# Arnold's Missed Rhymes

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Arnold's doubtful reputation as a rhymer – that is, his reputation for doubtful rhyme – is a part of the much larger celebrity which he has enjoyed as a great poet who, curiously, was something other than simply good when it came to the task of writing verses. Many of his contemporaries professed the opinion that he was a poet not born but made;[1] and while few went so far as Traill, whose obituary cast him as an intuitive critic who wrote poetry from motives other than 'a poetic impulse', numerous reviewers responded to something in Arnold's verse that conveyed an unsteady or uneasy or incomplete kind of poetic accomplishment.[2] Prothero, the editor of Byron, put his finger on this kind of reaction when he detected in Arnold's more experimental efforts 'almost a confession that lyric poetry is an uncongenial element'.[3] True, admirers were not slow to claim 'harmony' among his virtues, though that line of praise can sound a little formulaic ('we should think little of the poetical sensibility of any one who could be blind to the loveliness, or deaf to the harmony, of many of the separate poems'); and in his brilliant and largely effusive study in appreciation Swinburne included laudatory remarks on Arnold's 'faultless folds and forms of harmonious line' and claimed him as 'the most efficient, the most sure-footed poet of our time'.[4] But Swinburne was being tendentiously counter-cultural in praising Arnold's sure-footedness: most commentators thought him anything but; and to remark upon the imperfection of his wobbly ear, in particular, was normal. Even an admirer such as Lionel Johnson was forced to concede that 'his sense of melody sometimes failed him'.[5] His lines were often 'in-euphonious', said G.W.E. Russell, the editor of his letters, concurring in good part with the unforgiving judgment of Frederic Harrison that 'where nature has withheld the ear for music, no labour and no art can supply the want'.[6] 'I am not sure that he was highly sensitive to the

musical qualities of verse', Eliot ventured in a lecture at Harvard in 1933, perhaps pausing for a decorous laugh from the audience: everyone had been saying that about Arnold for eighty years.[7]

Arnold, said Harrison, was 'insensitive to cacophonies that would have made Tennyson or Shelley "gasp and stare"', and one place where this defining insensitivity expressed itself was in his 'stiffness in rhyming'.[8] Sometimes his rhymes were misrhymes, and sometimes they missed rhyming altogether. Russell agreed with that: 'His rhymes are sometimes only true to the eye';[9] and many others had said something along the same lines before him. 'There are faults', said W.E. Henley, 'and these of a kind that this present age is ill-disposed to condone', foremost among them: 'The rhymes are sometimes poor'.[10] Reviewers sometimes compared him to Elizabeth Barrett Browning, alike in his occasionally 'forced rhyming':[11] George Saintsbury, for one, objected to 'rhymes almost descending to the cockney level of Mrs Browning at her unintelligible worse';[12] and, in his quick-witted book about Arnold he developed his disgruntlement, detecting the first signs of 'a deficient ear' way back in the schoolboy poem *Alaric at Rome*, where it was manifest particularly in defective rhymes. The child was to prove father to the man in this regard, at least, since among the 'inadequacies' and 'incompetences of expression' which Saintsbury found 'so oddly characteristic' of Arnold the inability to rhyme well always stood out – in the 'jarring rhymes' of 'Empedocles on Etna', say.[13]

Now, I am very far from merely agreeing with these verdicts, as will be obvious, but I think they pick up unsympathetically on something about Arnold's rhymes and misrhymes that is indeed true and interesting. Rhyming does not always seem easy or straight-forward in Arnold; but that need not be a matter (or, at least, not always) of merely lacking the knack to

get them into better shape. Arnold's most accomplished experiments in misrhyme seem to me altogether more witting than that, drawing on 'inadequacies' and 'incompetences' (to use Saintsbury's terms) and finding in them an unexpected poetic resource which contributes to his highly individual conception of poethood. 'His is not poetry of the absolutely trustworthy kind', said Saintsbury, and he did not mean to praise;[14] but purposefully to eschew the aura of complete technical proficiency that one might recognise as 'trustworthy' could, rather, be a way of going about a quite different end, making poetry of a more precarious but wholly and distinctively Arnoldian kind. Arnold's most characteristic poetry is always written out of a background of hesitancy and doubt in its own proceedings and validity: the poems are productions in keeping with an age that he intuitively regarded as 'deeply *unpoetical*' – 'Not unprofound, not ungrand, nor unmoving: -- but un*poetical*'.[15] To 'analyse the modern situation', as Arnold felt a modern poet honour-bound to do, was to grasp 'its true *blankness* and *barrenness*, and *un*poetrylessness':[16] he means 'poetrylessness', which becomes in his self-consciously modern sensibility the way to an uneasy new kind of poetry, authenticated by its feelings of self-mistrust; and to that the faltering life of his rhymes brilliantly contributes.

