

## Studies in English, New Series

---

Volume 1

Article 4

---

1980

### "The Forsaken Merman" and "The Neckan": Another Look

Clyde K. Hyder  
*University of Kansas*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies\\_eng\\_new](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new)



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Hyder, Clyde K. (1980) ""The Forsaken Merman" and "The Neckan": Another Look," *Studies in English, New Series*: Vol. 1 , Article 4.

Available at: [https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies\\_eng\\_new/vol1/iss1/4](https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new/vol1/iss1/4)

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Studies in English at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Studies in English, New Series by an authorized editor of eGrove. For more information, please contact [egrove@olemiss.edu](mailto:egrove@olemiss.edu).

## The Forsaken Merman and The Neckan: Another Look

Clyde K. Hyder

Emeritus, The University of Kansas

Knowledge of an author's sources may throw light on his originality; if it tells little of the relationship between his experience and his writing, it may often be useful in deflating extravagant conjectures about that relationship. Taking account of sources was beyond the aim of "Hugh Kingsmill" (H. K. Lunn), whose *Matthew Arnold* was written partly under the influence of Lytton Strachey; both set out to be condescending to Victorians. To add color to his caricature, Strachey did not hesitate to invent details — for instance, the allegation that Doctor Arnold's legs were too short for his trunk. Similarly, though Kingsmill knew only that, as a letter by Matthew Arnold explains,<sup>1</sup> Renan had told John Morley of how the youthful Arnold's visit with George Sand had created the impression of "*un Milton jeune et voyageant*," Kingsmill had a decided distaste for Milton and so placed beneath the portrait of George Sand the inscription "He struck a chill to her heart."<sup>2</sup> He presumably intended to heighten the effect of this, parallel to his other inscriptions, by assigning to George Sand "a warm bosom." Another biographer describes the youthful Sam Ward as "bubbling" and quotes his saying that "at thirty I must be *aut Caesar aut nullus*."<sup>3</sup> Nobody would think of using the four Latin words as key words for the later "King of the Lobby" (a contemporary of the Arnolds) in the fashion in which Kingsmill applies them to Thomas Arnold. He has much to say of a supposed conflict between Matthew's youthful impulses and his allegiance to his father, a much misunderstood person to whom the son's intellectual debt was considerable.<sup>4</sup>

Pursuing his purpose to find in Arnold's work some reflection of the alleged conflict, Kingsmill could detect in the "interminable poem [*Sohrab and Rustum*]... hardly a hint of any relation between Thomas and Matthew Arnold on the one hand, and Rustum and Sohrab on the other."<sup>5</sup> That "interminable", by the way, is a small indication of his lack of sympathy with his subject, less important than his misunderstanding of what Matthew Arnold meant by "moral" ideas or "criticism of life" in poetry or of Arnold's books on educational, social, and religious subjects, all exposed to a kind of pseudo-sophisticated denigration. In spite of his earlier admission regarding *Sohrab and Rustum*, Kingsmill quotes nine lines about the death of Sohrab, the last

three being an obvious reminiscence of Homer's lines describing the death of Patroclus and later of Hector (*Iliad*, XVI, 855-57, and XXII, 361-63), suggesting that "a faint relation between his own experience and his theme is perhaps discernible."<sup>6</sup>

