
CHAPTER - 2

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2.1 TRENDS IN THE 19TH CENTURY POETRY :

The 19th century poetry is called Victorian poetry. Victorian Poets had a tendency to be serious, reflective and melancholic. Their thoughts often turn towards death, loss, regret for the vanished past and lament for the transience of life. Collectively these states of mind constitute the elegiac, and a number of distinguished and effective elegies were produced in the period. The elegiac often extends its boundaries beyond the usual objects of lament, friends, members of the family and lovers to express more general regret. In the following lines of Emily Bronte one hears the pure and unadulterated note of elegiac feeling, in this case imagined rather than based on any specific event.

"Cold in the earth, and the deep snow piles above thee!

Far, far removed, cold in the dreary grave!

Have I forgot, my only love, to love thee,

Severed at last by time's all wearing wave?"

R. Alcona to J. Brezida

The poem concluded with a plangent outcry.

And even yet, I dare not let it languish,

Dare not indulge in memories rapturous pain;

Once drinking deep of that divinest anguish,

How could I seek the empty world again?"¹

These lines capture the pure essence of elegiac feeling and one often encounters it in Victorian poetry, but in many of the poems the feeling is less pure and concentrated and other consideration came into play. J.R. Watson notes the prevalence of the elegiac and says that, "We may find it unhelpful or even unhealthy,"². Most Victorians, however, were more to encourage such feelings than to suppress. We should not criticise the Victorians too severely, since there is a sense in which the elegiac is very central to the inherent genius of poetry, that is because "epitaphs, of their very nature are wistfully separated from original experience and original loves, rather as all celebratory and reflective poetry is. Absence may ambitiously aspire to the state of presence, but will never finally attain it."³

There were a number of serious elegies in earlier English poetry, including Chaucer's 'Book of the Duchess', Milton's 'Lycidas', Donne's 'Anniversaries', Pope's 'elegy on the Death of an Unfortunate Lady', Gray's 'elegy written in country church yard', Wordsworth's 'elegiac stanzas' and Shelley's 'Adonais'. Victorian poets often continue the moods and cadences of these works, and often continue to explore similar attitudes in the face of death, but actually there was not a great difference, since although earlier poets enjoyed the consolations of belief in the after life, it did not always take the edge off the felt sharpness of death.

In one important sense the Victorian elegies continue the tendency exhibited in previous examples to pay as much attention to the mourner as to the mourned. Given the fact, the experience belongs to the celebrant rather than to the dead person; this is inevitable, and since the experience belongs to poets, the elegies will naturally concern themselves very self-consciously with theories of poetry. 'In Memoriam' is by far the most important elegy in the period. In the past it was not necessary for poets to know the object of their lament very well. Donne had never met Elizabeth Drury, Milton was merely a slight acquaintance of Edward King, Gray's rude forefathers could only be distantly imagined and Shelley had only the briefest acquaintance with Keats. The presence of death always guaranteed seriousness and earnestness. But in Tennyson's case Arthur Hallam was a close and loved friend whose death was a shattering personal experience, calling into doubt the whole stability and reliability of human existence. It was the central event in Tennyson's life and left its mark on many other poems.

A very different elegy is Arnold's 'Rugby Chapel', published in 1867. The work has all the trappings of elegiac poetry in its melodramatic guise: gloom, austerity, coldness and solemnity. Yet it celebrates a man who has a radiant beacon for his son and many others. Arnold produced elegies

on celebrities unknown to him personally_ ' Heine's Grave' and 'Hawthorn Churchyard.' Like Arnold, Swinburne often makes use of his extensive classical education, and typical of this is the close echo of Cattulus in the poem celebrating Baudelaire: 'Are Atque Vale.' This is the same genre as Arnold's public elegies, since Swinburne only knew Baudelaire through his works.

So far, since the most of the elegies have been for fellow poets and male friends, they have approximated quite closely to classical models. But there is a large body of Victorian elegies for wives and lovers. It is probably the case that there was in 19th century, something approaching a cult of death, it imagined on the average consciousness much more and disease was less under control than it is now. The elaborate culture surrounding it possibly had morbid sources, but it was also a way of making a virtue out of necessity, of acknowledging the overwhelming fact rather than shying away from it. The growth of the 'cult' aspects might be directly related to the decline in deep and consolatory belief. Poetry marshalled to make it's contribution to the cult and there is a mass of very minor and very bad elegiac poetry, especially in the context of domestic mourning.