They do not always falter, of course. That Arnold was sensitive to the capabilities of rhyme is evident enough: sometimes the effects are very beautiful, especially in those poems where rhymes are not to be expected, either because the verse rhymes but not regularly, or because rhyme seems irrelevant, as in blank verse. Consider, for example, this passage from the early poem 'Mycerinus':

> — So spake he, half in anger, half in scorn;
> And one loud cry of grief and of amaze
> Broke from his sorrowing people; so he spake,
> And turning, left them there; and with brief pause,
> Girt with a throng of revellers, bent his way
> To the cool region of the groves he loved.

There by the river-banks he wandered on,
From palm-grove on to palm-grove, happy trees,
Their smooth tops shining sunward, and beneath
Burying their unsunned stems in grass and flowers;
Where in one dream the feverish time of youth
Might fade in slumber, and the feet of joy
Might wander all day long and never tire.
Here came the king, holding high feast, at morn,
Rose-crowned; and ever, when the sun went down,
A hundred lamps beamed in the tranquil gloom,
From tree to tree all through the twinkling grove,
Revealing all the tumult of the feast—
Flushed guests, and golden goblets foamed with wine;
While the deep-burnished foliage overhead
Splintered the silver arrows of the moon.
It may be that sometimes his wondering soul
From the loud joyful laughter of his lips
Might shrink half startled, like a guilty man
Who wrestles with his dream; as some pale shape
Gliding half hidden through the dusky stems,
Would thrust a hand before the lifted bowl,
Whispering: *A little space, and thou art mine!*[17]

(ll. 79-106)

'Mycerinus' is a broken-backed poem about a life that is crazily broken-backed: Mycinerus overthrows years of selfless and wise public service upon learning that the gods have not rewarded him for his good leadership but rather punished him for it. This passage comes before you as a new departure into blank verse, a stichic turn marking a clean break from the regular stanzas that have made up the first 78 lines of the poem, which set up the back-story behind the king's determination to spite the gods and wander in untiringly self-indulgent pleasure. And yet the verse insinuates a continuity that its paraphraseable meaning is not inclined to admit: *scorn*, *on*, *morn*, *down*, *wine*, *moon*, *man*, *mine* – picking up on the rhymes *intertwine*/*mine* and *flown*/*own* from close to the end of the stanzaic section (ll.59-60; 65-6) – form a thin but persistent line of what MacNeice once called 'ghosts of rhymes'. (Subsequently the shadow rhyme shifts to an assonance: *smooth*/*gloom*/*reproof*/*roofed* (ll.112; 113; 114; 118).) The blank verse initially looks like it describes an escape away from a world where duties are to be fulfilled, out into a space of utter liberty (or, here, libertinism);

but the dim presence of rhyme subliminally keeps in mind the ordered stanzaic world of obligations gracefully fulfilled that had, ostensibly, been left far behind.[18] The verse enacts with unostentatious ingenuity a recurrent movement of the mind back to some insistent thought, no matter how much distraction provided by the diversity of the new life.

Another broken poem, 'The Sick King in Bokhara', features a guilty sinner successfully demanding that his monarch put him to death for his sins; and it works something like the other way round, moving towards its quatrains (ABCB) through an opening section of irregularly rhymed verses, as though shifting in sympathy with the king's dawning realisation of the order of the moral law. Arnold said it was the first of his poems that Clough really liked;[19] but while it is hard to imagine Clough warming much to the rather creepy sensibility on show, the psychology of the piece has a subtler side which might have been part of its appeal, and it is communicated by rhyme. The king takes some time to be persuaded he should act in so counter-intuitive a way, but his lurking propensity fully to grasp the moral truth has already been insinuated in the frequent but sporadic occurrence of rhyme during the earlier part of the poem, an obscured glimpse of the regular ABCB rhyming that establishes itself at l.93.

> 'Now I at nightfall had gone forth
> Alone, and in a darksome place
> Under some mulberry trees I found
> A little pool; and in short space
> With all the water that was there
> I filled my pitcher, and stole home
> Unseen; and having drink to spare,
> I hid the can behind the door,
> And went up on the roof to sleep.
>
> (ll. 65-73)

'Place' finds a partner in 'space', and 'there' with 'spare'; but 'forth' reaches out with no more than the very partial success of 'door'; and 'found' finds nothing. ('Sleep' belatedly

finds ‘creep’ in the next verse.) There is a more subtle but related effect in the very great poem ‘The Buried Life’, in which the poetry moves somewhat similarly forward through incidental and unpredictable rhymes before resolving itself into a succession of strong couplets at its crescendo, as though momentarily realising some buried potential:

> Only—but this is rare—
> When a belovéd hand is laid in ours,
> When, jaded with the rush and glare
> Of the interminable hours,
> Our eyes can in another’s eyes read clear,
> When our world-deafened ear
> Is by the tones of a loved voice caressed—
> A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast,
> And a lost pulse of feeling stirs again.
> The eye sinks inward, and the heart lies plain,
> And what we mean, we say, and what we would, we know.
> A man becomes aware of his life’s flow,
> And hears its winding murmur; and he sees
> The meadows where it glides, the sun, the breeze.
>
> And there arrives a lull in the hot race
> Wherein he doth for ever chase
> That flying and elusive shadow, rest.
> An air of coolness plays upon his face,
> And an unwonted calm pervades his breast.
>
> (ll.77-95)