Kingsmill's treatment of Arnold's youthful interest in a Frenchwoman is just as vulnerable. What can be reasonably assumed (as opposed to the next to nothing that is known) about Marguerite, the woman who figures in the series "Switzerland," is outlined by P. F. Baum, who considers the poems possibly related to her and sensibly deprecates conjectural assignment of others.<sup>7</sup> Evidence does not warrant attributing to a youthful love-affair the importance assigned to it by Kingsmill and others who forget that young men often feel attractions not sanctioned by congeniality of taste, temperament, or background. If they are as poetic as Arnold, they might think of barriers between persons as like the estranging sea and as something to ponder on; they also learn from the experience of other people. Kingsmill insists that Arnold's experience was crucial. He might have been satisfied if Arnold had been involved in an intimacy like Wordsworth's with Annette Vallon, not usually regarded as the real-life representative mirrored in the Lucy poems; he is disappointed by Arnold's choice, attributing it to paternal influence. No one should be surprised, therefore, when he also assumes that Margaret in "The Forsaken Merman" is "a symbol of the happiness he had missed, quickening his imagination until it attained" in that poem "a complete though only momentary freedom."<sup>8</sup> Would he have called it a mere coincidence that in the course of the narrative Arnold used (this he did not know about) the heroine's Scandinavian name corresponded to "Margaret"? "Marguerite," pleasant-sounding and in French meaning both "daisy" and "pearl," has left traces in poetry, beginning with those Old French poets Chaucer had in mind when in his Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* he professed allegiance to the daisy. We have no reason to suppose that it was the real name of the Frenchwoman Arnold met in Switzerland, a country of which other members of the Arnold family were also fond; and if it was not her name, what would be the point of choosing "Margaret" as the name to use in the poem? Instead of being obsessed with the French name or its English equivalent, as is implied, he may have liked it and simply decided to keep what he found in his source.

It was another set of commentators, not those who took their cue

from Kingsmill, that Tolkien had in mind when he mentioned "Jabberwocks" who "burbles in the tulgey wood of conjecture."<sup>9</sup> The example of Kingsmill has to some extent affected other interpreters. If H. W. Garrod did read Kingsmill with care, he must have overlooked a passing reference to the Fausta of "Resignation" as Arnold's sister, for Garrod pauses to consider a temptation to make something of Fausta. (Arnold's choice of the name may remind us that Margarete, too, is the heroine of *Faust*, by the modern author whom Arnold most admired.) But Garrod concludes, "Nothing hints that the poet's reaction to her was stretched beyond the bound of friendship."<sup>10</sup> Since "Fausta" was not a Byronic half-sister, his conclusion is hardly surprising. Garrod was also unaware of the evidence that associated "Faded Leaves" and other poems with the woman to whom Arnold became happily married. Looking for Marguerite everywhere, he finds her in many places. If he had been familiar with the immediate source of "The Forsaken Merman," he would not have prefaced his conjectural observations by misinforming his readers that Marguerite "lent her name to the lost bride of *The Forsaken Merman*."<sup>11</sup>

In 1918 Herbert Wright had identified the immediate source of the narrative used in that poem as a passage from George Borrow's review of J. M. Thiele's *Danske Folketsagn*,<sup>12</sup> though apparently he did not realize that Borrow had merely translated a passage by Thiele, itself based mainly on the Danish ballad "*Agnete og Havmanden*" ("Agnes and the Merman"), which may be considered an ultimate though not an immediate source.<sup>13</sup> What follows is from Borrow:

There lived once two poor people near Friesenborg, in the district of Aarhus in Jutland, who had one only child, a daughter, called Grethe. One day that they sent her down to the sea-shore to fetch some sand, as she was washing her apron, a merman arose out of the water. His beard was greener than the salt sea; his shape was pleasing, and he spoke to the girl in a kind and friendly tone, and said, 'Come with me, Grethe, and I will give you as much gold and silver as your heart can wish,' 'That were not badly done,' replied she, 'for we have very little of it at home.' She let herself be prevailed on, and he took her by the hand, and brought her down to the bottom of the sea, and she in the course of time became the mother of five children. When a long time had passed over, and she had nearly forgotten all she knew of religion, one festival morning as she was sitting with her youngest child in her lap, she heard the church bells ringing above, and there came over her mind great uneasiness, and an anxious longing to go to church. And as she sat there with her children, and sighed heavily, the merman observed her affliction, and enquired

what made her so melancholy. She then coaxed him, and earnestly entreated him to let her go once more to church. The merman could not withstand her tears and solicitations, so he set her on the land, and charged her strictly to make haste back to the children. In the middle of the sermon, the merman came to outside of the church, and cried, 'Grethe! Grethe!' She heard him plainly, but she thought she might as well stay till the service was over. When the sermon was concluded, the merman came again to the church, and cried, 'Grethe! Grethe! will you come quick?' but still she did not stir. He came once more, the third time, and cried, 'Grethe! Grethe! will you come quick? your children are crying for you.' But when she did not come, he began to weep bitterly, and went back to the bottom of the sea. But Grethe ever after stayed with her parents, and let the merman himself take care of his ugly little children, and his weeping and lamentation have been often heard from the bottom of the deep.