Inevitably, the most prominent work in which death and domesticity meet is Patmore's 'The unknown Eros'. His first wife Emily Andrews died after fifteen years, so that

he was acquainted with bereavement. In 'Departure', sounds the domestic note. 'Tired memory' is a poem in which Patmore tried to find religious faith, though deprived of the wife who seemed to encourage and validate it. Another poet worth mentioning, who celebrated the virtues of dead wife, is William Barnes.

Patmore and Barnes are sometimes haunted by death, but Rossetti is perhaps the most consistently death-haunted poet of the period, and his whole work is pervaded with death or death-like states of loss, separation and dreaming. 'The House of wife' sonnet cycle pervaded with death and the poet is often dubious about distinctions between life and death.

The final major love elegist to consider is Hardy and the poems he wrote mourning the death of his first wife in 1912 belong to the modern period. Like their Victorian predecessors they exploit the congruence of emotion and geographical place, but in a curious way, because of their starkness and avoidance of sentimentality, they are moving.

Like many other great Victorians like Tennyson, Arnold and Rossetti, Hardy was time-haunted and many of his central motives are very similar, but the style and character of his poetry feels very different, suggesting the principal motives will not always explain the individual character of a poet.

Finally, there is an elegy worth considering that it is not quite like the others, which celebrates friends, mistresses, wives and poets. Hopkins' 'Felix Randal' deals with a blacksmith who was one of the parishioners in a Lancashire town. It is a touching poem about a man broken by sickness and Hopkins' attitude to him is influenced not by a poetic fancy but by the common metaphors which tapify the relationship of priest to parishioners / father to child. But finally we see that, this poem like 'Thyrsis', is a lament for a maker, for that is what 'Felix Randal' was and poets are always particularly touched by the deaths of makers / Thus the survey of 19th century poetry reveals the fact that that the 19th century poetry was mainly elegiac.

2.2 MATTHEW ARNOLD AS A POET

Matthew Arnold is one of those few men who have left a considerable body of work both in prose and verse. Matthew Arnold was the eldest son of Dr. Thomas Arnold, the famous head master of Rugby. He was born at Laleham on December 24, 1822 in his father's pre Rugby days. The father wished the son to be educated. But after some time, the father changed his plans and brought the son to Rugby under himself. At Rugby the rest of young Matthew's school days were spent. In his poem, 'Rugby Chapel,' November 1857 the poet paid a pious and noble tribute to the great Head master who had died fifteen years earlier _ V12

"For fifteen years
we who till then in thy shade
Rested as under the boughs
of a mighty oak, have endured
Sunshine, and rain as we might
Bare, unshaded, alone
Lacking the shelter of thee."

Matthew Arnold was a man of warm family sympathies. With his eldest sister Jane, he had a genuine friendship. When his brother William Delafield Arnold died at Gibraltar in 1859 on his voyage to England, Matthew Arnold mourned his death in two elegiac poems, 'A Southern Night' and 'Stanzas From Carnac.'

Matthew Arnold won prizes for poetry at Rugby with his 'Alaric in Rome', and at Oxford, the Newdigate Prize from Cromwell. At Oxford he was a scholar Balliol. Oxford left a permanent stamp on his life and character, culture and urbanity. The eloquent tribute to Oxford scenery and the country side round about that any poet has paid must be credited to Arnold's account. Some of his best poetry is inspired by Oxford scenes and Oxford friendships. The first of these poems is, 'The Scholar Gipsy', so full of minute details of the beauties of Oxford Scenery and 'Thyrsis', the pastoral elegy in which he expresses his love for his Oxford friend, the poet Clough.

