NTU Studies in Language and Literature
Number 27 (June 2012), 25-46

Matthew Arnold's Reception of Hippolyte Taine: Lord Byron as "Touchstone"

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ABSTRACT

The reception of Hippolyte Taine in Victorian England features as one of the crucial incidents in the context of its rich and diversified cross-cultural literary historiography—Taine's book on *History of English Literature* changed the way of talking about the Romantic School in the anglophone world. In particular, the Frenchman's representation of Byron catalyzed Matthew Arnold's canonization of the Romantic poet. It is argued that there was a touchstone effect that mediates as well as displaces Arnold's critical position of Byron. This essay begins by giving a survey of English readers' immediate reception of Taine, and then it focuses on the interchange between Arnold and Taine with regard to the image of Byron. Unlike other English critics who dismiss Taine's work, Arnold on the one hand draws on the Frenchman's perception, and on the other consolidates his touchstone theory as a strategy of reading, resulting in a revision of the concepts of literary criticism and canon. His efforts not only justify the value of Taine's work but also the position of Byron in the canon of English literature.

Keywords: *History of English Literature*, Hippolyte Taine, Matthew Arnold, Lord Byron, literary criticism, canon, touchstone

阿諾德接受泰納觀點研究：以拜倫為「試金石」

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摘　要

法國史學家泰納《英國文學史》之出版，可視爲英國維多利亞時代跨文化文學互動的重要事件，此書改變了大眾對浪漫主義詩人的刻板印象，以及英美文學批評家討論此學派的態度與方式。明確來說，泰納於其書中所呈現的拜倫，曾催化阿諾德修改其典範概念，以利納入拜倫作品爲英國文學的正典。本論文旨在揭示，阿諾德經歷了一段試金評比、概念轉換的過程，終究正視拜倫爲英國文學的正典。論文開端鋪陳英國讀者如何批評泰納及其作品，接著整理阿諾德如何自一八六〇至一八八〇年代，反覆推敲浪漫詩人的地位以及泰納筆下的拜倫。有別於其他英國批評家藐視泰納作品的態度，阿諾德結合其試金石閱讀策略以及泰納的觀點，進而修正其文學批評與典範等概念。其修正的觀點不僅提陳泰納作品的價值，亦彰顯拜倫爲英國典範詩人的地位。

關鍵詞：《英國文學史》、泰納、阿諾德、拜倫、文學批評、典範、試金石

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Jui-Pi Chien

I. The controversy over Hippolyte Taine's *History of English Literature* in the English milieu

At the time when Taine (1828-1893) put forward his *History of English Literature* as an illustration of a scientific study of history and culture, Anglo-American critics like Henry James (1843-1916), Leslie Stephen (1832-1904), and an anonymous writer in Edinburgh Review were cynical about Taine's work. They criticized Taine's project in elegantly satirical tones, swinging between the metaphor of a beautiful "*tableau vivant*" (James 846) and the indictment of silly "trash" (Anonymous 327). Despite the legitimacy Taine claimed for his approach, his cynical readers tended to decode the concept of "*milieu*" as a physical entity, and they detested Taine's idea of social and natural environments whose power is so huge that they not only create but also deform human nature (Taine, *Histoire* XXVI). English critics at the time also doubted how Taine, as a foreigner, could possibly present an unbiased picture of English people and society. Moreover, they felt uncomfortable applying a foreign rule or formula to the study of their own culture and literature—they were alarmed at the prospect of Taine's methodological survey.

Shortly after Taine published his work in French and English (1863, 1864, 1871), major critics declared their triumph in terminating the unwelcome intrusion from France. First of all, an anonymous critic in *Edinburgh Review* found it an unpardonable fallacy that Taine assigned "creative force" to our environment (Anonymous 305). The critic stated his belief that creativity had been God's privilege and God alone could endow "natural gifts to individual men" (308). He then criticized Taine for lacking true faith in God and innate human quality; Taine's work was merely a failure that generates the least "critical fairness" about England, and the most "egotism and prejudices" in France (327-28). Secondly, Henry James judged Taine's work in respect of two aspects—the scientific and the literal—and found the work incomplete, premature, and needing revision for its philosophical insufficiency. Nevertheless, he admired Taine's

"eloquence" and "masterly composition" (James 845, 848). James skillfully employed the metaphor of a *tableau vivant* to bring his conflicting viewpoints together, implicating that the work itself is an impressive work of art though not yet perfected. Because of such provisional characteristics, James refrained from positively recommending the work to English readers. He simply judged it as a manifestation of the French mind, which was still remote from the English mind (841-48). Finally, Leslie Stephen ridiculed Taine's stereotypical misconceptions of environment and people. He thought Taine's comparative method, though genuine, ruled out exceptions in considering individual differences. He then supplied counter arguments and "native" viewpoints to expose the falsehoods in Taine's statements (Stephen 81-111).

All in all, those Anglo-American critics had detected Taine's new approach, but in their reviews they somehow sidetracked into trivialities concerning Taine's lack of religious belief, his way of writing, and his national and intellectual lineage as a Frenchman. In a deeper sense, their critical attempts were normative: the availability of bilingual competence and translations could have assisted communication between cultures, but their reactions against Taine's unbearable errors have undermined this possibility. They ended up offering their own opinion as regards how Taine should speak and write. They were all suspicious about the legitimacy of Taine's work in England, taking rather the distinction between true and false statements as the ultimate critical index, and shying away from new observations that would endanger the established norms of aesthetics in England.