Clement K. Shorter was probably the first person to suggest a Scandinavian source for "The Forsaken Merman"; "We owe a rendering of 'The Deceived Merman' [Borrow's title for "Agnes and the Merman"] to both George Borrow and Matthew Arnold, but how different the treatment!"<sup>14</sup> Wright, however, specifies details indicating that the passage cited is closer than the ballad to Arnold's poem: "one festival morning," corresponding to Arnold's Easter, the important festival for Christian faith; "As she was sitting with the youngest child in her lap" (cf. "And the youngest sat on her knee"); emphasis on Grethe's concern for her soul. Most decisive is the difference of names, usually Agnes, not Margaret, in the German and Scandinavian ballads, including the one Borrow entitled "The Deceived Merman." Benjamin Thorpe began his translation from Thiele (see note 13): "In the diocese of Marhuus there dwelt two poor people who had an only daughter named Margaret, or Grethe."<sup>15</sup> The sentence indicates how natural it was for an Englishman to recognize that *Grethe* is a shortened form of *Margrethe* (cf. *Gretchen*, with the suffix *-chen*, in relation to *Margarete* in *Faust*).

In "The Forsaken Merman," description, as well as revelation of Margaret's feelings, may cause one to lose sight of its being in form a dramatic lyric. Addressing his children, the merman recalls how their mother had heard the church bell that aroused concern for her soul's safety, since water-sprites are demonic and since she is living apart from the church. As is the way of poets, Arnold humanizes both Margaret and the merman. But critics search assiduously for biographical implications. A remark by Stanley T. Williams — "Like the

merman, Arnold cannot, because of something in his nature and manner of thinking, worship in the church, as do the others. He can only look on, somewhat unhappily, as the merman watches Margaret<sup>16</sup> — cannot be taken literally, for Arnold did attend church; and the author of *Literature and Dogma* and *God and the Bible* had an intelligent faith. However tempting it may be to recall “the sea of faith” in “Dover Beach,” probably written during Arnold’s honeymoon,<sup>17</sup> the merman’s not entering the church harmonizes with the tradition regarding mermen, according to which his presence would have been abhorrent, as in some of the ballads and in Arnold’s “The Neckan.” Arnold’s later letters show him devoted to his children, but to date no one has suggested that the merman’s pathetic remarks to and about his children are related to a trait which a phrenologist — phrenology was taken seriously in his day, like some aspects of literary Freudianism in ours — might assign to Arnold’s philoprogenitiveness. In ballads grouped with “Agnes and the Merman,” the various analogues of “Hind Etin” described by Francis James Child, the merman speaks of the plight of his children.<sup>18</sup> Indeed in one a division of five children between parents is mentioned; two being assigned to each parent, a theoretical division of one child would follow. In various ballads, Agnes decides to stay in the Christian world, to return to the underwater realm, or to die. Since the authorship of such ballads is unknown, they are safe from biographical speculation.

Like some other writers, Williams does justice to the skill of Arnold’s contrast between the sea-realm, where “the great winds shorewards blow” but which contains

Sand-strewn caverns, cool and deep,  
Where the winds are all asleep,

and Margaret’s “white-walled town,” with “the little gray church on the windy shore.” The merman reflects that prayers in the church must be long — a sad rather than a slightly amusing thought, for he connects it with Margaret’s absence. He has found that her “eyes were sealed to the holy book,” that she has joy in her faith, in the life of the town, in the sunlight that had not reached to her underwater home with its “spent lights” and view of strange sea-creatures, in all her daily activities. But even as she sings while spinning, she remembers that home in the sea, and her sigh and tears emphasize her mother-love, her longing

THE FORSAKEN MERMAN

For the cold strange eyes of a little Mermaid  
And the gleam of her golden hair.