Arnold took a second class in the classics in 1844 and was elected to a fellowship at Oriel College in 1845. But Dr. Arnold had died in 1842 and the family had to prepare for some other shelter. Young Matthew Arnold was thrown on his own resources. After brief trial of a mastership at Rugby Arnold attached himself to the Marquis of Lansdowne as private secretary, hoping one day to qualify himself for a diplomatic career. He was well qualified for it by his fine presence, his scholarship/his knowledge of modern languages and his sweet persuasive speech. But it was not his destiny to play any direct part in politics. By the influence of it Lord Lansdowne, he got an inspectorship of schools. He remained an inspector of schools till he retired just a few years before his death.

On the 10th of June 1851, Arnold married the lady who for the rest of his life was both the source of his happiness and the main stimulus of his ambition. She was Miss Frances Lucy Wightman. Arnold's domestic life was on the whole very happy, though not free from usual trials and worries. For the better education of their children, the Arnold moved from London to Harrow but at Harrow they had to bear the most harrowing of bereavement any parent can suffer. They lost their eldest son at Harrow in 1868. In 1872, they lost their second son also at Harrow. The following year Arnold moved from Harrow, a place, with so many sad associations for Matthew Arnold and Mrs. Arnold. They settled in Pain's Hill, Cobham, Surrey, which for the remainder of the poet's life remained their home.

Some time before receiving the Civil List Pension Arnold had thought of retiring from the Inspectorship. It was in April 1886, however, he sent in his resignation soon after a lecturing tour in America. Shortly after his retirement from the Inspectorship, he died. It was a sudden death-heart failure. He had been a man of sturdy habits and had done a good deal of mountaineering on the Alps, the Alps which have given him a good many of his images in his poetry. Such a man should not have died of heart failure. But over exertion was the immediate cause of his death. He was buried where he was born, at Laleham, with his children.

2.3 ARNOLD IN VICTORIAN CONTROVERSIES :-

Though opposed to political and social controversy, he presently found he had to join in the fray, ^{interest} of liberal opinion. It was the period of vigorous discussion of theological, scientific and philosophic problems. Arnold participated keenly in the polemical thought of his day. He was convinced that the old faiths were fighting a losing battle; that the belief in a personal God would be no longer possible, and that a confident belief in immortality was no longer defensible by reason. Hence, there is the undertone of sadness in his poetry. "His verse is constantly haunted by his lingering desires for those beliefs which are for him no more than memories and the wistful sadness with which his unceasing craving for the unknowable and unattainable filled his."

2.4 The chief influences that helped to mould Arrols poetry were :

- a) The classical influence
- b) The influence of Goethe,
- c) The influence of Wordsworth
- d) The influence of Byron
- e) The influence of Keats.

a) The classical influence:

In an early poem of the 1849 volume entitled 'To A Friend' he answers to an inquiry made as to who "proppd" his mind. The answer is important as showing the things he

valued both in Life and Literature. First of all, Homer, who clearestsouled of men saw the 'Wide Prospect of Europe 'and `Asian Fens'and `Smyrnas bay' though blind. Next came Epictetus, the stoic slave teacher of Arrian, but his greatest thanks were due to Sophocles; `the mellow glory of the attic stage,' who with his "even-balanced soul" saw life steadily and saw it whole. Here then is a confession of those elements of Greek poetry and thought that influenced Arnold most. In `Resignation the poet to whose mighty heart heaven communicates a quicker impulse to scan, Europe`and `Asian Fens'and `Smyrna'st came Epictetus

"Not his own course, but that that of man
Though he move mountains." (5)

is Sophocles; Such a poet sees in some great historied land amidst his people inspiring them and exulting among them; but he does not envy the ruler's place. He mingles with the crowd and shares their joy. He admires beauty of women, of the sun-lit town at sun-set, the sun -lit pastures in the morning and the quiet trees and woods. He sympathises with them all.

"Leaned on his gate, he gazes: tears
Are in his eyes, and in his ears
The murmur of a thousand years:
Before him he sees Life unroll.
A placid and continuous whole
That general Life, which does not cease

Whose secret is not joy, but peace
That life, of whose dumb wish is not missed
The life of plants, and stones and rain:
The Life he craves; if not in vain
Fate gave what chance shall not control,
His sad lucidity of soul."