The effect there is very powerful, a sudden vivid sense of the possibility of connection overcoming isolation, and its power comes partly from the play of its rhymes: for rhyme has its own intrinsic relation to the idea of connectedness. ‘Rhyme is commonly recognized as a binder in verse structure’, says Wimsatt in a celebrated piece, ‘But where there is need for binding there must be some difference or separation between the things to be bound’.[20] Arnold himself recognised the particular binding power that rhymes possess: when translating the unrhymed Homer, that binding power is felt as a problem – ‘rhyme inevitably tends to pair lines which in the original are independent, and thus the movement of the poem is changed’. So it is a great poetic difficulty that when Chapman translates a line from Homer, using rhyming couplets, he should be ‘forced, by the necessity of rhyming, intimately

to connect with the line before'.[21] But it is nothing but a very great strength, at once formal and human, that the standout line 'A bolt is shot back somewhere in our breast' should find itself intimately connected with the thought of being 'by the tones of a loved voice caressed'. Several of Arnold's masterpieces work the irregularity of rhyme with inconspicuous brilliance; the unobtrusiveness of the effect enacts a kind of tenderness or care about the situation. In 'Dover Beach', for example, the unpredictable fluctuation of rhymes creates a sonic world of shifting connections and separations in which, like Arnold in the poem, 'we / Find also in the sound a thought' (ll. 18-19), before the verse discovers a kind of unconsoled resolve in its closing pair of ringing couplets, emerging from the poem's noise of incertitude:

> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And we are here as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and fight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Ending with a couplet like that makes a gesture towards some sonnet-like conclusiveness. Arnold is not especially famous as a writer of sonnets, though one or two of his sonnets are well-known, and some of them at least show his highly self-conscious interest in the intricacies of rhyme. The sonnet about Shakespeare, for instance, is properly aware both of its relationship with Shakespeare's own practice and of the natural inadequacy of its act of homage.

> Others abide our question. Thou art free.
> We ask and ask—Thou smilest and art still,
> Out-topping knowledge. For the loftiest hill,
> Who to the stars uncrowns his majesty,
>
> Planting his stedfast footsteps in the sea,
> Making the heaven of heavens his dwelling-place,
> Spares but the cloudy border of his base
> To the foiled searching of mortality;
>
> And thou, who didst the stars and sunbeams know,
> Self-schooled, self-scanned, self-honoured, self-secure,

Didst tread on earth unguessed at. — Better so!

All pains the immortal spirit must endure,
All weakness which impairs, all griefs which bow,
Find their sole speech in that victorious brow.

It is an improvised form for a sonnet: as Miriam Allott says, an octet which is based on Wordsworth (ABBAACCA), joined on to a Shakespearean quatrain and concluding couplet (DEDEFF). But then the sense of an ending is complicated by the simultaneous appearance of an alternative rhyme scheme in the sestet (DEDEDD): Allot says that the existence of the Shakespearean couplet is obscured by what she calls an 'accidental sight rhyme', but whether something rather more purposive is at work than an accident remains a nice question. The poem is about the elusive inscrutability of a great imagination, so there is something entirely appropriate about it coming to a close in a way that is at once mindful of the way Shakespeare used to pull off such things so well while leaving this modern tribute smudged and mishandled; and the effect is only intensified by Arnold's decision in later printings to split the quatrain and couplet into two groups of three lines, a perplexing decision unless you think some piece of textual wit about sonnet form is in play.

A paradoxical sign of Arnold's sensitivity to the scope of rhyme was his unusual (for the time) interest in poems that, not in blank verse, were not rhymed at all. The reviewers were generally unhappy with the experiment: his Balliol friend J. D. Coleridge described them as 'rhymeless lyrics which are mere prose, printed in varying-sized lines';[22] but he kept experimenting with unrhymed verse throughout his writing life. Saintsbury, whose scholarship was as extraordinary as his taste was unexceptional, expressed a common conviction when he announced: 'Except blank verse, every rhymeless metre in English has on it the curse of the *tour de force*, of the acrobatic', and he accordingly judged the 'rhymelessness' of 'The Strayed Reveller' merely 'a caprice, a will-worship'.[23] He was not

alone in being provoked by Arnold's audacious ambition to write in a way that drew so unabashedly close to the condition of prose: William Rossetti, for one, was also troubled by 'The Strayed Reveller' being 'written without rhyme — (not being blank verse, however) — and not unfrequently, it must be admitted, without rhythm', and regretted 'the attempt to write verse without some fixed laws of metrical construction'.[24] R.H. Hutton, too, expressed misgiving about these 'pieces of unrhymed *recitative*', which he thought lent themselves too readily to Arnold's penchant for didacticism and oratory.[25] And they can indeed sound off tiresomely; but their best effect is the very opposite of oratorical show: their ambition is what Arnold called in a later, rather cumbersome sonnet, the 'Austerity of Poetry'. The unrhymed poems exist against a background expectation of rhyming; they find in 'rhymelessness' a way of articulating an epochal sort of 'poetrylessness'; and they ache for their absent rhymes like a missing limb. The masterpiece of this idiom is the late poem 'Growing Old', which seems to avoid anything like sonic concordance with a painful scrupulosity: the special desolation of the poem is the product of its unappeasable resistance to the necessity of rhyme.