It is mother-love, not *l'amour passionnel*, that this decidedly un-French Margaret feels. The merman, in speaking to the children, introduces the line "The sea grows stormy, the little ones moan," a line he repeats in his plea to the mother. *Pace* Kingsmill and others (to call the roll would be embarrassing), this emphasis on mother-love is an odd way to discharge from the dark cavern of the Freudian Unconscious a supposedly traumatic emotional experience.

Another line is repeated by the merman: "Children dear, was it yesterday?" Usually the Otherworld is timeless, and such familiar stories as those of Thomas Rymer or Rip Van Winkle recall the supernatural lapse of time, but the repeated line helps to convey the vividness of the merman's impression, like one of a recent happening.

The conclusion of "The Forsaken Merman" is emphatic. At the end of the poem the merman, though conscious of the strength of Margaret's faith, prophesies future visits in which the burden (in two senses of the word) will be:

'... there dwells a loved one,  
But cruel is she!  
She left lonely for ever  
The kings of the sea.'

In an earlier passage the merman has said:

Once she sate with you and me,  
On a red gold throne in the heart of the sea.

The detail magnifies Margaret's sacrifice and enhances the merman's dignity. The attribution of royalty requires no great powers of invention. There is no reason to suppose that Arnold had heard of the Danish poet Oehlenschläger's adaptation of the ballad "*Agnete og Havmanden*" in which the merman promises Agnete:

Thou shalt be queen of my joyous halls  
Of polished crystal with gleaming walls.  
Seven hundred maidens attend me there,  
Seven hundred young mermaids with golden hair.<sup>19</sup>

This Solomonic grandeur has no basis in the ballad, nor in another ballad that Borrow translated and entitled "The Merman." Tinker and Lowry do not note that in his *Tales of Wonder* Matthew Gregory ("Monk") Lewis included not only a translation of the latter in which he calls the merman a "water-man,"<sup>20</sup> but also an adaptation called "The Water-King." Furthermore, in his original poem "The Cloud-King" (possibly the only narrative poem in which the denouement hinges on a point in grammar) a "Water-King" appears as a brother demon.<sup>21</sup> To know who first attributed royalty to mermen is hardly possible. A dwarf-king, an elf-king, and a hill-king appear in analogues of "Hind Etin," in the group containing ballads about mermen. Robert Jamieson, who published his own translation of the ballad translated by Lewis and afterwards to be translated by Borrow as "The Merman," disclaimed "ambition to rival Lewis" and incidentally expressed the opinion that the merman "cannot, with propriety, be deemed a water-king": "Although he was the inhabitant of the water, he was not the sole lord of the element."<sup>22</sup> In Tennyson's boyish poem, "The Merman," the merman is

Singing alone  
Under the sea,  
With a crown of gold  
On a throne,

and in a companion-piece, "The Mermaid," a mermaid wishes that "the King of them all would carry me, / Woo me, and win me, and marry me." Correspondences of this kind are commonplaces. Tennyson's mermaid also aspires to sing and comb her hair, like Heine's Lorelei; mermaids who do both must be multitudinous.

The happy union of imagery and rhythm in Arnold's

Now the wild white horses play,  
Champ and chafe and toss in the spray,

recalls the imaginative association of horses and white-crested waves in ancient myth, in which Poseidon drove his steeds in Oceanus. H. J. Rose writes of Poseidon: "It is not at all certain that he was originally conceived as of human form; several legends ... and his standing title Hippios, 'He of the horse(s)', are consistent with his having horse-shape."<sup>23</sup>

