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**Matthew Arnold's *Sohrab and Rostum: An Episode*
Imperialist and Exoticist Orientalism at Work**

Master's Thesis in Literacy Studies



Statue of *Rostam and Sohrab* by Mohammad Hossein Mamourian

Venue: Ferdowsi's Tomb in Tous, Iran

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Abstract

Matthew Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum: An Episode* (1853) is perhaps the most famous adaptation of Abolqasem Ferdowsi's Persian epic *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings). It retells the story of Sohrab, the Tartar hero, who fights Rustum, the Persian chieftain, in single combat, not knowing that he is truly his father. Rustum who does not believe he has ever had a son mortally wounds Sohrab in the battle and the tragedy ends with Sohrab's death on the banks of the Oxus.

Arnold creates two different worlds to depict the rivalry between the father and son. Sohrab comes from the East where almost everything implies darkness, discord, and backwardness. Colors in the East are either black, grey, or white. The country is nameless, the architecture is primitive, and the water from the rivers is full of salt. On the other hand, the west, which is paradoxically a part of the Orient at the same time, is full of colors, has an established history, a modern army, and impressive architecture. All these binary opposites portray a distinction between the East and West, which is also reflected in the contemporary geopolitics of the Victorian era in a parallel setting.

The opposition is not limited to imagined geographies, colors, and architecture. There is a confrontation between masculinity and femininity as well which is represented by and through the protagonists. Gender roles, however, are not exclusively assigned to human characters alone. Animals, plants, and inanimate objects also have masculine/feminine attributes at times.

This research intends to explore the binary opposites concerning the East/West and masculine/feminine dichotomies, and find out the scope and nature of imperialist versus exoticist Orientalism employed by Arnold in his poem. Close readings of similes and relevant excerpts from the poem, in addition to engagement with critical sources pertaining to Orientalism and Victorian art and literature form the basic methodology of this endeavor.

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1. Introduction

Matthew Arnold (1822-1888) was an English poet and cultural and literary critic of the Victorian era. He is often remembered as the third greatest poet of his generation, behind Alfred Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning.¹ He began his career as a poet when he was still a 16-year-old student and established his reputation with his third volume of poetry published in 1853, titled as *Poems: A New Edition*. This collection “contained two new poems which have been widely known and liked ever since, *Sohrab and Rustum* and *The Scholar Gipsy*.”² In 1857 he was offered a position, which he accepted and held until 1867, as Professor of Poetry at Oxford.³ Arnold was a talented poet but at the height of his career he decided to quit poetry and turned to writing literary and cultural criticism instead. A synopsis of his *Sohrab and Rustum: An Episode* is as follows:

The poem is an account of Sohrab’s search for his father, who disappeared years earlier. A warrior for the Tartars, Sohrab engages in battle with Persian forces. Not realizing that Rustum, the Persian chieftain, is his father, Sohrab challenges the older man in single combat. Only when the young warrior lies mortally wounded from Rustum’s spear does he talk of his birth. It is then that father and son realize their relationship. Grief-stricken, Rustum promises to give Sohrab’s body a royal burial.⁴

The poem retells a popular episode from Ferdowsi’s Persian epic *Shahnameh* (“Book of Kings” in Persian) and in order to better understand the background upon which Arnold composed his poem, the following questions form a point of departure:

1. Who was Ferdowsi and what is the *Shahnameh* all about?
2. What sources did Arnold use to tell his version of the story?
3. How different is Arnold’s rendition from the original Persian text?

¹ Extracted from the entry on Matthew Arnold in newworldencyclopedia.org

² Extracted from the entry on Matthew Arnold in poetryfoundation.org

³ Extracted from the entry on Matthew Arnold in poets.org

⁴ *Encyclopedia Britannica*. revised and updated by Kathleen Kuiper

1.1 Ferdowsi and the *Shahnameh*

Abolqasem Ferdowsi was born around 935 near the city of Tus in northeastern Iran and died in the same city between 1020 and 1026. *Encyclopedia Britannica* says, “the Persians regard Ferdowsi as the greatest of their poets,” which can be true only if Persian *epic* poetry is taken into account; there are in fact many other Iranian poets who are world famous for other forms of poetry such as Khayyam, Rumi, Hafiz, Sadi, etc. Under the same entry in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, the *Shahnameh* is also briefly introduced. “Though written some 1000 years ago, this work is as intelligible to the average modern Iranian as the King James Version of the Bible is to a modern English speaker.” It took Ferdowsi more than 30 years to compose the *Shahnameh*⁵, an epic poem of nearly 50,000 rhyming couplets. Under an independent entry⁶ in *Britannica* we read, “(t)he *Shahnameh* is ... mainly based on the *Khvatay-namak*, a history of the kings of Persia in Pahlavi (Middle Persian) from mythical times down to the 7th century. Ferdowsi versified and updated the story to the downfall of the Sasanian empire (mid-7th century).”

The key protagonist of the *Shahnameh* is Rostam (or “Rustum” as transcribed by Arnold). Rostam is a legendary Iranian hero and faithful supporter of several mythological kings of Persia and his life and herculean labors, from birth to death, are thoroughly depicted by Ferdowsi. Stories of Rostam cover about half the length of the *Shahnameh* and his tragic encounter with his son, Sohrab, is perhaps the most popular episode of Ferdowsi’s epic poem among Persian speakers around the world.

1.2 Sources of *Sohrab and Rostum*

Arnold is believed not to have been able to read Persian. “(W)ith very few exceptions, the translators and imitators (of Persian literature) were acquainted with Persian language,” says Hasan Javadi and adds, “Matthew Arnold is one of these exceptions.”⁷ John D. Yohannan⁸ asserts that, “Arnold had no knowledge of the Persian original.” Reza Taher-Kermani⁹ also says, “Arnold ...

⁵ It was completed in 1010.

⁶ *Encyclopedia Britannica*. *Shahnameh*, work by Ferdowsi

⁷ *Persian Literary Influence on English Literature*, Mazda Publishers, 2005. pp. xi and xii

⁸ *Encyclopedia Iranica*. English ii. Persian Influences in English and American Literature. Originally published: December 31st, 1998

⁹ *The Review of English Studies*. Volume 69, Issue 289, April 2018 “Why the Oxus? On the Majestic River of Arnold’s *Sohrab and Rostum*” (page 3)

could not read the episode in its original Persian,” and Isabelle Gadoin¹⁰ adds emphatically that, “(n)o source ever attested that he was able to read Persian at all—let alone *tenth century* Persian!”

Gadoin’s emphasis sounds rather overdramatized, however, since the *Shahnameh*, as we already read in the extract from *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “is as intelligible to the average modern Iranian as the King James Version of the Bible is to a modern English speaker.” But she is perfectly correct that “no source ever attested” that Arnold could read Persian.

Yohannan briefly introduces Arnold’s sources for his *Sohrab and Rustum* as follows: “Arnold had no knowledge of the Persian original, but he had read a synopsis (not entirely accurate) of the episode in Sir John Malcolm’s *History of Persia*. Later Arnold came upon a detailed review by the critic St. Beuve of Jules Mohl’s ongoing French translation of the Persian epic.”¹¹

Parvin Loloi¹² adds that, “some critics have argued that Arnold was also familiar with Atkinson’s version of the story.”

Malcolm’s synopsis was “a thirty-line summary of the *Sohrab and Rustum* episode,” reprinted in Gadoin’s article and “not entirely accurate” as Yohannan describes it¹³. Mohl’s translation was in French prose and was published in seven volumes between 1838 and 1878. The last volume was actually published posthumously, and St. Beuve’s detailed review of the ongoing translation published in *Le Constitutinnel* in Paris on February 11, 1850¹⁴ must have been a more accessible source to Arnold. Taher-Kermani says, “Sainte-Beuve’s essay contains two synopses from Ferdowsi’s oeuvre: the first is the story of ‘Iraj,’ ... and the second is ‘Sohrab’” He continues his comment about St. Beuve’s synopsis of the story of Sohrab and says, “his account of the latter [Sohrab] is elaborate: so extensive that Arnold thought he could translate it into English without needing to have access to Mohl’s rendition.”¹⁵ The last source might have been James

¹⁰ *Geographies of Contact*. Chapter V. Jules Mohl: A Missing Link in the Complex Network of Nineteenth-Century Orientalism. (pp. 183-197) January 2017

¹¹ *Encyclopedia Iranica*. English ii. Persian Influences in English and American Literature. Originally published: December 31st, 1998

¹² *Encyclopedia Iranica*. *Shahnameh* Translations iii. into English. Online Edition, 2014.

¹³ An example for this “inaccuracy” is discussed in chapter three concerning the claims about Sohrab’s illegitimacy.

¹⁴ Loloi, Parvin. *Encyclopedia Iranica*. *Shahnameh* Translations iii. into English. Online Edition, 2014.

¹⁵ *The Review of English Studies*. Volume 69, Issue 289, April 2018 “Why the Oxus? On the Majestic River of Arnold’s *Sohrab and Rustum*” (page 3)

Atkinson's *Shahnameh*, which was an abridged version of Ferdowsi's work translated into English prose and verse and published in a single volume in 1832.

1.3 Discrepancies Between Arnold's Rendition and Ferdowsi's Tale of Sohrab

Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* cannot be considered as a mere translation of Ferdowsi's story. As Taher-Kermani explains in his article,¹⁶

Had Arnold wanted, he could have taken Mohl's French prose version from Sainte-Beuve's article, and translated it into English verse. But Arnold does not produce a second-hand version of 'Sohrab;' he instead writes a poem about Rostam and Sohrab in which the scaffolding of the action, the plot, and the characters are mostly the same as Ferdowsi's poem, but in which the spirit and mode of treatment are his own. (page 30)

He highlights certain similarities and differences in form and content between Arnold's and Ferdowsi's "Sohrab" in his article, some of which could be due to St. Beuve's interpretation of Mohl's translation and some were purely Arnold's invention. In general, he clarifies that Arnold's adaptation of 892 lines is shorter than the original story. It mainly covers the battle scene and Sohrab's death with brief flashbacks to Rustum's marriage whereas the original tale begins with details about how Rustum got to know his wife, Princess Tahmineh, in the first place and ends with her sad death in less than a year after losing her dear son, Sohrab.

The most prominent difference to Persian speakers, however, is the title of Arnold's rendition. In the *Shahnameh* the story is titled the "Tale of Sohrab" and in Persian oral tradition it is invariably referred to as "Rostam and Sohrab." Even in most translations or adaptations into other languages, whether films, music, animations, poetry or prose, the same order is preserved in the title of the tale. But there are at least two English renditions in which the order of the names is reversed: Matthew Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*, and Jerome W. Clinton's *The Tragedy of Sohrab and Rustum* (first published in 1987). Although Arnold apparently did not have access to the original Persian story, Ferdowsi himself reversed this collocational title in the introduction to the battle scene and said, "Now listen to the [story of the) battle between Sohrab and Rostam,"

¹⁶ Taher-Kermani, Reza. (2015) *Persia by Way of Paris: On Arnold's Sohrab and Rustum*, Middle Eastern Literatures, 18:1, 22-40

which is perfectly justifiable due to the metric requirements of Persian poetry. In his translation, Mohl adhered to the traditional collocation and titled the battle scene “Combat de Rustem contre Sohrab,” hence preserving the common order preferred by Persian oral tradition. But he translated Ferdowsi’s introductory line as faithfully as possible and literally retained the exact order of words used by the Iranian poet, “Ecoute maintenant le combat de Sohrab contre Rustem.”¹⁷ Whether it was Arnold’s exposure to this detail in Mohl’s faithful translation or his own preference to reverse the popular Persian title, the outcome put Sohrab in limelight which seemed to match the graveness of the young hero’s fate and could have been probably more resonant to Arnold’s contemporary English readers who were acquainted with “the tragic fate of young heroes” who “died in Central Asia in the 1840s, and were subsequently honored in Britain as young martyrs of the empire,”¹⁸—those British officers died at the very same setting where Arnold’s story took place.

Arnold Orientalized his Homeric (and Miltonic) adaptation by adding details such as place names that at times had no equivalent in Ferdowsi’s tale of Sohrab and might have been taken from Alexander Burne’s *Travels into Bokhara; being the account of a journey from India to Cabool* (1834). Taher-Kermani adds that, “the sequence in which his [Arnold’s] characters come into play is entirely different from that of Ferdowsi or indeed of Sainte-Beuve.” (Persia by Way of Paris, page 31) Rostam and Sohrab fight three times in three days in the *Shahnameh* but St. Beuve reduces this period to two days and in Arnold’s rendition everything occurs in only one day, from dawn to dusk.

Perhaps the most important character missing in Arnold’s *Sohrab and Rustum* is Gordafarid, the Iranian heroine, whose role in the story will be briefly discussed in chapter three. Hasan Javadi also names two other characters from the original Persian story whose absence intensifies the prevalent fatalism in Arnold’s adaptation: Zendah Razm and Hajir who are the only people that could identify Rustum to Sohrab.¹⁹ On the other hand, Arnold adds two characters to the story from upcoming parts of the *Shahnameh*. Peran-Wisa, the able minister of Afrasiab, the mythical king of Turan and the main antagonist of the *Shahnameh* “does not make his appearance in the

¹⁷ von Mohl, Julius. *Lives des Rois*. (1838-1878) Paris

¹⁸ Taher-Kermani, Reza. *The Review of English Studies*. Volume 69, Issue 289, April 2018 “Why the Oxus? On the Majestic River of Arnold’s *Sohrab and Rustum*” (page 8)

¹⁹ *Persian Literary Influence on English Literature*, Mazda Publishers, 2005. pp. xi and xii

Shahnameh until many years after the time of Sohrab’s death.”²⁰ (note 125, page 103) In spite of this, he plays a distinct role as a major advisor to Sohrab in Arnold’s adaptation. Another example of character anachronism is the role Ferood plays as the commander of the Iranian army whereas in the original text Shah Kai Kaus commands the army in person and Ferood’s father, the crown prince Siavush “does not appear to have been born until after the death of Sohrab.” (note 170, page 112)

Finally, Arnold uses blank verse to create his version of the story whereas in the original Persian text each line comprises two distinct rhyming halves of 11 syllables each. The following excerpt from Dick Davis’s translation of the *Shahnameh* (2006) into English verse can represent the original rhyme and rhythm of Ferdowsi’s poem to a decent degree. The original Persian lines are also included to provide a visual basis for comparison at least. (The Persian text is from Khaleghi-Motlagh’s edition of the *Shahnameh*, 2nd volume.)²¹

کنون گر تو در آب ماهی شوی

وگر چون شب اندر سیاهی شوی

وگر چون ستاره شوی بر سیهر

ببری ز روی زمین پاک مهر

بخواهد هم از تو پدر کین من

چو ببند که خاکست بالین من

And you could be a fish within the sea,
 Or pitch black, lost in night’s obscurity,
 Or be a star in heaven’s endless space,
 Or vanish from the earth and leave no trace
 But still my father, when he knows I’m dead,
 Will bring down condign vengeance on your head.

²⁰ *Sohrab and Rostum* published by Werner School Book Company in 1896 and annotated by Merwin Marie Snell

²¹ The excerpts are both taken from Taher-Kermani’s “Persia by Way of Paris” (page 36)

Davis uses the classical iambic pentameter in his rendition whereas Ferdowsi used an additional feminine ending too. (End rhymes in both texts are underlined.)

Despite all these differences in form and content between Arnold's adaptation and Ferdowsi's story, Arnold manages to convey the quick pace, liveliness, tragic sense, as well as the simplicity of diction as in the original text. This is why many Iranian scholars agree that "*Sohrab and Rustum* by Matthew Arnold ... is the best-known adaptation of the *Shahnameh*."²²

1.4 Research Process

1.4.1 Preliminary Steps

Being a Persian native speaker, I could not help finding Arnold's adaptation of exceptional interest. On my quest to find an appropriate topic for my master's thesis I had already read critical reviews of *Sohrab and Rustum* which fluctuated between highly appreciative tributes and bitter criticism and initially a comparative study of Arnold's rendition and the original Persian source sounded exciting since it could help shed light on the nature of such diverse treatments. An example of high praise for *Sohrab and Rustum* is found in R. H. Stoddard's review published in June 1888.²³

To those who can read the recital of heroic actions without emotion it is nought; but to those who are capable of being moved with feeling and passion—the pathetic and tragic elements of life—it is the noblest poem in the world. It fulfills the old definition of tragedy, in that it awakens pity and terror, and it fulfills the highest definition of poetry, in that it is admirably planned, orderly in its development, transparently clear and vividly picturesque, manly, majestic, dignified, and more than all, vital with human interest. Written in the grand style of Homer, there is a distinction in it which no other English narrative poem possesses. (page 661)

On the other hand, Professor W. C. Wilkinson bitterly attacked Arnold and his poem in the very same journal some 20 years later.²⁴

²² Loloi, Parvin. *Encyclopedia Iranica*. *Shahnameh Translations* iii. into English. Online Edition, 2014.

²³ *The North American Review*. Vol. 146, No. 379, Matthew Arnold as a Poet. p.p. 657-662

²⁴ *The North American Review*. Vol. 188, No. 636, Matthew Arnold as Poet: Tried by his *Sohrab and Rustum*. Pp. 666-681

The conditions, then, that might have made the “fable” of *Sohrab and Rustum* suitable for a fine poem did not exist, and Arnold must be pronounced unfortunate in his choice of theme. “Unfortunate,” I say, but in critical strictness I ought to say, unwise, ill-judging; wrong choice of subject is part of the demerit of a poet considered as artist.

But now let us suppose that the Amphictyonic Council required Arnold to write a poem on this ineligible subject, and let us proceed to consider how he performed his compulsory task. Did he manage his subject well or ill? I am compelled to say that, in my opinion, he managed it ill—in some important respects surprisingly ill. (page 668)

How could a poem receive such extreme reviews? Soon I found that my knowledge of English and direct access to the original Persian source of Arnold’s poem would not guarantee a fair comparative study, and knowledge of French was a prerequisite to be able to trace the roots of Arnold’s adaptation in St. Beuve’s French review of Mohl’s translation of the *Shahnameh* into French. And I knew no French. Moreover, comparative studies of this nature and scope had already been carried out quite in detail.²⁵

So, I thought of studying the mythological basis for Rustum’s act of filicide instead, which at first glance looked exclusive to Persian culture and in stark contrast to the presumably (I conjectured) western act of patricide, depicted most famously in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, but again soon I found that St. Beuve had already spoken of “western counterparts of ‘Sohrab,’ Ossian’s poem *Carthon* and Voltaire’s *Henriade*,”²⁶ in which the father killed the son. Furthermore, this mythological venture would better fit into the realm of comparative cultural studies and did not directly belong to the domain of English literature.

Finally, I came across the geopolitical context of the rivalries between the British and Russian empires in Central Asia during the 18th and 19th centuries and eventually—and correctly—I was

²⁵ Hasan Javadi has dedicated the first section of the fifth chapter of his book to Arnold’s poem: *Persian Literary Influence on English Literature: With Special Reference to the Nineteenth Century*. (Mazda Publishers. Originally published in 1983.) Reza Taher-Kermani has also dedicated a full chapter (chapter three) of his book, *The Persian Presence in Victorian Poetry* (Edinburgh University Press, 2019), to the complex process by which Arnold indirectly translated Ferdowsi’s tale of Sohrab into English and provides a comparative reading of the Persian and the English poem as well.

²⁶ Taher-Kermani, Reza. (2015) *Persia by Way of Paris: On Arnold’s Sohrab and Rustum*, *Middle Eastern Literatures*, 18:1, 22-40

guided by my kind supervisor to direct my focus on the Orientalist aspects of Arnold's poem in that framework.

