Munera Pulveris was a far cry from the "death" envisioned by Arnold at the conclusion of "The Function of Criticism." Yet it bears a certain resemblance to a mood indulged by Arnold in his other major composition of 1864–65, the imaginative complement to "The Function of Criticism," "Thyrsis."

At the nadir of the poet's imaginative quest in "Thyrsis," he loses his grasp of the Cumnor country around Oxford, and in being forced to acknowledge the death of the past and of his friend, begins to anticipate his own decline into old age and death:

Yes, thou art gone! and round me too the night
In ever-nearing circle weaves her shade.
I see her veil draw soft across the day,
I feel her slowly chilling breath invade
The cheek grown thin, the brown hair sprent with grey;
I feel her finger light
Laid pausefully upon life's headlong train;
The foot less prompt to meet the morning dew,
The heart less bounding at emotion new,
And hope, once crushed, less quick to spring again.

And long the way appears, which seemed so short
To the less practised eye of sanguine youth;
And high the mountain-tops, in cloudy air,
The mountain-tops where is the throne of Truth,
Tops in life's morning-sun so bright and bare!
Unbreachable the fort
Of the long-battered world uplifts its wall;
And strange and vain the earthly turmoil grows,
And near and real the charm of thy repose,
And night as welcome as a friend would fall.

(131-50)

This is the dark side of Arnold's affirmative commitment to prose and criticism in 1864; if "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" expresses his acceptance of the duties of criticism, these stanzas of "Thyrsis" express his resistance to them. If in "The Function of Criticism" the barriers that sectarianism and selfish interest and practicality erect to the discovery of truth are held to be surmountable by disinterestedness and stoical detachment from practical life, here the aspirant to truth finds himself engulfed in "earthly turmoil," quite incapable of ascending the mountains or scaling the walls that obstruct the road to truth. This is as close as Arnold will come in the 1860s to the Tennysonian and Ruskinian equation between "the days that are no more" and a Death in Life.

Yet even here the speaker does not, after all, succumb to the temptation to escape from hard struggle into the dark night of easeful death. He suddenly hears a troop of Oxford hunters, whose presence suggests to him that the past may, after all, be recoverable; and so he crosses "into yon farther field," (157) from whence he is able once more to see, upon its lonely ridge, "the single elm-tree bright" (26) that had been for him and Thyrsis the symbol of the Scholar-Gipsy and the light of imagination. But although he is now able to see the tree, he cannot reach it; "I cannot reach the signal-tree to-night, / Yet, happy omen, hail!" (165-66) In the Preface to Essays in Criticism, written at the same time as "Thyrsis," Arnold affirmed that "we are all seekers still!" So, too, the affirmation of the poem lies in the speaker's ability to continue striving toward the light even as he feels himself surrounded by the darkness. Clough, by giving himself wholeheartedly to the storms that raged outside the happy ground of art, had lost sight of the Scholar-Gipsy and become a part of that darkness. That is why it is so hard for a latter-day shepherd, especially a part-time one like Arnold, to "flute his friend, like Orpheus, from the dead" (90). Tempted though he has been by the darkness, the poet will not follow his friend into it:
There thou art gone, and me thou leavest here
Sole in these fields! yet will I not despair.
Despair I will not, while I yet descrie
'Neath the mild canopy of English air
That lonely tree against the western sky.
Still, still these slopes, 'tis clear,
Our Gipsy-Scholar haunts, outliving thee!
Fields where soft sheep from cages pull the hay,
Woods with anemones in flower till May,
Know him a wanderer still; then why not me?
A fugitive and gracious light he seeks,
Shy to illumine; and I seek it too.

(191–202)

"Thyrsis" plumbs depths not exposed in "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," which Arnold was composing simultaneously with it. In the prose essay it is not Arnold, who aligns himself with "spotless purity," but Cobbett, Carlyle, and Ruskin, who are encircled by darkness and who do indeed become "blackened . . . with the smoke of . . . conflict in the field of political practice." Yet both poem and essay finally celebrate what is only a partial victory over circumstances, not a discovery of truth but a recovery of the ability to work toward it in despite of doubts and uncertainties. The tree of "Thyrsis" is a part of the "promised land" envisioned at the conclusion of "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time"; as the poet must rest content with the ability to "hail" the tree, so the critic, toiling in the wilderness, must be content "to have saluted [the promised land] from afar."78

Truth was not, Arnold now believed, to be found by penetrating ever deeper into the darkness and the storm in the expectation that at the heart of the darkness was the light, and at the eye of the storm peace; he was willing to explore the darkness only with an abiding awareness that the source of light lay outside and above it. In 1863, while inspecting schools in the East End of London, where "the fierce sun overhead / Smote on the squalid streets of Bethnal Green," Arnold met a sick and overworked preacher whose ability to sustain his cheerfulness in the midst of the squalor by his religious faith re-
inforced Arnold's conviction that spiritual detachment was the key to vision as well as to peace:

O human soul! as long as thou canst so
Set up a mark of everlasting light,
Above the howling senses' ebb and flow,
To cheer thee, and to right thee if thou roam—
Not with lost toil thou labourest through the night!

("East London," 1–2, 9–13)

The letters on education and the state that Arnold sent to the *Pall Mall Gazette* at the end of 1865 were signed only by "A Lover of Light."

When Arnold published "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time" in 1865, Ruskin's involvement in practical affairs was still, with the exception of his agreement in 1864 to subsidize Octavia Hill's slum reclamation project, largely confined to the expression of opinion about practical questions. In the following year, however, he declined to allow his name to be brought forward as Arnold's successor for the Oxford Professorship of Poetry because "it was not the purpose of fate that I should lose any more days in such manner. . . ."

