Bulkington from *Moby-Dick* as abruptly as Briggs removes Plaskett, who, we learn almost incidentally, drowns on his next voyage (*WP* p. 49). Finally, after Derrick's suicide, Briggs's hero must man the tiller while his shipmates dispatch and devour a turtle in a tureen of soup (*WP* p. 103). The comic scene is similar in tone and detail to Melville's rendering of the tortoise in "The Encantadas." But in Briggs the scene comes to a messy conclusion when the starving lad inadvertently lets go of the wheel just as the cook presents the meal. The ship lurches (as in Billy's minor mishap with Claggart), and the soup spills on the deck. The comic slip of the wheel in Briggs's work prefigures Ishmael's more serious mishap at the helm in "The Try-Works."

Although such similarities hint that Melville knew *Working a Passage* well enough to borrow freely from it, the parallels may be merely coincidental. After all, Briggs and Melville had much in common; both had worked passages at sea and in the literary milieu of the 1840's. But it is unlikely that Melville would have overlooked the humorous writings of that kindred spirit, the popular "Harry Franco." Nor is it inconceivable that he carried in memory the tragic tale of Derrick, the leather-lipped sailor, even up to the moment of *Billy Budd*. Thus, ironically, in 1868, when Charles F. Briggs asked "And where . . . is Herman Melville?" the serviceable "Harry Franco" could not have known how close his friend would be to him twenty years later.

John Bryant

*Pennsylvania State University, Shenango Valley Campus*

---

THE "BRIGHT GIRLDE" OF "DOVER BEACH"

Matthew Arnold's comparison of the Christian past to the "folds of a bright girdle furled" remains the most enigmatic image in "Dover Beach."

1 In particular, why *girdle*? Although the word seems obviously incongruous in this context, Arnold apparently preferred it to "garment," which he originally chose but then deleted. 2 One certainly cannot visualize the resulting simile very


easily. George H. Ford, who offers the most explicit analysis of this phrase, flatly and justifiably calls the entire line difficult:

This difficult line means, in general, that at high tide the sea envelops the land closely. Its forces are "gathered" up (to use Wordsworth's term for it) like the "folds" of bright clothing ("girdle") which have been compressed ("furled"). At ebb tide, as the sea retreats, it is unfurled and spread out. It still surrounds the shoreline but not as an "enclasping flow" (as Arnold speaks of the sea in To Marguerite, Continued).³

Ford's reconstruction of the tidal logic of Arnold's imagery makes excellent sense, though it unfortunately offers no specific justification for "girdle" (in Ford's scheme, "bright clothing" could apparently replace the original phrase). Alan Roper helpfully comments that "the change [from garment] to 'girdle' may also recall in this context of muted and explicit classical reference the embroidered cestus of Venus, which brings with it associations of love, emotion, and enchantment so appropriate to the whole poem."⁴ Having made this suggestion, however, Roper freely admits that "this is a possible gloss not sufficiently demanded or realized by the terms of the poem" (Roper, p. 180). "Girdle" obviously connotes protectiveness. As a form of clothing—and here Arnold may have been remembering Carlyle—it also contrasts nicely with the "naked shingles" created by the decline of Christianity. The word is hardly inappropriate to Arnold's concerns in "Dover Beach"; yet it never seems wholly justified or even explicable. Why this uncommon and puzzling choice of diction? One possible answer is that "girdle" represents a brief but apt verbal echo of J. A. Froude's The Nemesis of Faith (1849).

Froude and Arnold met at Oxford. Their friendship appears to have been fairly intimate, and of an intellectually supportive character, as many friendships tended to be in the challenging, polemical atmosphere of Oxford. Froude read Arnold's poetry with admiration and care, and included him in a select list of his 1845 confreres.⁵ Arnold, in turn, esteemed Froude and valued his advice on poetic matters enough to take it occasionally.⁶ He would

---

invariably have read Froude's work much as we read Clough's Both and the various efforts of other friends. Given the controversial topicality of The Nemesis of Faith, Arnold almost certainly knew this particular book. Nemesis, which traced the religious crisis of the sceptical Markham Sutherland, was excoriated by the traditionalists and widely discussed. The storm Froude provoked, and the hardship he endured as a result, may explain his impatience with the seemingly unearned serenity of The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems (1849): "I admire Matt—to a very great extent. Only I don’t see what business he has to parade his calmness and lecture us on resignation when he has never known what a storm is and doesn’t know what he has to resign himself to." Arnold's response to the turbulent Nemesis unfortunately remains conjectural. He at least looked at it closely enough, I would suggest, to recall this passage some two years later:

But unhappily the trials of life will not wait for us. They come at their own time, not caring much to enquire how ready we may be to meet them and we little know what we are doing when we cast adrift from system. "How is it" said Martin Luther's wife to him, "that in the old Church we used to pray so often and so earnestly, and now we can but mutter a few words a poor once a day, with hearts far enough away". . . . Even superstition is a bracing girdle, which the frame that is trained to it can ill afford to lose (pp. 179-180; Froude's ellipses).