1.4.2 Critical Questions

In order to analyze Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* within the framework of Orientalism, it was essential to first find the answers to the following questions:

1. What is Orientalism?
2. Was Arnold an Orientalist?
3. Is *Sohrab and Rustum* an Orientalist poem? If so, to what extent?

1.5 Orientalism

Valerie Kennedy²⁷ refers to Edward Said to define Orientalism.

As Said says in his introduction to *Orientalism*, Orientalism can mean many different things. He specifies three main meanings: the academic study of the Orient, "a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident,' and finally, beginning in the late 18th century, a "corporate institution for dealing with the Orient," that is, "dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it," and so on. (page 2)

Elaborating on this "style of thought" and its prevalence in the Victorian era Kennedy explains that "(g)enerally, three versions of Orientalism dominate in Victorian literature: exoticist Orientalism, imperialist Orientalism, and Orientalism used as part of a critical perspective on Victorian society itself." (page 3) Later in the same article, Kennedy refers to Chris Bongie²⁸ and differentiates between exoticist and imperialist Orientalism, taking the word *exoticism* as "effectively a synonym for Orientalism." (page 9) She explains that "(i)mperialist exoticism 'affirms the hegemony of modern civilization over less developed, savage territories,' while exoticizing exoticism 'privileges those very territories and their peoples, figuring them as a possible refuge from an overbearing modernity.'"

²⁷ *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*. "Orientalism in the Victorian Era" Online Publication Date: August 2017

²⁸ *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siecle*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991

As for the first meaning of Orientalism defined by Said, the present research is not concerned with the academic study of the Orient; anthropology, sociology, historiography, and philology are beyond the scope of this thesis.

But the second and third meanings of Orientalism construct the main focus of this study, that is, the Orientalist style of thought which draws a distinction between the Orient and the Occident, and the power relations by which the West dominates or exerts authority over the East. The intention is to find out whether it is more the imperialist Orientalism or exoticist Orientalism that governs Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*. Does his poem “affirm the hegemony of modern civilization” over the Orient, or does he find the Orient “a possible refuge from an overbearing modernity”? And finally, does he critique the Victorian society through his poem?

1.6 Was Arnold an Orientalist?

Isabelle Gadoin believes that “(f)or all his talents, Matthew Arnold could in no way qualify as an ‘Orientalist,’ not even in the broader sense of the term.”²⁹ As for the academic study of the Orient, Gadoin is right; Arnold was not engaged in the scientific study of the Orient. But along with Tennyson and Fitzgerald, Kennedy³⁰ asserts, a good many of Arnold’s poems too, “are characterized by exoticizing exoticism (which I shall call exoticizing Orientalism), that is, the use of Oriental themes and settings as images of an alternative to or an escape from a rapidly evading capitalist society.” She also talks about “the nostalgia for lost Oriental glory and heroism present in poets like Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold.” (page 9)

Commenting on Fitzgerald and his *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* in the same article, Kennedy mentions the “common Victorian Orientalist tendency to relegate positive images of the Orient to the past” and traces of this tendency can be seen in Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* as well. Kennedy continues with her comments about Fitzgerald’s translation/adaptation of *Rubaiyat* and says, “the Orientalist theme of past glory is represented through famous historical and mythical Persian figures.” (page 10) Likewise, Arnold’s adaptation of the tale of Sohrab represents the “nostalgia for lost oriental glory and heroism” through the “mythical Persian figures” of Sohrab,

²⁹ *Geographies of Contact*. Chapter V. Jules Mohl: A Missing Link in the Complex Network of Nineteenth-Century Orientalism. (pp. 183-197) January 2017

³⁰ *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*. “Orientalism in the Victorian Era” Online Publication Date: August 2017

Rustum, and their accompanying cast of characters. Therefore, although Arnold is not considered as an Orientalist, Oriental themes and settings are found in some of his poems.

Kennedy believes that Arnold did not limit himself to Oriental themes and refers to Javadi's *Persian Literary Influence on English Literature* (1983) to clarify her point. "(A)s Hasan Javadi says, Arnold's Orientalism was part of a broader 'cultur[al] cosmopolitanism,' encompassing 'Greek, Roman, and Oriental antiquity.'" (page 13) Part of this cosmopolitanism can be seen in Arnold's Homeric treatment of Oriental heroes in *Sohrab and Rustum*. Kennedy continues by highlighting traces of Orientalism in Arnold's poems to prove his affinity with the trend. She lists the following poems and briefly analyzes them.

1. Inspired by Julia Pardoe's *The City of the Sultan* (1838)
2. *Mycerinus* (1849)
3. *The Strayed Reveller* (1849)
4. *Constantinople* (1839)
5. *Land of the East* (1838)
6. *The World and the Quietest* (1849)
7. *A Southern Night* (1861)
8. *Obermann Once More* (1867)
9. *The Sick King in Bokhara* (1849)

The Orientalist elements that Kennedy discovers are at times "little more than an exotic and incidental stage setting" as in poems 1, 2, and 3, and sometimes evoke "the idea of 'glories gone,'" as in poems 4 and 5. In poems 6, 7, and 8 "(e)astern wisdom and detachment become part of Arnold's criticism of contemporary English—and by extension Western—society." And the last poem on the list "suggests an equivocal attitude toward the East." (pages 13 and 14)

1.7 Is *Sohrab and Rustum* an Orientalist Poem?

Kennedy labels *Sohrab and Rustum* as "Arnold's most significant Orientalist poem" and through a brief analysis provides three examples for the elements of Orientalism in this particular poem; first "the negative Orientalist stereotype" of "Tartar boys" who are "false, wily, [and] boastful," second "the poem's superfluity of epic similes, which Arnold declared that he 'took a great deal

of trouble to Orientalize' to make them appropriate," and third the "Orientalist allusion" to the Persepolis "that adds to the overall theme of past glory."³¹ (page 15)

Based upon the definitions for exoticist and imperialist Orientalism, I would endeavor to explore how Arnold constructed the Oriental scaffolding of his poem and in what way the elements of geography, color, architecture, and gender (incorporated into the human characters, animals, plants, and inanimate objects) contribute to the overall Orientalist attitude of the poem toward the East. Close readings of major similes and relevant excerpts from Arnold's adaptation, in addition to engagement with secondary sources about art and literature in the Victorian era, will form the foundation upon which the nature and scope of his Orientalism shall be explored in this research paper. The excerpts from the poem may not always be directly related to the topic under discussion, but they are deemed to be indispensable in clarifying the context in which relevant themes are investigated. Finally, this research process will hopefully pave the way for a comparative study of Arnold's two other works that directly deal with Persian themes, *The Sick King in Bokhara* and *A Persian Passion Play*, which, strangely enough, both pertain to killing, murder, and execution just like *Sohrab and Rustum*.

³¹ *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*. "Orientalism in the Victorian Era" Online Publication Date: August 2017

2. *Sohrab and Rustum*: Orientalism at Work

Sohrab and Rustum is perhaps one of Arnold's most pictorial Orientalist poems where visual imagery not only exoticizes the atmosphere but also helps foreground "the basic distinction between East and West," hence highlighting "the Orientalist style of thought" that Edward Said introduced in his *Orientalism* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1978).

To elaborate on Orientalism L. Koefoed and Michael Haldrup³² explain that it is "a style of thought that produced the image of the Orient as a threatening, inferior, and underdeveloped 'other' as compared to the Western powers." They also refer to "the concept of imaginative geography" introduced by Said which basically "works by producing contradictions between the East and West."

The present chapter aims at exploring how Arnold develops this imaginative geography of the Orient by verbal description of the boundary between the East and West, and how he represents Iran as an *imaginative* Western power within the Orient to highlight the opposing binaries between the Orient and Occident. The binaries are then perused through close readings of the parts of the poem where different tints and hues paint a colorful world in the West and allocate only shades of black, grey, and white to the East. Finally, representations of Eastern and Western architectures are studied to complete the list of binaries in this chapter. Although masculinity and femininity also form significant binary opposites, they are saved for the next chapter since the mere number of close readings concerning the gender issue deserves an independent study.

2.1 An Imaginative Geography

Sohrab and Rustum, the protagonists of Arnold's epic poem, come from two different worlds.

"One from the east, one from the west;" (line 474)

Sohrab is from the East, from a mythical land called Turan in the original Persian text whose inhabitants are referred to as Tartars by Arnold. Rustum, on the other hand, comes from the West, from Iran, and Arnold uses the historical name "Persians" to refer to the inhabitants of ancient Iran.

³² "Orientalism," *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (Second Edition), 2020

2.1.1 Iran and Turan

Iran and Turan were traditional enemies in mythological times, but the precise geography and location of Turan is unknown. Through references in Iranian mythology, however, it can be inferred that the Oxus separated Turanians from Iranians and their territory might have roughly corresponded to the present-day Central Asia. Arnold refers to several Turanian cities, rivers, mountains, deserts, regions, ethnicities, and tribes but curiously, he does not mention the name of this mythical land, Turan, even once. Instead, he prefers to refer to this *imagined geography* by the name of her inhabitants, the Tartars. But who are Tartars?

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*,

The name Tatar first appeared among nomadic tribes living in northeastern Mongolia ... from the 5th century CE. (...) After various groups of these Turkic nomads became part of the armies of the Mongol conqueror Genghis Khan in the early 13th century, a fusion of Mongol and Turkic elements took place, and the Mongol invaders of Russia and Hungary became known to Europeans as Tatars (or Tartars).

Moreover, oxfordreference.com elaborates on the term and introduces Tartars as “(a) number of Central Asian peoples who, over the centuries, were a threat to civilized peoples in Asia and Europe. (...) Papal envoys (c. 1250) to the Mongols consistently called them Tartars, probably by association with Tartarus, the place of punishment in the underworld of Greek mythology.”

So, Arnold somehow saved the mythological geography of the land in which Sohrab was born and grew up but changed the people who lived there, from the original mythical Turanians to more recent and more familiar Tartars, for a purpose. We know that the tragedy of *Sohrab and Rustum* took place in a mythological period before the Achaemenid dynasty came to power in 550 BC. But Arnold’s reference to Tartars who did not come into existence until 5th century CE and became known to Europeans only in the 13th century (and were historically associated with Mongol invaders and figuratively reminded Europeans of Tartarus, the infernal regions of ancient Greek mythology), is not merely a case of literary anachronism. He illustrates the forces of the Orient by a name which corresponds to “peoples who, over the centuries, were a threat to civilized peoples,” be it the Persians in West Asia, or Europeans in the bigger picture and the Occident in general. Furthermore, these “invaders” came from an area reminiscent of the infernal

regions of Tartarus, already known to Arnold's contemporary readership through a semi-homophonous association. Therefore, the imagined geography of the Orient that Arnold creates evokes a greater sense of repulsion in his readers with this added information of more recent history about the more familiar inhabitants of this nameless land. In other words, the mere mythological hostility between the Persians and Turanians, as two very distant and ancient nations in the Orient, was not close enough in time or place to pull the desired emotional string in Arnold's English-speaking readers and thus he restructured it to suit his purpose.

2.1.2 The Oxus and the River Imagery

The imagined geography of the Orient—Turan—is complemented with the historical geography of Iran by references to regions, mountains, seas, and rivers in this ancient country. The picture, however, is only completed when the Oxus, as the border river between the two territories, decisively separates the region into two distinctive worlds of the East and West. The river would have historically placed Iranians in the south, however, and still a trace of this geographical fact can be seen in Arnold's poem when both armies move to camp after the tragic death of Sohrab.

“The Persians took it on the open sands
Southward, ...” (lines 872 and 873)

But as it will be explained in the following lines, Arnold adhered to the modern course of the river as it flowed at the time he composed his poem, rather than the ancient course, in order to further highlight the differences between the imagined geographies of the Orient and Occident.

Arnold starts *Sohrab and Rustum* as follows:

“And the first grey of morning fill'd the east,
And the fog rose out of the Oxus stream.” (lines 1 and 2)

He places the scene of the battle between Sohrab and Rustum on the Oxus stream along which the Tartar camp (Sohrab's army from Turan) is stationed. The Oxus was the mythical boundary between Iran and Turan and although it is not mentioned in the original Persian text where the battle exactly took place, the setting described by Arnold does not sound implausible since it is near the border between the two enemies. It is believed, however, that the course of the river has

gone through several major shifts throughout history and at times it flowed—either entirely or partially—into the Caspian Sea, making the Iran-Turan border more like a north-south dividing line as shown in the following map:



Fig. 1. Forgotten realms of the Oxus region (Google Maps Engine). Satellite imagery courtesy of Google Earth.

In the notes to *Sohrab and Rustum* published by Werner School Book Company in 1896 and annotated by Merwin Marie Snell³³, she explains that the Oxus (presently called the Amu Darya) “has entirely changed its direction, oscillating between the Caspian and the Aral. When the Greek historians wrote, it flowed into the Caspian Sea a short distance from its southern end; ... and in the sixteenth century it returned to the Aral.” Therefore, the ancient course of the Oxus would not suit the geographic setting Arnold had planned for his poem and the modern course would provide a better foundation.

The modern course of the river, which looks like the map on the following page, clearly divides the region into eastern and western sides and this helped Arnold create the geographic basis for the hypothetical distinction he depicted between the East and West. Arnold did not simply mention the name of the river, hoping that the learned reader would recognize the course of the stream. He literally *drew* a map for his readers, to help them visualize the course of the river. He

³³ Specifically in note 126 (pages 103 and 104).

pointed out the origin of the river in the Pamere (Pamir) Mountains, the direction it followed, the major regions and cities it flowed through or next to, and the final destination of the stream in the Aral Sea. As Alan Roper writes in the introduction to *Arnold's Poetic Landscapes*, "... landscape features rarely operate in Arnold's poems as mere decorative backdrops but are again and again the source and correlative of a mood and a representation of a kind of life." (page 3) The Oxus is not merely a border river separating the East from West in Sohrab's tale as a "mere decorative backdrop." It represents life, from cradle to grave, with all joys and sorrows in between, continuing despite tragic losses and failures. The story begins at "the first grey of morning" (line 1) next to the Oxus, and ends at night when "stars emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea," (last line) into which the Oxus finally flows. And the tragedy begins, climaxes, and goes through a catharsis beside the very same river.

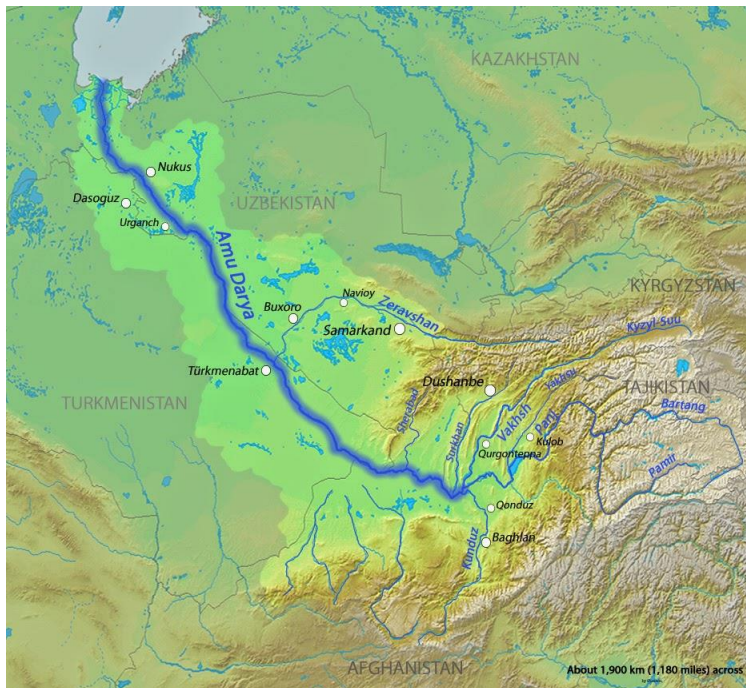


Fig. 2. Illustration by **Shannon 1** published on 11 May 2021

In the final passage of the poem, we read:

... the majestic river floated on,
 ...
 ... through the hush'd Chorasmian waste,
 ...—he flow'd

Right for the polar star, past Orgunjè,
...
Oxus, forgetting the bright speed he had
In his high mountain-cradle in Pamere,
A foil'd circuitous wanderer--till at last
The long'd-for dash of waves is heard, and wide
His luminous home of waters opens, bright
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed stars
Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea. (line 875 to the end)

The Oxus whose origin is the “high mountain-cradle in Pamere” floats through “the hush'd Chorasmian waste,” and flows northward “right for the polar star, past Orgunjè” till finally it flows into “the Aral Sea.” The journey of the river has more to it, though. The Oxus is personified as a *male* “foil'd circuitous wanderer.” This is the background upon which the whole poem is constructed. There is no straight path for the river—or for human life by extension—and circumstances make it change directions. Obstacles may foil or frustrate anyone, and one may seem to be wandering aimlessly, but there is always hope and even if one loses “the bright speed” he might have had at the beginning in his “high mountain-cradle,” he shows resilience and moves on through harsh times. As a river full of life and sounds of vitality may fall silent in a “hush'd” desert, the sound of “waves” can help it revive. The poet creates a soundscape here in which “the bright speed” of the river quiets down in the “hush'd ... waste” until “the long'd-for dash of waves is heard.” The word “dash” echoes the initial “bright speed” of the Oxus in his origin and “waves” which represent motion, sound, and life are in stark contrast to the “waste” which connotes immobility, silence, and death. The auditory imagery then smoothly changes into a visual landscape where the Oxus flows into the Aral Sea:

... and wide
His luminous home of waters opens, bright
And tranquil, from whose floor the new-bathed stars
Emerge, and shine upon the Aral Sea. (line 888 to the end)

The Aral is “home” to the Oxus and “opens wide” to welcome the stream. His “home of waters” is “luminous,” “bright,” and “tranquil.” Brightness is the quality that the river has long “forgotten” and retains at “home.” The river also finds “tranquility” and peace at his destination. If he once “flow’d right for the polar star,” which is a single star, he is now endowed with innumerable “new-bathed stars,” shining upon home “from whose floor” they emerge each and every single night at the horizon. The journey of the river comes to an end here, but as mentioned earlier, the geographic setting of the poem is the platform upon which several other Oriental elements are built to highlight the East-West dichotomy. (The personification of the Oxus as a male being will be addressed at the end of chapter three under the feminine/masculine binary of inanimate objects.)

The river imagery in Arnold’s poetry seems to be a recursive theme with an interestingly similar predecessor in an earlier poem titled “The Future,”³⁴ published only one year prior to *Sohrab and Rustum*. The opening lines of “The Future” read as follows:

“A wanderer is man from his birth.
He was born in a ship
On the breast of the river of Time;” (line 1 to 3)

If “man” is the wanderer in the river of Time in “The Future,” it is the Oxus that substitutes the “man” and represents “a foil’d circuitous wanderer” in *Sohrab and Rustum*. The course of the river in “The Future” is also “circuitous” as

“... the river in gleaming rings
Sluggishly winds through the plain;” (lines 14 and 15)

“The Future” has more similarities to *Sohrab and Rustum* such as the scene in which “the snowy mountains pass,/ Echoing the screams of the eagles” (lines 9 and 10) but it requires a different study to compare and contrast these images. The river imagery in *Sohrab and Rustum* comes on the scene again towards the end of the story, with a reference to several more rivers in Turan against only one river in Iran. The implications of this contrast will be discussed in section 2.1.5.