Besides, he was by that time plunged deep in the defense of Governor Eyre, who had in 1865 presided over the brutal and murderous suppression of an uprising in Jamaica. To the defense of Governor Eyre, as Leon has remarked, Ruskin lavishly contributed time, money, and eloquence. "The Eyre Committee," Carlyle wrote on September 15, 1866, "is going on better, indeed is now setting fairly on its feet. Ruskin's speech . . . is a right gallant thrust, I can assure you." In a revealing metaphor Carlyle went on to describe how, "while all the world stands tremulous, shilly-shallying from the gutter, impetuous Ruskin plunges his rapier up to the very hilt in the abominable belly of the vast block-headism." 79

In 1868, two years after Arnold, in his elegy to Clough and to his own poetic powers, had publicly and formally rededicated himself to the pursuit of an elusive light, Ruskin delivered what Rosenberg has called an "elegy to his abandoned hopes" 80 in the lecture "The Mys-
tery of Life and Its Arts." In it he admits that whereas earlier in life his influence was due to his ability to reveal to others the beauty of the physical cloud and of its colors in the sky, in future his influence must depend upon his ability to discover to others the terrifying knowledge that comes from the perception that this cloud is truly "a pillar of darkness," that human life partakes in large measure of "the mystery of the cloud," and that "its avenues are wreathed in darkness, and its forms and courses no less fantastic, than spectral and obscure." Ruskin, who from his earliest works had attached high metaphysical significance to degrees of light and dark in works of art, now believed that genuine insight was denied to him who did not descend into the darkness of the modern world and suffer its disappointments as his own.

Later in the lecture, Ruskin asserts that a great lesson may be received from the hewers of wood, and drawers of water, those dumb Carlylean figures who speak only through their deeds; but "I grieve to say, or rather—for that is the deeper truth of the matter—I rejoice to say—this message of theirs can only be received by joining them—not by thinking about them!" Nor did Ruskin lose any time in attempting to practice what he preached, but began to enter the realm of practical life in a variety of ways. Having given up his belief in art, having concluded that "You cannot have a landscape by Turner, without a country for him to paint; you cannot have a portrait by Titian, without a man to be portrayed," he determined that "the beginning of art is in getting our country clean, and our people beautiful." In 1871 he decided to clean the streets of St. Giles and hired three sweepers for the task. Never afraid to touch dirt, literal or metaphorical, himself, he personally demonstrated to the three how to use the broom to sweep refuse neatly into the gutters. But his chief sweeper disappeared, and the project foundered. It was followed by the famous road-mending scheme in Oxford. Struck by a feature of the Scholar-Gipsy's Hincksey countryside that appears to have evaded Arnold's eye, Ruskin decided that a country lane that had deteriorated into a morass of dried mud might be made over by Ruskinian undergraduates into a decent country road. Despite, or perhaps because of, the participation
of such notable young men as Oscar Wilde and Arnold Toynbee, Ruskin's noble attempt to show that, as *Punch* said, "The truth he has writ in the Stones of Venice / May be taught by the Stones of Hincksey too," resulted in a road that Ruskin himself admitted to be the worst in the three kingdoms.\(^82\)

Many more such experiments, many more such failures, followed, the culminating disaster being the Guild of St. George. Acting on his belief that ideas need to be validated by practical application, Ruskin in 1871 conceived the idea of a guild that would be composed of men of good will who would follow his example by giving a tithe of their income, and more of their energy, to develop "some small piece of English ground" in accordance with Ruskinian ideals. But it was not until April 1872 that Ruskin received his first gift for St. George's—£30—and not until early in 1878 that the Guild was formally established. The increase of members was as small as that of funds, and by 1884, the membership still numbered just fifty-six. Of all the practical undertakings of the society—which ranged from communal farms to a traditionally organized linen industry—none flourished except, ironically, the museum at Sheffield. He who had deserted the muses to build a new Jerusalem could finally build only a temple in which to worship—the muses.\(^83\)

The repeated failures of Ruskin's practical schemes aggravated the distress he had felt over the hostile reception accorded to *Unto This Last* and *Munera Pulveris* because they could so easily, and so cynically, be used as "proofs" of the impracticality of the general ideas upon which the schemes purported to be based. It was with great bitterness that he wrote to Octavia Hill in 1878, "Of all injuries you could have done—not me—but the cause I have in hand, the giving the slightest countenance to the vulgar mob's cry of 'impractical' was the fatal-lest."\(^84\)

"I went mad," Ruskin wrote later in life, "because nothing came of my work." Like Arnold, Ruskin found himself in the wilderness, but unlike Arnold he felt himself to be wandering through it aimlessly. In one of the letters of *Fors Clavigera*, written in October 1875, Ruskin felt obliged to explain why he should be the single master at the apex of the hierarchy of the Guild of St. George:
And what am I, myself then, infirm and old, who take, or claim, leadership even of these lords? God forbid that I should claim it; it is thrust and compelled on me—utterly against my will, utterly to my distress, utterly, in many things, to my shame. But I have found no other man in England, none in Europe, ready to receive it,—or even desiring to make himself capable of receiving it. Such as I am, to my own amazement, I stand—so far as I can discern—alone in conviction, in hope, and in resolution, in the wilderness of this modern world. Bred in luxury, which I perceive to have been unjust to others, and destructive to myself; vacillating, foolish, and miserably failing in all my own conduct in life—and blown about hopelessly by storms of passion—I, a man clothed in soft raiment,—I, a reed shaken with the wind, have yet this Message to all men again entrusted to me: "Behold, the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Whatsoever tree therefore bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be hewn down and cast into the fire." 85

In attempting to reap the fruits of his own disappointments, Ruskin found that a mind that immersed itself in darkness and storm became itself dark and stormy; but this, he believed, was the price that had to be paid for the gift of prophecy.

In one sense, then, Arnold was certainly right to have used Ruskin as a foil in defining his own role as a social critic. Even as early as 1849, when the storms that beset Arnold were purely romantic and therefore held a kind of attraction for him, he would not brave them at the risk of his lucidity:

I struggle towards the light; and ye,
Once-longed-for storms of love!
If with the light ye cannot be,
I bear that ye remove.