> It is to suffer this,
> And feel but half, and feebly, what we feel.
> Deep in our hidden heart
> Festers the dull remembrance of a change,
> But no emotion—none.
>
> (ll.16-30)

But even in this barren place, the vestige of an old rhyming instinct is not quite defunct. Something rhyme-like stirs along the line 'And feel but half, and feebly, what we feel', and an earlier pair of lines manages a dark skit of a couplet: 'Is it to feel our strength — / Not our bloom only, but our strength – decay?' (ll.6-7). You could not say that 'strength – ' and 'strength – decay?' achieves a rhyme; but it would equally be wrong to say that its recurrence had *no* relationship with rhyme; and as the poem closes, an intermittent path of semi-rhymes on the last words of five of the seven stanzas can be dimly made out: *alone*, *decline*, *pain*, *none*, *man*. But whether the persistence of this feeble memory of rhyme is dimly consoling,

as a mark of energies still not quite dead, or rather a painful reminder of the lost vitality of the old modes, it is difficult to say.

Arnold's genius for misrhyme most clearly displays itself in the poems that more openly entertain the duties and pleasures of rhyme as part of their business. A good place to start here is the 'Memorial Verses' to Wordsworth, which occupy something of the same territory as the unrhymed lyrics in memory of the Brontës and Heine; but here partial rhyme does not come in as a shadowy presence among rhymelessness, but rather as a falling away from the better rhyme that is not achieved. More than just an elegy for a poet, this is an elegy for poetry altogether; and so it is appropriate, beyond the normal good manners of the form, for the elegist to display the inadequacy of any modern attempt at verse. After the loss of Goethe and Byron, Wordsworth's death takes away the last of the possibilities:

> Goethe in Weimar sleeps, and Greece,
> Long since, saw Byron's struggle cease.
> But one such death remained to come;
> The last poetic voice is dumb—
> We stand to-day by Wordsworth's tomb.
>
> (ll.1-5)

The triplet is a studied piece of misfooting: *come* / *dumb* / *tomb*. 'Whether "tomb" rhymes with "dumb" I shall not assume the province of determining', said the critic Herbert Paul, archly;[26] but I should say the effect is very powerful, and any doubts about its reality might be at least partly settled by the note on which the poem no less strikingly ends:

> Keep fresh the grass upon his grave,
> O Rotha, with thy living wave!
> Sing him thy best! for few or none
> Hears thy voice right, now he is gone.
>
> (ll.71-4)

These lines, which are about not hearing right anymore, do not hear themselves right either: they listen for a rhyme and discover it missing, so the poem quits with a rhetorical fall into a

depleted and unpoetical modernity ('now') – anticipating Auden's great, exhausted couplet in the Yeats elegy,

> Let the Irish vessel lie
> Emptied of its poetry.[27]

Saintsbury thought, a little more generously than he was sometimes inclined to think, that the 'Memorial Verses' were 'not unpoetically expressed', a phrase which, by the rules of the English double negative, indeed praises their poetical expression while at the same time saying something different than that they were straight-forwardly 'poetically expressed'.[28] Saintsbury could be a boisterous stylist but he was an astute and close reader, and his remark nicely gestures towards the way Arnold's poem wins its defeated effect through a kind of negating or nulling of more usual forms of poetic rectitude.

I should not pretend there is not a possible vulnerability to my analysis of such slight but (to my ears) telling effects: for there is a difficulty in attributing authorial purpose, at whatever level of self-consciousness, to effects such as this – namely, as MacNeice says, that '[c]ertain bad rhymes have always been allowed by English convention, for example "love" and "prove" or "happily" and "tree"'.[29] When Marvell writes 'Two paradises 'twere in one / To live in paradise alone', in a poem so full of mixed feelings about the solitude it purports to celebrate, it is tempting for the critic (this critic, anyway) to find within the muffed rhyme a betraying hesitancy that only serves to enrich the work;[30] but it would be a hard task to establish the effect as witting beyond doubt: a certain latitude in rhyme need not communicate anything other than participation in a convention which permits elbow room, and popular verse such as ballads, in particular, has always relied on rhymes of such imperfection.[31] Literary historians have for a long time tended to attribute the invention of modern dissonant rhymes to Wilfred Owen: possible precursors in the practice might include Dickinson, Hopkins, and Vaughan, though none seem conclusive cases;[32] and, as one

