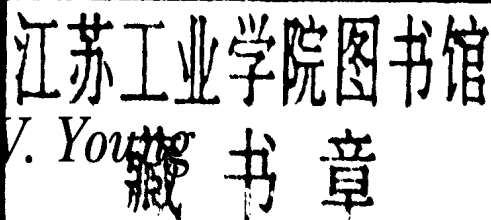


Poetry Criticism

*Excerpts from Criticism of the Works
of the Most Significant and Widely
Studied Poets of World Literature*

VOLUME 5

Robyn V. Young
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Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 91-118494

ISBN 0-8103-8333-0

ISSN 1052-4851

Printed in the United States of America

Published simultaneously in the United Kingdom

by Gale Research International Limited

(An affiliated company of Gale Research Inc.)

Preface

At various points in literary history, poetry has been defined as “jigging veins of rhyming mother wits” (Christopher Marlowe); “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” (William Wordsworth); “the opening and closing of a door, leaving those who look through to guess about what is seen during a moment” (Carl Sandburg); and “a momentary stay against confusion” (Robert Frost). The study of poetry produces a natural curiosity about the political, social, moral, and literary trends of a particular time period and is an essential element of a well-rounded liberal arts curriculum.

Poetry Criticism (PC) was created in response to librarians serving high school, college, and public library patrons who noted an increasing number of requests for critical material on poets. Like its Gale predecessor in genre-oriented studies, *Short Story Criticism (SSC)*, which presents material on writers of short fiction, *PC* is designed to provide users with substantial critical excerpts and biographical information on the world’s most frequently discussed and studied poets in high school and undergraduate college courses. Each *PC* entry is supplemented by biographical and bibliographical material to help guide the user to a greater understanding of the genre and its creators. Although major poets and movements are covered in such Gale Literary Criticism Series as *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*, *PC* offers more focused attention on individual poets than is possible in the broader, survey-oriented entries on writers in these Gale series.

Scope of the Work

In order to reflect the influence of tradition as well as innovation, poets from various nationalities, eras, and movements will be represented in every volume of *PC*. For example, the present volume includes commentary on Paul Laurence Dunbar, who was the first black American writer to achieve national recognition and critical acclaim for such works as *Majors and Minors* and *Lyrics of Lowly Life*; T. S. Eliot, who is universally recognized as one of the major poets of the twentieth century, whose masterpiece *The Waste Land* challenged conventional definitions of poetry upon its publication in 1922; Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who was a leading figure in Germany’s *Sturm und Drang* movement, whose poem “Prometheus” articulated this group’s aesthetics by positing that humanity must believe not in gods but in itself alone; and Sappho, considered the greatest female poet of the classical era, and the most accomplished and influential of a group of lyric poets who were active in Greece between 650 B.C. and 450 B.C. Since many of these poets have inspired a prodigious amount of critical explication, *PC* is necessarily selective, and the editors have chosen the most important published criticism to aid readers and students in their research.

Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the generous excerpts and supplementary material provided by *PC* supply them with vital information needed to write a term paper on poetic technique, examine a poet’s most prominent themes, or lead a poetry discussion group. Ten to fifteen authors will be analyzed in each volume, and each author entry presents a historical survey of the critical response to that author’s work. Some early reviews are included to indicate initial reaction and are often written by the author’s contemporaries, while current analyses provide a modern view. The length of an entry is intended to reflect the amount of critical attention that the author has received from critics writing in English and from foreign critics in translation. Critical articles and books that have not been translated into English are excluded. Every attempt has been made to identify and include excerpts from the most significant essays on each author’s work. In order to provide these important critical pieces, the editors will sometimes reprint essays that have appeared in previous volumes of Gale’s Literary Criticism Series. Such duplication, however, never exceeds fifteen percent of a *PC* volume. Finally, because of space limitations, the reader may find that some important articles are not excerpted. Instead, these pieces may be found in the author’s further reading list, with complete bibliographic information followed by a brief descriptive note.

