

Core English 313

Literary Criticism 3

****'Matthew Arnold as a Literary Critic'****

[1] Introduction:

△ ***Matthew Arnold (1822-1888), born Dec. 24, 1822, Laleham, Middlesex, Eng. — died April 15, 1888, Liverpool.***

△ Arnold ***spent his childhood near a river, which would act as a great influence* later on in his life.**

△ ***The Victorian poet and critic, was 'the first modern critic', and could be called 'the critic's critic', being a champion not only of great poetry, but of literary criticism itself.***

△ ***He purged English criticism of the purities latent in it and helped it acquire a universal stature which was a distant dream.***

△ ***Arnold craved for purity and morality in criticism.***

△ He insisted that ***literature should be treated as a platform to propagate moral value.***

△ ***T. S. Eliot -the most exponential of new criticism and for Eliot Arnold was his idol.***

△ Basically Arnold was a poet, but ***due to his temperament he returned to become a critic.***

△ Arnold was ***associated with the literary and cultural movement known as the romantic poets, but he later distanced himself from the Romantic Ideals and became a critic of both Romanticism and Victorian Society.***

△ ***His Critical Works:***

(1) Culture and Anarchy (1869);

(2) Literature and Dogma (1873);

(3) Essays in Criticism (1887).

Arnold's unapproachable favorites among the classical writers were Homer and Sophocles,* although *he greatly enjoyed and was influenced by Hesiod, Virgil, Marcus Aurelius, Theocritus, and others.

Arnold says that when one reads poetry he tends to estimate whether it is of the best form or not. It happens in three ways- *the real estimate, the historic estimate, and the personal estimate.*

His three critical theories are there:

01. *The Grand Style*,

***02. *Touchstone Method*,* and**

03. *His Criticism of Life*

01. The Grand Style:

He linked the grand style, as used by Homer, to what he called the nobility of the verse.

What Homer has done, ***according to Arnold, is to successfully employ the grand style in 'prosaic subjects'.***

"The grand style 'arises -in poetry when a noble nature, poetically gifted, treats with simplicity or severity a serious subject'."*

It is, of course, no definition at all, nor was meant to be one, but it does indicate the more prominent features of the sublime in poetry.

In the first instance, as ***Longinus said too, there can be no sublimity of utterance without the sublimity (or nobility) of the Great words issue only from great minds.***

In the next, ***the subject itself that is to be SO expressed must be serious enough to admit of such treatment. One of present import' but such as 'age cannot wither, nor custom stale'.***

Finally, that it needs one poetically gifted to handle it successfully goes without saying. ****Arnold finds only three masters of the grand style, two of whom, Homer and Milton, have been mentioned already; the third is Dante.****

****02. Touchstone Method:****

__Arnold also considers the question of the judgement of literature, which is a time-honoured function of criticism. *__

According to this method, ****in order to judge a poet's work properly, a critic should compare it to passages taken from works of great masters of poetry, and that these passages should be applied as touchstones to other poetry.****

'Indeed,' he says, ****there can be no more useful help for discovering what poetry belongs to the class of the truly excellent, and can therefore do us most good, than to have always in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry.****

It's a literary theory that suggests ****using a 'touchstone' or a standard work of literature to assess the quality and cultural value of other works.****

Arnold believed that ****such a method could help identify works that contribute to the intellectual and moral development of society.****

****03. His Criticism of Life:****

To Arnold poetry itself was the criticism of life:

'The criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty', and in his seminal essay *The Study of Poetry* (1888) he says that poetry alone can be our sustenance and stay in an era where religious beliefs are fast losing their hold.

He claims that poetry is superior to philosophy, science, and religion. Religion attaches its emotion to supposed facts, and the supposed facts are failing it, but poetry attaches its emotion to ideas and ideas are infallible. And science, in his view is incomplete without poetry.

****As a critic Arnold is essentially a moralist, and has very definite ideas about what poetry should and should not be.****

***Arnold's evaluations of the Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats are landmarks in descriptive criticism,* and as a poet-critic he occupies an eminent position in the rich galaxy of poet-critics of English literature.**

****04. The Way to Judge a Poetry:****

Perhaps Arnold's ***most famous piece of literary criticism is his essay "The Study of Poetry."*** In this work, ***Arnold is fundamentally concerned with poetry's "high destiny;" he believes that "mankind will discover that we have to turn to**

poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us” as science and philosophy will eventually prove flimsy and unstable.*

Arnold’s essay ***thus concerns itself with articulating a “high standard” and “strict judgment” in order to avoid the fallacy of valuing certain poems (and poets) too highly, and lays out a method for discerning only the best and therefore “classic” poets (as distinct from the description of writers of the ancient world)*.**

05. Conclusion:

Arnold says that criticism should be a **_*’dissemination of ideas, a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world’*_**



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