commentator puts it, Owen was 'the first poet of this century to widen the range of rhyme *systematically*' by using half-rhymes 'deliberately and not as occasional substitutes for the purer kind' – and now (he is writing in 1949) 'with many poets, it is the pseudo-rhyme which is the rule'.[33] Half-rhymes or para-rhymes or near-rhymes are consonances between 'inexact vowels', in Zhirmunsky's formulation, a practice which produces what he calls 'a desirable diversification of the monotonicity of identical monosyllabic endings':[34] a useful point, since for a modern poet the technique need not work to suggest than something is out of tune. 'The bad rhymes, I think, satisfy the ear like ordinary rhymes', Empson once said of a poem by Dylan Thomas, 'and are not meant, as in some poets' use of them, to suggest strain or horror'; and again, speaking of Kathleen Raine: 'It is full of half rhymes which are much better for not being full rhymes, so much so that her occasional rhymes sometimes feel a mistake, a slight flatness rather than an emphasis'.[35] At the same time, the effect is hardly always neutral: it would be absurd to read a poem such as MacNeice's 'Bagpipe Music' without recognising that bad rhymes are there being used to evoke a sense of cacophony which mirrors the dissonance of the times; and the disjuncture of lines such as the following is so closely related to the disjuncture of the lives which they relate that a reading which did not dwell on the technique would be seriously astray.

Alone here in the kitchen
I feel there's something missing
I'd beg for some forgiveness
But begging's not my business
And she won't write a letter
Although I always tell her
And so it's my assumption
I'm really up the junction

A song which begins by announcing, 'I never thought it would happen / With me and the girl from Clapham', is early on declaring its interest in things not happening, including, in that case, a proper rhyme on the word 'happen'; and a similar kind of mordant self-reflexive wit graces the closing lines set in the bereft kitchen, where one of the things that you feel to be

missing is a respectable rhyme with ‘kitchen’ – an absence that is especially telling since, a few minutes earlier in the song, when things have momentarily been going well for the couple, ‘missing’ had indeed found itself a fulfilling rhyme:

> We stayed in by the telly
> Although the room was smelly
> We spent our time just kissing
> The railway arms we’re missing[36]

The Railway Arms would be named after the institution that Clapham is principally famous for, which is Clapham Junction, and ‘junction’ is the word with which the song concludes its lyric; but the rhymes at the close are conveying nothing but disjunction.

I agree that nothing in Arnold is as programmatically done nor remotely as clear-cut as that, or as ‘Bagpipe Music’ or Owen’s war-damaged lines; but I think that a sensitivity to the communicative possibilities of imperfect rhyme is increasingly in the air in the nineteenth century, as a legacy of what Garrett Stewart calls ‘the Romantic decline of neoclassical rhyme’, thanks to which ‘rhyme gradually loses its definitive hold on the poetic imagination’.[37] Owen was bringing into systematic prominence a potentiality that must have been diffusely present within the language of English verse at large; and I think Arnold’s poetry is one place where, from time to time, you can hear that note of modernity – the ‘new age in poetry’ that Edmund Blunden believed he heard in Wilfred Owen’s poems in 1920 – just beginning to stir.[38] It is an important part of the effect, though, that it exists on the very borders of nineteenth century legitimacy: Allott is not being at all implausible when she says that the curious derailing of the Shakespeare sonnet is really just down to an accidental ‘sight rhyme’ – which is to say in other words, a blunder on Arnold’s part. Accidence or inadvertence are never entirely ruled out; and I am not disputing that some phenomena that might otherwise come within the net are, indeed, much more plausibly understood as

accidents of oversight. There is the oddity of line 99 of ‘Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse’, for instance, which has what Allot describes as a ‘defective rhyme-word’:

> For the world cries your faith is now
> But a dead time’s exploded dream;
> My melancholy, sciolists say,
> Is a passed mode, an outworn theme—
> As if the world had ever had
> A faith, or sciolists been sad!
>
> (ll.97-102)

It is certainly very puzzling that Arnold should have left that unrhymed ‘say’ standing through all the poem’s editions when he was otherwise so assiduous a tidier, and after all something could have been done with ‘avow’; but I admit it is hard to know what to make of the misrhyme otherwise. In general, however, I am keen to claim many of Arnold’s misrhymes as his own work; and I proceed here with an Empsonian principle to hand: ‘if one view makes a bit of poetry very good, and another makes it very bad, the author’s intention is inherently likely to be the one that makes it good; especially if we know that he writes well sometimes’.[39] The paradox here, one which the reviewers struggle with, is that making it good in these cases draws on a repertoire of ‘incompetences of expression’, in Saintsbury’s phrase, which in other circumstances would come across as no good at all.