I struggle towards the light. . . .
("Absence," 13–17)

Much more was this the case when the storms were intellectual and social, and had nothing intrinsically desirable about them. The picture
Arnold drew in "A Summer Night" of the "madman" who is struck by the tempest as he desperately tries to guide his wrecked ship toward "some false, impossible shore" is lent an almost prophetic power by being juxtaposed with Ruskin's picture of himself in 1875 as the beleaguered master of St. George's Guild, "blown about hopelessly by storms of passion," or (in a letter of the same year) as "a wrecked sailor, picking up pieces of his ship on the beach." But if we are reluctant to believe that life imitates art, we should at least take note of the fact that Arnold had already come close to predicting madness as Ruskin's particular fate.

In his 1864 lecture "The Influence of Academies on National Spirit and Literature" Arnold had, as we have already noted, accused Ruskin of losing the balance of his mind altogether in some of his critical speculations. But no one seems to have noticed that Arnold went even further than this in the lecture: he explicitly linked Ruskin with a lunatic asylum, and only when George Smith objected to the linkage did Arnold agree to expunge it from the printed version of his lecture:

As to the bit about Hanwell, it is not the very least too hard upon Ruskin; but it shall come out, or be softened down, if your personal friendship with him makes you unwilling it should appear in a magazine which you edit.\(^{86}\)

Hanwell was a lunatic asylum, and one whose physical layout had made a special impression on Ruskin because it suggested to him the near alliance between madness and genius. In 1872 he wrote a letter to the \textit{Pall Mall Gazette} on the subject of "Madness and Crime," in which he said: "I assure you, sir, insanity is a tender point with me. One of my best friends has just gone mad, and all the rest say I am mad myself." In 1874 he described the letter as one referring to "the increase of commercial, religious, and egotistic insanity, in modern society, and delicacy of the distinction implied by that long wall at Hanwell, between the persons inside it, and out." Ruskin, unlike his friend Charles Eliot Norton, wanted no part of peace in Bedlam, and yet could not conceive of his existence in perfect separation from it.
"Indeed," he wrote, "it has been the result of very steady effort on my own part to keep myself, if it might be, out of Hanwell, or that other Hospital which makes the name of Christ's native village dreadful in the ear of London . . . having long observed that the most perilous beginning of trustworthy qualification for either of those establishments consisted in an exaggerated sense of self-importance; and being daily compelled, of late, to value my own person and opinions at a higher and higher rate, in proportion to my extending experience of the rarity of any similar creatures or ideas among mankind. . . . "

Ironically, however, as Ruskin's descent (or what at times we are compelled to call ascent) into madness seemed to confirm the prudential wisdom of Arnold's strategy of detachment and self-effacement, Arnold seemed to relax much of his old severity toward his critical rival. In February of 1865, not long after Arnold had attacked Ruskin for his provinciality, dogmatism, and pugnacity, and had by study of his criticism diagnosed an imbalance of mind that seemed to forebode residence at Hanwell, he told Robert Browning that he would review a book on Ruskin that Browning's friend Joseph Milsand had published in 1864. His notebook for 1865 also lists the book as one he may review for the Pall Mall Gazette. Yet, as far as we know, Arnold never carried out his intention. It was as if, having used Ruskin for the purpose of defining himself and his critical role, he no longer felt challenged by him and could be more charitable in dealing with a man whose example no longer tempted him. Late in 1869 he wrote in the Cornhill Magazine, whose readers had reacted, as he had designed, far more tolerantly to his Culture and Anarchy than to Ruskin's Unto This Last, "If I were not afraid of intruding upon Mr. Ruskin's province, I might point out the witness which etymology itself bears to this law of righteousness as a prime element and clue in man's constitution." This "compliment" is, of course, tinged with irony; but it was sufficiently ambiguous for one of Arnold's readers, his friend the philologist Max Müller, to miss the point and require to be set straight. "What I said about etymology," Arnold patiently explained to Müller in 1871, "contained some intention not of chaffing etymology, but of chaffing Ruskin and the incredible nonsense he has
permitted himself to talk about it. . . . " This is obviously true, and yet the tone of the comment on Ruskin is strikingly different from five years earlier, when Ruskin’s penchant for etymology had been used as evidence of mental imbalance. Moreover, the form of this ambiguous compliment—with its expression of apprehension about “intruding on Mr. Ruskin’s province”—is exactly that of the better known and more effusive compliment in “Literature and Science.”

In 1872, the year Ruskin took up residence at Brantwood, only about ten miles from Arnold in Ambleside, Arnold wrote what was probably his first letter to Ruskin, but unfortunately the letter has not survived. Still, the fact of its being written may itself suggest Arnold’s desire to lessen any impression of animosity that his Oxford lectures might have conveyed. Even in his Preface to God and the Bible in 1875, where he rather sharply rebukes Ruskin for the dogmatism of a passage Ruskin had written years earlier in Modern Painters II, Arnold softens his criticism by adding: “However, Mr. Ruskin is talking only about the beauties of nature; and here, perhaps, it is an excuse for inventing certainties that what one invents is so beautiful.” In September of 1877 Arnold received Ruskin as a visitor at Ambleside, and in December of the same year decided that he was actually growing fond of the man whom in 1863 he had decided he should never like. After a London dinner party, Arnold wrote his sister: “Ruskin was there, looking very slight and spiritual. I am getting to like him. He gains much by evening dress, plain black and white, and by his fancy’s being forbidden to range through the world of coloured cravats.”