Arnold's underwater realm, where appear salt-weed, sea beasts,



and whales, and where "the sea-snakes coil and twine," has prompted speculation. Needless to say, snakes can be real; there is no reason to suppose that even in dreams they are symbolical. They are usually accepted for what they are in Coleridge's lines telling how the Ancient Mariner, after perceiving the water-snakes' beauty, blessed them. If distrust of snakes is as old as the story in Genesis, the twentieth century added a new hazard: the risk of mentioning even harmless snakes in the presence of a Freudian, susceptible to phallic fallacy in forgetting that snakes have an actual existence. Without disparaging Freud's insights, one may need to suggest a word of caution to literary psychologists: professional psychologists would not attempt analysis without questioning the person to be analyzed. Freud's own attempts to analyze certain literary and historical figures have not won acceptance from special students. One might remember that Freud had limitations, such as a superstitious belief in numerology, and was capable of such misjudgments as espousing the Looney theory of the authorship of Shakespeare's plays.<sup>24</sup> Arnold's misgivings about the Zeitgeist are also relevant. In the age of theology it did not seem absurd to interpret Ovid's account of the pursuit of Daphne by Apollo as symbolical of the Incarnation. These remarks may serve as a preamble to the reminder that Arnold's sea-snakes have been interpreted as obvious "eroticism" and so as standing for a "tension" relating to the Marguerite of "Switzerland." Arnold thus becomes a merman in both "The Forsaken Merman" and "The Neckan."<sup>25</sup> "It is impossible not to perceive in the latter poem" ["The Forsaken Merman"] states a different author, "a metaphorical presentation of the poet's hopeless passion for the shadowy Marguerite."<sup>26</sup> Marguerite is sufficiently shadowy for me to achieve that impossibility. Fortunately, the poem is one that both children and old men may enjoy without hearing of the author's "hopeless passion."

## II

In Arnold's volume of 1853 "The Neckan" comes just before his greater and perhaps most popular poem. *Neckan* is a nonce word. *Neck*, used in German, is not listed in the *O.E.D.*, which does list *nicker* from Old English *nicor*, used in *Beowulf* for "water-monster." Arnold needed a word not connected with the usual meaning of *neck*

as part of the body, also one with more rhythmical flexibility. One instance of *necken* (with an *e*, not *a*) does appear in a review of a collection of old Swedish ballads edited by Geijer and Afzelius in the *Foreign Quarterly Review* for April 1840, in which "Necken, the Water-King" appears more than once, being descriptive, in a kind of *catalogue raisonné* of a few ballads in which mermen play a part.<sup>27</sup> Arnold may have seen this. He could also have adapted the word from German rather than Swedish, since *Necken* could be the German plural of *Neck*. I have also found *Necken* listed as a rare variant of *Neck* in one German dictionary, Gerhard Wahrig's, though it is not listed in the Grimms' *Deutsche Wörterbuch*.

Thomas Keightley, who published his *Fairy Mythology* anonymously in 1828 (republished under his own name in 1850), discusses necks and their hope for salvation, denied in oral tradition and by ministers and priests, as does Benjamin Thorpe in his *Northern Mythology*. Both point out that necks could appear in the form of horses, haunting rivers and small streams.<sup>28</sup> One may recall what H. J. Rose wrote of Poseidon, that he was always associated with water but originally may not have been a god of the ocean (see note 23). Necks were sometimes malign; their connection with human drownings reminds us of the lore behind Synge's *Riders to the Sea*. Necks of the ocean are identified with mermen.

Both "The Forsaken Merman" and "The Neckan" are, then, about mermen and both concern disparity of religious faith in the creatures of the sea and mortals of the earth, the former being humanized. Unlike the earlier poem, "The Neckan" is a literary ballad, but is similar in that most of its story develops in the words of the Neckan's song.

Shortly before the publication of *The Poetry of Matthew Arnold: A Commentary* (1940), I wrote to its authors of finding resemblances in the story of "The Neckan" in certain passages of Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* and closer resemblances in Thorpe's *Northern Mythology*. I noted similarities in that volume, corresponding to those in Grimm. The editors suggested that I write an article on the subject; this I neglected to do, at the time having in mind other projects. In their *Commentary*, they stated:

Like "The Forsaken Merman," the story may be derived from two poems in Borrow's *Romantic Ballads* ..., "The Merman" and "The Deceived Merman." The former tells of a sea-creature who wooed and won a

## THE FORSAKEN MERMAN

mortal bride, while she was attending church, and how she sank with him to the depths of the sea, but there is no mention of any desire on his part for salvation. This, however, might have been suggested by the distress of Margaret (in the second poem) over the unholy union which she had contracted. Arnold was probably acquainted with and perhaps unconsciously influenced by the theme of Fouqué's *Undine* (1811).