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- The **biographical and critical introduction** contains background information designed to introduce a reader to the author and to the critical discussions surrounding his or her work. Parenthetical material following the introduction provides references to other biographical and critical series published by Gale, including *CLC*, *TCLC*, *NCLC*, *LC*, *CMLC*, *SSC*, *Drama Criticism (DC)*, and *Black Literature Criticism (BLC)*, *Children's Literature Review*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, and *Something about the Author*.
- A **portrait of the author** is included when available. Many entries also contain illustrations of materials pertinent to an author's career, including holographs of manuscript pages, title pages, dust jackets, letters, or representations of important people, places, and events in the author's life.
- The list of **principal works** is chronological by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The first section comprises poetry collections and book-length poems. The second section gives information on other major works by the author. For foreign authors, the editors have provided original foreign-language publication information and have selected what are considered the best and most complete English-language editions of their works.
- The **critical excerpts** are arranged chronologically in each author entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over the years. All individual titles of poems and poetry collections by the author featured in the entry are printed in boldface type to enable a reader to ascertain without difficulty the works under discussion. For purposes of easier identification, the critic's name and the publication date of the essay are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the journal in which it originally appeared. Publication information (such as publisher names and book prices) and parenthetical numerical references (such as footnotes or page and line references to specific editions of a work) have been deleted at the editor's discretion to provide smoother reading of the text.
- Critical excerpts are prefaced with **explanatory notes** as an additional aid to students and readers using *PC*. The explanatory notes provide several types of useful information, including: the reputation of a critic, the importance of a work of criticism, and the specific type of criticism (biographical, psychoanalytic, historical, etc.).
- Whenever available, **insightful comments from the authors themselves and excerpts from author interviews** are also included. Depending upon the length of such material, an author's commentary may be set within boxes or boldface rules.
- A complete **bibliographical citation**, designed to help the interested reader locate the original essay or book, follows each piece of criticism.
- The **further reading list** appearing at the end of each entry suggests additional materials for study of the author. In some cases it includes essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights.

Other Features

- A **cumulative author index** lists all the authors who have appeared in *PC*, *CLC*, *TCLC*, *NCLC*, *LC*, *CMLC*, *SSC*, *DC*, and *BLC* as well as cross-references to the Gale series *Children's Literature Review*, *Contemporary Authors*, *Contemporary Authors New Revision Series*, *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, *Dictionary of Literary Biography Yearbook*, *Concise Dictionary of American Literary Biography*, *Something about the Author*, *Something about the Author Autobiography Series*, and *Yesterday's Authors of Books for Children*. Users will welcome this cumulated index as a useful tool for locating an author within the Literary Criticism Series.
- A **cumulative nationality index** lists all authors featured in *PC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *PC* volume in which the author appears.
- A **cumulative title index** lists in alphabetical order all individual poems, book-length poems, and collection titles contained in the *PC* series. Titles of poetry collections and separately published poems are printed in italics, while titles of individual poems are printed in roman type with quotation marks. Each title is followed by the author's name and the corresponding vol-

ume and page number where commentary on the work may be located. English-language translations of original foreign-language titles are cross-referenced to the foreign titles so that all references to discussion of a work are combined in one listing.

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- ¹ David Daiches, "W. H. Auden: The Search for a Public," *Poetry* LIV (June 1939), 148-56; excerpted and reprinted in *Poetry Criticism*, Vol. 1, ed. Robyn V. Young (Detroit: Gale Research, 1990), pp. 7-9.
- ² Pamela J. Annas, *A Disturbance in Mirrors: The Poetry of Sylvia Plath* (Greenwood Press, 1988); excerpted and reprinted in *Poetry Criticism*, Vol. 1, ed. Robyn V. Young (Detroit: Gale Research, 1990), pp. 410-14.

Suggestions Are Welcome

Readers who wish to suggest authors to appear in future volumes of *PC*, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor.

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Matthew Arnold

1822-1888

English poet, critic, and essayist.

INTRODUCTION

A renowned late-Victorian author of elegiac verse, Arnold is remembered for such classic poems as "The Scholar-Gipsy," "The Forsaken Merman," and "Dover Beach," which evince a subtle, restrained style and compelling expression of spiritual malaise. Arnold also wrote literary criticism advancing the classical ideals of ancient Greek and Roman culture and advocating the adoption of universal aesthetic standards. Commentators often examine Arnold's prose works for insight into the poetic principles that inform his own verse, and in fact, Arnold extensively revised his own poetry according to the precepts expressed in his criticism. Critics suggest that Arnold's recognition of the pervasive Romantic tendencies of his poetry, which conflicted dramatically with his classicist critical temperament, ultimately led him to abandon poetry as a form of self-expression.

Arnold was the eldest son of Thomas Arnold, an influential educator who became headmaster of Rugby School in 1828, where Arnold received his early education. His first work, the long poem *Alaric at Rome*, was published while Arnold was still a student; he went on to graduate from Balliol College, Oxford, in 1844. Subsequently Arnold accepted a teaching position at the college and continued to write and publish poetry. His collection *The Strayed Reveller, and Other Poems* appeared in 1849, and most of his poetry was published in the eight years that followed. *The Strayed Reveller* includes the lyrical title poem and a few love poems and sonnets, but for the most part consists of poems on classical themes. The tone of despair and melancholy that characterized many of the poems in the volume dismayed readers and critics, and it was not widely popular. Most reviewers cited only a few individual poems, in particular "The Sick King in Bokhara" and "The Forsaken Merman," as the collection's best; modern critics concur with these assessments and dismiss much of the volume as unremarkable, representative Victorian verse. Arnold worked as a school inspector from 1851, and in 1878 he was appointed Professor of Poetry at Oxford, a position he held until shortly before his death in 1888.