II. Matthew Arnold's reception of Taine's *History of English Literature*

While most English and French critics were arguing over the legitimacy of Taine's work during the 1860s and 1870s, Arnold was rather reticent about his own opinion. Instead of publishing a thorough review of Taine, he sent Sainte-Beuve and Taine each a letter, respectively in January and February, 1864, praising the former as his guiding master, from whom he had learned "the taste for moderation and real truth" in criticism (Super 209), while admitting to the latter that he would refrain from judging such a broad subject as the history of English literature (Arnold, "Deux lettres" 175). It was not until March 1881 that Arnold wrote Taine another letter. This time, he revealed what he found unpleasant both then and seventeen

years earlier. He wrote that he found Taine's work too "systematic," but kept discreet about what specifically had aroused his "satisfaction and admiration" in his second reading of the work ("Deux lettres" 176). Despite such evasive compliments, he had included in the mail his own *Mixed Essays* (1879), which contains articles entitled "A Guide to English Literature," "A French Critic on Milton" and "A French Critic on Goethe," as if he were enthusiastic to exchange his ideas with Taine.

Another event, which induced Arnold to reread Taine's work, was the publication of Bishop Thirlwall's letters—Thirlwall's positive review of Taine was not published in book form until 1881. While major critics were arguing over Taine's national prejudice, Thirlwall in 1865 revealed to a friend that readers should pay more attention to "the extent and accuracy of knowledge and critical tact" in Taine (32). When reading it immediately after its publication, Arnold found it "excellent" and decided to follow it so as to enhance his own understanding of Taine (Arnold, "Deux lettres" 176; Farrell 437). In his 1881 letter to Taine, Arnold also informed Taine of his acquiescence with Thirlwall's opinion—he revealed that he would follow Thirlwall's judgment for the undoubted erudition in the latter.[1] Turning to Arnold's notebooks, we find that he in 1881 copied many lines from Taine's chapter on "modern life," which disclose his concern about the national differences between France and England. In addition, his notes about Byron, copied from the latter's journal, appeared in the same year. He expressed two extreme opinions: one criticizing Byron's lack of "patience, knowledge, self-discipline, [and] virtue"; the other affirming Byron's call for "a republic" (*Note-Books* 351; 359-61; 362-64). Arnold incorporated both notions into his preface to *Poetry of Byron*, which he published in the same month as his second letter to Taine ("Byron" 375).

Considering the fact that Arnold had sent out what he termed as the "beautiful and powerful volume" of *Poetry of Byron* to printers in December 1880 (Farrell 1974: 439), we suspect the reason for the postponed delivery of his preface and its coincidence with the second letter to Taine. In fact, measured against the corpus of Arnold's criticism, his reception of Taine is not something unusual—he had quoted from a lot more European critics as

[1] The year of Arnold's second letter to Taine is slightly uncertain. In F. C. Roe's book, it was reported as 1880, but the zero at the end was put into parentheses. Basing on the publication year of Thirlwall's *Letters to A Friend* in 1881, Farrell judged that Roe could have made a mistake, considering the fact that Arnold could not have written to Taine before he read Thirlwall's book (437).

he declared to be just and truth-seeking. However, his connection with Taine concerning a controversial English poet has been enhanced by "coincidences" gathered from his notes and letters. It has been asserted that Arnold drew from Taine the "general direction" to do justice to Byron and to pair Byron with Wordsworth (439).[2]

Arnold actually declared a drastic shift of critical position in his 1881 preface to *Poetry of Byron*. In his preface to his own selection of Wordsworth's poems, he still criticized Byron for not being able to achieve everlasting reputation. He compared Taine's and Scherer's observations of Byron, and valued Scherer's negative comments for their "words of truth and soberness" (*Mixed Essays* 195). In contrast, in the preface to *Poetry of Byron*, he blamed Scherer for having presented the most "severe and unsympathetic" criticism of Byron. Only then did he admit that Scherer had wrongly applied the principle of "impersonal and disinterested" art to Byron ("Byron" 369-70; Scherer 81)—but he also offered a more positive and sympathetic view in considering Byron as a national poet ("Byron" 371).[3] Arnold may have found Taine's "sympathy" for Byron—disparaged by both English and French critics—to be a fair judgment (376).

The aforementioned random casual invectives of Taine disclose a fundamental obstruction of communicating ideas between cultures—the receiving end either forestalls the incoming message with its own tradition of rhetoric and conceptual tools or dismisses it with harsh criticism, regarding it as a mere nuisance. However, the more serious programmatic criticism with its institutional and theoretical implications—achieved by

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[2] Concerning the pairing of Byron with Wordsworth, we find the similar idea in Taine: "We learn from Wordsworth and Byron, by profound Protestantism and confirmed scepticism, that in this sacred cant-defended establishment there is matter for reform or for revolt; that we may discover moral merits other than those which the law tickets and opinion accepts; that beyond respected social conditions there are grandeurs; that beyond regular positions there are virtues; that greatness is in the heart and the genius; and all the rest, actions and beliefs, are subaltern" (Taine1886: 460). Just like Arnold at the end of his preface to Byron, Taine also considered such pairing to be powerful and epoch-making.