Froude’s glance at Martin Luther shows that by “superstition” he undoubtedly means “Christianity.” This section of Nemesis consequently stands as an impressively precise analogue for much of “Dover Beach.” Both writers contemplate religion’s historical decline—Arnold, with his image of the “Sea of Faith” receding; Froude, with his nostalgia for fervent prayer. and his juxtaposed references to the “old Church” and the reformer who undermined its foundations. Both the prose passage and the poem regard traditional faith as an unfounded intellectual illusion, and both nonetheless evoke a mood of wistful regret for the emotional security which religion once offered. Even Arnold’s subsequent portrait of unpreparedness and uncertainty on the “darkling plain” finds a parallel of sorts in Froude’s recognition that misfortune may occur when men are least ready to confront it or capable of understanding it. And, of course, there is the repetition of “girdle.”

Clearly, the intellectual relevance of this section of The Nemesis of Faith to “Dover Beach” is fairly specific. But what could Arn-

old have intended by using "girdle"? Here one can merely assess contending probabilities. First, Arnold's echo of Froude seems almost certainly deliberate. The word is undeniably rare, and so incongruously placed in "Dover Beach" as to be virtually inexplicable as a descriptive epithet. "Girdle" contributes nothing that any of its far commoner synonyms would not also add. In its immediate context in The Nemesis of Faith, moreover, Froude's image bears closely on the religious theme of Arnold's poem, and shares its wistful mood. If the echo is intentional, then, what did the poet hope to achieve with it? One possibility is that the word represents a polemical "dig" at Froude. Arnold often placed Wordsworthian phrases in contexts intellectually subversive of them, as U.C. Knoepflmacher has shown; and W.S. Johnson, finding numerous mutual allusions in the poetry of Arnold and Clough, argues similarly that Arnold's borrowings from The Bothie constitute "only one example of [such] poetic argument and rejoinder by metaphor," and that the two poets carried on a sustained debate in verse. Yet, although there are elements in Nemesis that Arnold might have criticized, none occur in the "bracing girdle" passage, and the contention that Arnold's "bright girdle" works as allusive polemic finally puts too heavy a communicative burden on a single word. Would Arnold seriously expect Froude to catch the allusion? The likelier explanation is that "girdle" was a self-conscious but private verbal reminiscence. The word simply drew Froude's thoughts into Arnold's lyric in a way that permitted him to define his opinions through comparison and to orient his thinking more effectively. "Girdle" stands as a vestige of his attempt to ponder the issues from different literary perspectives.

Arnold's brief reference to The Nemesis of Faith in "Dover Beach" is just one of many allusively established coordinates according to which the poet steers his own course. Arnold was an intentionally "traditional" poet who virtually created through verbal echoes and analogues, as Kenneth Allott's annotations amply testify. In Arnold's hands, allusiveness became a deliberate gambit that enabled his poems to achieve verbal contact with diverse thinkers and tradi-

---

tions, and, potentially at least, to embody the culturally comprehensive overview that remained his central poetic ambition. Consequently, the decision to regard "girdle" as an allusion to Froude would actually accomplish two aims. It would make available a clarifying gloss on the most troublesome line in the poem. And it would call to mind again, in however modest a way, the strategically derivative character of Arnold's imagination.

William A. Ulmer

University of Alabama

MRS. PORTER'S MOON AND "RED WING"

Years ago Morris Freedman asserted that a popular song alluded to in poetry will not "read as jazz rhythms unless one hears the music behind the words" ("Jazz Rhythms in T. S. Eliot," South Atlantic Quarterly, 51 [Summer 1957], 419-435). This is quite true, but when Freedman cited The Waste Land ll. 199-201, "O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter/And on her daughter/They wash their feet in soda water," he failed to identify the song Eliot alluded to.1 It was "Red Wing," music by Kerry Mills, words by Thurland Chattaway, copyright 1907 by F. A. Mills. "Red Wing" was a very popular song indeed, and was often "ragged" and, later, "jazzed" when performed. Eliot knew his readers in the Jazz Age would hear the melody behind his paraphrastic allusion to "Red Wing" and "jazz" the lines as they read them.2 The allusion is, specifically, to the Chorus of "Red Wing":

CHORUS.

Now, the moon shines tonight on pretty Red Wing, the breeze is sighing, the night bird's crying.

1Why Freedman failed to identify the song is inexplicable. Perhaps he simply never gave it any thought, because of Eliot's note to l. 199 (see below), or perhaps