In 1852 Arnold released the collection *Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems*. Only the dramatic title poem of this volume is classical in theme; the rest of the volume features poetry dealing with love and with aspects of the human condition. *Empedocles on Etna* includes the "Marguerite" poems, a loosely related series recounting the course of a failed love relationship, a similar series of love poems addressed to Frances Lucy Wightman, whom Arnold eventually married, and the long narrative poem



"Tristram and Iseult." In 1853 Arnold reissued the volume as *Poems: A New Edition*, omitting "Empedocles on Etna" and "The New Sirens" and adding others. Explaining the revisions in a preface which is considered one of his most significant critical statements regarding poetry, Arnold denounced the emotional and stylistic excesses of late-Romantic poetry and outlined a poetic theory derived from Aristotelian principles of unity and decorum. He further stated that some of his own works, most notably "Empedocles on Etna," were flawed by Romantic excess, and that he had therefore decided to suppress those most affected. Commentary on *Poems* has focused on Arnold's critical pronouncements rather than the poetry itself, although two poems on classical themes added to the 1853 edition—"Sohrab and Rustum" and "The Scholar-Gipsy"—are often commended as among his best.

Arnold published only a few subsequent volumes of poetry, including *Poems: Second Series* in 1885 and the long verse drama *Merope* in 1858. His first major prose works, *On Translating Homer* and *The Popular Education of France, with Notices of That of Holland and Switzerland*, appeared in 1861, inaugurating his career as a highly visible and sometimes controversial literary and social critic.

Following *Merope*, Arnold published no poetry until *New Poems* appeared in 1867. Reviewers of the new volume, accustomed to regarding Arnold as an important literary critic, generally provided retrospective assessments of the poetic career of a writer whose true vocation was assumed to be prose. Nevertheless, critics again identified individual poems as exceptional achievements. Often commended, for example, is "Dover Beach." *New Poems* also contains the poem "Obermann Once More," the sonnet "West London," and "Thyrsis," an elegy dedicated to the memory of Arnold's friend, the poet Arthur Hugh Clough—works that are often praised for their sincerity, powerful images, and great beauty.

Critics generally view Arnold's poetry as a reflection of the spiritual dilemma of the Victorian, who, as Arnold wrote in "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," is caught "between two worlds, one dead / The other powerless to be born." The "dead" world is widely interpreted as a metaphoric evocation of the early Romantic period, during which Western culture had been reinvigorated by newly developed humanist and democratic ideals, while the "unborn" world represents a not-yet-realized society in which the scientific materialism of industrialized nations would be tempered by a highly developed state of cultural enlightenment. Arnold strove to imitate classical models in his poetry; however, critics agree that his work manifests Romantic self-absorption rather than classical objectivity. In fact, many have commented that as Arnold approached a classical ideal of poetry, his verse became less vital than those works infused with the Romanticism he sought to avoid. Many of his poems assume the form of a soliloquy or confession in which the narrator communicates feelings of melancholy or regret. Critics note, however, that Arnold's essentially Romantic sentiments are expressed in a precisely wrought and measured fashion.

During his lifetime both critics and Arnold himself focused on questions of romanticism and classicism in his poetry. Contemporary assessments, however, often see these considerations as secondary to consideration of Arnold's poetry as essentially modern, both in theme and structure. In such poems as "A Summer Night," "Dover Beach," and "The Forsaken Merman," for example, he varied line length and stanza or verse paragraphs in a procedure that foreshadows free verse technique. He also wrote unrhymed poems such as "The Strayed Reveller" and "The Future." Further, such poems as "Human Life," "Self-Deception," "Morality," and "Resignation" are meditations on the human condition that are surprisingly modern in expressing the despair and alienation that characterizes much twentieth-century literature. Evaluations of Arnold's poetic career generally conclude that while he failed to produce a unified body of work that adhered to his own poetic principles, he succeeded in producing a number of memorable and beautiful individual poems.