³⁴ *Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems*. 1852

2.1.3 Balance of Power Between East and West

Occurring in the proximity of the Oxus, the combat between Sohrab and Rostum occurs with the very same reference to the East/West dichotomy:

He spoke, and Sohrab kindled at his taunts,
And he too drew his sword; at once they rush'd
Together, as two eagles on one prey
Come rushing down together from the clouds,
One from the east, one from the west; (line 470 to 474)

Prior to this scene, the contrast is already shown in different ways but here the poet verbalizes the dichotomy and emphasizes the fact that Sohrab and Rostum were of equal power. Although it was Rostum's provocative words or "taunts" that triggered Sohrab to show reaction, the rest of the description shows the unpredictability of the outcome of the combat. They used the same type of weapon—"he too drew his sword"—and they were equally matched—"as two eagles on one prey"—following the same tactics—"at once they rush'd together," "rushing down together from the clouds." Even the wording of the last line of the simile highlights this *balance of power*: "One from the east, one from the west;" Four words against four words.

They also seem to be equally in a hurry to meet their impending fate, as the poet repeats the idea that "they rush'd together" once more only seven words apart, "rushing down together." But the second time, this haste has an added tinge of "decline": They come "down from the clouds." Even if the "prey" they fight for is "victory," "fame," or "glory," they must "descend" from their heights. Thus, their power struggle is not that heavenly and its outcome might be—and eventually will be—quite catastrophic.

The initial balance of power between Sohrab and Rostum, however, cannot be readily extended to the East and West. Their respective armies differed in diversity, weaponry, and organization (portraying the *threatening* military machine of the Orient as *inferior* to that of the more *modern* Occident in general) and the heroes' relative superiority in single combat fluctuated in the course of the battle.

The poet foregrounds the contrast between the two heroes' respective armies by elaborately describing the deployment of Sohrab's army, riding various kinds of horses, carrying different kinds of weapons, and wearing a variety of costumes in 32 lines, naming several places and tribes in Turan such as:

Tartars of the Oxus from Bokhara and Khiva (line 117 to 120)

Toorkmuns of the south (line 121)

The Tukas (line 122)

Those from Attruck and the Caspian sands (line 123 to 125)

A swarm of wandering horse who come from far (lines 126 and 127)

Tartars of Ferghana (line 128 to 130)

Wilder hordes who roam o'er Kipchak and the northern waste (lines 130 and 131)

Kalmucks and unkempt Kuzzaks (line 132)

Tribes who stray nearest the Pole (lines 132 and 133) and

Wandering Kirghizzes (line 133)

The dispersal of the troops is amazing. Black tents and black sheepskin caps of Tartar horsemen coming from such a wide variety of regions and tribes connotes "darkness and discord"³⁵ respectively, whereas Arnold's description of the Persian army tells a different story. It is condensed to only five lines:

And on the other side the Persians form'd;--
First a light cloud of horse, Tartars they seem'd.
The Ilyats of Khorassan; and behind,
The royal troops of Persia, horse and foot,
Marshall'd battalions bright in burnish'd steel. (line 136 to 140)

The royal troops of Persia have only a small group of soldiers at the forefront—the Ilyats of Khorassan. Snell claims³⁶ that Arnold's reference to the Ilyats is "an anachronism." They could not have participated in a battle that took place in mythological times (presumably it occurred before the Achaemenids came to power and established the first Persian Empire about 2500

³⁵ Colors and their significance will be thoroughly discussed in the following section of this chapter.

³⁶ Note 168 (page 112) of Werner School Book Company's edition of *Sohrab and Rustum* published in 1896

years ago) because “they are descended from tribes that have entered the country [Iran] not earlier than the first Turkish conquest of 1038.” In any case, this small group of soldiers or “light cloud of horse” looked like Tartars, either in appearance and the fact that they rode horses, or the smallness of their numbers. The main body of the royal troops of Persia, however, is described as a modern army in polished armor comprising cavalry and infantry; “horse and foot.” The effect of “less is more” is perhaps best seen in this comparison: the description of the Persian army in five lines against the army of Turan described in 32 lines. The last line in particular is an alliterative series of six words where “marshall’d battalions” (of the Persian army) denotes “unity, order, and strength,” and the chain of “bright in burnish’d steel” connotes “light and invincibility.” But Arnold does not fall into the trap of simplistic stereotyping of “light versus darkness.” In other words, the West, represented by the Persian Empire, is not all “light and order” against the “darkness and discord” of Turan, which represents the East. (This is further explained in the paragraph after next.)

Right after the two armies are stationed against each other, Peran-Wisa, the general of the army of Turan, asks the Persian Lords to choose a champion from among themselves to fight the Tartars’ champion, Sohrab, “man to man.” (line 153)

The “Tartar squadrons” feel thrilled and proud when they learn about the challenge and subsequently, in a detailed simile Arnold describes the Persian army’s “fear” and shatters the “invincibility” he had already attributed to the “royal troops” through his concise description of “battalions bright in burnish'd steel.”

But as a troop of pedlars, from Cabool,
Cross underneath the Indian Caucasus,
That vast sky-neighbouring mountain of milk snow;
Crossing so high, that, as they mount, they pass
Long flocks of travelling birds dead on the snow,
Choked by the air, and scarce can they themselves
Slake their parch'd throats with sugar'd mulberries--
In single file they move, and stop their breath,
For fear they should dislodge the o'erhanging snows--

So the pale Persians held their breath with fear. (line 160 to 169)

The “royal troops” whose formation was described as “battalions bright in burnish’d steel” is now demoted to a “troop of pedlars” who move “in single file” lest “they should dislodge the o’erhanging snows” on the “vast sky-neighboring mountain” of “the Indian Caucasus.” Arnold Orientalizes the setting by referring to place names (Cabool and the Indian Caucasus) which are not mentioned in the original Persian text but illustrate the imminent danger the Persian army may encounter if they are to fight Sohrab. The fear is tangible, and the signs of catastrophe are real. “Long flocks of travelling birds” are “dead on the snow, choked by the air.” Not just a random number of dead birds but “long flocks” of them. The air on the high mountain is so thin that it kills travelling birds and “parches” the pedlars’ throats, and they are afraid even to breathe for the fear of an avalanche. The correlative of mood emanated by the landscape, as Alan Roper calls it³⁷, is that of imminent danger. It is Sohrab whose name has caused this fear, and the royal troops are not only “pale with fear,” they have to also “hold their breath” for the threat is as real as an avalanche.

2.1.4 Cities as Symbols of Urban Civilization

So far, we saw how Arnold displayed the balance of power between his two protagonists and how he avoided creating a stereotypical picture of an invincible West. On the other hand, we also noticed that he did not give Sohrab’s people the credit to be named after their mythical homeland, Turan, and called them “Tartars” whereas the name of Rustum’s homeland, Iran, literally appears for five times in the poem. This, however, is subtly requited by the poet’s reference to the most prominent feature of any civilization, that is, cities. But how?

Two cities are named in Iran: Casbin (the present-day Qazvin) and Cabool (the current capital of Afghanistan), but despite their historical importance, both cities are mentioned only as insignificant place names in Arnold’s adaptation.

“... long-neck’d cranes

Stream over Casbin and the southern slopes

Of Elburz,” (line 112 to 113)

³⁷ *Arnold’s Poetic Landscapes*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969

“... a troop of pedlars, from Cabool,
Cross underneath the Indian Caucasus,” (lines 160 and 161)

Casbin is the city over which “long-neck’d cranes” fly, and Cabool (or Kabul) is the city where an ordinary group of traveling salesmen come from. But the cities in Turan are symbols of a civilization. Sohrab says:

I have ...
... seen
Afrasiab’s cities only, Samarcand,
Bokhara, and lone Khiva in the waste, (from line 755 to 761)

They are the only cities Sohrab has been to, but Bokhara was mentioned two more times in the poem (lines 119 and 274), Khiva appeared once more before in line 120, and Samarcand also showed up previously for two more times (lines 40 and 356). In addition, Ferghana was also mentioned early in the poem (line 128): A total of nine mentions of four city names. Despite Sohrab’s disillusionment with his homeland toward the end of the tale, his or the narrator’s reference to these cities denotes that the Orient, as depicted by Arnold, is not necessarily an inferior and underdeveloped land with no trace of urban civilization or inhabited only by nomadic tribes, the so-called Tartars. In fact, Bokhara in particular, was already known to Arnold’s readers through his previously published poem of *The Sick King in Bokhara* in 1849 and it was of geopolitical significance to the British public for reasons which will be explained at the end of this section. So, Arnold somehow compensates for the void he attributed to the Orient by depriving her inhabitants of a name for their homeland, through his repeated reference to four significant and thriving cities in the same imagined geography. The impact of such references to real geography on the intended readers is vividly illustrated by Julia Kuehn in her article titled “Exoticism in 19th-Century Literature.”³⁸ In her comments in the section dedicated to *One Thousand and One Nights*, she says, “(f)or Romantic and Victorian writers ... , *The Arabian Nights* ... stood for the wonderful against the mundane, and the imaginative against the prosaic and rational. On the other hand, the stories referenced real people and a real geography: many readers were thus led to believe that Scheherazade’s tales actually gave a faithful account of the

³⁸ *Discovering Literature: Romantics & Victorians*. British Library (bl.uk) May 15, 2014

Orient.” Likewise, Arnold’s reference to real place names and peoples, although not always historically accurate but recognizable within the imaginary geographies he created, could lead if not the majority but a good many of his readers to find his overall account of the Orient both wonderful and credible.

2.1.5 Sohrab’s Disillusionment with the Imagined Geography of His Homeland

The story develops differently though and Sohrab whose name brought pride and hope to the Tartar squadrons and frightened the Persians gets mortally wounded at the end. Only minutes before his tragic death, Sohrab who is now disillusioned with the land in which he was born and grew up, has different feelings toward the *imagined geography* of the Orient built into the poem by Arnold.

... but I
Have never known my grandsire's ...
... lofty house in Seistan,
Nor slaked my thirst at the clear Helmund stream;
But lodged among my father's foes, and seen
Afrasiab's cities only, Samarcand,
Bokhara, and lone Khiva in the waste,
And the black Toorkmun tents; and only drunk
The desert rivers, Moorghab and Tejend,
Kohik, and where the Kalmuks feed their sheep,
The northern Sir; and this great Oxus stream, (line 755 to 765)

Sohrab wishes he could have seen Zal, his grandfather, and his “lofty house” in Seistan, and quenched his thirst “at the clear Helmund stream” in Iran. He regrets having lived his life among his “father’s foes” in Turan and compares the things he has never known in Seistan in the West with everything he has seen in the Orient. The concept of “less is more” is at work here again: Zal’s singular lofty house in Seistan against “Afrasiab’s cities” of “Samarcand, Bokhara, and lone Khiva in the waste, and the black Toorkmun tents.” The river imagery also accentuates “less is more”: the “clear” water of “Helmund stream” which is free of salt and can quench one’s thirst against the salty water of the many desert rivers of Moorghab, Tejend, Kohik, the northern

Sir, and the Oxus. Zal's house and the clear water of the Helmund are of greater value to Sohrab now than all the cities, tents, and rivers he names in the Orient. Once again, Arnold's geographic description of the Orient helps highlight the basic distinction between the East and West.

2.1.6 Geopolitical Awareness of Arnold's Contemporary Readers

Let us now move on to an important article titled "The Imaginary Orient"³⁹ and borrow some ideas to shed light on Arnold's readership. Linda Nochlin (1931- 2017), the distinguished American art historian critically analyzed Jean-Lean Gerome's Orientalist painting of the late 1860s, *The Snake Charmer*, in the abovementioned article and asserted that "(o)ur gaze is meant to include both the spectacle and its spectators." The spectacle she referred to was the young snake charmer and the spectators were the local people watching the scene. She extended her comment about the spectators to the viewers of the painting and said, "(c)learly, these black and brown folk are mystified—but then again, so are we." Likewise, our interpretation of Arnold's poem is meant to include both the plot and its characters, and as Tartars and Persians experienced feeling of pride, joy, hope, and fear during the ups and downs of the tale, the readers of the poem and in particular Arnold's contemporary British readership might have experienced similar feelings toward his portrayal of the final tragic encounter between Sohrab and Rustum due to their underlying geopolitical awareness of the current tensions in the very same *imagined geography* that the mythological battle took place. In other words, the distinction between the East and West so elaborately developed in the poem, could have been a reflection of the British imperial pursuits in the same region as well.

In his essay titled "Why the Oxus? On the Majestic River of Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*" (pages 5 and 6) Reza Taher-Kermani refers to "Britain's strategic endeavors in Asia (and Europe) to impede its imperial rivals' encroachment on India." He relies on Edward Ingram's seminal work, *The Beginning of the Great Game in Asia, 1828-1834* (Oxford, 1979) and a few of his other essays to explain the "geopolitical importance" of the Oxus in the 1830s and 1840s. Parallel to Iran-Turan rivalry portrayed in *Sohrab and Rustum*, there were tensions between the British Empire, or British India to be more precise, and the Russian Empire particularly around the Oxus which was "strategically located in the terrains" between the two empires. Taher-

³⁹ *The Politics of Vision*. Chapter 3 (1989)

Kermani says that “London and Calcutta, since the early nineteenth century, were concerned about the possibility of (Russian) invasion,” and “(t)he Oxus was ... likely to be part of a potential invasion route.” So, “the British were in need of intelligence on Central Asia,” and “(a) number of agents were consequently dispatched to the territorial states on ... the Oxus.” Taher-Kermani adds that “the young British intelligence-gathering officers ... were admired for their gallantry and nobility of action,” (page 7) and provides proof from articles published at the time, praising their bravery. This mission, however, was not all safe and at times ended in the “tragic fate” of the agents who “were subsequently honored in Britain as young martyrs of the empire.” (page 8) A couple of those young officers were, in sober reality, executed in Bokhara in 1842.

Consequently, the British public was aware of these political affairs and the tale of Sohrab evoked memories of recent heroism in them. Rustum had to defend the glory and threatened *invincibility* of the ancient Persian Empire even if his own son were to be sacrificed, just as the young British officers were martyred, in the eyes of the British public, for the glory of the British Empire in the West against the threat of *inferior* Russians in the East. The Oriental themes and setting of the poem incorporated into the imagined geography of Arnold’s rendition serve a dual function then: On the one hand they emphasize the relative hegemony of modern Persian army over the less developed Tartar squadrons which culminates in the ultimate victory of the West, and on the other hand, they represent a “nostalgia for lost Oriental glory and heroism,” in the bigger picture, since Iran, in spite of representing the West, is still in the East and can evoke the Orientalist theme of past glory; a combination of imperialist and exoticist Orientalism.

2.2 Colors

Colors are too universal to be solely considered as Oriental elements but they do play a pivotal role in creating an Orientalist atmosphere in Arnold’s *Sohrab and Rustum*; Arnold paints Sohrab’s world of the Orient *black and white*, in stark contrast to the *colorful* world of Rustum which is somehow the Occident within the Orient. Arnold commences his portrayal of this contrast with a detailed description of Sohrab’s army about which colors are the most intriguing. The Orient is colored in grey, black, and white.

2.2.1 Grey, Black, and White

The color scheme in the Orient begins with the very first line of the poem, where “the Tartar camp” is stationed along the Oxus:

And the first grey of morning fill'd the east,
And the fog rose out of the Oxus stream.
But all the Tartar camp along the stream
Was hush'd, and still the men were plunged in sleep; (line 1 to 4)

Sohrab is from Turan in the East and his army has camped next to the Oxus. It is “the first grey of morning” and “grey” is the first color associated with the East, which happens to pertain to Turan in the east as well as the grey of dawn when and where the sun rises. The atmosphere is further obscured by the “fog” rising from the river and the sleepy silence is due to the early hours of the day. Arnold’s use of color to portray the East starts with “grey” and intensifies to “black” when he refers to “Tartar tents” in the opening page of the poem:

“Through the black Tartar tents he [Sohrab] passed,” (line 12)

And he repeats the same words only four lines further down as if to establish the color code:

“Through the black tents he passed,” (line 16)

Later, when Peran-Wisa, King Afrasiab’s wise advisor and the general of the army of Turan, gets ready to come out of his tent, we read that he,

... threw a white cloak round him, ...
...
And on his head he set his sheep-skin cap,
Black, glossy, curl'd, the fleece of Kara-Kul; (line 98 to 101)

Although Peran-Wisa throws a “white cloak” around him, which happens to be the only thing different in color from the black and grey world of the East, he almost immediately puts on a “black” cap too, and the cap is made of the fleece of Kara-Kul, which is a sheep breed of Central Asia known for their glossy, tightly curled black fleece. Interestingly, the name of the sheep

directly translates to “black fur” in the Uzbek language. So, despite his white cloak, which can symbolize his wisdom and maturity, he puts a very “black” cap on to reestablish his affiliation with the Tartar forces of “darkness.”

When Tartar horsemen file into the open plain next to the Oxus, they are depicted as follows:

From their black tents, long files of horse, they stream'd;

...

... they stream'd.

The Tartars of the Oxus, the King's guard,

First, with black sheep-skin caps and with long spears; (line 110 to 118)

The East is all painted in black; black tents and black caps with only one white element in between. No other color is associated with the Orient throughout the poem and the range of colors pertaining to the East comprise only the grey of dawn⁴⁰, Peran-Wisa's white cloak, and the black tents and black caps of Tartar troops which spread over the setting of the poem to constantly remind the readers of the prevalent darkness in the Orient.

2.2.2 *Green, Gold, and Scarlet*

Unlike the color code for the Orient, where the East is portrayed in a spectrum of black and grey with only one singular “white cloak” around Peran-Wisa, the West happens to be quite colorful. There are “dark green melons” (line 199) as part of Rustum's morning meal, and his horse, Ruksh, has “a saddle-cloth of broider'd green, crusted with gold” (line 277). Green normally symbolizes nature and health and functions as an introduction to the colorful world of the Occident, but apart from green, there are several tints of red associated with the West, the first of which is seen in Rustum's tents:

“Of scarlet cloth they were, and glittering gay,” (line 192)

⁴⁰ *The grey of dawn* is repeated once more in line 111 to illustrate the atmosphere as “some grey November morn” in a simile which likens the long files of horse to “files ... of long-neck'd cranes.”

Moreover, his armor, although plain for this particular combat against Sohrab, has a rich helm, “inlaid with gold,” (line 267) and the “gold” on Ruksh’s saddlecloth and Rustum’s helm clearly associates with “power” and “wealth.”

The red color motif, which started with Rustum’s scarlet tents, reappears in the description of his rich helm:

“And, from the fluted spine atop, a plume
Of horsehair waved, a scarlet horsehair plume.” (lines 268 and 269)

“Scarlet” can be associated with “courage and joy” and it rightfully depicts Rustum and his “tents” which are “glittering gay” and the “waving” scarlet horsehair plume accentuates Rustum’s enthusiasm and energy despite his age.

Commenting on a large exhibition titled *The Orientalists, 1798-1914*, held in London and later in Washington DC in 1984, Sarah J. Graham-Brown says in “Orientalism in Color”⁴¹ that “(s)ometimes a Christian reference is inserted into a painting of a Muslim religious occasion.” She provides an example then. “For instance, in a work by Leon-Adolphe-Auguste Belly entitled ‘Pilgrims Going to Mecca’ the catalogue notes that in one corner of the painting is a woman and a child on a donkey, an allusion to the biblical flight to Egypt.” The very same thing might happen in the world of literature too, and Christian allusions may find a way into a literary creation alien to Christian traditions. The color “scarlet” in the excerpt above can be associated with the blood of Christ by Westerners, and although the pre-Christian plot of the poem does not readily allow such an interpretation, that is a Christian reference in a totally non-religious and pre-Christian context, it can still foreground “sacrifice” and the tragic climax of the tale where Rustum’s hands, or as he describes them himself “these slaughterous hands” (line 249), are to be washed in his own son's blood.

2.2.3 Blue

Although red is a strong color motif in Rustum’s world, it is not the only color in the West and together with green, there are other colors which add to the variety of kaleidoscopic patterns

⁴¹ *Middle East Report* 125/126 (July-September 1984)

pervading Arnold's adaptation. For instance, in a simile which depicts how Rostum brings back "hope and peace" to the pale Persians scared by Sohrab, Arnold speaks of "the blue waves" of "the Persian Gulf."