One of the few readers to have noted the impact of misrhyme in Arnold, I believe, is Philip Davis, who has a passing remark of typical suggestiveness about the poem ‘Self-Deception’:

> For, alas, he left us each retaining
> Shreds of gifts which he refused in full.
> Still these waste us with their hopeless straining,
> Still the attempt to use them proves them null.
>
> (ll.17-20)

‘By cruel half-rhymes’, says Davis, ‘something is rendered null in Arnold’s gifts—“Still the attempt to *use* them *proves* them null”’:[40] that is finely noticed; and the effect is only further enhanced in this case by the nullifying effect of the bad rhyme in ‘null’, as though

exemplifying a gift misused or used with only partial success. The effect at such moments is as though a tenacious instinct to rhyme were meeting some recalcitrant counter-force, so that the process which Peter McDonald handsomely describes as 'the poetic transformation of the fortuitous into the felicitous through rhyme', is only imperfectly or incompletely done.[41] Hutton identified a sense of incompleted business within Arnold's poems in general: that they 'are not artistic wholes, which come to a necessary and natural end because their structure is organically perfect, but rather fragments of imaginative reverie, which begin when the poet begins to meditate, and end when he has done';[42] and some of the most striking terminal rhymes bear witness to Arnold's equivocal capacity to end things in a 'necessary and natural' way on the small scale of the ending of a line. As it happens, Hutton thought Arnold much better in his rhymed poems than in his 'irregular rhythmic improvisations': 'The music of rhymed verse always seems to bind him down to the simpler ranges of human experience', said Hutton, expressing a preference for those 'more perfect forms of verse'.[43] But we might agree with that preference while finding slightly different grounds for it: rhyme may matter to some of his most memorable poetical moments because it is only within its jurisdiction that the effects of imperfectly binding rhymes, their complication and challenge, are made possible.

Arnold's poetry has a number of recurrent preoccupations to which his missed rhymes contribute with particular consequence. One is epochal, the thought that the lives of his time were peculiarly difficult: in this, he is, as James said, 'the poet of his age, of the moment in which we live, of our "modernity", as the new school of criticism in France gives us perhaps license to say'.[44] Arnold wasn't the only Victorian to entertain this, perhaps secretly flattering, conviction of having an unprecedentedly hard time: his own hallmark version of it is to conceive life as a matter of being agonisingly neither one thing nor another, 'Wandering

between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born' ('Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse', ll. 85-6). The charmingly fantastic good life of the scholar gipsy, by contrast, is whole and true and single, unlike the half-lives led back in the place that Arnold calls, with a Wordsworthian inflection, 'the world', a bad place where 'each half lives a hundred different lives' and we endure an unsustaining spiritual life, but 'half-believers of our casual creeds' (ll.161; 169; 172): that sounds like a likely place to find misrhyme, which leads a half life of its own, neither a rhyme exactly but certainly not *not* a rhyme. The halfness of Arnoldian life reveals itself, more than anything, in a perpetual awareness of the solitariness that accompanies our no less compelling sense of relationship, even if what mainly ties us together is the shared generational sense of our lonely predicament. As Michael O'Neill says well of the organising metaphor of scattered, lamenting islands in 'To Marguerite – Continued', 'Arnold's image of isolation is remarkable for its collectiveness':[45]

> Oh! then a longing like despair
> Is to their farthest caverns sent;
> For surely once, they feel, we were
> Parts of a single continent!
> Now round us spreads the watery plain—
> Oh might our marges meet again!
>
> (ll.13-18)

The rhymes in this poem reach out towards one another with a particular resonance: for if, as Garrett Stewart says, a rhyme 'must appeal (rather than peal) across a distance defined by difference even when processed under the sign of similarity', then the unbridgeable distance between the isolated island-selves in this poem is at once tentatively overcome and sadly re-affirmed.[46] 'Despair' is recorded in this third stanza partly by the inability of the word itself to find a confirming echo in 'were'; and, metrically, 'sent' is really no more securely joined up with 'continent' (although it could have managed something with 'content', but then that would have been a different world). The poem to which 'To Marguerite – Continued' became the continuation, which was called 'Isolation', imagines relationship (a love affair, a series of

rhymes) as well as isolation (a failed love affair, rhymes that do not join up). At this point he is invoking the myth of the moon falling in love with Endymion:

> Yet she, chaste queen, had never proved
> How vain a thing is mortal love,
> Wandering in Heaven, far removed.
> But thou hast long had place to prove
> This truth—to prove, and make thine own:
> 'Thou hast been, shalt be, art, alone.'
> (ll.27-30)

Here is a tangle in tune with the age: *proved* finds a partner in *removed*, but the march of the quatrain is complicated by the intervening presence of *love*, an unexpected misrhyme with the *proved* that preceded it and no better a rhyme for the *prove* that is formally its intended; and then *prove*, which also comes back within the next line, stands in some relationship to *proved*, of which it is the diminishment. Finally, the couplet that comes to tidy this up is a weakling, 'alone' less partnering than subsuming wholly the word, 'own', for which the poem is meant to be finding a rhyme. But then again, the couplet has an understated strength: it possesses one of those ghost senses of which Garrett Stewart writes so memorably.[47] For in real sonic time the phoneme with which 'alone' rhymes is not actually 'own' but 'known', the word carrying over by natural elision the terminal 'n' of 'thine' ('thy known'): the ghost word discreetly registers the poem's whole troubled preoccupation with *knowing*, the way in which aloneness is a 'known' for everyone, something individually learned from within each separate human existence. (It is only the deluded who never 'knew, although not less / Alone than thou, their loneliness' (ll.41-2).)