PRINCIPAL WORKS

POETRY

Alaric at Rome 1840

The Strayed Reveller, and Other Poems 1849
Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems 1852
Poems: A New Edition 1853
Poems: Second Series 1855
Merope 1858
New Poems 1867
The Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold 1950

OTHER MAJOR WORKS

On Translating Homer (lectures) 1861
The Popular Education of France, with Notices of That of Holland and Switzerland (essay) 1861
Essays in Criticism (criticism) 1865
On the Study of Celtic Literature (criticism) 1867
Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism (essay) 1869
St. Paul and Protestantism, with an Essay on Puritanism and the Church of England (essay) 1870
Friendship's Garland: Being the Conversations, Letters, and Opinions of the Late Arminius, Baron von Thunder-ten-Tronckh (fictional letters) 1871
Literature and Dogma: An Essay towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible (essay) 1873
God and the Bible: A Review of Objections to "Literature and Dogma" (essay) 1875
Last Essays on Church and Religion (essays) 1877
Mixed Essays (essays) 1879
Irish Essays, and Others (essays) 1882
Discourses in America (lectures) 1885
Civilization in the United States: First and Last Impressions of America (essay) 1888
Essays in Criticism: Second Series (criticism) 1888
Letters of Matthew Arnold, 1848-1888 (letters) 1895
Matthew Arnold's Notebooks (notebooks) 1902
The Works of Matthew Arnold. 15 vols. (criticism, essays, lectures, and poetry) 1903-04
Complete Prose Works. 11 vols. (criticism, essays, and lectures) 1960-77

CRITICISM

Matthew Arnold (essay date 1853)

[In the following excerpt from his preface to *Poems: A New Edition* Arnold defends his decision to exclude his poem "Empedocles on Etna" from the collection and outlines his philosophy of poetry.]

I have, in the present collection, omitted the Poem from which the volume published in 1852 took its title [*Empedocles on Etna*]. I have done so, not because the subject of it was a Sicilian Greek born between two and three thousand years ago, although many persons would think this a sufficient reason. Neither have I done so because I had, in my own opinion, failed in the delineation which I intended to effect. (p. 3)

A poetical work . . . is not yet justified when it has been

shown to be an accurate, and therefore interesting representation; it has to be shown also that it is a representation from which men can derive enjoyment. In presence of the most tragic circumstances, represented in a work of Art, the feeling of enjoyment, as is well known, may still subsist: the representation of the most utter calamity, of the liveliest anguish, is not sufficient to destroy it: the more tragic the situation, the deeper becomes the enjoyment; and the situation is more tragic in proportion as it becomes more terrible.

What then are the situations, from the representation of which, though accurate, no poetical enjoyment can be derived? They are those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope, or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situations there is inevitably something morbid, in the description of them something monotonous. When they occur in actual life, they are painful, not tragic; the representation of them in poetry is painful also.

To this class of situations, poetically faulty as it appears to me, that of Empedocles, as I have endeavoured to represent him, belongs; and I have therefore excluded the Poem from the present collection. (pp. 4-5)

"The Poet," it is said, and by an apparently intelligent critic, "the Poet who would really fix the public attention must leave the exhausted past, and draw his subjects from matters of present import, and *therefore* both of interest and novelty."

Now this view I believe to be completely false. It is worth examining, inasmuch as it is a fair sample of a class of critical dicta everywhere current at the present day, having a philosophical form and air, but no real basis in fact; and which are calculated to vitiate the judgment of readers of poetry, while they exert, so far as they are adopted, a misleading influence on the practice of those who write it.

What are the eternal objects of Poetry, among all nations, and at all times? They are actions; human actions; possessing an inherent interest in themselves, and which are to be communicated in an interesting manner by the art of the Poet. Vainly will the latter imagine that he has everything in his own power; that he can make an intrinsically inferior action equally delightful with a more excellent one by his treatment of it: he may indeed compel us to admire his skill, but his work will possess, within itself, an incurable defect.

The Poet, then, has in the first place to select an excellent action; and what actions are the most excellent? Those, certainly, which most powerfully appeal to the great primary human affections: to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time. These feelings are permanent and the same; that which interests them is permanent and the same also. The modernness or antiquity of an action, therefore, has nothing to do with its fitness for poetical representation; this depends upon its inherent qualities. To the elementary part of our nature, to our passions, that which is great and passionate is eternally interesting; and interesting solely in proportion to its greatness and to its

passion. A great human action of a thousand years ago is more interesting to it than a smaller human action of to-day, even though upon the representation of this last the most consummate skill may have been expended, and though it has the advantage of appealing by its modern language, familiar manners, and contemporary allusions, to all our transient feelings and interests.

These, however, have no right to demand of a poetical work that it shall satisfy them; their claims are to be directed elsewhere. Poetical works belong to the domain of our permanent passions: let them interest these, and the voice of all subordinate claims upon them is at once silenced.