[3] Scherer accused Taine of showing favouritism to Byron—he thought Taine's approach was more about a personal interpretation (involving distortion) of history than an unbiased presentation of historical facts. From his perspective, he saw that the Romantic School does not exist at all in England. Taine's overrating of Byron appeared as a strategic attempt at bridging English literature with the grand movements in France and Germany (Scherer 74-75). Insisting on his principle of impersonal and disinterested art, Scherer simply judged Byron as a "coxcomb," a playboy and egotist, who was altogether insincere to be a person and a real poet (82-83). Scherer's "positivist" tone basically goes against Arnold's preference for a pan-European perspective of *Weltliteratur*, advocated by Goethe.

Thirlwall and Arnold—illustrates another mechanism in cultural communication, one which is not so much concerned with the truth or falsehood on the semantic level, but rather focuses on the similarity of projects at a contextual or a disciplinary level. Although both Thirlwall and Arnold were also suspicious of the scientific value of Taine's work,[4] they somehow illustrate a chain of interpretations that transfered Taine's critical viewpoint from one culture to another: Thirlwall's letter serves to correct false impressions of Taine; Arnold's intensive work on Byron dampens down the controversy over Taine; Arnold puts forward a new look at Byron. In terms of the aesthetics of reception, the two "horizons of expectation," that of Taine and that of Thirlwall and Arnold, mediate between the private and historical readings of Byron (De Man xii-xiii). Perceived in the dialectics between reading and understanding, between personal experience and methodical criticism, Arnold's motivation for revising Byron through Taine is not entirely explicit—Arnold was after all unwilling to acknowledge his indebtedness in his second letter to Taine. Nevertheless, our path of tracing the connections between Arnold's critical tactics and his dealings with Taine's ideas will reveal how Arnold profited from reformulating Taine.

III. The development of Arnold's critical tactics

In the 1860s, Arnold was not less revolutionary than Taine while promoting some sort of literary reformation—literary criticism in particular should be clearly separated from party lines and religious controversies. In his quest for independent and objective laws of literary criticism, Arnold pleaded for English critics to look up to role models in France: *Revue des deux mondes*—the journal that discusses "the best" that is known and thought in the world; *L'Académie Française*—the institute that offers "a fixed standard," "correct information," "judgment," and "taste" for intellectual matters (Arnold, *Essays in Criticism: First Series* 51, 61). To save his nation from divisions by self-interests, Arnold emphasized the necessity of establishing institutes and introducing foreign works of

[4] In his letter to a friend, Thirlwall said: "Taine's mind, no doubt, is not free from bias; but that which affects his judgment most injuriously is not any national prejudice, but his philosophical theory" (31). Like other critics of his time, Thirlwall was uncomfortable with the scientific aspect of milieu theory which Taine claimed to be a new approach for the study of history and culture.

literature and criticism. He urged his countrymen to apply their genius and creativity to their practices and readings of criticism: a genuinely "disinterested" critic should learn to be "patient," "flexible," "collected," "sincere" and "constructive" so as to broaden knowledge. A reliable critic should give rise to "spiritual perfection," "great happiness," "persuasion" and "understanding" among the public rather than hard-hitting "polemics" which easily provokes anger and misunderstanding (25-41, 66).

Arnold's manifestoes written in the 1860s and 1870s impressed readers with their intellectual affiliation to the institutionalization of criticism in France. However, in a practical sense, he was not comfortable with "systematic judgment"—popular in both France and Germany—which he dismissed as "the old story of the man and the *milieu*," evoking Taine's approach as his point of reference, and something that is "the most worthless [and unprofitable] of all" (*Mixed Essays* 191, 209). For Arnold, the making of a masterwork requires "intellectual and spiritual atmosphere" and "an order of ideas" in its time and environment—all of which writers should combine them in their own uniquely creative fashions ("Function of Criticism" 584). However, in the early stage of his career, Arnold did not think it necessary to look into a writer's "character and time" thoroughly so as to ensure the right understanding of target works. Moreover, he thought a critic equipped with a method tends to be more interested in his own philosophy than his object—a methodical critic is likely to misinform readers of his object. Arnold preferred to highlight "personal sensation" as the best condition of mind for arriving at "a right understanding" (*Mixed Essays* 191). He redefined criticism as a process of inquiry, in which a critic ponders over the advantages and defects of lines before coming up with his own judgment. As regards his evaluations of Byron, it took Arnold a rather long period (1860s-1880s) to observe both English and French critics' comments.