The irruption of Arnoldian solitude into the poetry often exploits the device of misrhyme to bear, through the noise it makes, witness to an individuality that finds itself only ever incompletely accommodated. The effect is typically bleak, but it would be wrong to cast the thing as too simply pessimistic, and it can also carry an undernote of resistance. 'A rhyme has

to do both with the selection and the placement of the words that chime', as Donald Wesling very rightly says;[48] but a refusal to chime may be a kind of self-defining kick against the pricks. 'To tunes we did not call our being must keep chime', says Empedocles (I.ii, l.196), but Arnold's verse does not always obey such fatalism.

> Ah! two desires toss about
> The poet's feverish blood.
> One drives him to the world without,
> And one to solitude.
>
> ('In Memory of the Author of "Obermann"', ll.93-6).

That would be an example of the rhymes being, as Henley said they were, 'sometimes poor'; but the question for the reader is whether the poverty is in any particular case expressive, a failure of formal obligations turning out to be, in a new way, nothing but decorous. Rhyme, said Chesterton, 'does go with reason, since the aim of both is to bring things to an end';[49] but of Arnoldian turmoil there can be no end, and the near-miss of the rhyme, by resisting the epigrammatic finish promised by the quatrain, leaves the verse unclosed. It is a confirming piece of dark wit that the lonely word left that lives only half-accommodated within the room of the stanza is 'solitude'; and other Arnold misrhymes do something similar:

> O born in days when wits were fresh and clear,
> And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames;
> Before this strange disease of modern life,
> With its sick hurry, its divided aims,
> Its heads o'ertaxed, its palsied hearts, was rife—
> Fly hence, our contact fear!
> Still fly, plunge deeper in the bowering wood!
> Averse, as Dido did with gesture stern
> From her false friend's approach in Hades turn,
> Wave us away, and keep thy solitude!
>
> ('The Scholar-Gipsy', ll.201-10)

The 'divided aims' of modern life get a sympathetic hearing in the half-hearted impulse that offers, first, 'aims' as a companion for 'Thames', and then 'wood' for 'solitude'. That stanza exemplifies with particular point the astute observation made by M.R. Ridley of the poem

generally: that ‘the stanzas do not come to an end which the ear expects and with which it is satisfied; they merely drift uneasily to a standstill’, something he attributed to the inferiority of Arnold’s craftsmanship when compared to that of Keats (on whose odes, as Ridley argued, Arnold had based his form).[50] But, then again, not giving the ear what it expects need be no less of a meditated end, as in the bizarre couplet that brings the lines ‘Resignation’ to a close:

> Yet, Fausta, the mute turf we tread,
> The solemn hills around us spread,
> This stream that falls incessantly,
> The strange-scrawled rocks, the lonely sky,
> If I might lend their life a voice,
> Seem to bear rather than rejoice.
> And even could the intemperate prayer
> Man iterates, while these forbear,
> For movement, for an ampler sphere,
> Pierce Fate’s impenetrable ear;
> Not milder is the general lot
> Because our spirits have forgot,
> In action’s dizzying eddy whirl’d,
> The something that infects the world.
>
> (ll.265-74)

There is scant consolation in these lines, which amount to a withering anti-*Tintern Abbey*, from which the eternal principle of joy has somehow gone astray, and the uplifting pantheism of ‘something far more deeply interfused’ has been modulated into the ‘something’ which, an infection, thwarts the ambitions that the spirit entertains for ‘movement’. The stasis to which the poem is only barely resigned is captured in its last couplet, which, with a bleak kind of creativity, matches ‘whirl’d’ with its near-homophone ‘world’, and leaves the poem not with the movement of a rhyme but really stuck in the doldrums. (Sir John Davies: ‘Behold the world, how it is whirled round! / And for it is so whirled, is named so’.[51])

It is one of many telling moments in Arnold’s complicated lyricism when a reader could say, as Horatio does to Hamlet, ‘You might have rhymed’;[52] but part, at least, of Arnold might have answered with Stevens: ‘Personally, I like the words to sound wrong’.[53]