Achilles, Prometheus, Clytemnestra, Dido—what modern poem presents personages as interesting, even to us moderns, as these personages of an "exhausted past?" We have the domestic epic dealing with the details of modern life which pass daily under our eyes; we have poems representing modern personages in contact with the problems of modern life, moral, intellectual, and social; these works have been produced by poets the most distinguished of their nation and time; yet I fearlessly assert that *Hermann and Dorothea*, *Childe Harold*, *Jocelyn*, *The Excursion*, leave the reader cold in comparison with the effect produced upon him by the latter books of the *Iliad*, by the *Oresteia*, or by the episode of Dido. And why is this? Simply because in the three latter cases the action is greater, the personages nobler, the situations more intense: and this is the true basis of the interest in a poetical work, and this alone. (pp. 5-7)

But for all kinds of poetry alike there was one point on which [the Greeks] were rigidly exacting; the adaptability of the subject to the kind of poetry selected, and the careful construction of the poem.

How different a way of thinking from this is ours! We can hardly at the present day understand what Menander meant, when he told a man who enquired as to the progress of his comedy that he had finished it, not having yet written a single line, because he had constructed the action of it in his mind. A modern critic would have assured him that the merit of his piece depended on the brilliant things which arose under his pen as he went along. We have poems which seem to exist merely for the sake of single lines and passages; not for the sake of producing any total-impression. We have critics who seem to direct their attention merely to detached expressions, to the language about the action, not to the action itself. I verily think that the majority of them do not in their hearts believe that there is such a thing as a total-impression to be derived from a poem at all, or to be demanded from a poet; they think the term a commonplace of metaphysical criticism. They will permit the Poet to select any action he pleases, and to suffer that action to go as it will, provided he gratifies them with occasional bursts of fine writing, and with a shower of isolated thoughts and images. That is, they permit him to leave their poetical sense ungratified, provided that he gratifies their rhetorical sense and their curiosity. Of his neglecting to gratify these, there is little danger; he needs rather to be warned against the danger of attempting to gratify these alone; he needs rather to be perpetually re-

mind to prefer his action to everything else; so to treat this, as to permit its inherent excellences to develop themselves, without interruption from the intrusion of his personal peculiarities: most fortunate, when he most entirely succeeds in effacing himself, and in enabling a noble action to subsist as it did in nature.

But the modern critic not only permits a false practice; he absolutely prescribes false aims.—“A true allegory of the state of one’s own mind in a representative history,” the Poet is told, “is perhaps the highest thing that one can attempt in the way of poetry.”—And accordingly he attempts it. An allegory of the state of one’s own mind, the highest problem of an art which imitates actions! No assuredly, it is not, it never can be so: no great poetical work has ever been produced with such an aim. (pp. 9-10)

The present age makes great claims upon us: we owe it service, it will not be satisfied without our admiration. I know not how it is, but their commerce with the ancients appears to me to produce, in those who constantly practise it, a steadying and composing effect upon their judgment, not of literary works only, but of men and events in general. They are like persons who have had a very weighty and impressive experience: they are more truly than others under the empire of facts, and more independent of the language current among those with whom they live. They wish neither to applaud nor to revile their age: they wish to know what it is, what it can give them, and whether this is what they want. What they want, they know very well; they want to educe and cultivate what is best and noblest in themselves: they know, too, that this is no easy task . . . and they ask themselves sincerely whether their age and its literature can assist them in the attempt. If they are endeavouring to practise any art, they remember the plain and simple proceedings of the old artists, who attained their grand results by penetrating themselves with some noble and significant action, not by inflating themselves with a belief in the pre-eminent importance and greatness of their own times. They do not talk of their mission, nor of interpreting their age, nor of the coming Poet; all this, they know, is the mere delirium of vanity; their business is not to praise their age, but to afford to the men who live in it the highest pleasure which they are capable of feeling. (pp. 14-15)

A host of voices will indignantly rejoin that the present age is inferior to the past neither in moral grandeur nor in spiritual health. He who possesses the discipline I speak of will content himself with remembering the judgments passed upon the present age, in this respect, by the men of strongest head and widest culture whom it has produced; by Goethe and by Niebuhr. It will be sufficient for him that he knows the opinions held by these two great men respecting the present age and its literature; and that he feels assured in his own mind that their aims and demands upon life were such as he would wish, at any rate, his own to be; and their judgment as to what is impeding and disabling such as he may safely follow. He will not, however, maintain a hostile attitude towards the false pretensions of his age; he will content himself with not being overwhelmed by them. (pp. 15-16)

I am far indeed from making any claim, for myself, that

I possess this discipline; or for the following Poems, that they breathe its spirit. But I say, that in the sincere endeavour to learn and practise, amid the bewildering confusion of our times, what is sound and true in poetical art, I seemed to myself to find the only sure guidance, the only solid footing, among the ancients. They, at any rate, knew what they wanted in Art, and we do not. It is this uncertainty which is disheartening, and not hostile criticism. How often have I felt this when reading words of disparagement or of cavil: that it is the uncertainty as to what is really to be aimed at which makes our difficulty, not the dissatisfaction of the critic, who himself suffers from the same uncertainty. (p. 16)