And dear as the wet diver to the eyes
Of his pale wife who waits and weeps on shore,
By sandy Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf,
Plunging all day in the blue waves, at night,
Having made up his tale of precious pearls,
Rejoins her in their hut upon the sands--
So dear to the pale Persians Rostum came. (line 284 to 290)

Rostum is "dear" to "pale Persians" as a skin "diver" is to his "pale wife." Persians are "pale" out of fear and the diver's wife is "pale" out of anxiety. Persians are afraid for Sohrab is a fearsome warrior and they may lose the war against him, and the diver's wife is anxiously "weeping and waiting" for her husband, fearing his loss in the sea. Again, Arnold Orientalizes the scene by referring to place names in the Orient⁴² and activities peculiar to the region: Bahrain, the Persian Gulf, and pearl hunting. Although "Persians" are "pale," the poet tactfully uses another alliterative pair of words to balance the auditory weight of his diction: The wet diver brings "precious pearls" from underneath the blue waves of the Persian Gulf when he comes back home at night. Likewise, Rostum brings back hope and peace of mind to the Persian army by accepting Sohrab's daring and daunting challenge. Rostum and the diver are both "dear" to their respective expectants and bring relief. Blue which symbolizes peace has a calming effect too and helps relieve the pale Persians and the diver's wife.

2.2.4 *Black versus White*

The next simile repeats the black color motif associated with the East in contrast to a "white" signifying the West:

⁴² References to real place names are paradoxical in Arnold's adaptation. Iran is pictured as a Western power within the Orient. Therefore, any reference to place names within this imagined geography can Orientalize the overall atmosphere of the poem and still refer to the Occident within the greater Orient.

As some rich woman, on a winter's morn,
Eyes through her silken curtains the poor drudge
Who with numb blacken'd fingers makes her fire--
At cock-crow, on a starlit winter's morn,
When the frost flowers the whiten'd window-panes--
And wonders how she lives, and what the thoughts
Of that poor drudge may be; so Rustom eyed
The unknown adventurous youth, (line 302 to 309)

In note 193 (page 117)⁴³, Snell quotes some unknown critics from *Edinburgh Review*, October 1882, who “have justly taken exceptions to this simile, which is ‘so entirely modern that it strikes a jarring note.’” Also, Valerie Kennedy refers to the editors of *Sohrab and Rustom* in her essay titled “Orientalism in the Victorian Era” (published online on August 22, 2017) who find “the comparison of Rustom to ‘some rich woman’ looking at ‘the poor drudge’ making her fire on a cold winter’s day ... a ‘vivid mid-Victorian image, [which] is strikingly awkward.’”

It is true that the overall atmosphere delineated by the poet appears to be Dickensian and in particular the “window-panes” are historically misplaced (In England, glass became common in the windows only in the early 17th century and Romans first produced glass for windows probably around 100 AD⁴⁴, whereas the story takes place at least some six hundred years before that), but the elements of comparison serve Arnold’s purpose to highlight the distinction between East and West, both verbally and visually.

Rustom is compared to “some rich woman” who is looking at a “poor drudge” through the “silken curtains” of her “whiten’d window-panes.” “Silken curtains” highlight the rich woman’s wealth and her position—both her social status and orientation—and lead her to “wonder” how the “poor drudge” lives or what she thinks about. She “sees” that her fingers are “blacken’d” with soot and probably are “numb” with cold, but she is only “curious” to know how she lives. She “wonders” how the poor woman lives and may feel pity for her too, but no more. She sees her through her “silken curtains” and the time and place are not as “dire” to her as the “winter’s morn” can be to the “poor drudge.” The poor woman’s fingers are blackened with soot and numb

⁴³ Werner School Book Company’s edition of *Sohrab and Rustom* published in 1896

⁴⁴ Extracted from “A Brief History of Glass Windows” by Raj Kain, June 25, 2020. clerawindows.com

with cold at “cock-crow.” But “cock-crow” is not necessarily an ungodly hour to the rich woman who is most probably warm inside her home, noticing the “star-lit” winter’s morn and enjoying the visual imagery of the flowery patterns of frost on her “whiten’d window-panes—as well as the auditory alliterative music of the words—while watching the poor drudge in cold weather outside. And it is Sohrab, “the unknown adventurous youth,” who is compared to the “poor drudge.” Once again, the black color motif is associated with the East, but here “black” does not only connote “darkness.” It is used together with “white”—blackened fingers against whitened windowpanes—and this evokes the contrast between “good” and “evil” or “right” and “wrong.” The “famous” Rustum is associated with “white,” “good,” and “right,” eyeing the “unknown” Sohrab who is associated with “black,” “evil,” and “wrong.” The poor drudge of the simile, however, is making “fire” too, and this can be interpreted as Sohrab’s challenging of Rustum; a challenge which is underestimated or perhaps considered “harmless” by Rustum, just like what the rich woman thinks of the poor drudge who is only making “her fire”: a fire that does no harm to the comfort and security of the rich woman’s home.

Let us now digress a little from color motifs and study another instance of Orientalization for which Arnold said he “took a great deal of trouble”⁴⁵ to make appropriate. Was his simile of the rich woman and poor drudge the only non-Oriental analogy in the poem?

Rustum; his morning meal was done, but still
The table stood before him, charged with food--
A side of roasted sheep, and cakes of bread;
And dark green melons; and there Rustum sate
Listless, and held a falcon on his wrist,
And play'd with it; (line 196 to 201)

Commenting on a translation of Arnold’s *Sohrab and Rustum* into Persian, Abdolhossein Zarrinkoub (1923-1999) finds Arnold’s introductory description of Rustum rather inappropriate. “Waking up late on the battlefield, eating a huge morning meal of meat and melons, and playing leisurely with a falcon on his wrist all correspond more to a nineteenth-century English general

⁴⁵ Kennedy, Valerie. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*. “Orientalism in the Victorian Era” Online Publication Date: August 2017

rather than a warrior from mythical times.”⁴⁶ (Translation into English from Zarrinkoub’s original Persian text is mine.)

Zarrinkoub believes Arnold’s trouble at making a convincing Oriental delineation is not always successful and the underlying Victorian mindset has at times overshadowed his attempts at exoticizing the atmosphere. This is just like what some English critics thought about Arnold’s simile of the rich woman and poor drudge and found it “entirely modern,” “mid-Victorian,” and incongruent with the expected Oriental themes.

In spite of these technical imperfections, colors add fascinating details to the overall atmosphere of the poem before, during, and after the combat between Sohrab and Rostum.

2.2.5 Grey as a Chromatic Bridge

Right before the battle, Sohrab notices a familiar color of his world in Rostum’s hair:

“... and he saw that head,
Streak'd with its first grey hairs;” (lines 339 and 340)

Colors are abundant in Rostum’s world and “grey” is no exception, but it is Sohrab’s perspective that adds extra meaning to the image: what if this familiar color signifies something more than “aging” and is a bridge between Sohrab’s world and that of his father’s? Later on in the poem, we shall encounter another scene in which Rostum similarly endeavors to build a chromatic bridge between his world and that of his son’s.

2.2.6 Solid Red and Oriental Black

Moving on with color motifs and towards the end of the combat, the red color motif is used again by Rostum after Sohrab falls to the ground, mortally “wounded, on the bloody sand.” (Line 526) Here Rostum rebukes Sohrab for being deceitful and says:

⁴⁶ *Neither Eastern nor Western, but Humane*. Tehran, Amir Kabir Publishing House, Published in Persian in 1974 (page 471)

“Fool, thou art slain, and by an unknown man!
Dearer to the red jackals shalt thou be
Than to thy friends, and to thy father old.” (line 537 to 539)

It sounds as if Sohrab’s blood on the sand is not enough to portray the violence of the act and color “red” in its clearest literal sense, not a hue, tint, or shade of red, but red as a solid color has to be added to the impending scene: Sohrab’s body is to be torn by jackals, in spite of the fact that he is “dear” to his old father. Rustum, being Sohrab’s old father in reality, does not know that Sohrab is his own son yet and reiterates that Sohrab is slain “by an unknown man,” refraining from revealing his true identity in order to deprive Sohrab of the honor of being defeated by the legendary hero of Iran. The irony is gruesome.

“... Rustum knew not his own loss, but stood
Over his dying son, and knew him not.” (lines 574 and 575)

Prior to these two lines, Arnold creates a scene in which “a breeding eagle” is “pierced with an arrow” of “some hunter” and her mate looks for her to no avail and “nor knows his loss,” just like Rustum. The dying eagle, on the other hand, is compared to Sohrab and she knows that,

... never more
Shall the lake glass her, flying over it;
Never the black and dripping precipices
Echo her stormy scream as she sails by. (line 569 to 572)

The black color motif of the Orient is once again repeated as “black and dripping precipices” or dark, wet cliffs that shall never again echo the breeding eagle’s cries. The “darkness” of the black cliffs is overwhelming, and the dying eagle shall never “see” her reflection in the lake or “hear” the echo of her alliterative “stormy scream” while “sailing” above black “precipices” again. Her death is foreshadowed by the black cliffs and is inevitable. (This simile will be studied in more detail in the section dedicated to the confrontation between femininity and masculinity in chapter three.)

2.2.7 Purple as a Chromatic Bridge

Later on, as Rostum starts to realize who Sohrab really is, a new color is used in the tableau. Purple, which has a tint of red in it, describes Rostum's perspective through the poet's words:

And he saw that Youth,
Of age and looks to be his own dear son,
Piteous and lovely, lying on the sand;
Like some rich hyacinth which by the scythe
Of an unskillful gardener has been cut,
Mowing the garden grass-plots near its bed,
And lies, a fragrant tower of purple bloom,
On the mown, dying grass--so Sohrab lay,
Lovely in death, upon the common sand.
And Rostum gazed on him with grief, (line 631 to 640)

Rostum sees Sohrab "lying on the sand," and speculates how "that Youth" could have actually been "his own dear son." Rostum is grief-stricken and cannot deny that if he had a son, he would have been of the same "age and looks." He feels pity for the "lovely" youth "in death." Sohrab is compared to a "hyacinth" which "has been cut" by the "scythe" of an "unskillful gardener." The scythe was supposed to mow "the garden grass-plots," but the unskilled gardener acts like the Grim Reaper, holding a scythe, and collects his victim's soul. Who is this "unskillful gardener"? Does Rostum see himself as the unskillful gardener who should have only cut "dying grass"? Or does the poet cast doubts on the skills of a more powerful being in charge of this "garden" of the world? In any case, the outcome is the same. "The rich hyacinth," the "fragrant tower of purple bloom," is lying on the "dying grass." The hyacinth is "rich" or "pleasantly deep or strong in color and fragrance" as defined by Oxford Dictionary. The hyacinth is also "tall" like a tower. It is purple and in bloom, too. Likewise, Sohrab is rich or "pleasantly strong" as a "lovely" youth, and tall, and living his life in full bloom; living with hope and purpose. How about "purple"? How is a color out of the black and grey spectrum attributed to a man from the East? So far in the poem, everything in the Orient was either grey or black. Is this a change of direction in color motifs? As a matter of fact, it is. But it is Rostum who "imagines" Sohrab as a "purple" hyacinth

through the poet's verbal and visual depiction and let's not forget that Rustum is still doubtful about Sohrab's true identity. In other words, the color "purple" is not in reality a part of Sohrab's costume or weapons and nothing in his world is described as purple either. "Purple" is what Rustum and the poet attribute to Sohrab and begin to "own" him as a familiar color in the chromatic world of Rustum in the West. This is like what Sohrab did when he found the familiar color of grey in Rustum's hair (lines 339 and 340) and earnestly pleaded with him to reveal his true identity. Perhaps these two parts can best illustrate the poet's "controlling gaze." Nochlin⁴⁷ says, "(t)he white man, the Westerner, is of course always implicitly present in Orientalist paintings like *The Snake Charmer*; his is necessarily the *controlling gaze*, the gaze which brings the Oriental world into being, the gaze for which it is ultimately intended." How else could these two worlds of different color spectra come into being if Arnold did not intend to make use of them? It is through *his* controlling gaze that Sohrab finds a familiar grey in Rustum's hair and Rustum likens Sohrab to a purple hyacinth. Subsequently, it is through a Westerner's perspective, that is Arnold's eyes, that we get acquainted with the distinctions between colors in the East and West.

Purple, although mysterious in nature, is the color of "nobility" and following this simile Sohrab is no more a merely "unknown adventurous youth" to Rustum and he considers Sohrab of noble descent. But the "hyacinth" has a lot more to tell. It can be an allusion to the story of the Spartan prince Hyacinthus and the sun god Apollo as well. In Greek mythology, Hyacinthus was a beautiful young man and Apollo's lover who accidentally got killed in a game of discus. Apollo threw a discus and it hit Hyacinthus on the head. The flower "hyacinth" then grew from his blood. The allusion does reverberate the tragic end of Sohrab's tale; however, it seriously differs in the underlying themes, the most significant of which is the homosexual love between Apollo and Hyacinthus in contrast to the homosocial rivalry between the father and son in Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum*.

2.2.8 Vermilion

Arnold's choice of colors to paint Rustum's world of the Occident which started with green and continued with scarlet, blue, white, grey, red, and purple reaches its zenith in vermilion (a bright orange-red color) to reveal Sohrab's lineage to his father and grandfather.

⁴⁷ *The Politics of Vision*. Chapter 3: The Imaginary Orient (1989)

... Sohrab loosed
 His belt, and near the shoulder bared his arm,
 And show'd a sign in faint vermilion points
 Prick'd; as a cunning workman, in Pekin,
 Pricks with vermilion some clear porcelain vase,
 An emperor's gift--at early morn he paints,
 And all day long, and, when night comes, the lamp
 Lights up his studious forehead and thin hands--
 So delicately prick'd the sign appear'd
 On Sohrab's arm, the sign of Rustum's seal.
 It was that griffin, which of old rear'd Zal,
 Rustum's great father, (line 669 to 680)

Sohrab “loosed his belt” and “bared his arm” to prove his identity to his father by the tattoo of a griffin delicately “prick’d” on his arm “near the shoulder.” The “griffin” was “the sign of Rustum’s seal” and that of Rustum’s “great father,” the “old ... Zal.” The tattoo on Sohrab’s arm is in “faint vermilion” and this is the first time a color other than black, or grey is directly attributed to Sohrab and his world of the Orient. The color is “faint” though because the tattoo was pricked on Sohrab’s arm by his mother a long time ago when he was a baby:

“... prick'd upon this arm I bear
 That seal which Rustum to my mother gave,
 That she might prick it on the babe she bore.” (line 658 to 660)

The color is of the same hue as his father’s “tents” and “horsehair plume,” and an indispensable part of the sign which proves his lineage to Rustum and his grandfather. The “vermillion points” of the sign are not just painted on his arm, but “prick’d” permanently to prove his solid connection to Rustum’s world of colors. In fact, the revelation of the vermilion griffin is like a ritual by which Sohrab is initiated into his father’s world.

On the other hand, the simile Arnold has crafted into this “rite of passage” accentuates its tragic consequence. The tattoo is compared to the patterns pricked or painted by “a cunning workman” from “Pekin” on “some clear porcelain vase” with “vermillion.” Another instance of

Orientalization, but this time from the Far East. The “vase” is “an emperor’s gift.” The tenor described by the “vase” in this simile is Sohrab’s arm, and by extension Sohrab himself; a witty synecdoche. Indeed, Sohrab was “an emperor’s gift” in the sense that both of his grandfathers were kings. Zal, Rustum’s father, was the King of Seistan, and his maternal grandfather, Tahmineh’s father, was the King of “Samangan” (recorded by Arnold as “Ader-baijan”—presently called Azerbaijan—which is perhaps a mistake made during the process of translation/adaptation). Arnold has Orientalized this simile by referring to the art of painting on “some clear porcelain vase” done by a “workman from Peking.” The vase is not only extremely valuable because it is “an emperor’s gift,” but it is at the same time tremendously “fragile” since it is made from “porcelain.” The vase is painted by a “Chinese” artist and the color vermilion used to paint the vase symbolizes “life, eternity, and good luck” in the Chinese tradition of Taoism. However, the vermilion patterns of “eternity” painted on the vase cannot save *the vase* against its inherent “fragility,” just as the vermilion tattoo on Sohrab’s arm cannot avert the fate awaiting him. This makes Arnold’s verbal and visual manipulation of the color vermilion in both the tenor and vehicle of his simile aesthetically of significant value.

2.2.9 Yellow

The “color” evolution of Sohrab from a black and grey background to Rustum’s world of colors, however, is fatal and before his crimson blood paints the final scene of his tragic death, his physical weakness is shown by the color “yellow.” Sohrab belongs to the world of colors now and when he talks about his unfortunate fate, he recalls “the black Toorkmun tents” in line 762 and then mentions the Oxus.

“The yellow Oxus, by whose brink I die.” (line 766)

Technically, the yellow color of the river, as Snell explains⁴⁸, is due to the earthy sediment or “silt” found in the Oxus. Rustum also talks of “yellow” when he hears Sohrab’s words.

Then, with a heavy groan, Rustum bewail’d:--

“Oh, that its waves were flowing over me!

⁴⁸ Werner School Book Company’s edition of *Sohrab and Rustum* published in 1896: notes 215 and 216, page 121

Oh, that I saw its grains of yellow silt
Roll tumbling in the current o'er my head!" (line 767 to 770)

When Sohrab talks of "yellow," it is the physical weakness before death foreshadowing his final demise, and when Rustum brings up "yellow," it is death in the yellow waters of the Oxus that he wishes for. If vermillion built the foundation for Sohrab's rite of passage to Rustum's world of colors, the yellow slit in the Oxus creates the negative context that implies illness and madness simultaneously: Sohrab is ill-fated and Rustum is raving mad for what he has done unknowingly to his own son.

2.2.10 Blue Again

A few lines before the game of colors comes to an end, Sohrab foretells that his father shall finally "have peace":

But thou shalt yet have peace; only not now,
Not yet! but thou shalt have it ...
...
Returning home over the salt blue sea,
From laying thy dear master in his grave. (line 829 to 834)

The "blue" of the sea had already been employed to imply "hope and peace" in the simile concerning pearl hunting in the Persian Gulf, but here the implication is clearer with an overtone of prediction. The peace implied by blue here is achieved only after the burial of the Persian king, Kai Khosroo. (In the original Persian text, there is no such prediction. And the Persian king at the time of the battle, and long after that, was Kai Kaus.)

2.2.11 Crimson and White

Colors blend in at the end of Sohrab's life (not at the end of the tale though). When Sohrab draws the spear from his side, his crimson blood runs on his body which is white with death.

... the blood
Came welling from the open gash, and life
Flow'd with the stream;--all down his cold white side
The crimson torrent ran, dim now and soil'd,
Like the soil'd tissue of white violets
Left, freshly gather'd, on their native bank,
By children ...
... his head droop'd low,
His limbs grew slack; motionless, white, he lay--
White, with eyes closed; (line 840 to 849)

Crimson is a rich, deep red, inclining to purple which is often likened to the color of fresh blood. Life flowed out of Sohrab's body as his blood ran "down his cold white side." This is the only instance in which the poet mixes two colors. He had already contrasted black with white in the simile about the rich woman and poor drudge, but this is the only time when colors blend: crimson blood running on Sohrab's side which is cold and white with death. The combination is precisely like what "white violets" look like. They have white petals tinged with purple and they symbolize "innocence;" innocence which is wasted by children who "freshly gathered" the violets and "left" them discarded "on their native bank," just like innocent Sohrab who is freshly wounded and lying to die on the banks of the "majestic Oxus," the stream which ran between his "fatherland" of scarlet, vermillion, crimson, and plenty of other colors, and the land on which he grew up among his father's enemies, in shades of black, grey, and white.