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[1] For example, Leslie Stephen, *Saturday Review* (September 1867): *Matthew Arnold: The Poetry. The Critical Heritage*, ed. Carl Dawson (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 158.
[2] H.D. Traill, *Contemporary Review* (June 1888): *Critical Heritage*, 322.
[3] Rowland Prothero, *Edinburgh Review* (October 1888): *Critical Heritage*, 357.
[4] J.D. Coleridge, *Christian Remembrancer* (April 1854); A.C. Swinburne, *Fortnightly Review* (October 1867): *Critical Heritage*, 96-7; 179.
[5] Lionel Johnson, *Academy* (January 1891): *Critical Heritage*, 387.
[6] G.W.E. Russell, *Matthew Arnold* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), 4. Frederic Harrison, *Tennyson, Ruskin, Mill, and Other Literary Estimates* (1899): *Critical Heritage*, 429.
[7] T.S. Eliot, *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism: Studies in the Relation of Criticism to Poetry in England* (London: Faber, 1933), 118.
[8] Harrison, *Critical Heritage*, 429; 430.
[9] Russell, *Matthew Arnold*, 4.
[10] W.E. Henley, *Athenaeum* (August 1885): *Critical Heritage*, 287.
[11] [W.E. Aytoun], *Blackwood's Magazine* (September 1849): *Critical Heritage*, 52.
[12] George Saintsbury, 'Corrected Impressions', in *Collected Essays and Papers* (1895): *Critical Heritage*, 400.
[13] George Saintsbury, *Matthew Arnold* (second edition; Edinburgh: Blackwood, 1899), 5; 19; 23
[14] Saintsbury, *Matthew Arnold*, 219.
[15] To Clough, early February 1849: *The Letters of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Cecil Y. Lang (6 vols.; Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1996-2001), i.131.
[16] To Clough, 14 December 1852: *Letters*, i.250.
[17] All quotations from Arnold's poetry are taken from *The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, ed. Kenneth Allott; second edition, ed. Miriam Allott (London: Longman, 1979).
[18] Louis MacNeice, *Modern Poetry. A Personal Essay* (1938; second edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 133.
[19] To Palgrave, March 1869: *Letters*, iii.321-2.
[20] 'One Relation of Rhyme to Reason': W.K. Wimsatt, *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954; London: Methuen, 1970), 164.
[21] 'On Translating Homer': *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, ed. R.H. Super (11 vols.; Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1960-77), i.106; 107.
[22] J.D. Coleridge, *Christian Remembrancer* (April 1854): *Critical Heritage*, 109.
[23] Saintsbury, *Matthew Arnold*, 11.
[24] W.M. Rossetti, *Germ* (February 1850): *Critical Heritage*, 61.
[25] R.H. Hutton, *British Quarterly Review* (April 1872): *Critical Heritage*, 224.
[26] Herbert W. Paul, *Matthew Arnold* (London: Macmillan, 1902), 32.
[27] 'In Memory of W.B. Yeats', iii: W.H. Auden, *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber, 1976), 198.
[28] Saintsbury, *Matthew Arnold*, 26.
[29] MacNeice, *Modern Poetry*, 131.
[30] 'The Garden', ll. 63-4: Andrew Marvell, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (London: Allen Lane, 1972), 101.
[31] See T. Walter Herbert, 'Near-Rimes and Paraphones', *Sewanee Review* 45 (1937) 433-52, 439-40.
[32] See D.S.R. Welland, 'Half-Rhyme in Wilfred Owen: Its Derivation and Use', *Review of English Studies* NS 1 (1950) 226-241, 242-3.
[33] Gordon Symes, 'A Note on Rhyme', *English* 7 (1949) 167-171, 167.
[34] Viktor Zhirmunsky, 'Introduction to *Rhyme: Its History and Theory*', trans. John Hoffmann, *Chicago Review* 57:03/04 (Winter 2013) 118-126, 123.
[35] William Empson, *Argufying: Essays on Literature and Culture*, ed. John Haffenden (London: Chatto and Windus, 1987), 384; 435.
[36] Squeeze [written by Chris Difford and Glen Tilbrook], 'Up the Junction', *Cool for Cats* (1979).

[37] Garrett Stewart, *Reading Voices: Literature and the Phonotext* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 80; 82.
[38] Blunden: 'the discovery of final assonances in place of rhyme may mark a new age in poetry' (*Athenaeum*, 10 December 1920): quoted in Welland, 'Half-Rhyme in Wilfred Owen', 226.
[39] William Empson, *Milton's God* (revised edition; London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), 28.
[40] Philip Davis, 'Arnold's Gift: The Poet in an Unpoetic Age' in *Essays and Studies: Matthew Arnold: A Centennial Review*, ed. Miriam Allott (London: English Association, 1988) 00-00, 74.
[41] Peter McDonald, *Sound Intentions. The Workings of Rhyme in Nineteenth-Century Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 38.
[42] R.H. Hutton, *British Quarterly Review* (April 1872): *Critical Heritage*, 229.
[43] Hutton, *Critical Heritage*, 224; 225; 225-6.
[44] Henry James, *English Illustrated Magazine* (January 1884): *Critical Heritage*, 282.
[45] Michael O'Neill, ' "The Burden of Ourselves": Arnold as Post-Romantic Poet', *Yearbook of English Studies* 36.2 (2006) 108-124, 123.
[46] Stewart, *Reading Voices*, 98.
[47] Stewart, *Reading Voices*, 68-70, *etc.*.
[48] Donald Wesling, *The Chances of Rhyme. Device and Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 63.
[49] G.K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (London: Oxford University Press, 1913), 18.
[50] M.R. Ridley, *Keats's Craftsmanship. A Study in Poetic Development* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 208.
[51] 'Orchestra', stanza 34.
[52] *Hamlet*, II.ii.279.
[53] To Henry Church, 1 June 1939: *Letters of Wallace Stevens*, ed. Holly Stevens (1966; Berkely: University of California Press, 1996), 340.