In the next paragraph they add that I had pointed out to them that "some of the material in the poem could have been derived" from Keightley and from Thorpe.<sup>29</sup>

A re-examination of the problem suggests modification of their statement, which may have been prepared without time for careful study. They did not distinguish between ultimate and immediate sources and, aware of the almost boundless range of the human mind, were inclined to make some statements tentative.

Keightley says of the neck: "Sometimes he is represented as sitting, of summer nights, on the surface of the water, like a pretty little boy, with golden hair hanging in ringlets, and a red cap in his hand." Elsewhere he affirms that the neck "sits on the water and plays his golden harp, the harmony of which operates in all nature."<sup>30</sup> Thorpe, who occasionally acknowledges indebtedness to Keightley but who may have phrased some passages similarly because he and his predecessor drew from a common source, writes that the neck is seen "occasionally as a handsome youth, with yellow locks flowing over his shoulders and a red cap, sitting on a summer evening on the surface of the water with a golden harp in his hand."<sup>31</sup> Arnold's poem begins:

In summer, on the headlands,  
The Baltic Sea along,  
Sits Neckan with his harp of gold,  
And sings his plaintive song.

The second stanza adds that, like the forsaken merman, the Neckan has wife and children, who are now in the water below him. A passage in both Keightley and Grimm tells how one of two boys saw a neck playing on his harp near the river and warns him that he has no hope of salvation. But when the father of the boys, the parish priest, learns of the neck's weeping, he tells them to reassure him, as they do.<sup>32</sup>

Tinker and Lowry, in the passage quoted above, explain that Borrow's translated ballad "The Merman" — as I have pointed out, the same Danish ballad was translated by others, and nothing in "The Forsaken Merman" proves indebtedness to "The Deceived Merman" by Borrow — "tells of a sea-creature who wooed and won a mortal bride, while she was attending church..." If they had included some other details, Arnold's obligations would have been more clear. In "The Merman," the merman's mother makes a horse and necessary trappings for her young son and changes him into a knight before he goes to a church where he weds his mortal bride. Arnold's fifth stanza begins:

Sings how, a knight, he wander'd  
By castle, field, and town.

A continuation of the song tells of the Neckan's bridal and of the priest's question regarding his identity:

—'I am no knight,' he answered:  
'From the sea-waves I come.'—  
The knights drew sword, the ladies scream'd,  
The surpliced priest stood dumb.

The effect of the pretended knight's approach to the church in the ballad-translation is equally startling:

When in he walk'd with his plume on high,  
The dead men gave from their tombs a sigh:

The priest heard that, and he clos'd his book:  
"Methinks yon knight has a strange wild look."<sup>33</sup>

After the maiden accepts him, she is led to a boat, which soon sinks beneath the waves. The knight, the wedding, and the effect on the priest are details that Arnold apparently adapted from the ballad, though not necessarily from Borrow's translation.

In the first version of "The Neckan" the priest speaks thus:

—'Why sitt'st thou there, O Neckan,  
And play'st thy harp of gold,  
Sooner shall this my staff bear leaves,  
Than thou shalt Heaven behold.'—

Like other commentators, Tinker and Lowry failed to perceive that what the priest says here belongs to the Tannhäuser story; they assumed that only the part added to the final version of the poem (1869), the budding of the staff, is connected with the story. They were, therefore, mistaken in suggesting that Swinburne's "Laus Veneris" (in *Poems and Ballads*, 1866) could have supplied knowledge of the story, and Wagner's opera was not familiar in the earlier date.<sup>34</sup> Arnold could have found the story in a ballad in Arnim and Brentano's *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* or in an adaptation of another old German ballad, "Venus and the Christian Knight" by Richard Monckton Milnes.<sup>35</sup> A passage in Grimm's *Deutsche Mythologie* also tells the story.<sup>36</sup> Theoretically, then, Arnold could have found all his source material in Grimm and a translation of a Danish ballad or, if he was already acquainted with the story of Tannhäuser, in Keightley's *Fairy Mythology* and the same ballad. But one must also consider a passage in Thorpe's *Northern Mythology* that tells how a priest encountered a young man sitting on the surface of the water and playing a stringed instrument:

He saw that it was the Neck, and in his zeal addressed him thus:—"Why dost thou so joyously strike thy harp? Sooner shall this dried cane that I hold in my hand grow green and flower, than thou shalt obtain salvation." Thereupon the unhappy musician cast down his harp, and sat bitterly weeping on the water. The priest then turned his horse, and continued his course. But lo! before he had ridden far, he observed that green shoots and leaves, mingled with beautiful flowers, had sprung from his old staff.<sup>37</sup>

The priest returned to tell the news, as in the passage in Keightley the boys were instructed to do by the priest, their father. The added element is that relating to the Tannhäuser story. On the principle of William of Ockham, that one should not unnecessarily multiply entities, one must decide that, though Arnold could have been familiar with other works mentioned, Thorpe's *Northern Mythology* and a translation of the Danish ballad, whether by Borrow, Lewis, Jamieson, or others (Arnold could also have had access to a German translation<sup>38</sup>), were the likely sources of "The Neckan."

In the 1869 version of the poem, its final form, Arnold completed the incident from the Tannhäuser story, telling how the staff budded. His reason for doing so is obvious. The story told in the old ballad of Tannhäuser not only involved the union of a mortal and a supernatu-

ral being, like "The Neckan" and "The Forsaken Merman," but also was, like the former, an illustration of the wrong done by priests' harsh judgments (in the old German ballad the priest is also a pope).

The last stanza of a literary ballad may, often with slight variations, repeat the first. A familiar example is Carroll's "Jabberwocky," parodying the ballad style. Another example is Keats's "*La Belle Dame sans Merci*," in which the "lady in the meads" is an enchantress like the Venus in the Tannahäuser story. Arnold's only change in his final stanza adds a letter, "this" replacing "his." As his poems and prose indicate, Arnold knew the value of repetition. In spite of the budding of the staff, the Neckan's song remains plaintive (this is a change from the source), for now he weeps at the unkindness of Christian souls, who, better than those outside the Christian pale, should know the value of what in his noble praise of the virtue St. Paul calls "charity" (in the King James Bible, I. Cor. 13).

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> George W. E. Russell ed., *The Letters of Matthew Arnold* (New York, 1896), 2: 151.

<sup>2</sup> Hugh Kingsmill, *Matthew Arnold* (New York, 1928), opposite p. 58.

<sup>3</sup> Lately Thomas, *Sam Ward: "King of the Lobby"* (Boston, 1965), p. 65.

<sup>4</sup> Charles R. Moyer's dissertation "Matthew Arnold and His Father" (University of Kansas, 1959) treats this subject sympathetically.

<sup>5</sup> Kingsmill, p. 147.

<sup>6</sup> Kingsmill, p. 147.

<sup>7</sup> *Ten Studies in the Poetry of Matthew Arnold* (Durham, N. C., 1958), pp. 58-84. See also "Matthew Arnold's Original Version of 'The River'," *TLS*, 28 March 1958, p. 172.

<sup>8</sup> Kingsmill, p. 84.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Daniel Grotta-Kurska's *J. R. R. Tolkien: Architect of Middle Earth* (Philadelphia, 1976), p. 82.

<sup>10</sup> H. W. Garrod, *Poetry and the Criticism of Life* (London, 1931), p. 35.

<sup>11</sup> Garrod, p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> "The Source of Arnold's 'Forsaken Merman,'" *MLR*, 13 (1918), 90-94.

<sup>13</sup> The passage translated by Borrow also appeared in J. M. Thiele's *Danmarks Folkesagn* (Copenhagen, 1843), 2: 259-61, cited here because the earlier edition was inaccessible. Borrow's translation, according to Wright, appeared in the *Universal Review*, 2 (1825), 563-64. For Benjamin Thorpe's translation of the same passage, see no. 15 below.

<sup>14</sup> *George Borrow and His Circle* (Boston and New York, 1913), pp. 109-10.