The "white" in this simile, however, is not the distinguished "white" of wisdom and maturity pertaining to either old Peran-Wisa's cloak and "snow-headed Zal" (line 801), or the "white" in contrast with "black," where "white" windowpanes associated with "goodness and righteousness." It is the white of "death" repeated in proximity to a "cold" and "motionless" body "with eyes closed."

"... motionless (and) white, he lay
White, with eyes closed;"

Death's destructive power is not limited to Sohrab's "cold white side." It spreads to the white violets with their "soil'd tissue" and even the "crimson torrent" of Sohrab's blood becomes "dim now and soil'd." The white of death is omnipresent and knows no border, no East, no West, and no color as rich or deep as crimson can overshadow it.

2.2.12 Black Finale

The last color employed in the poem is black and it completes the color wheel of the West. It is, of course, used once more previously to describe the intensity of the fight and the darkness covering the battleground in lines 499 and 500.

"... the gloom
Grew blacker,"

The darkness which blanketed the field covered Rostum and Sohrab and foreshadowed the ominous misfortune that both characters would encounter: Sohrab's tragic death and Rostum's inconsolable grief. But the final show of "black" tells a different story.

So, on the bloody sand, Sohrab lay dead;
And the great Rostum drew his horseman's cloak
Down o'er his face, and sat by his dead son.
As those black granite pillars, once high-rear'd
By Jemshid in Persepolis, to bear
His house, now 'mid their broken flights of steps
Lie prone, enormous, down the mountain side--
So in the sand lay Rostum by his son. (line 857 to 864)

Here Rostum is lying on the sand "by his dead son," just like one of the "enormous," "black granite pillars" lying "prone" on the "broken flights of steps" of the "Persepolis," the majestic palace of the Achaemenid dynasty in Iran which is now in ruins. If the black granite pillars once connoted the power and strength upon which King Jemshid's palace was "rear'd" in the Persepolis, the same "black" pillars lying "prone" on "broken" flights of steps now associate

with “suffering” and “mourning.” Black, the sum of all colors, encompasses Rustum’s world too and the West is not immune to “suffering.”

All in all, colors do not individually or exclusively pertain to Orientalism, whether imperialist or exoticist, but they do contribute to the “basic distinction between East and West” by creating contrastive worlds for the protagonists of the story and their people: the black and grey Orient versus the colorful Occident.

2.3 Architecture

Contradictions between the East and West can be seen in the architectural representations of the Orient and Occident too, and the following discussion on the realm of architecture exhausts the list of binaries produced by the East/West dichotomy.

Arnold refers to a monumental construction in the West, the Persepolis, whose significance concerning the “black granite pillars” of the palace was discussed in the previous page. But apart from the color at play, the counterpart of the majestic Persepolis in the East, a nameless fallen clay fort on a small hill, produces the last binary opposition between the East and West.

2.3.1 *The Persepolis versus a Clay Fort*

Early in the poem, the only representative of Eastern architecture is introduced.

And to a hillock came [Sohrab], ... [where] ...
...
The men of former times had crown'd the top
With a clay fort; but that was fall'n, and now
The Tartars built there Peran-Wisa's tent,
A dome of laths, and o'er it felts were spread. (line 17 to 23)

The nameless fort which is also “fall’n,” or in ruins, was made on “a hillock” by “the men of former times” out of “clay.” The Persopolis, on the other hand, was constructed on “the mountain side” by Jemshid, the mythological King of Persia, not just by “men of former times,” and it had an impressive architecture; “enormous” pillars made out of “black granite” with

“flights of steps.” The comparison reminds one of the concept of “imperialist exoticism” introduced by Chris Bongie.⁴⁹ He argues that imperialist exoticism (which may as well be called “imperialist Orientalism”), “affirms the hegemony of modern civilization over less developed, savage territories.” The hegemony of the relatively modern Persian Empire is meticulously depicted not only in the grand architecture of the Persepolis or the “battalions in bright burnish’d steel,” but also in the wide array of colors attributed to everything Western, and the ultimate victory of the old champion of the Persian Empire. In totality though, the Persian Empire is a part of the Orient and her final victory only affirms the hegemony of a more modern civilization, that is the West.

2.3.2 Why Are Both the Persepolis and the Clay Fort in Ruins?

There is a puzzling question here that supports the argument above in favor of the greater West in general and overshadow the relative hegemony and victory of the Persian Empire. We saw that Rostum lay in the sand by his dead son, and the scene was likened to the black granite pillars of the Persepolis lying prone, down the mountain side. Unlike the fallen clay fort upon which the Tartars built Piran-Wisa’s tent and refers to no recognizable historical monument, the Persepolis has a solid history behind it. Contrary to the myth that dates the construction of the monument back to the reign of Jemshid, the mythological King of Persia, it was founded by Darius the Great in 518 BC⁵⁰, and burnt down by Alexander the Great in 330 BC. Nevertheless, the destruction of the Persepolis was long after mythical times and does not historically coincide with the period in which Rostum lived and died. In other words, the simile built around the Persepolis relates to a historical period long after the era of Rostum and does not match the temporal framework of the plot. It is also true that Arnold did not always adhere to historical accuracy in his poem (the examples of which are the anachronism about the Ilyats of Khorassan, the mid-Victorian simile of the rich woman and poor drudge, and reference to King Kai Khosroo instead of Kai Kaus), but why should these two samples of architecture associated with Iran and Turan be both in ruins?

⁴⁹ *Exotic Memories: Literature, Colonialism, and the Fin de Siècle*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1991

⁵⁰ UNESCO. World Heritage Convention whc.unesco.org

In “The Imaginary Orient”⁵¹ Nochlin says, “(n)eglected, ill-repaired architecture functions, in 19th-century Orientalist art, as a standard *Topos* for commenting on the corruption of contemporary Islamic society.” A few lines further down she continues, “(t)hese people ... have let their own cultural treasures sink into decay.” The Persepolis was a pre-Islamic monument but the ruins were truly neglected by the then Islamic society in Iran for centuries until serious archeological research about the site started in the 1930s by Europeans. Therefore, Nochlin’s view about the reason behind the portrayal of such ruins puts both Iran and Turan among the less developed territories over which modern Western civilization exerted its hegemony via imperialist Orientalism. If Iran represented the Occident within the Orient in Arnold’s rendition, in the bigger picture, nonetheless, it would still be part of the Orient where people, in Nochlin’s eyes, “let their own cultural treasures sink into decay.” In line with this view of backwardness in the Orient, Taher-Kermani comments on the “nineteenth-century pattern of thinking about Persia” in Britain and says, “(t)hose who visited the country only saw an afterglow of a once-burning light, of the ‘prosperous’ Persia of ancient times. They found modern Persia non-progressive, backwards, and marked by social conservatism and religious superstitions. This shift led to a narrative of decline, from ancient glory to modern decay.”⁵² Taher-Kermani’s reading vividly illustrates the historical background upon which the Orient, and in particular Persia, was presented to the West in literature; a glorious past against a hopeless present.

In conclusion, the element of architecture plays a paradoxical role in Arnold’s poem. The fallen clay fort in the Orient affirms the backwardness of the less developed territory with no implications of past glory, whereas the ruins of the Persepolis in the West (located in the greater Orient) reverberate the “nostalgia for lost Oriental glory.” The paradox, nonetheless, is beautifully depicted.

⁵¹ *The Politics of Vision*. Chapter 3 (1989)

⁵² *The Review of English Studies*. Volume 69, Issue 289, April 2018 “Why the Oxus? On the Majestic River of Arnold’s *Sohrab and Rustum*” (page 19)

3. *Sohrab and Rustum*: The Gender Issue

Unlike the East-West dichotomy upon which Arnold created a great deal of his verbal and visual imagery in *Sohrab and Rustum*, using imagined geography, colors, and architecture to accentuate the distinction between the Orient and Occident, his portrayal of feminine and masculine traits seems to be more fluid.

In *Oriental Imaginings: Representations of Persia in Nineteenth-Century English Literature*⁵³, Farzad Boobani argues that “(a)fter Sohrab and Rustum’s initial confrontation and throughout their combat, the similes in their totality sustain a pattern in which the father and son are sharply contrasted by means of binary opposites.” He continues that “(t)he overall organizing force behind these oppositions is a deep confrontation between masculinity and femininity (in both a physical and figurative sense).” (page 125) This is the point of departure from which this study endeavors to explore the binary opposites concerning masculinity and femininity in four different categories: human characters, animals, plants, and inanimate objects.

3.1 Human Characters

Arnold’s poem is an epic narrative revolving around the combat between Sohrab and Rustum, and it is not unlikely to find the poem loaded with male characters and masculine traits. In fact, there is only one female character, Sohrab’s mother, whom Arnold briefly refers to in the story and the other female personae, whether women or female animals, only appear in similes. There are, of course, instances in which Rustum scolds Sohrab for being girlish or cases which highlight feminine traits in either character. However, the most significant female character missing in Arnold’s adaptation is Gordafarid.

3.1.1 Gordafarid

Jalal Khaleghi-Motlagh provides a brief introduction to Gordafarid’s character⁵⁴ and explains that in the original Persian text,

⁵³ WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2013

⁵⁴ *Encyclopedia Iranica*. Originally published: December 15, 2002

Upon Sohrab's attack on Dej-e Sepid (the Iranian fortress on the frontier with Turan) and the defeat and capture of the Iranian hero, Hojir, Gordafarid puts on her armor and challenges the Turanian heroes to single combat. She is, however, defeated by Sohrab, who only realizes that his adversary belongs to the opposite sex when he succeeds in removing her helmet. He then promptly falls in love with her. Gordafarid, who does not see herself as Sohrab's equal in battle, deceives him by false promises. She takes him up to the gate of the fortress, which she enters, and the gate closes behind her. The most haunting part of this episode is her conversation with Sohrab and her foreboding of Sohrab's downfall.

It is impossible to know how Arnold's rendition of Sohrab's tale would read if he had not omitted this part of the original story from his adaptation, but it would definitely have changed the all-male epic atmosphere of his *Sohrab and Rustum*. In Nochlin's analysis⁵⁵ of Gerome's Orientalist painting, *The Snake Charmer*, we read about similar absences. "We are haunted by certain *absences* in the painting. These absences are so conspicuous that, once we become aware of them, they begin to function as presences, in fact, as signs of a certain kind of conceptual deprivation." The conceptual deprivation we encounter in Arnold's poem is the role of women which is reduced to only one character, Sohrab's mother, whose "name" is not even mentioned in the story. Although Tahmineh is remembered lovingly by Rustum, she is at the same time seen as a "sad mother" (line 610) doing "some light female task," (line 647) while Rustum and Sohrab are fighting ferociously. Even Sohrab, her son, thinks of her as a "defenseless woman" (line 598) whose only active role in the story was to have Rustum's seal, the griffin, tattooed upon Sohrab's arm after his birth. If it were not for a few other "nameless" women in the similes or the feminine traits associated with the protagonists, the poem would have been totally deprived of any female presence. In any case, the relative absence of women in Sohrab's tale is quite conspicuous.

Let us now examine how Arnold deals with the concepts of masculinity and femininity in his poem. First, Sohrab and Rustum's self-images and opinions about each other will be introduced and then we shall see what chief commanders of Iran and Turan think of them. Persians and Tartars' impressions of the heroes culminates this introduction.

⁵⁵ *The Politics of Vision*. Chapter 3: The Imaginary Orient (1989)

3.1.2. General Opinions about Sohrab and Rostum

The first time Sohrab asserts his “masculinity” is when he is talking to Peran-Wisa at the opening of the story:

Thou know'st if, since from Ader-baijan first
I came among the Tartars and bore arms,
I have still served Afrasiab well, and shown,
At my boy's years, the courage of a man. (line 42 to 45)

Sohrab refers to his service in the army and showing “the courage of a man” despite his young age and “boy’s years.” His self-image is that of a courageous man and he desires to prove his *manliness* to his father.

I seek one man, one man, and one alone--
Rostum, my father; who I hoped should greet,
Should one day greet, upon some well-fought field,
His not unworthy, not inglorious son. (line 49 to 52)

Sohrab is looking for his father, Rostum, who is an epitome of masculinity in his eyes: one man, one man, and one alone. The repetition of “one man, one man, and one alone” not only emphasizes Sohrab’s earnest desire to find his father but implies the unique *manliness* of Rostum too. Sohrab feels he needs to prove to his father that, as a son, he is not “unworthy” or “inglorious” and he believes this must be done “upon some well-fought field.” In other words, his “worth” and “glory” may only qualify as acceptable if proved on a “manly battlefield.” To prove his worth to his unseen father and probably find a chance to finally meet him, Sohrab proposes a plan.

... I
Will challenge forth the bravest Persian lords
To meet me, man to man; if I prevail,
Rostum will surely hear it; if I fall--
Old man, the dead need no one, claim no kin. (line 55 to 59)

Sohrab thinks if he wins a single combat against “the bravest Persian lords,” his father will hear about it and he will have proved his worth. And if he dies in the battle, he won’t need to meet his father anymore. But he is unaware of the ironic turn of events. Peran-Wisa warns Sohrab against the risks of his plan.

“To seek out Rustum--seek him not through fight!
Seek him in peace,” (lines 75 and 76)

Peran-Wisa knows Rustum and is worried about the ill-fated outcome of a single combat which may place Sohrab against Rustum.

“... my heart forebodes
Danger or death awaits thee on this field.” (lines 86 and 87)

But he finally gives in, affirming Sohrab’s self-image of an unstoppable “courageous man” and his opinion about his “one and only” father.

“... who can keep the lion's cub
From ravening, and who govern Rustum's son?” (lines 91 and 92)

He compares Sohrab to a “lion’s cub” and he knows that he is Rustum’s son, so Rustum is in the first place “the lion.” Sohrab is established as a hero whose self-image and Peran-Wisa’s opinion about him prove his *manliness*. His popularity among the Tartar camp is also reiterated after Peran-Wisa challenges “a champion from the Persian lords to fight ... Sohrab, man to man,” (lines 152 and 153) and

“A thrill through all the Tartar squadrons ran
Of pride and hope for Sohrab, whom they loved.” (lines 158 and 159)

Sohrab’s “name and fame” caused “a thrill ... of pride and hope” among “Tartar squadrons,” whereas “... pale Persians held their breath with fear.” (line 169) In the simile prior to this line (line 160 to 168: already discussed in chapter two), Sohrab is compared to the overhanging snows of an avalanche and that is why pale Persians held their breath with fear lest Sohrab’s overwhelming masculine force may destroy them.

On the other hand, Rostum is already described implicitly by Sohrab. He is the “one man, one man, and one alone,” to whom Sohrab has to prove his worth and glory on the battlefield. He is the father of the “lion’s cub” too, as described by Peran-Wisa. But Rostum enters the scene only when Gudurz meets him in his tent to tell him about the Tartar challenge.

“... and there Rostum sate
Listless, and held a falcon on his wrist,
And play'd with it;” (line 199 to 201)

Rostum is “listless” because of his “quarrel with the Persian King” (line 85) but still holds “a falcon on his wrist,” which is a symbol of bravery. Gudurz introduces Sohrab to Rostum then.

“Sohrab men call him, but his birth is hid.
O Rostum, like thy might is this young man's! (lines 214 and 215)

Except for Peran-Wisa and probably other advisors to King Afrasiab of Turan, Sohrab’s true identity is hidden from Persians— “his birth is hid.” But he is famous and Gudurz finds his “might” comparable to Rostum’s strength. He knows that Rostum is Iran’s one and only hope against Sohrab’s challenge.

“... all eyes turn to thee.
Come down and help us, Rostum, or we lose!” (lines 258 and 259)

Hearing Gudurz’s words about Sohrab, Rostum wishes he “had such a son.” He actually believes that he has a “slight helpless girl” instead.

“For would that I myself had such a son,
And not that one slight helpless girl I have--
A son so famed, so brave, to send to war,” (line 229 to 231)

Rostum appreciates Sohrab’s manly attributes of “fame,” “bravery,” and “fitness to go to war” and thinks of his “presumptive” daughter as a “slight helpless girl.” This is the first time in the poem that Arnold describes a female character and the qualities of being slight (or thin) and helplessness go against the properties sought for by Rostum to send a “son” to war. It must be

remembered that this is Rostum's perspective and later we shall see that Arnold does not necessarily favor this misogynistic attitude.

Rostum is well aware of his own fame and says if he had a son like Sohrab, he could hang his armor up—or “retire” in its modern sense—and take care of his old father instead.

There would I go [Seistan], and hang my armour up,
And with my great name fence that weak old man [Zal],
...
And rest my age, and hear of Sohrab's fame,
...
And with these slaughterous hands draw sword no more. (line 236 to 241)

Rostum knows that he has a “great name” and “slaughterous hands,” so his self-image matches that of a “well-known fierce warrior.” He is also well aware that he is not “match'd/ In single fight with any mortal man.” (lines 258 and 259) Gudurz who knows how sensitive Rostum is when it comes to his “great name” and self-image tries to provoke him to accept Sohrab's challenge and succeeds.

3.1.3 The Wet Diver and His Wife

The second time a female character appears in the poem is when Arnold describes “fear and hope” in the Persian army by a simile:

And dear as the wet diver to the eyes
Of his pale wife who waits and weeps on shore,
By sandy Bahrein, in the Persian Gulf,
Plunging all day in the blue waves, at night,
Having made up his tale of precious pearls,
Rejoins her in their hut upon the sands--
So dear to the pale Persians Rostum came. (line 284 to 290)

This simile is already discussed in detail in chapter two, but it is still worth mentioning how Arnold creates a binary opposition between a husband and wife. On the sandy shore of Bahrain in the Persian Gulf, we notice the (implied) “wet” eyes of the “waiting” and “weeping” pale “wife” of a “wet” diver who is plunging for precious pearls. The alliterative chain of words describing the pale “wife” (implied “wet” eyes, waiting, and weeping) all illustrate the “weaker” partner anxiously waiting for the safe return of her husband who is a “wet” diver, but being “wet” for the diver explicitly portrays his daring task of plunging for precious pearls in the Persian Gulf; another chain of alliterative words that highlights the potentially dangerous and masculine feat the “stronger” partner has to perform which is ultimately rewarding. In fact, the female vehicle in this simile—the pale wife—describes the all-male but terrified tenor of the Persian army, and the male vehicle—the wet diver—corresponds to the all-male masculine hero, Rustum. Does this mean that Arnold tends to attribute all weaker qualities to female characters or *feminizes weakness* in general? It seems that the answer is not definitively positive. In only about a dozen lines further down, Arnold presents his controversial simile in which Rustum and Sohrab are compared to “some rich woman” and a “poor drudge” respectively. (line 301 to 309) In an all-male combat where almost everything is masculine, Arnold employs feminine characters to describe his overtly male protagonists. It is true that the “poor drudge” is a “weaker woman,” but Rustum is also compared to a “woman.” In other words, being a woman is not inherently considered to be a weakness and in this sense, Arnold breaks the stereotypes associated with the portrayal of male heroes. Does this singular instance suffice to conclude that Arnold’s use of female characters, in this particular poem at least, proves his impartiality toward genders? Perhaps not, but at the same time this is solid ground upon which one might presume that he did not advocate a misogynistic attitude in full force.

3.1.4 Sohrab as a Young Cypress versus Rustum as Some Single Tower

Rustum’s arrogant view of Sohrab, which all started with the simile discussed in the previous section, continues with an added touch of pity in the following lines:

... long he [Rustum] perused
His spirited air, and wonder'd who he was.