Two kinds of *dilettanti*, says Goethe, there are in poetry: he who neglects the indispensable mechanical part, and thinks he has done enough if he shows spirituality and feeling; and he who seeks to arrive at poetry merely by mechanism, in which he can acquire an artisan’s readiness, and is without soul and matter. And he adds, that the first does most harm to Art, and the last to himself. If we must be *dilettanti*: if it is impossible for us, under the circumstances amidst which we live, to think clearly, to feel nobly, and to delineate firmly: if we cannot attain to the mastery of the greater artists—let us, at least, have so much respect for our Art as to prefer it to ourselves: let us not bewilder our successors: let us transmit to them the practice of Poetry, with its boundaries and wholesome regulative laws, under which excellent works may again, perhaps, at some future time, be produced, not yet fallen into oblivion through our neglect, not yet condemned and cancelled by the influence of their eternal enemy, Caprice. (pp. 16-17)

Matthew Arnold, in his *The Poems of Matthew Arnold: 1840-1866*, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1908, 367 p.

Algernon Charles Swinburne (essay date 1867)

[Swinburne was an English poet renowned during his lifetime for the technical mastery of his lyric poetry, and he is remembered today as a preeminent symbol of rebellion against the moral orientation of the Victorian age. In the following excerpt from a review of *New Poems*, Swinburne favorably appraises Arnold’s poetry, commending in particular the excellence of his sonnets and elegies and the perfection of form he often achieves.]

For some years the immediate fame of Mr. Matthew Arnold has been almost exclusively the fame of a prose writer. Those students could hardly find hearing—they have nowhere of late found expression that I know of—who, with all esteem and enjoyment of his essays, of their clearness, candour, beauty of sentiment and style, retained the opinion that, if justly judged, he must be judged by his verse, and not by his prose; certainly not by this alone; that future students would cleave to that with more of care and of love; that the most memorable quality about him was the quality of a poet. Not that they liked the prose less, but that they liked the verse more. His best essays ought to live longer than most, his best poems cannot but live as long as any, of their time. So it seemed to some who were accordingly more eager to receive and more careful to

study a new book of his poems than most books they could have looked for; and since criticism of the rapid and limited kind possible to contemporaries can be no more than the sincere exposition of the writer's belief and of his reasons for it, I, as one of these, desire, with all deference but with all decision, to say what I think of this book [*New Poems*], and why. For the honour of criticism, if it is to win or to retain honour at all, it must be well for the critic to explain clearly his personal point of view, instead of fighting behind the broad and crestless shield of a nameless friend or foe. The obscurest name and blazon are at least recognisable; but a mere voice is mere wind, though it affect to speak with the tongues and the authority of men and of angels.

First on this new stage is the figure of an old friend and teacher. Mr. Arnold says that the poem of "*Empedocles on Etna*" was withdrawn before fifty copies of the first edition were sold. I must suppose then that one of these was the copy I had when a schoolboy—how snatched betimes from the wreck and washed across my way, I know not; but I remember well enough how then, as now, the songs of Callicles clove to my ear and memory. Early as this was, it was not my first knowledge of the poet; the "*Reveller*," the "*Merman*," the "*New Sirens*," I had mainly by heart in a time of childhood just ignorant of teens. I do not say I understood the latter poem in a literal or logical fashion, but I had enjoyment enough of its music and colour and bright sadness as of a rainy sunset or sundawn. A child with any ear or eye for the attraction of verse or art can dispense with analysis, and rest content to apprehend it without comprehension; it were to be wished that adults equally incapable would rest equally content. Here I must ask, as between brackets, if this beautiful poem is never to be reissued after the example of its younger? No poet could afford to drop or destroy it; I might at need call into court older and better judges to back my judgment in this; meantime "*I hope here be proofs*" that, however inadequate may be my estimate of the poet on whom I am now to discourse, it is not inadequate through want of intimacy with his work. At the risk of egotism, I record it in sign of gratitude; I cannot count the hours of pure and high pleasure, I cannot reckon the help and guidance in thought and work, which I owe to him as to all other real and noble artists, whose influence it was my fortune to feel when most susceptible of influence, and least conscious of it, and most in want. In one of his books, where he presses rather hard upon our school as upon one devoid of spiritual or imaginative culture, he speaks of his poems as known to no large circle—implies this at least, if I remember: he will not care to be assured that to some boys at Eton Sohrab and Rustum, Tristram and Iseult, have been close and common friends, their stream of Oxus and bays of Brittany familiar almost as the well-loved Thames weirs and reaches. However, of this poem of "*Empedocles*" the world it seems was untimely robbed, though I remember on searching to have found a notice of it here and there. Certain fragments were then given back by way of dole, chiefly in the second series of the author's revised poems. But one, the largest, if not the brightest jewel, was withheld; the one long and lofty chant of *Empedocles*. The reasons assigned by Mr. Arnold in a former preface for cancelling the complete poem had some weight: the subject-

matter is oppressive, the scheme naked and monotonous; the blank verse is not sonorous, not vital and various enough; in spite of some noble interludes, it fails on the whole to do the work and carry the weight wanted; its simplicity is stony and grey, with dry flats and rough whinstones. (pp. 414-16)