In the next decade Arnold and Ruskin were to engage in a debate that had little rancor and great significance. This friendly debate was but the latest installment of a feud that had raged in English literary circles for forty years, over the relative merits of Byron and Wordsworth. What makes the debate particularly revealing is the fact that Ruskin to a considerable degree identified Arnold with Wordsworth and himself with Byron. Although he had “used Wordsworth as a daily text-book from youth to age” and had even “lived . . . according to the tenor of his teaching,” Ruskin was growing more and more
impatient with "the amiable persons who call themselves 'Wordsworthians'." There were two reasons for his impatience with the Wordsworthians. First, they did not practice the Wordsworthian doctrines they preached. None of them would do practical spadework at Ferry Hincksey, and "not all the influence of Mr. Matthew Arnold and the Wordsworth Society together obtained, throughout the whole concourse of the Royal or plebeian salons of the town, the painting of so much as one primrose nested in its rock, or one branch of wind-tossed eglantine." Arnold boasted in 1879 that as a Wordsworthian he could read "with pleasure and edification" not only _Peter Bell_ and the _Ecclesiastical Sonnets_, but even "the address to Mr. Wilkinson's spade. . . ." But Ruskin in 1880 claimed that "it was matter of some mortification to me, when, at Oxford, I tried to get the memory of Mr. Wilkinson's spade honoured by some practical spadework at Ferry Hincksey, to find that no other tutor in Oxford could see the slightest good or meaning in what I was about. . . ." But even worse, in Ruskin's view, than the Wordsworthians' failure to practice what they preached was their refusal to recognize that their "excellent master often wrote verses that were not musical, and sometimes expressed opinions that were not profound."84

Ruskin's irritation with the Wordsworthians reached its height when he read, shortly after its appearance in 1879, _Poems of Wordsworth Chosen and Edited (with a Preface) by Matthew Arnold_. In this Preface, Arnold maintains that only Shakespeare and Milton deserve a higher place among English poets than Wordsworth, and that Wordsworth's recognition has been hindered or delayed by special obstacles that Arnold hopes to remove. His first aim is to select, from among Wordsworth's voluminous output, his best poems and to arrange them more logically than their author did; additionally, he hopes to indicate the true nature of Wordsworth's power and value. These lie, Arnold stresses, not in Wordsworth's "philosophy," so dear to the Wordsworthians—although "I am a Wordsworthian myself"—but in his ability to feel and to convey "the joy offered to us in nature, the joy offered to us in the simple primary affections and duties. . . ." The realization of this joy in Wordsworth's poetry is especially
valuable because the joy comes from a universally accessible source; it is capable of being a joy for all, a "joy in widest commonalty spread."95

Ruskin expressed his reaction to Arnold's edition of Wordsworth in the second installment of "Fiction, Fair and Foul," appearing in the August 1880 number of the Nineteenth Century:

I have lately seen, and with extreme pleasure, Mr. Matthew Arnold's arrangement of Wordsworth's poems; and read with sincere interest his high estimate of them. But a great poet's work never needs arrangement by other hands; and though it is very proper that Silver How should clearly understand and brightly praise its fraternal Rydal Mount, we must not forget that, over yonder, are the Andes, all the while.

In Ruskin's view, Arnold estimated Wordsworth's poems so highly precisely because he could not see over them; one lowly peak paid tribute to another, less lowly. In fact, it was Wordsworth himself who most accurately determined his rank and scale among English poets when he exclaimed: "What was the great Parnassus' self to thee, / Mount Skiddaw?" "Answer his question faithfully," snaps Ruskin, "and you have the relation between the great masters of the Muse's teaching and the pleasant fingerer of his pastoral flute among the reeds of Rydal." Despite his long allegiance to Wordsworth, Ruskin's personal and social suffering had removed him beyond the compass of Wordsworth and of the Lake Country. From the height of his new but sad eminence, Ruskin views Wordsworth as "simply a Westmoreland peasant, with considerably less shrewdness than most border Englishmen or Scotsmen inherit."96

Long before this, in his "Memorial Verses" of 1850, composed upon the occasion of Wordsworth's death, Arnold had celebrated the "healing power" of this poet of the iron age:

Wordsworth has gone from us—and ye,
Ah, may ye feel his voice as we!
He too upon a wintry clime
Had fallen—on this iron time
Of doubts, disputes, distractions, fears.
He found us when the age had bound
Our souls in its benumbing round;
He spoke, and loosed our heart in tears.
He laid us as we lay at birth
On the cool flowery lap of earth,
Smiles broke from us and we had ease;
The hills were round us, and the breeze
Went o’er the sun-lit fields again;
Our foreheads felt the wind and rain.
Our youth returned; for there was shed
On spirits that had long been dead,
Spirits dried up and closely furled,
The freshness of the early world.

(40–57)

Europe, Arnold wrote, might again be supplied with examples of
Goethe’s “sage mind” and “Byron’s force,” with those who would
Teach men daring and courage; but never again with a Wordsworth
Who would teach men how to avoid the tragic fate:

The cloud of mortal destiny,
Others will front it fearlessly—
But who, like him, will put it by?

(68–70)

Ruskin too was appreciative of Wordsworth’s healing power (and
May even have learned from Arnold how to define it), but finally it
Was not enough—men needed something more. Wordsworth had in­
Deed a vivid sense of natural beauty, and “a pretty turn for reflections,
Not always acute, but, as far as they reach, medicinal to the fever of the
Restless and corrupted life around him. Water to parched lips may be
Better than Samian wine, but do not let us therefore confuse the qual­
Ities of wine and water.”

Not only was Wordsworth remiss in providing a well rather than
a vineyard; the well he provided was but a shallow one. The poets
of the English Lakes, says Ruskin, were innocent, domestic, refined —and isolated from the turmoil of the real world. They observed "the errors of the world outside of the Lakes with a pitying and tender indignation, and [arrived] in lacustrine seclusion at many valuable principles of philosophy, as pure as the tarns of their mountains, and of corresponding depth." And just in case his readers are unacquainted with the Lake District, Ruskin tells them in a note that he has been "greatly disappointed, in taking soundings of our most majestic mountain pools, to find them, in no case, verge on the unfathomable." 