Among Arnold's fellow critics, Henry James made the most severe comment on Taine's survey of Byron. He did not appreciate Taine's "Continental view," which he thought was extremely fallacious and unacceptable. James was particularly furious about the gap between content and purpose in Taine's essay. He criticized that Taine pretended to be sketchy but had actually presented a heavy study on one single poet (846-47). The critic in *Edinburgh Review* mocked Taine's excessive and unnecessary "sympathy" for "egotism" in Byron. He concluded that Taine simply resorted to common sense as everyone already knew very well that

egotism had been Byron's "source of inspiration" (323-24). Leslie Stephen in turn appears rather appreciative of Taine's survey—he thought it was due to the recognition of glowing and concentrated "passion" in Byron that allowed Taine to fabricate a "unity," which saves the poet from being divided by biased impressions like "capriciousness," "affectation" and "wayward humour" (106-07).

By trivializing Taine's survey on the life and works of Byron, these critics actually averted from some severe criticism of English society—Taine concluded that Byron was a prey to the "constraint" and "hypocrisy" in his environment (Taine, *History* 48). He proposed that English critics should reform their ideas and overcome their partiality of "religious divinations" and "instincts" in shaping their doctrines of criticism. Taine moreover put forward the idea that "science" would substantially improve their abilities to judge fairly (67-68). As regards Arnold's reception of the French critics, in the 1860s and 1870s he was ambivalent about the suitability of such a scientific approach. He had declared himself a fervent follower of Sainte-Beuve while seeking a unifying, "modern" and "European" perspective of criticism in Taine as well.[5] Sainte-Beuve, with his erudition of Latin poetry and diverse traditions, bequeathed to Arnold the artifice of satisfying current demands of criticism. Arnold revealed to Sainte-Beuve that the latter had inspired him to discuss literature of the past from the angle here and now.[6] However, he had also felt the need to teach "intelligence" to the English nation in going beyond the restrictions of moral judgment, which was a dominant trend among English and French critics.[7] Arnold's shifting evaluations of Byron demonstrate a thorny process of

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[5] Arnold had corresponded with Sainte-Beuve in French. In one of his letters sent to Sainte-Beuve, he revealed his excitement about meeting and learning from Taine: "J'ai beaucoup lu M. Taine…L'histoire de la littérature anglaise! [C]'est une forte besogne qu'il est donnée la! [A]ucun Anglais ne l'a encore bien traitée dans son ensemble, et sous un point de vue moderne et européen. Dès que je saurai en quoi je puisse être utile à M. Taine, je ferai de mon mieux pour le satisfaire" (written in London, dated January 13, 1864) (Bonnerot 537).

[6] In one of Arnold's letters to Sainte-Beuve, in which he touched upon his moral judgment of Romantic poets like Shelly and Byron, he justified his criticism with the lesson he learned from Sainte-Beuve: "Mais, me direz-vous, il faut de la nouveauté dans la manière de présenter les choses passées et de les approprier au temps. Oui, sans doute, cela est vrai, je le sens peut-etre même que toute la *question* est là" (dated September 29, 1854) (Bonnerot 522).

[7] In one of Arnold's letters in English, he drew on his difference from Renan and the French style of criticism: "The difference is, perhaps, that he tends to inculcate morality, in a high sense of the word, upon the French nation as what they most want, while I tend to inculcate *intelligence,* also in a high sense of the word, upon the English nation as what they most want" (dated December 24, 1859) (Bonnerot 531).

overcoming the impressionistic and belletristic type of criticism he shared with other critics. Meanwhile, he was extending his scope to consider the legitimacy of those intriguingly new ideas Taine had illustrated for Byron, i.e., the validity of scientific historiography for the present.[8]

Before giving some serious thoughts to Taine's survey of Byron, Arnold had formulated his own rule of distinguishing between "the main current" and "minor currents" of literary works. The main current has been canonized in history: poets who were able to produce a great amount of writings, refined techniques, decent subject matters, and a profound sense of culture have delineated the boundary. However, those who were outside the canon, including Arnold's contemporaries, failed either as personalities or because of their tastes for poetry. In his first series of *Essays in Criticism*, published in 1865, Arnold pointed out the flaws of poets in the early nineteenth century: Wordsworth for his seclusion, as if he had completely "retired" from modern society; Coleridge for his addiction to opium; Scott for his intoxication with medieval feudalism; Keats for his poor health and miserable death early in his life. He added that Byron and Shelly were the most futile of all—they both had been aristocrats, but they had been too daring and brainless to save their own lives (Arnold, *Essays in Criticism: First Series* 176-78). Arnold ridiculed Byron in particular as an extravagant natural power, which had wasted its energy in pounding against the "huge" and "cloud-topped" rock of Philistinism (192-93). He then concluded that "[t]he best literary creation of that time in England [should] proceed from those who did not make the same bold attempt as Byron and Shelly" (177). For Arnold in the 1860s, he saw the modern project of freedom and liberation in England as a complete failure for the lack of "intellectual equipment" and "culture" among its advocates (193).