(Resignation II- 186-198)

Such is Arnould's estimate of the character of sophocles and his poetry. And such is his ideal of the function of the poet, 1) a general sympathy with life and an unenvying sympathy with joy and beauty. 2) a regard for peace rather than joy in the life of Nature and 3) the preservation of the 'sad lucidity of soul.' The line 'whose secret is not joy but peace.' is important as showing the great difference between Arnold and many of his contemporaries.

The sonnet, 'world place' paying a tribute to Marcus Aurelius, as well as criticising him, ends with the stoic's cry:

“The aids to noble life are all within” Arnold's stoic creed, to which he paid tribute in his reference to the slave-philosopher, Epictetus in 'To a friend' referred to above gives a special character to the sombre lyrical quality of most of his poetry. The titles and subjects of many of Arnould's poems reveal the great influence of Greek poetry upon him. The strayed Reveller is Greek both in

subject and form. It is rhymelles. and irreguler in meter and makes a thin attempt to reproduce effort of the choric odes of Greek tragedy. `Merope and Empedocles' were written to illustrate his admiration of Greek life and poetic thought and methods. The subjects are Greek, the methods are Greek. "Above all `Sohrab and Rustum' is a most triumphant illustra illustration of the simplicity and grandeur and high seriousness of the Greek Epic and of his implicit trust in Homer." ⁶ It is Greek in treatment and conception.

b) The influence of Goethe:-

The next formative influence on Arnold is that of Goethe and Wordsworth among the moderners. Goethe was one of Arnold's life-long masters. Goethe preached a message of an intellectual life: the intellectuality of Arnold could not but welcome it. Goethe preached a message of a complete, serene, full life. Arnold had to welcome it, as sophocles had taught him to 'see life clearly and see it whole.' Arnold paid his tribute to Goethe in 'The Memorial Verses,' along with Byron and Wordsworth. The poet mourns Wordsworth death. Byron had died first, he says, 'and we bowed our heads in grief.' We had felt Byron like "the rolling sound of passion and moral Law. But Arnold admired Byron's Titanic force. Next came Goethe's death and Arnold calls him, "Europe's sagest head. Physician of the iron Age." Memorial Verses (16-17)

In an age when Europe was dying, Goethe had proclaimed the glory of art and announced to Europe "Art still has truth, influence, take refuge there." (Memorial Verses 28).
Wordsworth's influence :

Arnold's contact with Wordsworth was more personal. He had known him personally as a child, when he with his father went to reside at Fox, How in the Lake country in close vicinity to Wordsworth. In the poem 'Memorial Verses,' Arnold lays his tribute on Wordsworth's grave. He tells us there that wordsworth came to this world when it was hopelessly submerged under a round of conventions, but Wordsworth taught us to appreciate the beauty of nature. Wordsworth was like Tiresias whom Arnold has celebrated in 'The strayed Reveller.' Arnold mourns he lived in a similar world to that in which wordsworth had lived in his younger days and is glad that 'The scholar Gipsy' had a better time, being "born in days when wits were fresh and clear/And life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames.(201-202) "In disgust from this hurry and worry, Arnold turned to Nature for relief-to nature," whose secret is not joy but peace." The major influence of wordsworth is clearly seen in Arnold's Cromwell's prize poem at Oxford. The key-words, 'pure', 'joy' and 'power' are precisely those which are leading motifs in Arnold's handling of wordsworth. Arnold's wordsworthianism was recognised early. Swinburne

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whose review of Arnold's 'New Poems' in 1867 is still a useful critique. He pointed out "it's pervasiveness with some sympathy; although later in a mood of disaffection, he sneered at Arnold as a 'Pseudo Wordsworth'⁷ only in that meditative lyric verse in which Arnold attempts to deal with modern ideas, that were reshaping the European mind, we do not find the subject matter making anything like an adequate criticism against Wordsworth's Poetry. Even this point, must be seriously qualified. However, Arnold did not attempt to make poetry of the very 'unpoetrylessness' of the modern world, his characteristic poetic response to modernity was one of evasion. We can mention only such poems as 'Obermann', 'The Scholar Gipsy' and 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse' to see that they represent an attempt to fly from the modern world into poetry rather than an attempt to fuse the two.