Wordsworth, like nearly every subject that Ruskin approached after 1870, had to be studied in the terms of light and dark imagery. By the standards of Ruskin's majestic darkness, Wordsworth had to be judged wanting. His poetry, far from conveying (as Arnold held) "joy in widest commonalty spread," is "lowly in its privacy of light," that is, the light remains a low one because it does not penetrate or surmount those dark obstacles that only the attempt to extend one's private light to others will reveal. Wordsworth's was "a gracious and constant mind; as the herbage of its native hills, fragrant and pure; —yet, to the sweep and the shadow, the stress and distress, of the greater souls of men, as the tufted thyme to the laurel wilderness of Tempe,—as the gleaming euphrasy to the dark branches of Do­dona." 

To epitomize the placid and unruffled shallowness of Wordsworth's vision, Ruskin, in the third installment of "Fiction, Fair and Foul," quotes the following lines from Wordsworth's poem "Near the Spring of the Hermitage," from the series called Inscriptions:

Parching summer hath no warrant
To consume this crystal well;
Rains, that make each brook a torrent,
Neither sully it, nor swell.

"So it was," notes Ruskin contemptuously, "year by year, among the unthought-of hills. Little Duddon and child Rotha ran clear and glad;
and laughed from ledge to pool, and opened from pool to mere, translucent, through endless days of peace. But eastward, between her orchard plains, Loire locked her embracing dead in silent sands; dark with blood rolled Isar; glacial-pale, Beresina-Lethe, by whose shore the weary heart forgot their people, and their father’s house.” While Wordsworth cultivated his wise passiveness amidst the rills and streams of Westmorland, innocent men and women were being murdered in revolutionary carnage in Nantes, the French were massacring Austrians in Bavaria, and, in 1812, the grand army of Napoleon was being overwhelmed on its retreat from Moscow.100

Lest he be thought to judge Wordsworth by an arbitrary standard, Ruskin now commences his comparison between Wordsworth and Byron. Byron, “the first great Englishman who felt the cruelty of war,” asks, “Who thinks of self, when gazing on the sky?” and Ruskin finds himself compelled to answer that “Mr. Wordsworth certainly did.” It infuriates Ruskin, as his own vision of the heavens darkens, to think that Wordsworth characteristically saw the clouds “brightened by Man’s Immortality instead of dulled by his death.” Byron, on the contrary, darkened the clouds with his own melancholy; and of him it might be said, as he had said of Lucifer in “The Vision of Judgment,” “Where he gazed, a gloom pervaded space.” Wordsworth, happily crossing Westminster Bridge at so early an hour of the morning that the sleeping city might be seen as if it were country, could remark how the city wore like a garment the beauty of the morning; “Byron, rising somewhat later, contemplated only the garment which the beauty of the morning had by that time received for wear from the city.” The contrast that Ruskin sees between Wordsworth’s vision and Byron’s is very like that which Arnold had instituted over thirty years earlier between the classical and the romantic poet in “The Strayed Reveller.” Whereas Wordsworth, from his aloof detachment, “calls God to witness that the houses seem asleep, Byron, lame demon as he was, flying smoke-drifted, unroofs the houses at a glance, and sees what the mighty cockney heart of them contains in the still lying of it, and will stir up to purpose in the waking business of it, The sordor of civilization, mixed / With all the passions which
Man's fall hath fixed.' Naturally, says Ruskin, the piously sentimental public shrinks with alarm from the poet who refuses to provide it with "the pure oblation of divine tranquillity." 101

If, in Ruskin's eyes, Arnold in Fox How was the spiritual brother of Wordsworth of Rydal Mount, neither of them having known the depth or the trouble of human compassion, then he himself was the spiritual descendant of the sorrowful and righteously indignant Byron. Those who disapprove of Byron say that he does not suffer fools or enemies gladly or with repose; and an amused Ruskin cannot help remarking ironically: "This defect in his Lordship's style, being myself scrupulously and even painfully reserved in the use of vituperative language, I need not say how deeply I deplore." Still less did Ruskin deplore another "fault" of Byron's, his combination of steady, "bitter melancholy" with a sense of the material beauty that lurks in iridescence, color-depth, and morbid mystery, a combination that is found to the full "only in five men that I know of in modern times; namely, Rousseau, Shelley, Byron, Turner, and myself." This peculiar sense of the link between melancholy and beauty set Ruskin and Turner and the three great romantics cited apart from all artists who delighted in clear-struck beauty and also from the "cheerful joys of Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Scott, by its unaccountable affection for 'Rokkes blak' and other forms of terror and power. . . . " This group in which Ruskin proudly places himself is united not just by its melancholy, its attraction to darkness, and its love of mountains, thunderclouds and dangerous seas; it shares also a "volcanic instinct" of justice, "which will not at all suffer us to rest any more in Pope's serene 'whatever is, is right'; but holds, on the contrary, profound conviction that about ninety-nine hundredths of whatever at present is, is wrong: conviction making four of us, according to our several manners, leaders of revolution for the poor, and declarers of political doctrine monstrous to the ears of mercenary mankind. . . . " Ruskin concludes this segment of his comparison of Wordsworth and Byron by saying that the elements of Byron's nature, "as of mine also in its feeble terms," made him an object of loathing to the "selfishly comfortable public." 102
Arnold was quick to notice, in the August and September numbers of *Nineteenth Century*, this passionate outburst of Byronic allegiance that his own edition and discussion of Wordsworth had provoked. Into his notebook for 1880 he copied, from the page of "Fiction, Fair and Foul" that contained the remarks critical of his Wordsworth edition, Ruskin's condescending description of Wordsworth as "simply a Westmorland peasant" who had a gift for natural beauty and for reflections "medicinal to the fever of the restless and corrupted life around him"; he also quoted two of the lines Ruskin had cited as evidence of Wordsworth's shallow placidity ("Parching summer hath no warrant / To consume this crystal well") and set beside them his own pet example of bad Wordsworth, "Sol hath dropt into his harbour—."\(^{103}\)