Arnold's "personal sensation" was at work—his criticism still adhered to moral judgment. He pointed to unbearable character traits in Byron, failing to recognize what had gone beyond the canon of major current. Individual qualities such as passion rather than poetic conventions had been indispensable in shaping the modern project and its spirit. While consistently using the major current to judge Byron and his contemporaries, Arnold denied the possibility of men with qualities like passion, morbidity and the unruly becoming part of the literary establishment. His canon was

[8] The author is indebted to one of the anonymous reviewers for clarifying the major distinction between Sainte-Beuve's and Taine's critical approaches.

definitely closed up: it was well-defined by the adequacy, permanence and decorum of masterworks, and Romantic poets are not likely to be part of it because of their shortcomings and idiosyncrasies. Furthermore, the reasons for which he dismissed Byron reveal a certain fallacy in his critical approach. Because of avoiding taking into account the "character and time" of a writer so as to make a clear distinction between his idea of canon and the "systematic judgment" on the continent, Arnold, in the 1860s and 70s, lacked "sympathy" for Romantic irony which was prevalent among Romantic poets and their works, in the form of battling states between the inner and the outer.

It has been suggested that the reasons for Arnold's softened critical tone toward Romantic poets in the 1880s were more personal than professional. It has been asserted that Arnold finally began to appreciate Byron mostly because of their shared "vision of personal isolation" and the feeling of "empathy" developed in the editing process (Farrell 437, 439). However, we should also consider the fact that Arnold in the meantime was perfecting his "touchstone" theory. While he was editing and selecting Byron in 1880, he also wrote his theory of touchstone selection, which he published in the same year as the preface to *The English Poets*, edited by Thomas Ward (1845-1926). It is true that Arnold quoted touchstones out of their specific passages, contexts and corpuses, but he assigned them the new function of sharpening the tested. The result of such a process is to bring forth the similarly good quality among diverse poets in history and to enrich the greater corpus of English poetry rather than evaluating the diverse conditions of composition at different moments in history (Arnold, *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* 16-17; 20-21; 54-55). Arnold insisted so much upon the application of his method to the point that he declared he had parted ways from a previous approach adopted by Algernon Swinburne (1837-1909) ("Byron" 367-68). Swinburne in his collection presented Byron "in the whole," receded from his own "ingenuity of selection," and highlighted the "life and variety" of lines in their corresponding contexts (Swinburne viii-ix, xxiv). However, Arnold concentrated on lines and fragments that are "vivid, powerful, [and] effective," and exerted the most of his instinct and taste of selection—he aimed at rescuing Byron from defamation and gaining readership (369, 375-77). Therefore, Arnold was actually highly charged to carry out his own motive for Byron—he was transforming his own discourse in accordance with the new criteria he planned for literary criticism, judgment, taste and canon.

IV. Touchstone selection as a method of literary criticism

Touchstone selection has been criticized for its limitation of scope—such a method is found to be tinged with moral implications and the miseries of life (about the loss of family members late in Arnold's life). When relating this method to Arnold's life and poetry—presuming that a method corresponds to its author's biographical details—one may find it pitifully unproductive: Arnold reads into poetic lines his own sensations and personal estimates rather than sharpening a tool which would serve him in making fair and fresh judgments (Eells n. pag.). The most severe criticism has been targeted on the act of selecting itself: lifting certain lines from their specific contexts violates the rule of presenting an encompassing view of a poet in relation to his works (Grierson 28-31). Touchstone selection appeared obscure to critics and literary historians due to its association with Arnold's sense of morality and melancholy. In order to do justice to its value as a method, we need a different framework of relevance—an alternative viewpoint—in order to fully appreciate the method as a positive mode of thinking, which not only gathers and recycles fragments, but also generates something new that transforms the way we appreciate a given corpus of works.

The way Arnold makes his selections is prescribed by his erudition of the classics. Nevertheless, rather than just demonstrating his refined taste, Arnold has a more ambitious motive for his selections: he gathers from them a couple of not-yet appreciated subjects or qualities like vividness and invincibility which put forward the strengths of Byron as a poet and hopefully bridge the gap between major and minor poets. Selecting touchstones is a constant process of mediation and revised understanding: passages in this corpus are mediated by those in another; a corpus (the whole) by selected passages (the parts). In managing the case of Byron, it is the viewpoint summarized from the parts or Arnold's critical position in the 1880s that serves to shed light on the whole. Such a method of reading and interpreting is not as empirical as that of testing and discarding materials—it is above all a matter of the critic's mind.

In recognizing and interpreting the touchstones in Byron, Arnold was weaving his "sympathy" for Byron into two major strands in his approach—a criticism of life and the selection of touchstones. His looks into Byron's journal helped him appreciate the spirit of liberation and to do

justice in the poet. To play down negative comments—egotism, affectation, silliness and flippancy, targeted at characters in Byron's long narratives, Arnold turned to Goethe (1749-1832), Taine, Swinburne and John Nichol (1833-1894) to affirm the genuine and powerful nature of the poet (Arnold, "Byron" 375-76). Concerning the selection of Byron's works, Arnold put aside his criterion of "a criticism of life" so as to shift readers' attention to those lines about "a single incident," "a single situation" and "happier moments" (373, 368-69). Unlike the works by Wordsworth, from which Arnold did not venture to "detach portions" (*Essays in Criticism: Second Series* 161),[9] those by Byron were dissected, closely examined and tested by touchstones. As regards their reduced amount, Arnold argued that the superior quality matters more than quantity, and that this should serve Byron well "in letting him, at his best and greatest, speak for himself" (200-01).[10] In addition, Arnold devised a working genre, "personal," placed it as the first category in the anthology, in parallel with two other genres like "lyric" and "elegiac." The newly-devised genre for Byron distinguishes itself from traditional genres like descriptive, narrative, dramatic and satirical—it includes compact short poems and stanzas chosen from Byron's long narratives like *Childe Harold* and *Don Juan* (Byron 3-73).