Byron's Influence :

None of other major Romantic poets influenced Matthew Arnold's poetry and thought as profoundly as Wordsworth. Nevertheless, it was impossible for a poetically sensitive lad of Arnold's generation to escape the reverberations of Byron's unparalleled popularity. Byron or a sort of Byron, gestalt, does appear as shadow or submerged image fairly frequent in Arnold's mature poetry, as the type of impetuous, violent and undivided will. Thus, the early sonnet, 'To The Duke of Wellington' praises the Iron Duke not

for what he did, but for his singleness of purpose, his wit
"which saw one clue to life and followed it."⁸ Arnold's
deeply felt need for such integrity of purpose is the
dominant motif of his correspondence with Clough and many of
his poems, the major example being 'The scholar Gipsy'. The
significance of Byron, then, in the poetry of Matthew
Arnold is not to be found in direct poetic influence.

Keats' Influence :

Next after Wordsworth and Byron, Keats was the Romantic poet whose impact was most felt by Arnold. Keats' richness of language, his symbolic method, his romantic medievalism and his passionate love for beauty were important elements in shaping the prevailing idea of what poetry could or should be. By the very energy with which Arnold struggled against the Keatsian influence and its derivatives in Tennyson and the spasmodics, the force of the influence itself is displayed. The echoes of Keats in Arnold's poetry are relatively few and in general seem to be deliberate importations chosen, or at least admitted, quite consciously for a specific purpose. The major instances of direct influence upon four important poems 'The scholar Gipsy', 'Thyrsis', 'The strayed Reveller' and 'Empedocles on Etna.' In 'The Scholar Gipsy' and 'Thyrsis' Arnold deliberately permitted himself to celebrate the Oxford countryside and

all that complex of Romantic association. When he set himself to compose a poem in which richly detailed, sensuous nature descriptions was at the same time to represent the countryside of the spirit of eternal youth pursuing the gleam and drawing it's refreshment from moonlight, dew and nightingales. It was inevitable that should have yielded to the full attractive force of Keats. When Arnold wrote the speeches which Lionel Trilling has aptly characterised as "an almost barbaric paean to the whole of life, even to pain, he must have had in mid such a poet as Keats."⁹

2.5 A SURVEY OF ARNOLD'S POETRY :

Arnold's first poems, including "The Strayed Reveller" (1849) and the volume with "Empedocles On Etna" (1852) were anonymous. These volumes appeared under the pseudonym - `The strayed Reveller and Other Poems` by "A". Nearly every poem in that first volume has been reprinted, with Arnold's consent and some of them are really good poems, one certainly `the forsaken Merman' might call itself great, while `Mycerinus' is certainly original, with (it's) new light on the pagan gods of Egypt and their queer reward of virtue. The second volume, `Empedocles on Etna and other poems' by "A" might better be described as `Margurite volume'. This mysterious lady takes a good deal of space in this volume and also in Arnold's heart.

Arnold's third volume of poems was issued in 1853, under his own name, with a preface that heralded his fame as a literary critic under the title 'Poems, excluding 'Empedocles' and added some new ones. One can understand why Arnold was not ashamed to attach his own name to this volume. When we remember that it contains such beautiful poems as 'Sohrab and Rustum', 'The Scholar Gipsys', 'the Church of Brou', 'Philomela' and the little cameo of elegiac splendour, 'Requiescat'. In 1855 appeared 'Poems by Matthew Arnold - Second Series', of which only 'Balder Dead' and 'Separation' were new; and in 1858 came into the world of criticism, 'Merope' with its preface. In the interval between the volumes of 1855 and 1858, Arnold was elected Professor of poetry at Oxford.

Then followed in 1867 'New Poems' which restored 'Empedocles; with 'Thyrsis' as a sort of continuation of 'The Scholar Gipsy', 'Rugby Chapel', a good many sonnets and that exquisite poem, 'Dover Beach'. His 'Later Poems' contain the great tribute to Dean Stanley - Westminster Abbey - and some facile poems paying tribute to his beloved dogs and birds. Among the outstanding poems of Arnold we must count 'The Scholar Gipsy', 'Thyrsis', 'Rugby Chapel' and 'Westminster Abbey' with their grave elegiac note. We must also mention 'The Forsaken Merman', 'Mycerinus', 'Marguerite', 'Sohrab and Rustum', 'Tristram and Iseult', 'Requiescat', 'Stanzas from the Grand Chartreuse', 'A

southern Night' Heine's Grave', 'Dover Beach', 'The strayed Reveller' and some beautiful sonnets including the noble one on Shakespeare.