Arnold was probably appalled by the intensity of Ruskin's attack on Wordsworth. In the course of his correspondence with Macmillan concerning the book of selections from Byron to be published in 1881, Arnold went so far as to call the long-dead Wordsworth "the old man whom Ruskin despises." Yet in one sense Arnold replied to Ruskin's essays, in his introduction to the Byron volume, by granting the justice of their criticism of Wordsworth. True, he quotes many horrendous passages from Byron in order to demonstrate that this poet of the aristocratic, or barbarian class, had indeed "the insensibility of the barbarian" in his poetic style; yet he frankly admits that although he had in his previous essay ranked Wordsworth just after Shakespeare and Milton, their verse was of a higher order altogether not only than Byron, but than Wordsworth, "the author of such verse as 'Sol hath dropt into his harbour'—or (if Mr. Ruskin pleases) as 'Parching summer hath no warrant'—."\(^{104}\) Leon Gottfried rightly points out that Arnold thus "appears to be softening the tone of controversy implied by his quotation of the gallery of horrors from Byron."\(^{105}\) But Arnold's concession does not go beyond appearances. Ruskin's objection to Wordsworth had been a moral, not an aesthetic, objection; although Arnold admits the stylistic badness of "such lumbering verse as Mr. Ruskin's enemy, 'Parching summer hath no warrant,'" he reiterates the assertion of his earlier essay, denied by
Ruskin, that Wordsworth's great power lay in his sense "Of joy in widest commonalty spread."108

Yet the impulse that moved Ruskin to express so forcefully his moral and political preference for Byron over Wordsworth was one by no means foreign to Arnold. Even now, in 1881, when Arnold is certain that "Wordsworth has an insight into permanent sources of joy and consolation for mankind which Byron has not," he must candidly admit, "I . . . can even remember the latter years of Byron's vogue, and have myself felt the expiring wave of that mighty influence." In "Memorial Verses," written thirty years earlier, Arnold had confessed to a guilty admiration of Byron's power:

When Byron's eyes were shut in death,  
We bowed our head and held our breath.  
He taught us little; but our soul  
Had felt him like the thunder's roll.  
With shivering heart the strife we saw  
Of passion with eternal law;  
And yet with reverential awe  
We watched the fount of fiery life  
Which served for that Titanic strife.  

(6-14)

Then, in a slightly later poem, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," he unwittingly revealed a certain sympathy with Byron's romantic melancholy even as he determined to separate himself from it. If Arnold never went so far in his mild apostasy from Wordsworth as Ruskin was to do in 1880, he had in 1849, as we have already seen, admitted that "Wordsworth's eyes avert their ken / From half of human fate" and in 1865 acknowledged that among the English romantics only Byron and Shelley had possessed the courage to make the bold attempt to apply the skeptical and subversive modern spirit in English literature. Attempting more, they achieved less than some of their contemporaries; and the greatest literary success of the romantic period was achieved by Wordsworth, a man who, according to Arnold, "retired (in Middle-Age phrase) into a monastery. I mean, he plunged
himself in the inward life, he voluntarily cut himself off from the modern spirit.” Byron and Shelley, Arnold predicted, would be remembered, and well remembered, not for their successful works but for their passionate and futile efforts, their Titanic struggles and grandiose failures.¹⁰⁷

Even now, in 1881, Arnold makes no attempt to conceal his admiration for the power of Byron’s personality, which was best evinced in his fierce struggle against both the old order and middle-class philistinism. The sincerity and strength with which Byron opposed, in his poetry and in his life, the old order, “with its ignorance and misery below, its cant, selfishness, and cynicism above,” count for a great deal both in life and in literature.¹⁰⁸ The energy and the agony of Byron’s personality still serve to remind men of “the struggle that keeps alive, if it does not save, the soul.”¹⁰⁹ Eventually, Byron destroyed himself by his immoderate passion for justice. Upon the impregnable philistinism of the middle class, “he shattered himself to pieces”; and he is now remembered by contemporary warriors against the philistines as “the passionate and dauntless soldier of a forlorn hope, who, ignorant of the future and unconsolled by its promises, nevertheless waged against the conservation of the old impossible world so fiery battle; waged it till he fell. . . . ”¹¹⁰

Byron, like Clough, is dead because he could not await the passing of the social and political storms of his day. Yet we do not sense, when we read this essay of 1881, any hostility toward Byron of the kind that was directed toward Clough in the earlier “Thyrsis.” Arnold’s admiration for Byron is, in fact, no longer tinged with the guilt and uneasiness that were apparent in “Memorial Verses.” For Arnold has by this time in his life chosen the other, the Wordsworthian, path; the temptation has passed, the decision has long since been made. Arnold can now offer to Byron the least qualified praise of his “straining after the unlimited” that is to be found anywhere in his work just because he has so entirely separated himself from the Byronic impulse in art, in politics, and in life. Whereas Ruskin in the previous year had gone out of his way to affirm his fellowship in suffering, sadness, and indignation with Byron, their shared love for “Rokkes blak,” Arnold
now makes it perfectly clear that, although he had once felt Byron's influence, he now regards him, and has long regarded him, "without illusion." Goethe, who had taught Arnold that to act is easy, to think hard, also helped him to see that the cause of all defects in Byron, the true source of his weakness both as a man and as a poet, was his inability to think: "The moment he reflects, he is a child," says Goethe;—"sobald er reflectirt ist er ein Kind." Dedicated to dwelling in the light, Arnold was bound to divorce himself from Byron, for Byron "has no light, cannot lead us from the past to the future; 'the moment he reflects, he is a child.' The way out of the false state of things which enraged him he did not see,—the slow and laborious way upward; he had not the patience, knowledge, self-discipline, virtue, requisite for seeing it."\[111\]