For very young he seem'd, tenderly rear'd;
Like some young cypress, tall, and dark, and straight,
Which in a queen's secluded garden throws
Its slight dark shadow on the moonlit turf,
By midnight, to a bubbling fountain's sound--
So slender Sohrab seem'd, so softly rear'd.
And a deep pity enter'd Rustum's soul (line 311 to 319)

Rustum finds Sohrab different from what he expects. He knows that Sohrab “came seeking Rustum ... defying forth all the most valiant chiefs,” (lines 310 and 311) but now he has “very young” looks and a “spirited air” or enthusiastic impression, is tenderly reared (reiterated once more as “so softly rear’d” at the end of the description) and is compared to “some young cypress.” If Sohrab has been bold enough to defy “all the most valiant chiefs,” why is he described as “soft” and “tender”? As a “young cypress,” he is portrayed as “tall,” “dark,” and “straight,” throwing a “slight dark shadow” in a romantic setting of “moonlit turf” or grass by “midnight,” to a “bubbling fountain’s sound,” which is so remote from scenes of bloodshed and aggressive violence expected from a famous warrior. The *princely* upbringing of the “young cypress” in a “queen’s secluded garden” adds a tinge of femininity to the vehicle Sohrab is compared to and this makes Rustum feel “pity” for him.

Regardless of gender, the cypress tree is a symbol of everlasting life, resilience, and free spirit in the original Persian culture but the romantic aura surrounding it in the simile above consolidates Rustum’s initial misogynistic attitude and arouses feelings of pity in him, especially when it is emphasized that Sohrab and the young cypress are both tenderly/softly reared. Ironically though, the cypress is associated with death and the underworld in Greek and Roman mythology and this entangled web of meanings, from femininity to free spirit and the shadow of death, can clarify the foundation for Rustum’s anticipatory flash of “deep pity” penetrating his soul.

In “Orientalism in Color,” Sarah J. Graham-Brown mentions that “portrayals of ‘Oriental’ subjects, whether people, landscapes or monuments are often imbued with a significance which does not intrinsically belong to them.” She continues that “(n)owhere is this more evident than in the transfer of Western male sexual fantasies and repressed desires to the female ‘Oriental.’” Although Arnold does not introduce any such female Orientals in his poem and the only female

character, Sohrab's mother, is devoid of any sexual overtones, Sohrab himself, however asexually, is portrayed as a Homeric hero with a *significantly* "slender" physique which is quite contrary to his portrayal in the original Persian text and this "slenderness" *does not intrinsically belong* to him. Sohrab's "slender" physique is verbally accentuated in the musical alliteration of line 318: "So slender Sohrab seem'd, so softly rear'd," and is contrasted to Rostum's "giant figure" described a few lines further down (line 336). But Sohrab was as "vast" (line 325) in physique as his father in the original Persian text, and the contrast in Arnold's adaptation is probably employed to aggravate the effect of the final tragic act of filicide, or it could be just a clash of perspectives since Sohrab's self-image is that of a courageous man despite his young age and it is to Rostum, through the narrator, that Sohrab "seemed" slender and softly reared. In other words, the poet's change of perspective adds this tinge of femininity to Sohrab's character whereas his masculinity is already expressed by the hero himself and confirmed and reconfirmed by individuals in both sides as well as the two armies of Iran and Turan.

Rostum, however, manifestly expresses his own masculine features and warns Sohrab against the fatal outcome of combat with him:

Behold me! I am vast, and clad in iron,
And tried; and I have stood on many a field
Of blood, and I have fought with many a foe--
Never was that field lost, or that foe saved.
O Sohrab, wherefore wilt thou rush on death? (line 325 to 328)

Rostum is "vast" in physique, armored, experienced, and invincible. He has been to many a "well-fought field" of blood and has never been defeated; the very same battlefields on which Sohrab wished Rostum could one day greet him as "his not unworthy, not inglorious son." (line 52) Rostum, who felt pity for Sohrab and his tender age just before talking to him, cannot help acknowledging the young hero's courage:

"There are no youths in Iran brave as thou." (line 333)

Rostum's mixed feelings of pity and admiration for Sohrab complicate through the course of the combat but Sohrab appears to be emotionally more stable and shows more studied emotions towards Rostum whether before or after recognizing him as his true father. Even amidst the

battle he admits his unknown opponent's masculine dominance: "thou art more vast, more dread than I,/ And thou art proved, I know." (lines 385 and 386)

Sohrab is more or less consistent in his attitude toward Rostum, both before he learns Rostum's true identity and after that.

. . . Sohrab heard his voice,
The mighty voice of Rostum, and he saw
His giant figure planted on the sand,
Sole, like some single tower, which a chief
Hath builded on the waste in former years
Against the robbers; (line 334 to 339)

Contrary to Sohrab who is "slender" and "soft" in Rostum's perspective, Rostum has a "mighty voice" and "giant figure" in Sohrab's perspective. If Sohrab has feminine attributes in Rostum's eyes, Rostum is literally masculine in Sohrab's view. Rostum, who was already described as "one man, one man, and one alone" by Sohrab, is unique: "sole, like some single tower," and the alliterative chain of words following "sand," combined with the synonymous adjectives of "sole" and "single" preceding the lonely "tower" in the "waste" emphasizes that singularity. Rostum's distinctiveness is portrayed in the same architectural design of the *imagined geography* expected of the Orient, that is, Sohrab's perspective: he is likened to a "single tower" built by "a chief" on the desert—"waste"—against the threat of the "robbers." Even through a psychoanalytical lens, Rostum's masculinity is highlighted here by the phallic symbol of a "single tower" erected in the middle of "the waste." Furthermore, the tower was built by a presumably masculine "chief" as a stronghold against the enemies. Interestingly, Sohrab maintains this feeling of admiration towards Rostum for his masculine power even in the heat of the combat.

On the other hand, Sohrab is like a "young cypress" tenderly reared in a "queen's secluded garden" next to a "bubbling fountain." He is raised in a sheltered environment of peace and quiet: a feminine queen's garden, among other trees and flowers, signifying the security and serenity of the modern West, which basically illustrates Rostum's perspective in contrast to Sohrab's depiction of the harsh environment of the East.

3.1.5 Rostum's Depreciative View of Sohrab

Rostum's feelings of admiration and pity for Sohrab turn to wariness as Sohrab sees grey hair in his head and finding the color familiar (already discussed in chapter two), embraces Rostum's knees and implores him to reveal his true identity.

But Rostum eyed askance the kneeling youth,
And turn'd away, and spake to his own soul:--
"Ah me, I muse what this young fox may mean!
False, wily, boastful, are these Tartar boys." (line 345 to 348)

Sohrab is now a "young fox" whom Rostum is suspicious of. Rostum stereotypes Tartar boys as untrue, deceitful, and arrogant and Sohrab is the same to him. He cannot believe why Sohrab, a famous warrior, should be kneeling in front of him, embracing his knees and beseeching him to disclose his name. He is afraid if he reveals his identity, Sohrab may "find some pretext not to fight" (line 352) and then boast that he and Rostum exchanged gifts instead of fighting and this would have shamed the "chiefs of Iran."

Rostum also finds Sohrab inconsiderate since no one, in his opinion, dared to even look at "great Rostum," let alone fight him.

Rash boy, men look on Rostum's face and flee!
For well I know, that did great Rostum stand
Before thy face this day, and were reveal'd,
There would be then no talk of fighting more. (line 369 to 372)

Rostum is confident about his own masculine power, but he has a hard time figuring out what to make of Sohrab. His feelings towards Sohrab, which start with pity for his feminine upbringing mixed with admiration for his courage, change to wariness and finally he finds him impetuous. He blames Sohrab's impetuosity on his youth because, he believes, if he were a man rather than a "rash boy," he would flee if he looked on Rostum's face. In other words, he finds rational fear a *manly attribute* that Sohrab has not acquired yet.

Rostum asks Sohrab to yield and warns him that if he does not, he will surely die.

“Or else thy bones shall strew this sand, till winds
Bleach them, or Oxus with his summer-floods,
Oxus in summer wash them all away.” (Lines 376 to 378)

This is the first time in the poem that Arnold refers to the Oxus as a *masculine* figure: *his* summer floods. And then in the very last passage of the poem, the river is clearly personified as “he.” (line 879 to 890) This shall be thoroughly discussed in the last section of this chapter.

3.1.6 Sohrab and Rostum’s Shared View on Femininity

In response to Rostum’s forewarning about getting killed, Sohrab asks rhetorically:

"Art thou so fierce? Thou wilt not fright me so!
I am no girl to be made pale by words.” (line 380 and 381)

Here we get exposed to Sohrab’s perspective on femininity for the first time. He believes words can frighten girls and he is “no girl.” This depreciative attitude towards the opposite sex is what Sohrab shares with his father. Rostum has already expressed his disappointment with his presumptive daughter: “that one slight helpless girl I have” (line 230), and Sohrab finds it “girlish” to be intimidated by verbal threats. Thus, despite Rostum’s pity for Sohrab’s feminine upbringing versus Sohrab’s admiration for his father’s masculinity, both heroes express a misogynistic attitude toward girls, and if it were not for Arnold’s controversial simile in which he likened both Rostum and Sohrab to women, the overall tone of the poem would be sexist.

3.1.7 Sohrab’s Filial Feelings versus Rostum’s Naming and Shaming

Sohrab and Rostum start the fight and after two failing attempts to strike Sohrab, Rostum falls to his knees and although Sohrab has the opportunity to “unsheathe his sword” and “pierce the mighty Rostum while he laid dizzy ... on his knees,” he draws back “courteously.” (line 420 to 426) Sohrab has the upper hand now but acts nobly and invites Rostum to stop fighting:

“But oh, let there be peace 'twixt thee and me!” (line 447)

Sohrab has already proven to Arnold's readers in the battle scene that he is by far a more adept warrior and definitely "not an unworthy or inglorious son" for his father, the mighty Rostum. He is also well aware of his own masculine power despite his young age:

"Boy as I am, I have seen battles too--
Have waded foremost in their bloody waves,
And heard their hollow roar of dying men;" (line 433 to 435)

He has known blood, violence, and death, yet he feels he should not fight the old warrior who keeps denying being Rostum.

"Thou say'st, thou art not Rostum; be it so!
Who art thou then, that canst so touch my soul?" (lines 431 and 432)

"... never was my heart thus touch'd before.
Are they from Heaven, these softening of the heart?" (lines 436 and 437)

Sohrab believes "heart and soul" that this old warrior is not his enemy, but Rostum who is "trembling with rage" and feels humiliated, attacks Sohrab verbally and tries to shame him by calling him a "girl."

"Girl! nimble with thy feet, not with thy hands!
Curl'd minion, dancer, coiner of sweet words!" (lines 457 and 458)

"Thou art not in Afrasiab's gardens now
With Tartar girls, with whom thou art wont to dance;" (lines 460 and 461)

Rostum is hopelessly portrayed here as a male chauvinist, who finds Sohrab's behavior and words "girlish." In his opinion, it is girlish to be "nimble with one's feet" like a "dancer," and a "man" should be "nimble with his hands" instead. That is why he says:

"... on the Oxus-sands, and in the dance
Of battle, and with me, who make no play
Of war; I fight it out, and hand to hand." (line 462 to 464)

Rustum believes in “the dance of battle” fought out “hand to hand,” and the Oxus-sands are not like Afrasiab’s gardens where Sohrab was used to dancing with Tartar girls, relying on his nimble feet. He attempts to humiliate Sohrab by calling him a “curl’d minion” of Afrasiab and ridicules his verbal skill of coining “sweet words” as an equivalent to his effeminate dancing skills. Rustum’s self-esteem is deeply wounded, and he keeps blaming it on Sohrab’s so-called “girl’s wiles” or girlish tricks:

“... thou hast shamed me before both the hosts
With thy light skipping tricks, and thy girl's wiles.” (lines 467 and 468)

3.1.8 The Fatal Ending

The two heroes resume the fight until Rustum shouts out his own name. Sohrab stands bewildered, drops his shield, and Rustum’s spear pierces his side. Sohrab sinks to the ground, but Rustum still insists on hiding his identity.

“Fool, thou art slain, and by an unknown man!” (line 537)

Sohrab replies that it was Rustum’s name that made him drop his shield.

“... that beloved name unnerved my arm--

...

... and made my shield Fall;” (lines 547 to 550)

And finally Sohrab reveals his true lineage.

“The mighty Rustum shall avenge my death!

My father, whom I seek through all the world,

He shall avenge my death, and punish thee!” (lines 553 to 555)

Standing over his dying son and in utter disbelief, Rustum claims that he never had a son.

“What prate is this of fathers and revenge?

The mighty Rustum never had a son.” (lines 577 and 578)

He keeps hiding his identity and refers to himself in third person. Illeism is more than a literary device here and reflects Rustum's firm intention to conceal his identity as well as his strong belief in his self-image as a "mighty" masculine hero.

Sohrab replies that his father will take revenge despite his grief.

"What will that grief, what will that vengeance be?" (line 587)

3.1.9 Tahmineh, Her Presumptive Daughter, and Sohrab and Rustum's Attitudes toward Them

After Sohrab's call for his vengeance, the only female character in the poem is briefly introduced: Tahmineh, Sohrab's mother.

"Yet him I pity not so much, but her,
My mother, who in Ader-baijan dwells" (lines 589 and 590)

Her most I pity, who no more will see
Sohrab ...
...
And then will that defenceless woman learn
That Sohrab will rejoice her sight no more, (lines 593 to 599)

Sohrab feels more pity for his mother than his father and also feels sorry for his own death which will inevitably be his mother's main cause of sorrow. He feels sorry that he will be deprived of the joy of seeing his mother again and he knows his mother is "defenseless" against "destiny" and may not be able to change her son's fate. If Rustum thought of his "presumptive" daughter as a "slight helpless girl" and wished he had had a son instead, Sohrab also pities his mother as a "defenseless woman." The son shares his father's patronizing attitude towards the opposite sex: like father, like son. Therefore, the underlying sense of masculine superiority shared by the protagonists appears to violate the presumed confrontation between masculinity and femininity in the two heroes initially proposed by Boobani. But the fact that Sohrab had feminine attributes is immediately seen in the lines following his monologue.

"He spoke; and as he ceased, he wept aloud,

Thinking of her he left, and his own death.” (lines 602 and 603)

Sohrab “weeps aloud” just like the “pale wife who waits and weeps on shore,” (line 285) and likewise Rostum finally softens when he finds who he has mortally wounded, and weeps aloud.

“... his tears brake forth; he cast
His arms round his son's neck, and wept aloud,
And kiss'd him.” (line 727 to 729)

The binary opposites and deep confrontation between masculinity and femininity gradually give in to a merger of the qualities of both genders in the heroes who prove to possess more human traits than stereotypical gender roles.

Hearing Sohrab’s words about his mother, Rostum begins to remember the child he supposedly had in Azerbaijan.

... the babe,
Which was in Ader-baijan born to him,
Had been a puny girl, no boy at all--
So that sad mother sent him word, for fear
Rostum should seek the boy, to train in arms (line 607 to 611)

Rostum still believed the child was a girl based on his wife's words. In fact, Tahmineh had told him so because she was afraid if Rostum knew his child was a boy, he would take him away and train him as a warrior. The child is a “puny” girl to Rostum and “puny” is by no means an endearing term. It means “small and weak” and in stark contrast to a boy: “no boy at all.” Rostum’s arrogant attitude towards the opposite sex is reiterated here and even the picture the poet paints of Rostum’s wife is that of a protective yet fearful “sad mother.”

The first time Rostum shows signs of soft emotions is when he remembers his own youth and Sohrab’s mother.

“... tears gather'd in his eyes;
For he remember'd his own early youth,” (lines 618 and 619)

So, the mighty Rostum is not an all-masculine hero incapable of tender emotions and tears can fill his “dreadful eyes” (line 514) too. Rostum remembers his youth and how he married Sohrab’s mother, Princess Tahmineh.

... so Rostum saw
His youth; saw Sohrab's mother, in her bloom;
And that old king, her father, who loved well
His wandering guest, and gave him his fair child
With joy; and all the pleasant life they led,
They three, in that long-distant summer-time (line 623 to 628)

Tahmineh’s father approved of his daughter's marriage. He “loved well his wandering guest,” Rostum, and “gave him his fair child with joy” and the couple and the bride’s father were all happy with this union: they led a pleasant life; they three. The outcome of this union, however, has come under fire by at least two critics, questioning the tender gender-related issue of Sohrab’s legitimacy. First, Professor W. C. Wilkinson⁵⁶ who summarized the plot of this epic poem in his essay⁵⁷ published in November 1908 and claimed that “Sohrab is the illegitimate son of Rostum, who abandoned the mother before her child was born,” and based upon this presumption continued that “Rostum at least was an impure man, faithless alike to his wife, if he had one, and to the unwedded mother of his son.”

In Arnold's account of Rostum and Tahmineh’s marriage, they had the bride's father's approval and all three lived happily in Azerbaijan for a while until Rostum went back to Iran. In the original text, Rostum met Tahmineh in Samangan which might have been mistakenly translated to Azerbaijan (already discussed in chapter two). In either case, both territories belonged to Turan, the archenemy of Iran. Moreover, Rostum asked for a mobad (a Zoroastrian cleric) to officiate the wedding and sought the bride’s father's approval in Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*. Tahmineh was Rostum’s first love and legal wife, and Sohrab could by no means be illegitimate. It is true, however, that Rostum left Samangan immediately after he found his horse, Ruksh, only one day after his wedding but he did not know for sure he was going to have a child. In other

⁵⁶ William Cleaver Wilkinson (1833-1920)

⁵⁷ *The North American Review*. Vol. 188, No. 636, Matthew Arnold as Poet: Tried by his *Sohrab and Rostum*. Pp. 666-681

words, he did not knowingly abandon the legally wedded mother of his son nine months before the child was born or even before Tahmineh herself knew she was pregnant. (This narrative logic unfortunately loses cogency when Arnold changes Rustum's immediate return from Samangan/Azerbaijan to an indefinite length of stay in his adaptation.)

The second critic who questioned Sohrab's legitimacy about 110 years after Wilkinson is Isabelle Gadoin⁵⁸ who introduces Sohrab as "a son he (Rustum) never knew, because he was the fruit of an illegitimate affair with the Turanian princess Tahmineh." Initially I thought the reason why Wilkinson and Gadoin—or perhaps other critics as well—made the assumption that Sohrab was illegitimate or Rustum was an impure man might be understood by applying Nochlin's comments on Orientalist paintings and the picturesque, especially because textual proof in Arnold's rendition as well as the original text asserted that Rustum's love for Tahmineh was pure and they were lawfully wedded.

In her comments about Gerome's *Slave Market*, painted in early 1860s, Nochlin⁵⁹ says, "(l)ike many other artworks of his time, Gerome's Orientalist painting managed to body forth two ideological assumptions about power: one about men's power over women; the other about white man's superiority to, hence justifiable control over, inferior, darker races." Then she moves on to the wider topic of the picturesque and among various functions of this style of painting mentions the following: "Another important function, then, of the picturesque—Orientalizing in this case—is to certify that the people encapsulated by it, defined by its presence, are irredeemably different from, more backward than and culturally inferior to those who construct and consume the picturesque product. They are irrevocably 'Other.'"

Perhaps it was this *otherness* that led Wilkinson and Gadoin as consumers of an Orientalist product to assume that Rustum, being irredeemably different from the superior white man, could not have exercised his power over women in a justifiable manner. Although no proof can be found in either Arnold's adaptation or the original Persian text for the claims against Rustum, such as impurity, faithlessness, or abandoning the unwedded mother of his son, these claims may

⁵⁸ *Geographies of Contact*. Chapter V. Jules Mohl: A Missing Link in the Complex Network of Nineteenth-Century Orientalism. (pp. 183-197) January 2017

⁵⁹ *The Politics of Vision*. Chapter 3: The Imaginary Orient (1989)

have well stemmed from the cultural inferiority or racial backwardness these critics associated irrevocably with the Orient but sometimes a single word can change a whole chain of reasoning.