The lyric interludes of the "*Empedocles*" are doubtless known by heart to many ignorant of their original setting, in which they are now again enchased. We have no poet comparable for power and perfection of landscape. This quality was never made more of by critics, sought after by poets with so much care; and our literature lies in full flowerage of landscape, like Egypt after the reflux of the Nile. We have galleries full of beautiful and ingenious studies, and an imperial academy of descriptive poets. The supreme charm of Mr. Arnold's work is a sense of right resulting in a spontaneous temperance which bears no mark of curb or snaffle, but obeys the hand with imperceptible submission and gracious reserve. Other and older poets are to the full as vivid, as incisive and impressive; others have a more pungent colour, a more trenchant outline; others as deep knowledge and as fervid enjoyment of natural things. But no one has in like measure that tender and final quality of touch which tempers the excessive light and suffuses the refluent shade; which as it were washes with soft air the sides of the earth, steeped with dew of quiet and dyes with colours of repose the ambient ardour of noon, the fiery affluence of evening. His verse bathes us with fresh radiance and light rain, when weary of the violence of summer and winter in which others dazzle and detain us; his spring wears here and there a golden waif of autumn, his autumn a rosy stray of spring. His tones and effects are pure, lucid, aerial; he knows by some fine impulse of temperance all rules of distance, of reference, of proportion; nothing is thrust or pressed upon our eyes, driven or beaten into our ears. For the instinctive selection of simple and effectual detail he is unmatched among English poets of the time, unless by Mr. Morris, whose landscape has much of the same quality, as clear, as noble, and as memorable—memorable for this especially, that you are not vexed or fretted by mere brilliance of point and sharpness of stroke, and such intemperate excellence as gives astonishment the precedence of admiration: such beauties as strike you and startle and go out. Of these it is superfluous to cite instances from the ablest of our countrymen's works; they are taught and teach that the most remote, the most elaborate, the most intricate and ingenious fashions of allusion and detail make up the best poetical style; they fill their verse with sharp-edged prettinesses, with shining surprises, and striking accidents that are anything but casual; upon every limb and feature you see marks of the chisel and the plane: there is a conscious complacency of polish which seems to rebuke emulation and challenge improvement. It is otherwise with the two we have named; they are not pruned and pared into excellence, they have not so much of pungency and point; but they have breadth and ease and purity, they have largeness and sureness of eyesight; they know what to give and to withhold, what to express and to suppress. Above all, they have *air*; you can breathe and move in their landscape, nor are you tripped up and caught at in passing by intrusive and singular and exceptional beauties which break up and

distract the simple charm of general and single beauty, the large and musical unity of things. Their best verse is not brought straight or worked right; it falls straight because it cannot fall awry; it comes right because it cannot go wrong. And this wide and delicate sense of right makes the impression of their work so durable. The effect is never rubbed off or worn out; the hot suffering eastern life of "The Sick King in Bokhara;" the basking pastures and blowing pines about the "Church of Brou;" the morning field and midday moorland so fondly and fully and briefly painted in "Resignation;" above all, to me at least, the simple and perfect sea-side in the "Merman,"—"the sandy down where the sea-stocks bloom," the white-walled town with narrow paved streets, the little grey church with rain-worn stones and small leaded panes, and blown about all the breath of wind and sound of waves—these come in and remain with us; these give to each poem the form and colour and attire it wants, and make it a distinct and complete achievement. The description does not adorn or decorate the thought; it is part of it; they have so grown into each other that they seem not welded together, but indivisible and twin-born. (pp. 420-21)

The incalculable power of Wordsworth on certain minds for a certain time could not but be and could not but pass over. (p. 424)