Patience, knowledge, self-discipline, virtue—they were all endowments that Arnold had at one time or another found wanting in the man whose criticism of him had partly determined his strategy in the "Byron" essay; and by 1881 Ruskin was well on his way toward meeting that doom which, just because he lacked these endowments, Arnold had foretold for him. In 1878 he had suffered his first attack of madness, and was thereafter never very far from the darkness that was to engulf him by 1889. His vision of the world as a place of literal and metaphysical darkness was set forth in two lectures that he delivered at the London Institution in 1884, and that bore the magnificent title, at once literal and metaphorical, "The Storm-Cloud of the Nineteenth Century." Storm clouds had already preoccupied him when he was writing Modern Painters; and for fifty years he had recorded in his journals, in the most precise and scientific way, the weather, and various effects of cloud. He now claimed that since 1871 there had been a prevalence of a new kind of cold north wind—"plague wind"—blowing from no particular point of the compass but bringing always a new kind of dirty cloud: "not rain-cloud, but a dry black veil, which no ray of sunshine can pierce; partly diffused in mist, feeble mist, enough to make distant objects unintelligible, yet without substance, or wreathing, or colour of its own."

What was the source of this plague-cloud and what was its mean-
ing? It was in part, Ruskin knew and said, the product of science and technology: "It looks partly as if it were made of poisonous smoke: very possibly it may be: there are at least two hundred furnace chimneys in a square of two miles on every side of me." But Ruskin saw in the cloud not only the product of perverted science but the physical manifestation of divine judgment upon that perversion. Mere smoke, he conjectures, would not blow about so wildly. "It looks more to me as if it were made of dead men’s souls. . . . "112 But the overriding fact for him was that the new phenomenon had "blanched sun,—blighted grass—blinded man," and that "the Empire of England, on which formerly the sun never set, has become one on which he never rises."

The prophetic vision of a storm cloud enveloping Europe as the nineteenth century neared its end embodied Ruskin’s condemnation of the whole direction of modern thought and society. He who had once hoped that the dispassionate scientific mind would unite poetry, prophecy, and religion in its clarity of vision, was now moved to assign blame for the impending uncreation of the world to those seekers after light who had plunged the world into a new darkness:

If, in conclusion, you ask me for any conceivable cause or meaning of these things—I can tell you none, according to your modern beliefs; but I can tell you what meaning it would have borne to the men of old time. Remember, for the last twenty years, England, and all foreign nations, either tempting her, or following her, have blasphemed the name of God deliberately and openly; and have done iniquity by proclamation, every man doing as much injustice to his brother as it is in his power to do. Of states in such moral gloom every seer of old predicted the physical gloom, saying, "The light shall be darkened in the heavens thereof, and the stars shall withdraw their shining."

113

Ruskin was led to his apocalyptic vision of the great Anarch dropping the curtain of universal darkness by his genius, but also by his madness. Lamb says that "the true poet dreams being awake. He is
not possessed by his subject, but has dominion over it.” Of Ruskin it is difficult to say this, for the storm cloud, though it is partly the projection of his own mental state upon the external world, is an effect that becomes in turn a cause, and further darkens the state of his mind, does indeed take possession of him. Ruskin had himself become a part of that darkness which, in the view of Arnold, the writer who lacked compass and guide entered at his own peril. Yet just when Ruskin’s fate seemed to bear witness to Arnold’s predictive powers, Arnold seemed to lose all desire for combat with his critical adversary. The “Byron” essay, in which Arnold sought to placate Ruskin while disagreeing with him, is more notable for its spirit of conciliation than for any impulse to deal another blow to Byron and Byronism. Ruskin’s vigorous and emotional linkage of himself with Byron was still fresh in Arnold’s mind when, writing as a Wordsworthian, he tried at the conclusion of his essay to suggest that both men and both traditions had a place in the English poetic heaven and were perhaps even a complementary pair:

Wordsworth has an insight into permanent sources of joy and consolation for mankind which Byron has not; his poetry gives us more which we can rest upon now, and which men may rest upon always. I place Wordsworth’s poetry, therefore, above Byron’s on the whole, although in some points he was greatly Byron’s inferior, and although Byron’s poetry will always, probably, find more readers than Wordsworth’s, and will give pleasure more easily. But these two, Wordsworth and Byron, stand, it seems to me, first and preeminent in actual performance, a glorious pair, among the English poets of this century.

Though Arnold never went so far as to suggest that he and Ruskin, who for a couple of decades had been the most widely read of English social critics, might be, in a spiritual or a literary sense, a complementary pair, his subsequent allusions to Ruskin touched this gentle note of reconciliation. In 1882 he graciously told a Cambridge audience, after venturing a remark or two on the meanness of London
streets, that "here I have entered Mr. Ruskin's province, and I am well content to leave not only our street architecture, but also letters and Greek, under the care of so distinguished a guardian." Although Arnold felt even less at home with painting than with architecture, on 5 June 1883 he attended a drawing-room lecture given by Ruskin in a private home in Kensington for "some of his friends" on the merits of Kate Greenaway and the drawings of Francesca Alexander. Four years later, in response to a request for an article from the editor of the *Hobby-Horse*, Arthur Galton, who mentioned that Ruskin had already contributed an article, Arnold wrote, "I shall be curious to see what Ruskin has done for you. His is indeed a popular influence; I will not say that a contribution from me would do you no service; but it is not to be compared, as a help with the great public, to one from J. Ruskin." Just how much Arnold knew of the nature and history of Ruskin's personal travail it is difficult to say; but from his friendship in the 1880s with J. E. Millais, the husband of Ruskin's former wife and at one time the intimate of Ruskin himself, he is likely to have gained some information. In any case, we know that in February 1888, just two months before Arnold's death, a growing curiosity about the man whose approach to art and to life he had so decisively rejected led him to ask Sir Robert Collins, a friend of Ruskin's who had been tutor to Prince Leopold and afterward comptroller of the prince's household, to let him see a letter Ruskin had written to Collins:

My dear Sir Robert:

I was afraid you had forgotten to send Ruskin's letter; many thanks to you for letting me see it. It is a beautiful letter, though a very sad one. I cannot think that either at the National Gallery or at the British Museum he would not meet the great consideration due to him; if he does not, it is too bad.