The probable lexical basis for this misconception lies in Gadoin's reference to one of Arnold's major sources for his adaptation. Commenting on *Sohrab and Rustum* and its sources, Parvin Loloï⁶⁰ explains that "(o)riginally published in 1853 as an English poem without any acknowledgment of its sources, Arnold was accused of plagiarism. Subsequently he admitted to having used the *History of Persia* (1815) by John Malcolm (1767-1833) and ..." Gadoin clarifies in her article that, "Arnold added a foreword to the 1854 reprinting of his poems, which referred the anecdote back to John Malcolm's *History of Persia*, dated 1815." She continues that, "Malcolm's text offered a thirty-line summary of the *Sohrab and Rustum* episode, which Arnold purely and simply reprinted as an epigraph to the second edition of his poem." Gadoin also reprints this summary in her article, the first line of which may hold the key to the mystery of Sohrab's illegitimacy claimed by her and Wilkinson.

"The young Sohrab was the fruit of one of Rustum's early amours."

Collins Dictionary defines "amour" as "a love affair, especially one which is kept secret," and based on Malcolm's account, Sohrab was the fruit of just "one" of these early amours, implying the possibility of Rustum having had a few other such affairs. This may have well given rise to the two critics' assumption that Rustum was impure and faithless and thus Sohrab was his illegitimate son.

Does this new piece of evidence refute the argument that *otherness* and the pre-assumption that people from the Orient are more backward and culturally inferior to the white man led the critics to make the aforementioned claims against Rustum and Sohrab? Not necessarily. It may just move the point of reference temporally back another 100 years to 1815 and the same line of reasoning about "otherness" could be applied to John Malcom in the first place, and then by extension to the readers and scholars who would have attempted to analyze *Sohrab and Rustum* through Malcolm's lens.

⁶⁰ *Encyclopedia Iranica*. Shahnameh Translations iii. into English. Online Edition, 2014.

3.1.10 Rustum's Masculinity versus Sohrab's Femininity

In line with the binary opposites encapsulating our protagonists, what Rustum remembers about his own youth is a balanced mixture of romantic adventure and manly pursuits, that accentuate his overriding masculinity.

“The castle, and the dewy woods, and hunt
And hound, and morn on those delightful hills” (lines 629 and 630)

If he remembers “the castle” and “hunt and hound,” he also recalls the more romantic atmosphere of “dewy woods” and “morn on those delightful hills.” The simile by which he portrays his son, on the other hand, is feminized.

... his own dear son,
Piteous and lovely, lying on the sand;
Like some rich hyacinth which by the scythe
Of an unskilful gardener has been cut, (line 632 to 635)

The simile above is already discussed in detail in chapter two but it is still worth noticing how Arnold portrays Sohrab through Rustum's eyes as “dear,” “piteous,” and “lovely,” and likens him to a feminine symbol, the flower hyacinth, which in Greek mythology alluded to the “beautiful,” and “effeminate” Spartan prince, Hyacinthus. At the same time Rustum sees himself as the Grim Reaper, holding a scythe, alluding to Cronus and his masculine, destructive force who devoured his own children.

3.1.11 Rustum's Opinion about Tahmineh and His Presumptive Daughter

Rustum, who cannot believe he has a son, says:

"O Sohrab, thou indeed art such a son
Whom Rustum, wert thou his, might well have loved." (lines 641 and 642)

He still believes he has a daughter instead,

... men
Have told thee false--thou art not Rostum's son.
For Rostum had no son; one child he had--
But one--a girl; (lines 643 to 646)

And maintains his patronizing attitude towards women.

“... a girl; who with her mother now
Plies some light female task, nor dreams of us--
Of us she dreams not, nor of wounds, nor war.” (lines 646 to 648)

Compared to the horrendous wounds of war inflicted upon men, women do just some “light female task” in Rostum’s eyes and cannot even dream of the horrors of combat.

3.1.12 Rostum and Ruksh

When finally Rostum sees his own seal tattooed on Sohrab’s arm, he realizes that Sohrab is truly his son and breaks into tears.

“... his tears brake forth; he cast
His arms round his son's neck, and wept aloud,” (lines 727 and 728)

If weeping was already considered a feminine trait, not only the dispassionate, masculine hero of Iran finally weeps aloud, but his fierce steed, Ruksh, also melts into tears.

“... from his dark, compassionate eyes,
The big warm tears roll'd down, and caked the sand.” (lines 735 and 736)

3.1.13 Sohrab as White Violets

Sohrab who was once likened to a “hyacinth,” is once more likened to flowers toward the end of the poem, that is, “white violets”⁶¹ this time, which symbolize his “innocence” wasted on the

⁶¹ For a thorough discussion, please see chapter two: Colors.

banks of the Oxus. The flower imagery reiterates the femininity Arnold had already attributed to Sohrab by portraying him as a tenderly reared “young cypress.” But the flowers in these two similes share one more quality with the tree: If the cypress foreshadowed Sohrab’s unavoidable fate, the hyacinth and violets are all cut and discarded, and they not only imply “vulnerability” and “transience of life,” but explicitly signify how Sohrab is doomed to die.

The poem comes to an end with a brilliant passage personifying the Oxus as a masculine river. The merger of masculine and feminine qualities in the Oxus shall be discussed at the end of the present chapter.

3.2 Animals

Arnold refers to several animals in his poem some of which are not gendered like horses/steeds (except for Ruksh), cranes, sheep, ponies, birds, and jackals. A few others are gendered but play no significant role in the overall feminine/masculine dichotomy such as mares and camels. The rest of the animals are distinctly gendered or directly associated with either Sohrab or Rostum, thus connoting conspicuous gendered traits.

3.2.1 The Lion’s Cub, the Wild Stag, and the Lion

The first animal introduced into the poem is “the lion’s cub.”

“... who can keep the lion's cub

From ravening, and who govern Rostum's son?” (lines 91 and 92)

It is already discussed how Peran-Wisa supports Sohrab’s opinion about his *manliness* by comparing him to a “lion’s cub.” Masculine traits of “ravening” ferociously for prey and “ungovernability” consolidate this self-image. Moreover, Peran-Wisa knows that Rostum is Sohrab’s father and hence he is the very masculine “lion,” the young hero’s true father.

Sohrab’s masculinity is reaffirmed by a Persian lord too. Gudurz, the uncle of the King of Iran, who is summoned to give counsel on how to go about Sohrab’s challenge to fight “man to man,” introduces Sohrab as follows:

“... shame bids us take their challenge up,

Yet champion have we none to match this youth.

He has the wild stag's foot, the lion's heart.” (line 175 to 177)

He confirms that young Sohrab is agile as “he has the wild stag’s foot,” and brave for his “lion's heart.” The stag and lion symbolize virility and courage respectively and both of these qualities are closely associated with masculinity. Therefore, it is not only Sohrab himself, or Tartar squadrons and their general Peran-Wisa who “see” Sohrab as a manly hero, but the Persian army and their chief advisor, Gudurz, also find him of such great masculine power, agility, and courage that they may have no champions “to match this youth.”

Later on, when Gudurz meets Rostum to tell him about the Tartar challenge, he repeats the very same words he used to illustrate Sohrab’s agility and courage among the Persian King’s advisors: He has the wild stag’s foot, the lion’s heart. (line 216) The repetition emphasizes the general opinion held by Persians about Sohrab.

3.2.2 Falcon

In Rostum’s meeting with Gudurz, a real animal is portrayed too; Rostum was holding “a falcon on his wrist.”

... [Rostum] held a falcon on his wrist,
And play'd with it; but Gudurz came and stood
Before him; and he look'd, and saw him stand,
And with a cry sprang up and dropp'd the bird,
And greeted Gudurz with both hands, (line 200 to 204)

It is not specified whether Rostum’s falcon is male or female, but it symbolizes bravery and is often associated with victory. Out of respect, Rostum “drops” the bird to greet Gudurz “with both hands.” He was already “playing” with the bird which could connote how bravery and victory were merely playthings to the Iranian hero, but does “dropping” the bird forecast his looming loss?

3.2.3 *Ruksh*

The most thoroughly characterized animal in the poem is Ruksh, Rustum's stallion.

... Ruksh, his horse,
Follow'd him like a faithful hound at heel;
The horse, whom Rustum on a foray once
Did in Bokhara by the river find
A colt beneath its dam, and drove him home,
And rear'd him; (line 271 to 276)

Rustum did find Ruksh when it was a "colt" but not on a "foray ... in Bokhara by the river ... beneath its dam." In the original Persian text, Ruksh is not from the enemy territory and is originally from Iran. Interestingly, the meaning of the name of the horse matches the colorful world of Rustum (discussed in chapter two). Ruksh, in Persian, means: red and white in color. His masculine features are portrayed elsewhere in the poem. "He" is famous,

"Ruksh, whose renown was noised through all the earth," (line 272)

and as fierce as a "desert-lion,"

... Ruksh, the horse,
Who stood at hand, utter'd a dreadful cry;--
No horse's cry was that, most like the roar
Of some pain'd desert-lion, (line 501 to 504)

and "brave," and fearsome or "terrible" just like Rustum.

"My mother told me of thee, thou brave steed,
My terrible father's terrible horse!" (lines 743 and 744)

But Ruksh, this very masculine stallion, eventually melts into tears when he finds Sohrab dying to provide another example for the merger of femininity and masculinity.

3.2.4 *The Young Fox*

The next animal portrayed in the poem is a fox.

“... I muse what this young fox may mean!

False, wily, boastful, are these Tartar boys.” (lines 347 and 348)

When Rostum hears Sohrab’s words begging him to reveal his true identity, he thinks of him as a “young fox” and attributes falsehood, wiliness, and boastfulness to him as well as all Tartar “boys.” The “young fox,” although masculine, represents traits disapproved by Rostum as “boyish,” “immature,” and hence inappropriate for a “man.”

3.2.5 *Hawk, Partridge, and Snake*

In line with the binary opposites describing the father and son in the similes, Rostum’s first attempt to attack Sohrab is likened to that of a hawk against a partridge, a bird of prey versus a game bird.

... Rostum answer'd not, but hurl'd
His spear; down from the shoulder, down it came,
As on some partridge, in the corn a hawk,
That long has tower'd in the airy clouds,
Drops like a plummet; (line 398 to 402)

Interestingly, Christ is often symbolically presented as a mother partridge since it readily dies to protect its young. And a hawk is known for its clear, keen vision. Although the spear—a synecdoche for Rostum—misses Sohrab here, Sohrab is depicted as the one who will be ultimately sacrificed and to the Christian audience the partridge evokes motherhood, hence femininity. On the other hand, the hawk is fierce and teeming with masculine power, yet despite “towering long in the airy clouds” and “dropping like a plummet,” the hawk’s clear and keen “vision,” representing Rostum’s intelligence and clairvoyance, fails to function and Rostum does not “see” who he is assaulting and why. Moreover, Rostum’s attempt to attack Sohrab is thoroughly dramatized and ornated with details, hence emphasizing his arrogance: towering in

the airy clouds; whereas Sohrab's defensive maneuver and counterattack are portrayed as realistically as possible:

"... Sohrab saw it come,
And sprang aside, quick as a flash;" (line 402 and 403)

"... then Sohrab threw
In turn, and full struck Rustum's shield; sharp rang,
The iron plates rang sharp, but turn'd the spear." (line 405 to 407)

The figurative language used to describe Sohrab's reaction is limited to a single phrase: "quick as a flash," and the rest is as literal as it could be. The choice of words depicting the air of arrogance around Rustum is in sharp contrast to the wording employed to show Sohrab's sensibility. The same technique is used by Arnold to illustrate Rustum's second attack: detailed verbose description of his "club" in ten lines (line 408 to 417) against Sohrab's quick reaction, portrayed in two lines and one figurative device.

"... but again Sohrab sprang aside,
Lithe as the glancing snake," (lines 417 and 418)

Sohrab's agility and graceful movement is likened to that of a snake, creating an alliterative chain of words which helps represent the dancing maneuvers of a warrior: Sohrab sprang aside, lithe as the glancing snake. The snake is not gendered but the graceful movements of the animal become a pretext for Rustum to rebuke Sohrab for his feminine skills of dance. The next four lines continue to show how Rustum's second attack fails. The less the poet spends on describing Sohrab, the bolder his prowess as a young warrior contrasts that of "mighty" Rustum. "Less is more" is once again seen in this part of the poem.

3.2.6 The Breeding Eagle and Her Mate

After Rustum mortally wounds Sohrab, Arnold describes how Rustum is unaware of his loss through a simile already discussed in chapter two in which a hunter pierces a "breeding eagle" with an arrow when she is rising, and her mate does not "know his loss." (line 556 to 573)

Sohrab is likened to the “she-eagle” in this simile and Rostum is both the hunter, who has “pierced her with an arrow,” and the “he-eagle,” the “poor bird” flying home who does not know “his loss.”

“So Rostum knew not his own loss, but stood
Over his dying son, and knew him not.” (line 574 and 575)

Rostum is the hunter killing the she-eagle and simultaneously the he-eagle looking for his mate, not knowing that she is dying. Rostum is the masculine “killer” and “loser” at the same time. He has managed to annihilate his foe, yet he is not aware what loss he has inflicted upon himself. Rostum’s masculine power has been self-destructive and his victim, closer than a mate, is his own flesh and blood.

Sohrab, on the other hand, is feminized as a breeding eagle. Arnold has kept portraying the hero of Turan as a feminine character. Although the vehicle is an eagle with a “stormy scream,” it is still a she-eagle that gets killed; another binary opposite to show the confrontation between masculinity and femininity.

3.2.7 The Griffin

The last animal to study is the mythological creature, griffin, tattooed on Sohrab’s arm to prove his identity as Rostum’s true son (line 679). A griffin has the body of a lion and the head of an eagle and it is winged at times. It can be male or female, but it combines the qualities of power, majesty, leadership, and intelligence. All in all, it can be associated with either sex. Transcending the feminine/masculine dichotomy, the griffin eventually unites the father and son.

3.3 Plants

Sohrab is likened to one tree and two flowers in the poem and all three have already been discussed thoroughly in this chapter and chapter two.⁶² He is like a “young cypress” whose

⁶² It was almost impossible to compile these three plants independently in this section. The flowers were colored and had to be initially studied under the part dedicated to colors in chapter two, and together with the tree they portrayed Sohrab’s femininity and thus were to be dealt with under the section assigned to human characters in this chapter as well.

tender rearing and mythical association with death arouses Rostum's deep pity in his first encounter with Sohrab. In spite of this, the cypress tree symbolizes resilience and free spirit in the Persian culture and can be equally associated with men and women, but the feminine atmosphere surrounding the tree in Arnold's poem, clearly and effectively creates a feminine aura around Sohrab.

The "hyacinth" alludes to an effeminate character in Greek mythology and "white violets" connote vulnerability. The flower imagery functions as a complement to the feminine aura already created around Sohrab by the simile about the young cypress, so plants all contribute to the femininity Arnold attributes to Sohrab along with the themes of death and transience of life.

3.4 Inanimate Objects

Inanimate natural objects like mountains, deserts, the sun, the moon, or stars are not gendered in *Sohrab and Rostum* except for the very distinctive personification of a river, the Oxus. The simile by which Rostum is likened to a "single tower" (line 337) built "on the waste," can certainly be interpreted as a masculine symbol through a psychoanalytical lens, and Sohrab's being likened to the "overhanging snows" of an avalanche (line 168) surely echoes his masculine power, but the personification of the Oxus as a male character is conspicuously different. Boobani considers "the calm but powerful flow of the Oxus, a maternal source,"⁶³ (page 129) but then immediately explains in a footnote that "like Sohrab himself, who incorporates both masculinity and femininity, the river, as flowing water, merges the qualities of both genders." (note 195) In other words, he thinks it is not contradictory if the river is "rendered in masculine terms" and interpreted as a "maternal source" at the same time.

Boobani who had initially argued that "(a)fter Sohrab and Rostum's initial confrontation and throughout their combat, the similes in their totality sustain a pattern in which the father and son are sharply contrasted by means of binary opposites," and explained that "(t)he overall organizing force behind these oppositions is a deep confrontation between masculinity and femininity," (page 125) comes to the conclusion that not only "Sohrab ... incorporates both masculinity and femininity" but towards the end of the tragedy even Rostum "melting into tears, is overcome by a 'femininity' that tones down his 'masculine' grimness." (page 129) He is right,

⁶³ *Oriental Imaginings: Representations of Persia in Nineteenth-Century English Literature*

to some extent. If we put aside the simile concerning the rich woman and poor drudge as the one that describes “Sohrab and Rostum’s initial confrontation,” and the simile about white violets as the one that marks the end of the fight, then we come down to four similes “throughout the combat”: the cypress tree and some single tower, the partridge and the hawk, the breeding eagle and her mate, and the hyacinth and unskillful gardener. These four similes “in their totality” do “sustain” the pattern of “deep confrontation between masculinity and femininity,” but there are a good many other similes “throughout the battle” that either describe only one character, like that about the “snake,” or display no binary opposites like the following fatalist analogy:

“... we are all, like swimmers in the sea,
Poised on the top of a huge wave of fate,” (line 390 and 391)

Although Boobani’s initial argument may not be all-inclusive, his conclusion is convincing; it is not only the Oxus that “merges the qualities of both genders,” the protagonists as well as other personae, whether in the similes or not, also show traits of both genders at times and the “deep confrontation between masculinity and femininity” appears to be limited to a few major similes.

If colors “grey” and “purple” as chromatic bridges could help Sohrab and Rostum find a common ground and get to know one another’s perspectives, the griffin transcends the sharp contrast of the feminine/masculine dichotomy and unites the father and son. How about the Oxus? The Oxus, too, transcends the feminine/masculine dichotomy but does the powerful flow of this maternal source suffice to unite the East and West?

Not exactly on a coalescence between the East and West and more about favoring a less biased attitude toward East/West contradictions, Valerie Kennedy quotes a beautiful piece by Rudyard Kipling from around a hundred years ago:

(I)n a late poem, “We and They” (1926), Kipling challenges the binary opposition between “we” and “they,” which Edward Said identifies as the cornerstone of Orientalist (and imperialist) thinking, by concluding, after making a series of contrasts between English or European and non-European habits, that “if you cross over the sea,/ Instead of over the way,/ You may end by (think of it!) looking on We/ As only a sort of They!”⁶⁴

⁶⁴ *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*. “Orientalism in the Victorian Era” Online Publication Date: August 2017 (page 56)

Tartars also cross the river. Rustum abides by his son's last wish and does not fight them.

“Let them all cross the Oxus back in peace.” (line 782)

The enemies make peace and Tartars cross the stream, but the Oxus remains a border river separating the East from West. Unlike Kipling's “We and They,” Tartars remain to be uncompromisingly *They* despite crossing over a body of water, and the binary opposites of imperialist Orientalism pervading Arnold's poem show no sign of reconciliation.

4. Conclusion

A summary of the binary opposites discussed in chapters two and three can help make clearer conclusions about the Orientalist elements crafted into the poem. As can be seen in the following tables, negative stereotypes of the Orient at times outweigh the positive attitude toward the East and sometimes the opposite is true. There are also instances in which the overall atmosphere is either equilibrial or equivocal.