<sup>15</sup> Benjamin Thorpe, *Northern Mythology* (London, 1851), 2: 171.

<sup>16</sup> *Studies in Victorian Literature* (New York, 1923), p. 112.

<sup>17</sup> Baum, *Ten Studies*, p. 86. Cook and Tinker (p. 59), however, believed that the woman addressed was "a lay figure," neither his bride nor Marguerite.

<sup>18</sup> For discussion of variants of "Agnes and the Merman," the Danish ballad, see Francis James Child, *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (Boston, 1882), 1: 364 ff.

<sup>19</sup> From a translation by Myra E. Hull in "The Merman Lover in Ballad and Song," *Studies in English* [University of Kansas Humanistic Studies, 6, No. 4] (Lawrence, 1940), pp. 65-80. Miss Hull's essay, which includes translations of other ballads, touched upon "The Forsaken Merman," but she was unaware of Wright's article on its source.

<sup>20</sup> Lewis, *Tales of Terror and Wonder* (London, 1887), pp. 153-54. In Book 2, Canto 12, stanza 24 of *The Faerie Queene* Spenser introduces "a grisly Wasserman."

<sup>21</sup> Lewis, p. 164.

<sup>22</sup> Jamieson's *Popular Ballads and Songs* (Edinburgh, 1806), 1: 214.

<sup>23</sup> *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (New York, 1959), p. 63.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Looney's *Shakespeare Identified*, by one of life's little ironies, illustrates as nice a correspondence between author's name and theme as does *The Imperial Animal* by Lionel Tiger and Robin Fox.

<sup>25</sup> Howard W. Fulweiler's "The Metamorphosis of a Merman," *VP*, 1 (1963), 208-22, connecting "The Neckan" also with its author, arrives at the assumption that "the man from the sea must attempt to live on the land (could we say the sensitive Victorian intellectual must find his salvation in the crude society of Philistia?)" (p. 214). A brief rejoinder by Kenneth Allott, *ibid.*, 2 (winter, 1964), 60-63, mentions my earlier suggestion regarding the source of "The Neckan" as recorded in Tinker and Lowry (cf. n. 29).

<sup>26</sup> E. D. H. Johnson, *The Alien Vision of Victorian Poetry* (Princeton, 1952), p. 161.

<sup>27</sup> *Foreign Quarterly Review*, 15 (1840), 18.

<sup>28</sup> Keightley, 1: 235; Thorpe, *Northern Mythology*, 2: 21.

<sup>29</sup> Tinker and Lowry, pp. 127-28. Their mention of Margaret (instead of Agnes) "in the second poem" is an oversight; no relation of that ballad to "The Neckan" seems likely.

<sup>30</sup> Keightley, 1: 235, 236.

<sup>31</sup> Thorpe, 2: 78.

<sup>32</sup> Keightley, 1: 236-37. A similar passage appears in Stallybrass' translation of Grimm's *Teutonic Mythology* (London, 1883), 2: 493-94.

<sup>33</sup> For "The Merman," see George Borrow, *Romantic Ballads* (Norwich, 1913, reprinted from the 1826 edition), pp. 117-18.

<sup>34</sup> Henry T. Finck, *Wagner and His Works* (New York, 1898), 1: 454-55.

<sup>35</sup> Richard Monckton Milnes, *Poems, Legendary and Historical* (London, 1844), pp. 24-28. Though it does not consider Arnold's poem, my "Swinburne's *Laus Veneris* and the Tannhäuser Legend," *PMLA*, 45 (1930), 1202-13 treats of several earlier and later versions of the story.

<sup>36</sup> Tinker and Lowry, p. 128. The story of Tannhäuser also appears as No. 171 in the Grimms' *Deutsche Sagen* (1816, 1818).

<sup>37</sup> Thorpe, 2: 80.

<sup>38</sup> One appears, for instance, in Wilhelm Grimm's *Alddänische Heldenlieder, Balladen und Märchen* (Heidelberg, 1811), pp. 403-04. According to the *D. N. B.*, Thomas Arnold was especially fond of ballads; his son may have been able to consult more than one collection.