To bridge the gap between extreme views of the poet's life and works, Arnold elaborated on Goethe's seemingly opposing views—Byron is on the one hand "the greatest talent" at the time and on the other "a child" the moment he begins to reflect ("Byron" 372-73). These views do not necessarily touch upon Byron's standing as a poet but are essentially about his temperament, or rather, his formative quality which does the English nation good (372). Managing to synthesize Goethe's two opinions while revising Byron's works, Arnold lifted two fragments, i.e., touchstones, which he found quite effective:

> Goethe has well observed of Byron, that when he is at his happiest his representation of things is as easy and real as if he were improvising. It is so; and his verse then exhibits quite another and a higher quality from the rhetorical quality—admirable as this also in its own kind of merit is—of such verse

[9] Arnold inserted this phrase into the 1879 preface to Wordsworth for a collection of his essays published in 1927.

[10] This phrase is also a 1927 insertion into the 1881 preface to Byron.

as "Minions of splendour shrinking from distress,"[11] and of much more verse of Byron's of that stamp. Nature takes the pen from him; and then, assured master of a true poetic style though he is not, any more than Wordsworth, yet as from Wordsworth at his best there will come such verse as "He heard it, but he heeded not; his eyes were with his heart, and that was far away."[12] Of verse of this high quality, Byron has much; of verse of a quality lower than this, of a quality rather rhetorical than truly poetic, yet still of extraordinary power and merit, he has still more ("Byron" 376).

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[11] Here are the two stanzas (*Childe Harold*, Canto II. Stanzas 25, 26) from which we can find the key line. Arnold selected and included them in the first part of *Poetry of Byron*:

To sit on rocks, to muse o'er flood and fell,
To slowly trace the forest's shady scene,
Where things that own not man's dominion dwell,
And mortal foot hath ne'er or rarely been;
To climb the trackless mountain all unseen,
With the wild flock that never needs a fold;
Alone o'er steeps and foaming falls to lean;
This is not solitude, 'tis but to hold
Converse with Nature's charms, and view her stores unrolled.

But midst the crowd, the hurry, the shock of men,
To hear, to see, to feel and to possess,
And roam alone, the world's tired denizen,
With none who bless us, none whom we can bless;
Minions of splendour shrinking from distress!
None that, with kindred consciousness endued,
If we were not, would seem to smile the less
Of all the flattered, followed, sought and sued;
This is to be alone; this, this is solitude!

[12] Here is the stanza (*Childe Harold*, Canto IV. Stanza 141) from which Arnold selected the key line for his elaboration on Goethe's opinions:

He heard it, but he heeded not—his eyes
Were with his heart, and that was far away;
He reck'd not of the life he lost nor prize,
But where his rude hut by the Danube lay,
There where his young barbarians all at play,
There was their Dacian mother—he, their sire,
Butcher'd to make a Roman holiday—
All this rush'd with his blood—
Shall he expire and unavenged?
Arise! ye Goths, and glut your ire!

First, we need to analyze the ambivalence behind the statement that Nature has taken the pen from Byron. In a sense, it expands on the peculiar feature that there is no disparity between the poet's life and works: "he has lived amidst the spectacles he describes; he has experienced the emotions he relates" (Taine, *History* 24). Nevertheless, according to Byron's journal, such a blurring of distinctions between life and works does not come so peacefully—not so free from the torments of conscience—as Arnold has described. Byron admitted that he had been always on the lookout for experiencing some violent sensations, acquired from restless movements or transgressions against social norms; otherwise, he would feel "miserable" and could not write anything (Taine, *History* 10-14). He actually modeled characters in his long narratives on himself: they are enamored of heroic but tragic sentiments; they are "unhappy," lonely and melancholic even though in nature—their "combative spirit" has poisoned their happiness (12). Secondly, the two touchstones which Arnold has selected are from *Childe Harold*, but their contexts (footnotes 8, 9) reveal that there is no likelihood of attaining genuine happiness—in the former, the hero is happy when he is alone in nature, but he soon laments over feeling solitude when being among people; in the latter, the hero expresses his melancholy of not being able to go as far as he aspires. Rather than just praising *Childe Harold* to be as classical as a Greek tragedy, Taine actually made the point that happiness is not Byron's domain: "Byron found his domain, which is that of sad and tender sentiments: it is a heath, and full of ruins; but he is at home there, and he is alone. What an abode! And it is on this desolation that he dwells. He muses on it" (25-26). Taine concluded that Byron felt and invented his characters from deep inside—a great distinction he made from poets of the major current who tend to observe and deduce lessons in humanity—which is embedded by impulses, ennui and unhappiness. So it appears that, in contrast to Taine's contextualized reading, Arnold quoted these touchstones out of their contexts, read something different into these poetic lines, and hence annulled their contextualized meanings.

