

\*Core 301\*

\*Hist. Of Eng. Lit. 1832-1890\*

\*Unit 2 : Poems\*

**\*3. *The Forsaken Merman*.\***

**-By *Matthew Arnold***

**\*1. *About the Author*.\***

Matthew Arnold (24 December 1822 – 15 April 1888) was an English poet and cultural critic who worked as an inspector of schools. He was the son of Thomas Arnold, the celebrated headmaster of Rugby School, and brother to both Tom Arnold, literary professor, and William Delafield Arnold, novelist and colonial administrator. Matthew Arnold has been characterised as a sage writer, a type of writer who chastises and instructs the reader on contemporary social issues.[1] He was also an inspector of schools for thirty-five years, and supported the concept of state-regulated secondary education.

\*Born\*

24 December 1822

Laleham, England

\*Died\*

15 April 1888 (aged 65)

Liverpool, England

**\*Notable works\***

“Dover Beach”,

“The Scholar-Gipsy”,

“Thyrsis”,

Culture and Anarchy, Literature and Dogma ,

“The Study of Poetry.”

### **\*2. About the Poem:\***

“The Forsaken Merman” is a rhymed lyric poem written in irregular metre by Matthew Arnold, begun whilst he was studying at Oxford on a scholarship in the early 1840s, and which appeared in the poet’s first published collection, *The Strayed Reveller, and Other Poems*, in 1849.

Many critics initially found most of the poems in *The Strayed Reveller* to be obscure and aloof, but “The Forsaken Merman” was highly praised by fellow-poet Algernon Charles Swinburne for its lyric beauty.

The poem was published in 1849 and is not one of Matthew Arnold’s most famous poems. But, it is one of the best in his first collection — *The Strayed Reveller and Other Rooms*. In his ‘The Forsaken Merman,’ the poet contends with themes of betrayal and loss, and parenthood.

### **\*3. Rhyme Scheme:\***

‘The Forsaken Merman’ by Matthew Arnold is a ten-stanza lament that is divided into stanzas of varying lengths. The first stanza is nine lines long, the second: six, the third: nine, the fourth: seven, the fifth: eighteen, the sixth: sixteen, the seventh: twenty-one, the eighth: twenty-three, the ninth: sixteen, and the tenth: twenty. The poem uses rhyme throughout, but there is no single pattern that’s used throughout.

This includes simple couplets, like AABB, and alternate rhymes, like ABAB.

### **\*4. Critical Appreciation:\***

The poem is filled with melancholy and loss. Arnold belonged from the English Victorian Era and was known for his literary and social criticism, especially his classical attacks on contemporary tastes and manners of the “Barbarians” (the aristocracy), “Philistines” (the middle class) and “Populace” (the rich).

Margaret, who is a member of the human race marries this Merman and starts living with him beneath the sea for many years and carries his children.

She was having a happy life with him for many years in this enchanting world beneath “Where the winds are all asleep/ Where the spent lights quiver and gleam/ Where the sea snakes coil and toil/ Where the great whales comes sailing by”.

She sat on throne with the merman “a red gold throne in the heart of the sea”.

The journey was filled with gaiety and joy until one day Margaret heard the bells of Easter tolling from the mortal world above and she develops within the need of her religious duty. She decides to leave the merman and his children, “I must go for my kinsmen pray/ in the little grey church on the shore today”.

The merman grants her to quit and go to the village assuming that her visit will be ephemeral, “Go up dear heart, through the waves/ Say thy prayer and come back to the kind sea-caves”. But to make him lament she did not return back.

**\*5. Conclusion:\***

“The Forsaken Merman” uplifted the abandonment of a woman who would find solace by working in a loom and staying all by herself. The poem highlighted both the aspect of isolation of someone who was left behind and by someone who has to leave.

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