Beautiful but sad—it is perhaps the fitting final tribute of a man who believed that beauty and truth might be known without personal suffering to one who had become convinced that if in modern life there
existed a way through to beauty, it lay through participation in sadness and in suffering. Arnold’s willingness to reinclude Ruskin within the outer confines of the spiritually blessed has about it something of the empty ring of the final reinclusion of Clough at the end of “Thyr- sis” within the ideal of the Scholar-Gipsy. It is the sportsmanlike gesture of the victor toward the vanquished, a gesture that can be made only after the combat is over, because good sportsmanship, like disinterestedness, is the virtue of a spectator but not of a participant. From Ruskin’s point of view, however, Arnold’s life must have seemed a rejection of honorable defeat for mean victory, of Emped- ocles for Merope, of imperfect expression in the highest form for perfect expression in a lower; and the critical doctrine that grew out of this life an attempt to cut Shakespeare down to a Greek drama, to fit Gothic cathedrals to the proportions of Greek temples, and to order life without having fully experienced it. It is hardly surprising that Ruskin, when he went over to Ambleside in 1877 to visit Arnold, was “much disappointed in him.”

The questions that arise from a comparison of Arnold and Ruskin are questions of epistemology, of politics, and of morality. They are not simple questions, nor are they exclusively Victorian questions. What I have called the conflict between the classical temper of Arnold and the romantic temper of Ruskin is but a special Victorian version of a perpetually recurring conflict in human experience, a conflict that goes on not only between individuals and groups but within every man and woman. If one part of George Eliot could warn of the madness that will be visited upon a mind oversensitive to “all ordinary human life,” another part could, with equal sincerity and fervor, proclaim that “Half man’s truth must hidden lie / If unlit by sorrow’s eye.”

Perhaps most of us, as we try to weigh the relative merits of Arnold’s classicist detachment and Ruskin’s romanticist involvement, will be influenced by our evaluation of the dilemmas of our own age and society. Have the cataclysms of our century been due primarily to the anarchic industrial system that preoccupied Ruskin, or to the in-
tellectual and spiritual anarchy that Arnold deplored? Has the disinterested spirit of science and scholarship been a blessing or a curse? Are we passing through a dark night of the soul in transit to a new dawn, or are we finally awakening from a dream that dawned in 1789 to discover that it has been a nightmare? Does the solution to our problems rest in intellectual lucidity or in moral indignation? Do we require more light or more heat?

From one modern point of view nothing is more discreditable to Arnold than his insistence upon looking beyond the storms of his own day to what he called "the first faint promise and dawn of that new world which our own time is but now more fully bringing to light," and nothing more creditable to Ruskin than the fact that he went mad in the vain attempt to persuade the world that all of Europe was entering upon an age of madness. Those who espouse this point of view will point out that the new evils that had darkened the Victorian world made Ruskin's single-minded, passionate, all-consuming crusade against laissez faire industrialism the only morally acceptable reaction, and that he alone saw in the terrible new system a darkness that was to engulf the world. "Auschwitz," Lionel Trilling has said, "may be thought of as the development of the conditions of the factories and mines of the earlier Industrial Revolution." From this point of view Arnold's detachment, his unwillingness to risk his coherence and his sanity by fully meeting the darkness that surrounded him, crippled him intellectually and made him a morally culpable prototype of those who, in this century, have remained mere "onlookers," coolly pursuing truth while the whole creation groaned; but Ruskin, in spite of being, as Proust wrote, "often stupid, fanatical, exasperating, false and irritating," stands forth before us as "always praiseworthy and always great." Who but Ruskin, in his "madness," foresaw with literal accuracy the end of European civilization in factory smoke "made of dead men's souls"?

From another modern point of view, however, Ruskin's obsession with darkness and his unwillingness to look beyond it are equivalent to the irrational misery of the child, unable to conceive that night will eventually give way to morning, and his madness only the out-
ward sign that he was the first in a long line of sick people who in modern society have, by a strange paradox, assumed the mask of physicians. Those who espouse this point of view will tend to see in Ruskin a prototype of all those righteously indignant social reformers, terribly certain of the generosity of their own motives, who in this century have become so obsessed with social welfare and the urgency of filling men's bellies that they have been blinded to all other concerns, and particularly those safeguards of individual liberty that have been so painstakingly developed in democratic societies. "An army of unemployed led by millionaires quoting the Sermon on the Mount—that is our danger," prophesied George Orwell. From this point of view, the lesson of Auschwitz is not that laissez faire capitalism is the source of all our woes but that any piece of what Arnold called "machinery" can be made to serve the purposes of barbarism if it is employed by barbarians, and that the road that led to Auschwitz was to a considerable extent paved by those who, like Ruskin himself, were passionate for the destruction of laissez faire capitalism and saw nothing worth conserving in a liberal democracy that was willing to coexist with it. Arnold, on the other hand, recognized the danger both to oneself and to one's social vision in the "tyrannous single thought" or passion that subdues the soul, and saw that the true alternative to anarchy lay in culture, which opposed itself not to any particular form of "machinery" but to the barbarism that might employ machinery for inhuman ends.

Which of these positions is the true, or the truer, one, each reader must finally decide for himself. My comparison of Arnold and Ruskin has been intended to make clearer to the reader what were, in a particular time and place, the consequences and implications of holding these positions, and to suggest that neither position has a monopoly on wisdom or on virtue.