4.1 Imagined Geographies, Architecture, and Colors

Table 1

Binary Opposites in Imagined Geographies and Architecture

Imagined Geographies	
West	East
<p><u>Iran</u>: located on the west of the Oxus and inhabited by <u>Persians</u>.</p> <p>The name of the country is mentioned five times in the poem.</p> <p>Iran represents the <u>Occident</u>.</p>	<p><u>Nameless land</u> on the east of the Oxus and inhabited by <u>Tartars</u> who are a threat to civilized people and are associated with the Greek infernal regions of Tartarus.</p> <p>Tartars represent the <u>Orient</u></p>
In the bigger picture, both Iran and Tartars' homeland are in the Orient.	
<u>One river</u> is named in Iran with <u>clear water</u> .	<u>Five rivers</u> are named which have <u>salty water</u> .
Contemporary <u>British Empire</u> is associated with the <u>West</u> .	Contemporary <u>Imperial Russia</u> is associated with the <u>East</u> .
Cities as symbols of urban civilization:	
Two <u>insignificant</u> cities in Iran.	Four cities with <u>geopolitical significance</u> .
<u>Balance of Power</u>	
Sohrab is as <u>mighty</u> as Rustum.	
The <u>Persian army</u> is described in five lines but the description implies <u>unity, order, strength, light, and invincibility</u> .	The <u>Tartar squadrons</u> are described in 32 lines but the poet's detailed description implies <u>darkness and discord</u> .

The <u>Persian army</u> is <u>frightened</u> by Sohrab's name and fame.	Sohrab is metaphorically likened to the overhanging snows of an <u>avalanche</u> .
<u>Rustum's presence</u> brings <u>hope and peace</u> back to the Persian army.	Peran-Wisa warns Sohrab not to seek Rustum through fight and anticipates <u>danger and death</u> .
Two young British intelligence-gathering officers were executed in Bokhara in 1842. The setting and plot of the poem was familiar to the British readership.	The Emirate of Bokhara executed two British officers on charges of spying in 1842. Three decades later, the Emirate became a protectorate of Imperial Russia.
Architecture	
West	East
<u>Ruins of the Persepolis</u> paradoxically recall the leitmotif of <u>Oriental past glory</u> .	A <u>nameless fallen clay fort</u> reiterates the <u>backwardness and decline</u> of the Orient.
In the bigger picture, both monuments are in the <u>East</u> and <u>in ruins</u> .	

The overall atmosphere of the poem is that of imperialist Orientalism. Tartars come from a nameless country in the Orient but ironically their very name resonates with a constant threat to civilization. Their forces are great in number but their appearance and formation implies darkness and discord. They have cities of geopolitical significance and several rivers in their imagined geography, but the water in their rivers is salty. They have a clay fort built in the past but it is fallen and “nameless” just like their homeland. On the other hand, Persians come from Iran to the west of the Oxus and the water from the only river named in Iran can quench one's thirst. The Persian army is united, orderly, and strong and the Persepolis, although in ruins, is a glorious architectural wonder.

The element of architecture paradoxically portrays the Orientalist theme of past glory while displaying the backwardness and neglect pervading the Orient. The exoticizing and imperialist Orientalism seem to merge when it comes to architecture.

Arnold, on the one hand, has tried to tone down the sharp contrast between the East and West by portraying an initial balance of power between Sohrab and Rustum. Sohrab is likened to an avalanche whose mere name can scare the Persian army. But Rustum's powerful presence brings back hope and peace to the troops. Sohrab has the upper hand in the fight but eventually he is

slain and the West defeats the East to affirm “the hegemony of modern civilization over less developed, savage territories,” whether it is the Persians against Tartars or the Occident in general versus the Orient.

Colors, on the other hand, aggrandize this contrast. Tartars and their imagined geography are all painted in grey and black. Even Peran-Wisa with his white cloak of “wisdom and maturity” puts on a black cap to accentuate his bond with the forces of darkness. Everything associated with Sohrab is also black until he is initiated into Rustum’s world of color. But Rustum and everything associated with him come in a vast array of colors, including grey, black, and white with implications different from those for the Orient. The West is rich in color whereas the East is only black, grey, and white.

Table 2

Contrast in Colors Between East and West

Colors	
West	East
Dark green melons for Rustum’s morning meal, and Ruksh’s green saddlecloth symbolize <u>nature and health</u> .	“Grey at dawn” refers to <u>sunrise in the East</u> ; the place where and the time when the sun comes up.
Ruksh’s saddlecloth and Rustum’s helm are embellished with <u>gold</u> . Gold symbolizes <u>power and wealth</u> .	Black Tartar tents and <u>black</u> sheepskin caps of Tartar horsemen connote the <u>forces of darkness</u> .
Rustum’s tents of <u>scarlet</u> cloth and the <u>scarlet</u> horsehair plume on his helm associate with <u>courage and joy</u> . <u>Scarlet</u> also foregrounds “ <u>sacrifice</u> ” through association with “ <u>blood</u> .”	Peran-Wisa’s <u>white</u> cloak connotes his <u>wisdom and maturity</u> . Peran-Wisa’s <u>black</u> sheepskin cap is made of fleece of Kara-Kul. “ <u>Kara</u> ” means “ <u>black</u> ” in
Blue waves of the Persian Gulf, and the salt <u>blue</u> sea imply <u>hope and peace</u> .	Uzbek language and his <u>black</u> cap proves his affiliation with the <u>forces of darkness</u> .
Whitened windowpanes of a rich woman’s mansion: Rustum is like a rich woman and the	Blackened fingers of a poor drudge: Sohrab is likened to the poor drudge and the <u>black</u> color

<p><u>white</u> frost flowers on the windowpanes connote <u>goodness and righteousness</u>.</p>	<p>of soot on the poor drudge's fingers connotes <u>wickedness and dishonor</u>.</p>
<p>Rustum's <u>Grey</u> hairs: Sohrab notices the sign of <u>aging</u> in Rustum's hair. "<u>Grey</u>" which stood for the Orient functions as a <u>chromatic bridge between the West and East</u> now.</p>	<p><u>Black</u> precipices that echo the she-eagle's cries and anticipate her inevitable death: Sohrab is likened to the wounded she-eagle and the <u>black</u> cliffs foreshadow his <u>death</u>.</p>
<p>The gloom growing <u>blacker</u> during the combat: <u>Darkness</u> blankets the battlefield, foreshadowing the <u>ominous misfortune</u> befalling the father and son, <u>regardless of the East/West dichotomy</u>.</p>	
<p><u>Red</u> jackals: Rustum, who still does not know he has slain his own son, tells Sohrab that <u>red</u> jackals are to tear his body apart. He adds insult to injury by attributing the "<u>bloody</u>," <u>violent red</u> of his colorful world to the <u>scavenging scene</u>.</p>	<p><u>Purple</u> hyacinth: Sohrab is seen as a purple hyacinth in Rustum's eyes. "<u>Purple</u>" connotes "<u>nobility</u>" and although there is nothing <u>purple</u> in Sohrab's costume or weapons, the color functions as a <u>chromatic bridge between the East and West</u>.</p>
<p>Note: <u>Purple</u> is not a color of the East. Rustum attributes the color to Sohrab in his imagination.</p>	
<p>The two spectra of colors associated with the Orient and Occident merge from this point on.</p>	
<p><u>Vermilion</u> tattoo of a griffin: The colored tattoo proves <u>Sohrab's lineage to Rustum and Zal</u>. The Orient and Occident are eventually <u>linked</u> by this common sign. <u>Vermilion</u> symbolizes <u>life, eternity, and good luck</u> in Taoism but ironically the vermilion sign of Rustum's seal does not bring good luck to Sohrab and he gets killed by his own father.</p>	
<p>The <u>yellow</u> Oxus mirrors Sohrab's <u>physical weakness</u> before death and Rustum too wishes to die in the yellow waters of the Oxus. "<u>Yellow</u>" implies <u>illness</u> and <u>madness</u>: Sohrab is ill-fated and Rustum is raving mad at himself.</p>	
<p><u>Crimson</u> blood on Sohrab's <u>white</u> body, and <u>white violets</u> picked by children: The combination of colors connotes the wasted "<u>innocence</u>" of Sohrab, and "<u>white</u>" symbolizes <u>death</u> here which knows <u>no border, no East, no West</u>.</p>	
<p><u>Black</u> granite pillars of the Persepolis connote <u>power and strength</u> of the past, but now that they lie prone on broken flights of steps, they imply <u>suffering and mourning</u>.</p>	
<p>Note: The last touch of <u>black</u> completes the color wheel of the West.</p>	

4.2 Masculinity versus Femininity Represented by Human Characters, Animals, Plants, and Inanimate Objects

The confrontation between masculinity and femininity is not always illustrated as sets of binary opposites. There are similes, however, in which the contrast is sharply delineated but the overall depiction of feminine/masculine dichotomy is more fluid than the distinction shown between East and West through imagined geographies, architecture or colors. The following tables summarize how different characters and their feminine/masculine traits are represented from different perspectives and through various vehicles.

4.2.1 Masculinity and Femininity in *Sohrab and Rustum*

Table 3

Masculinity and Femininity Attributed to Sohrab

Character	Opinions about the Character
Sohrab	<p><u>Self-image</u>: “I have ... the courage of a man.”</p> <p>“I have seen battles,” “waded” in their bloody waves” and “heard ... hollow roar of dying men.”</p> <p>“I am no girl to be made pale by words.” (all masculine)</p>
	<p><u>Peran-Wisa</u>: He compares Sohrab to a “lion’s cub.” (masculine)</p>
	<p><u>Tartar squadrons</u>: They love Sohrab, take pride in him, and have high hopes for his victory. (masculine)</p>
	<p><u>Persian army</u>: Hearing Sohrab’s name, they hold “their breath with fear.” (masc.)</p>
	<p><u>Gudurz</u>: Sohrab “has the wild stag’s foot” and “the lion’s heart.” (masc.)</p>
	<p><u>Narrator</u>: Sohrab is like a “poor drudge.” (feminine)</p> <p>Sohrab weeps aloud. (feminine)</p> <p>(There is one simile in which Sohrab is likened to a masculine force of nature by the narrator, and three other similes in which he is likened to feminine plants.)</p>
	<p><u>Rustum</u>: He wishes he had a “son so famed, so brave, to send to wars.” (masc.)</p> <p>(masc.) He knows Sohrab has defied “all the most valiant chiefs” to seek him.</p> <p>(masc.) He acknowledges that “there are no youths in Iran brave as” Sohrab.</p>

Sohrab	<p>When Sohrab kneels and begs him to reveal his identity, Rostum finds his behavior suspicious, boyish, and immature. (boyish)</p> <p>He calls Sohrab a “rash boy” for not escaping like “men” who “look on Rostum’s face and flee!” (boyish)</p> <p>Sohrab seems “so slender” and “so softly reared” to Rostum. (fem.)</p> <p>He calls Sohrab a “girl” who is more “nimble” with his “feet” like a “dancer.” He ridicules his upbringing in “Afrasiab’s gardens,” dancing with “Tartar girls.” (feminine)</p> <p>(fem.) He rebukes Sohrab for his “light skipping tricks” and “girl’s wiles.”</p> <p>(three masculine, two boyish, and three feminine attributes)</p>
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Table 4

Masculinity and Femininity Attributed to Rostum

Character	Opinions about the Character
Rostum	<p><u>Self-image</u>: He is aware of his “fame” and “great name.”/ “I am vast ... and tried.”</p> <p>He knows he is not “matched in single fight with any mortal man.”</p> <p>“I have stood on many a field of blood” and “fought with many a foe.”</p> <p>“Never was that field lost, or that foe saved.”</p> <p>He knows that “men look on Rostum’s face and flee!”</p> <p>“I fight hand to hand” in the “dance of battle.”</p> <p>Even when he refers to himself in the third person, he says, “the mighty Rostum never had a son.” (all masculine)</p>
	<p><u>Peran-Wisa</u>: He knows Rostum’s “mighty strength” and warns Sohrab not to seek him “through fight.” (masculine)</p>
	<p><u>Gudurz</u>: He knows that Rostum is Iran’s only hope against Sohrab. (masc.)</p>
	<p><u>Narrator</u>: Rostum is like a “wet diver” plunging in the sea and bringing hope and peace to the Persian army.⁶⁵ (masculine)</p> <p>Rostum seizes “his club, which none but he/ Could wield.”⁶⁶ (masc.)</p>

⁶⁵ In the same simile the Persian army is likened to the wet diver’s “pale wife.” Persian troops are pale with fear, hence feminized.

⁶⁶ Lines 408 and 409

Rustum	<p>Rustum is like a “gardener” with a “scythe,” alluding to the Grim Reaper and Cronus. / Rustum has glaring “dreadful eyes.” (2 x masculine)</p> <p>Tears gather in Rustum’s eyes when he remembers his youth and Sohrab’s mother. / Rustum is like “some rich woman.” (2 x feminine)</p> <p>Rustum breaks into tears and weeps aloud. (feminine)</p> <p>(four masculine and three feminine attributes)</p>
	<p><u>Sohrab</u>: He is aware of Rustum’s name and fame.</p> <p>He hears his “mighty voice” and sees “his giant figure.”</p> <p>He acknowledges that Rustum is “more vast” and “more dread” than him, and says, “thou art proved, I know.”</p> <p>When wounded, he says, “the mighty Rustum ... my father ... shall avenge my death.” (all masculine)</p>

4.2.2 Masculinity and Femininity Displayed Through Animals and Plants

Table 5

Masculinity and Femininity Attributed to Animals and Plants Associated with Sohrab

Animals Associated with Sohrab	
Lion’s Cub/Lion Wild Stag (masc.)	Sohrab is likened to these three male animals. They symbolize masculine traits of ungovernability, courage, and agility respectively.
Fox (masculine)	Sohrab is like a “young fox” in Rustum’s eyes. The falsehood and wiliness associated with this masculine animal are disapproved by Rustum as boyish.
Partridge (fem.)	Sohrab as a partridge, alludes to a protective mother bird being sacrificed.
Snake (feminine)	Although not gendered, it associates with Sohrab and his graceful maneuvers, which are later rebuked by Rustum as feminine skills of dance.
Eagle (feminine)	Sohrab is like a dying breeding eagle.
Plants Associated with Sohrab	
Cypress Tree (feminine)	Sohrab is “tenderly reared” like a “cypress tree” in a “queen’s ... garden” next to “a bubbling fountain.”
Hyacinth (fem.)	Sohrab is like a “hyacinth,” alluding to the effeminate Hyacinthus.
Violets (fem.)	He is like “white violets,” gathered by kids and discarded by a river.

Table 6

Masculinity and Femininity Attributed to Rustum’s Animals and Animals Associated with Him

Rustum’s Animals and Their Significance	
Ruksh (masc./fem.)	Rustum’s stallion is famous, fierce as a “desert-lion,” brave, and fearsome. Despite his masculine traits, he melts into tears when he finds Sohrab dying. Ruksh is an example for the merger of femininity and masculinity.
Falcon (masc.)	Not gendered, yet it symbolizes bravery and victory, hence masculinity.
Animals Associated with Rustum	
Hawk (masculine)	Rustum is like a hawk; fierce with a keen vision. Ironically, his vision fails him. Although not gendered, it possesses a destructive masculine power.
Eagle (masc.)	Rustum is like a male eagle, unaware of “his loss.”

Sohrab and Rustum’s self-images embody the masculinity expected of fierce warriors and everyone, whether Tartar or Persian, admits their manliness. Rustum wishes he had a son so brave and manly as Sohrab and only a little after their first encounter, he begins to find Sohrab’s behavior and upbringing boyish. Later, raged by Sohrab’s swift maneuvers and his upper hand in the fight, Rustum resorts to humiliating Sohrab by calling him a “girl.” (No sexist language like this is found in the original Persian text.) As a narrator, Arnold follows the same line. Initially, he describes Sohrab as “the overhanging snows” of an avalanche who can petrify the Persian army, and praises his ungovernability, courage, and agility by likening him to a lion’s cub, a lion, and a wild stag respectively. But then he assigns feminine vehicles to describe Sohrab in similes, including a tree, flowers, a poor woman, and several female animals.

On the other hand, Sohrab finds Rustum an epitome of masculinity and except for one simile—that of “some rich woman,”—all the literal and figurative descriptions employed by Arnold, including those of Rustum’s animals and the animals associated with him, accentuate Rustum’s masculinity.

Both heroes and even Rustum’s stallion, however, soften in the course of tragic events and show emotions associated with femininity. As fierce warriors, Sohrab and Rustum prove their capability to have both masculine and feminine traits, and masculinity or femininity cannot be exclusively attributed to either hero.

4.2.3 *Sohrab and Rostum's Attitudes Towards the Opposite Sex*

Table 7

Sohrab and Rostum's Opinions about Tahmineh and Rostum's Presumptive Daughter

Character	Opinions about the Character
Sohrab's Mother	<p><u>Sohrab</u>: He thinks of her as a “defenseless woman” and pities her.</p> <p><u>Rostum</u>: He remembers her as “fair” and “in her bloom,” and then conversely as a fearful “sad mother” doing “some light female task” with her presumptive daughter.</p> <p>(Both Sohrab and Rostum have a patronizing attitude toward Tahmineh.)</p>
Rostum's Presumptive Daughter	<p><u>Rostum</u>: He thinks he has a “slight helpless girl;” “a puny girl, no boy at all,” who is doing “some light female task” with “her mother.”</p> <p>(Rostum has a patronizing attitude toward his presumptive daughter.)</p>

Sohrab and Rostum both have a patronizing attitude toward Tahmineh who is not even named in Arnold's adaptation. Rostum has the same attitude toward his presumptive daughter as well and readily calls Sohrab a “girl” to offend him. Sohrab's response also shows his low opinion of the opposite sex—“I am no girl to be made pale by words.” Even Arnold's use of a hyperbole to illustrate the Persian army's fear of Sohrab exhibits the same negative perspective: the Persian army is likened to the pale wife of a wet diver, weeping and waiting for her husband on shore.

If it were not for the controversial simile of the rich woman and poor drudge, the overall tone of the poem would be sexist. But Arnold breaks the stereotype of all-masculine heroes and likens both Sohrab and Rostum to women. Although the portrayal of Sohrab as a poor drudge is not very appreciative, Arnold compares both heroes to women and transcends the typical feminine/masculine confrontation.

4.2.4 *Merger of Feminine and Masculine Traits*

Table 8 The Significance of the Griffin

The Mythical Griffin
The griffin can be male or female and unites the father and son in the end.

The confrontation develops into a kind of equilibrium when Sohrab shows Rostum his tattoo of the mythical griffin which, whether male or female, finally bonds the father and son. The blending of masculinity and femininity already seen in emotional manifestations by Sohrab, Rostum, and Ruksh, and consolidated by the revelation of the griffin tattoo comes to a dramatic end when “the calm but powerful flow of the Oxus, a maternal source,” is personified as a male character and “merges the qualities of both genders.”⁶⁷ The Oxus is not the only inanimate object with gendered attributes and both Sohrab and Rostum are already likened to “an avalanche” and “a single tower in the desert” respectively to assert their masculinity, but the Oxus, despite being directly personified as a male river, possesses the universal qualities of a maternal source along which life goes on, whether on the West bank or East side of the stream.

Table 9

The Significance of Inanimate Objects

Inanimate Objects	
Avalanche	Sohrab is like “the overhanging snows” of an avalanche. (masc.)
Single Tower	Rostum is like a “single tower” in the desert. (masculine)
The Oxus	The Oxus, personified as a male character, is a maternal source as well. (masc./fem.)

In conclusion, the equivocal atmosphere created by the fluid treatment of femininity and masculinity in the poem cannot be easily categorized under either imperialist or exoticizing Orientalism. If the binary opposites found in the imagined geography, architecture, and even colors could affirm “the hegemony of modern civilization over ... savage territories,” neither the West nor the East is exclusively feminized to yield distinctive Orientalist interpretations.

As for critiquing the Victorian society, the poem does not seem to make any explicit comments.

⁶⁷ Boobani, Farzad. *Oriental Imaginings: Representations of Persia in Nineteenth-Century English Literature*. WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2013. (page 129)

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