The problem on which we need to shed more light is to find out how the feeling of happiness occurs in Arnold and how we can still perceive the quoted lines as touchstones so as to appreciate the subtlety of his method. Taking the line "Minions of splendour shrinking from distress!" as an example for analysis, we find that it is the most outstanding figure throughout the two stanzas—we can judge it as a "poetic point" (a ballet form) because of its late appearance in the two stanzas. It upholds the whole

structure and serves as the heart which expresses a metaphorical sense—the two stanzas eulogize solitude. Moreover, the word "minion" is a medieval usage—it echoes another medieval word "denizen" in line 12, and even the Latinate "regal" "dominion" in line 3. These key words convey the feeling that solitary strollers are the selected, elite few, so they are "minions"—Nature's darlings—shrinking from distress. Such Medievalist diction is also enhanced by the form of Spenserian stanza—iambic pentameter for 8 lines, followed by iambic hexameter in line 9—which was favored among Romantic poets in conveying their nostalgia for the Medieval and their love of Nature.

Other than the potential mental productivity of forms and dictions, Arnold's act of lifting or raising up lines presumes a mediation: his selection of Byron has been interceded by his knowledge of Wordsworth—passages in the corpus of Wordsworth which appear similar to those in Byron.[13] Therefore, Arnold has introduced into his revision of Byron a new context which is characterized by as many positive character traits as

[13] Wordsworth also touches upon the ambivalence of happiness, solitude and sorrow. Here are some examples:

(1) Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour:
England hath need of thee: she is a fen
Of stagnant waters: altar, sword, and pen,
Fireside, the heroic wealth of hall and bower,
Have forfeited their ancient English dower
Of inward happiness. We are selfish men (*London*, 1802)

(2) For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils" (*Daffodils*, 1804)

(3) Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland Lass!
Reaping and singing by herself
……..
Will no one tell me what she sings?
Perhaps the plaintive numbers flow
For old, unhappy, far-off things,
And battles long ago:
Or is it some more humble lay,
Familiar matter of to-day?
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,
That has been, and may be again? (*Solitary Reaper*, 1805).

possible—spontaneity, naivety, simplicity, happiness, sincerity and strength, etc., as he declared in his discussion of Goethe's opinions. Such an idealization aims to abolish negative comments which have inflicted the corpus of Byron: by fusing Wordsworth with Byron, a new understanding emerges and sheds light on the merits that Byron may have achieved. This mental activity of making transcendences from the immediate (poetic lines) to the ideal (touchstones), from the lower (quality) to the higher (merits), happens to coincide with the German idea of sublation (*Aufhebung*)—an approach Hegel has applied in bridging the gap between extremities, such as that between men and nature (Inwood 283-85).

Following the procedure of sublation—raising up, abolishing and preserving—we may well argue that Arnold has transformed the way of making sense out of these isolated touchstones. They no longer find their full meanings in their original contexts where the relationship between lines and usages is spatial and homogeneous. Instead, they find their inspiring, dynamic and prospective meanings between corpuses where the relationship is "temporal"—the fact that Wordsworth's poetry precedes Byron's. The philosophical approach of mediating between extremities—between men and nature, subjects and their objects of representation—applies to the poetic domain as well: Arnold not only preserves the continuity between the forerunner and the later poets, but also recognizes the talent and originality in the latter. For Arnold, touchstones selected from Byron appear similar to Wordsworthian passages, but they are still different and distinct from each other—temporality and heterogeneity enable him to recognize the unique voices and qualities in Byron's poetry. Carrying out criticism of poetry in like manner, Arnold takes it as the primary task to increase the number of readers and their admiration; he thinks studying by lamplight with the intention of figuring out contextualized meanings is secondary (Arnold, "Byron" 376).

V. Arnold's change of position concerning Byron

Arnold's approach pleased neither critics of his time nor those in our time. It has been criticized for its contradictory and self-centered quality: his evaluation of poetry is still every bit about moral judgment and his selection does not really serve Byron but himself (Eells 247-48). There have been several systematic studies which express disapproval of Arnold for not being thoughtful enough with his approach of presenting Byron (Gottfried

109). First, Byron's identification with the ordinary people in his call for a republic was questioned as a false impression. Critics who have traced the resemblance between Byron and Napoleon Bonaparte rather concluded that these two superhuman beings were by all means "egoistic" in their declarations of human rights (Étienne 906; Wilkes 23). Secondly, Swinburne in particular found fault with Byron's poetic improprieties, and, like other critics of his time, he insisted that one should assess the value of a poet's works on the basis of their totality, not fragments, and not even short poems (Swinburne xxvii). Finally, the New Critics accused Arnold of committing the fallacy of didacticism. They detected that Arnold had always glided back to "a criticism of life" and his personal sentiment, which made it frustrating to summarize a genuinely formal theory of criticism from his essays (Wimsatt 447-48). Wellek in particular criticized that *Poetry of Byron* appears disappointing since Arnold still showed his preference to genres like "lyric" and "descriptive," but weighed down "satiric," the genre which from Wellek's perspective offers "a persuasive argument" in favour of Byron's strengths (Wellek 178-79).