2.6 FEATURES OF MATTHEW ARNOLD'S POETRY :

Hugh Walker says, "Nothing in Arnold's verse is more arresting than it's elegiac element."¹⁰ Arnold could find little charm in the bourgeois world. "Like Wordsworth before him, like T.S.Eliot after, he wrote primarily for a small group of saddened intellectuals for whom the dominant world was a Wasteland, men who felt heart sick and deprived of some part of their energy over-growing by their

¹¹ civilization . To speak of this loss of energy while the rest of England flaunted it's own over growing strength was to invite contempt and disregard. At a time when official thought was announcing the Englishman's ascent to the lights of human possibility, Arnold declared that the modern man was crippled and incomplete. His poetry on the one hand is a plangent lamentation for a lost wholeness and peace, on the other hand it is the exploration of two modern intellectual traditions of romanticism and rationalism and moving back and forth between these two strands. It is an attempt to weave them together into a synthesis. Each alone, he feels, is insufficient, but together they promise much. The effort of reconciliation produces a body of poetry which is philosophical and elegiac.

Behind the struggle of romanticism and rationalism lies the diminution of the power of Christianity. Under the shadow of religion and with many gestures of submission to it, reationalism had tried to construct a new picture of the cosmos. By the 19th century that picture was sufficiently complete to show many men that Christianity even broadly interpreted could not explain it wholly.

The poetry of Doubt And of Despair :

Matthew Arnold saw more truly the sickness of the age and had the courage to record his vision.

"Ah, love, let us be true,

To one another! for this world, which seems

To lies before us like a land of dreams,

So various, so Beautiful, so new,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light ---"

(Dover Beach - 29-33)

"Arnold has abandoned the shelter of a traditional, consoling faith which his imagination could no longer accpet, and has set out across the Darkling Plain"¹².

In Arnold there is a real attempt to find new forms for fresh modes of thought, an attempt not often made in the Victorian Age. Yet his 'free' metres get no further, as a rule, than a rather stiff blank verse, with lines of irregular lengths. In his finest work, his sense of melody is beautiful, but other times his emotional imitation gives to his work stiffness and awkwardness.

Arnold commands our respect because he made no attempt to close his eyes to the discouraging spectacle presented by the loss of traditional faith and intellectual standards. The eyes of this poet are always turned backward in search of a vision he has lost and only momentarily recaptures.

Matthew Arnold's poetry is virtually the confession that his culture has failed. In his poetry the personal note is supreme, it is the problem of his own life which fascinates us. He can strike chords of great power and sweetness and sometimes of deep tenderness, but he is greatest as a poet when he expresses his own heartfelt mournfulness and yearning. The two worlds he stands between are the old world of faith which is dead, and new world of culture which is 'powerless to be born'. He cannot hide his sorrow, it is ever before him, he cannot disguise the fact that his culture has failed to satisfy him. In one of his most notable poems, which perhaps more than any other distils the very essence of the disturbed religious spirit of the age, he cries with an exceeding bitter cry after that cross which he has declared a vanished myth. He confesses the cruel conflict that is within him, the devoutness which has survived his doubts, the religious yearnings which are not quenched by his denials. In this respect, his position is unique; he sings as one believing in his unbelief, and he is only saved from utter despair by this devotness which he has not dared to destroy. But beyond that, the most

memorable feature of his poetry is "it's acknowledgement
wring from him rather than confessed that his lack of faith
has sapped the very courses of his thought, and that culture
in it's utmost beauty and refinement has proved itself but
shifting sand when the storms have beaten and the winds of

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trouble blown. He sees with dismay and despair the
hopeless tangle of the age. Thus, Matthew Arnold's poetry
reflects the trends in the 19th century.

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