Compared with the New Critics, Arnold may not be well-versed and explicit enough in formulating a consistent theory. However, we need to consider the constraints that his intellectual milieu and fellow critics imposed upon him—he wrote at the time when historic and personal estimates were well-received.[14] In "The Study of Poetry," an essay written for Ward's collection of *The English Poets*, Arnold revealed his insights into "the real estimate"—a principle which he used to engage his fellow critics and it governed also his editing of poets of both major and minor currents. Although we still find some ambiguities between "real" and "personal" estimates in Arnold's writing—considering the fact that "personal" is a new genre for Byron—the idea of the real estimate provides another context for examining the value of touchstone selection as a theory and to discuss how "sympathy" works in applying such a theory.[15] We should articulate a more positive sense of being "personal," "interested" and "sympathetic" if such states of mind all appear "real" to Arnold in his judgment of poetry.

To begin with, working out the real estimate corresponds to pinning down a certain "idea" or "governing thought" that stays unchanged in the

[14] Please refer to the paragraph containing notes 5, 6, 7 for a clarification of these constraints.

[15] Wimsatt ironically put Arnold's "touchstone" as "the sample piece of precious stuff" and criticized it as part of Arnold's didacticism (445).

"world-river" and "[English] stream" of poetry (Arnold, *Essays in Criticism: Second Series* 1-2). In this search for Platonic ideal form, Arnold defined Greek and Latin classics as the bedrock, standing upon which he could avoid drifting into the later changes of languages and being swayed by his "personal affinities, likings and circumstances." He fought against the common fallacy made in both historic and personal estimates, which reveal more of a critic's language of "exaggerated praise" than of what a poet's work "in itself it really is" (6-7). Moreover, to find out the genuine value of a poet's language, Arnold selected some specimens as models from his ideal source, which serve as touchstones to test some targeted works for their shared similar quality. However, though it is likely to juxtapose poetic lines of the past and those of the present, the river metaphor implicates that the value scheme in the real estimate is "descending": touchstones should be collected from the past; lines of the present are to be tested, and that such a "linear" motion is not subject to be reversed. Other than these, there are two features which exemplify the superiority of touchstones—the one is "matter and substance" which is associated with higher truths and seriousness as defined by Aristotle; the other is "style and manner" as rendered in diction and movement. They can be summarized as the features of "mark and accent," both of which are "closely related" and "in steadfast proportion one to the other" (20-22). In the context of poetry reading and interpreting, these features evoke visual images in the mind of a reader and give rise to acoustic effects in the act of reading. Such a synchronous occurrence is enjoyable and it is so personal that everyone who favors the real estimate can "[apply] it for himself" (10, 12, 13, 42, 54-55). Above all, Arnold judged the real estimate to be "continuous" and "universal" up to Elizabethan poetry and Milton. Following such a current, he criticized Chaucer's poetry in particular for its lack of high seriousness, but he still gave it credit for its virtues in substance, style and manner (34-35). Such an evaluation reveals that Arnold valued the overall excellence of features even while dealing with an exceptional case of the real estimate—the pleasure of reading may take precedence over any embarrassing lack of moral seriousness.

VI. Concluding remarks

In the case of Byron, Arnold made an exception in revising the normative conditions of touchstone selection. By reversing the time and

value scheme for Byron, Arnold shows that there is a chance of coming up with a new understanding when selecting touchstones from the present rather than from the remote past (the classics), though such a selection is still mediated by the immediate past (Wordsworthian passages). On top of the merits of character traits, the real estimate that Arnold has devised for Byron is vividness of images and sounds gathered from single incidents and situations, things that help readers "see and feel" what Byron has experienced in their respective processes of reading (Arnold, "Byron" 368). Moreover, the "personal" genre, which was created for *Poetry of Byron*, is definitely Arnold's favorite because it demonstrates his own process of reading, visualizing, memorizing and "feeling happiness". After having made such an effort, Arnold admitted the mistake he had made in the 1860s—his estimate of Byron at the time was "not only personal, but personal with passion" (*Essays in Criticism: Second Series* 54). Such a transformation in Arnold's discourse presents two apects of how Byron was viewed: the one in the 1860s is not very different from how fellow critics have depicted him. At this point, Arnold was disinterested but not theoretical. The other in the 1880s is charged with much more theoretical interest, and it is so refined as to become another touchstone—a unique case of the real estimate—to test not only Arnold's earlier criticism of Byron but also Taine's observation of Byron as a loner and prey to his society.

Arnold's interaction with Taine's thoughts has introduced scientific historiography (involving both passive reception and active understanding) into the aesthetics of revising Byron's position in literary history. The result goes beyond the stricture of two scientific paradigms which were well-received in the later nineteenth century: positivist "objectivism" which rests upon the accumulation and organization of facts; the general "spirit of the age" which circulates around some presumed governing shared features (Jauss 19-20, 28). In the fashion of a new canon, Byron—irrespective of his documented poetic improprieties and the Romantic School in its totality—appears as the outcome of Arnold's "hermeneutic" project, in which the critic has actively engaged and transformed different opinions of the poet in time (28). The crucial change that Arnold has achieved for Byron is indeed a transfer from vituperations, where critics quarrel over their invariable dislikes, to acclamations, where Byron glows with an effective power of language in the English stream of poetry.

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[Received 7 January 2011;
accepted 13 December 2011]