[When] there is a high and pure genius on either side a man cannot but get good from the man he admires, and as it was so in this case if ever in any, he must have got good from that source over and above the certain and common good which the sense of reverence does to us all. The joy of worship, the delight of admiration, is in itself so excellent and noble a thing that even error cannot make it unvenerable or unprofitable; no one need repent of reverence, though he find flaws or cavities in his idol; it has done him good to worship, though there were no godhead behind the shrine. To shut his eyes upon disproof and affirm the presence of a god found absent, this indeed is evil; but this is not an act of reverence or of worship; this is the brute fatuity of fear, wanting alike what is good and fruitful in belief, what is heroic and helpful in disbelief; witness (for the most part) the religious and political, moral and æsthetic scriptures of our own time, the huge canonical roll of the Philistine. Nothing can be more unlike such ignoble and sluggard idolatry than the reverence now expressed and now implied by Mr. Arnold for the doctrine and example of Wordsworth. His memorial verses at once praise and judge the great poet, then newly dead, better than any words of other men; they have the still clear note, the fresh breath as of the first fields and birds of spring awakened in a serene dawn, which is in Wordsworth's own verse. With wider eyes and keener, he has inherited the soothing force of speech and simple stroke of hand with which Wordsworth assuaged and healed the weariness and the wounds of his time; to his hands the same appeasing spells and sacred herbs that fell from the other's when they relaxed in death, have been committed by the gods of healing song. The elder physician of souls had indeed something too much of Æsculapius in him, something too little of Apollo his father; nevertheless the lineal and legitimate blood was apparent.

This elegy and the poem headed "Resignation" are, in my eyes, the final flower of Mr. Arnold's poems after Wordsworth—as I take leave to qualify a certain division of his work. The second of these is an unspotted and unbroken model of high calm thought, couched in pure and faultless words; the words more equal and the vision more clear than his old teacher's, more just in view and more sure in grasp of nature and life. Imbued with the old faith at once in the necessity of things and in the endurance of man, it excels in beauty and in charm the kindred song of Empedocles; from first to last there rests upon it a serene spell, a sad supremacy of still music that softens and raises into wisdom the passionless and gentle pain of patience; the charm of earth and sorrowful magic of things everlasting; the spell that is upon the patient hills and immutable rocks, awake and asleep in "the life of plants and stones and rain"; the life to which we too may subdue our souls and be wise. At times he writes simply as the elder poet might have written, without sensible imitation, but with absolute identity of style and sentiment; at times his larger tone of thought, his clearer accent of speech, attest the difference of the men. So perfect and sweet in speech, so sound and lucid in thought as the pupil is at his best, the master perhaps never was; and at his best the pupil is no more seen, and in his stead is a new master. He has nothing of Wordsworth's spirit of compromise with the nature of things, nothing of his moral fallacies and religious reservations; he can see the face of facts and read them with the large and frank insight of ancient poets; none of these ever had a more profound and serene sense of fate. The grave cadence of such a poem as the "Resignation," in this point also one of Mr. Arnold's most noble and effective, bears with it a memory and a resonance of the master's music, such as we find again in the lovely single couplets and lines which now and then lift up the mind or lull it in the midst of less excellent verse; such for instance as these, which close a scale of lower melodies, in a poem not wholly or equally pleasurable: but these are faultless verses, and full of the comfort of music, which tell us how, wafted at times from the far-off verge of the soul,

As from an infinitely distant land,
Come airs, and floating echoes, and convey
A melancholy into all our day.

These have a subtle likeness to Wordsworth's purer notes, a likeness undefined and unborrowed; the use of words usually kept back for prose (such as "convey") is a trick of Wordsworth's which either makes or mars a passage; here the touch, it may be by accident, strikes the exact chord wanted, elicits the exact tone.

But indeed, as with all poets of his rank, so with Mr. Arnold, the technical beauty of his work is one with the spiritual; art, a poet's art above all others, cannot succeed in this and fail in that. Success or achievement of an exalted kind on the spiritual side ensures and enforces a like executive achievement or success; if the handiwork be flawed, there must also have been some distortion or defect of spirit, a shortcoming or a misdirection of spiritual supply. (pp. 425-28)

There is nothing in either of the poets I speak of more distinctive and significant than the excellence of their best

sonnets. These are almost equally noble in style, though the few highest of Wordsworth's remain out of reach of emulation, not out of sight of worship. Less adorable and sublime, not less admirable and durable, Mr. Arnold's hold their own in the same world of poetry with these. All in this new volume are full of beauty, sound and sweet fruits of thought and speech that have ripened and brought forth together; the poetry of religious thought when most pure and most large has borne no fairer than that one on the drawing in the Catacombs of the Good Shepherd bearing the young, not of a sheep, but of a goat; or that other on the survival of grace and spirit when the body of belief lies dead, headed (not happily) "*Anti-Desperation*;" but all, I repeat, have a singular charm and clearness. I have used this word already more than once or twice; it comes nearest of all I can find to the thing I desire to express; that natural light of mind, that power of reception and reflection of things or thoughts, which I most admire in so much of Mr. Arnold's work. I mean by it much more than mere facility or transparency, more than brilliance, more than ease or excellence of style. It is a quality begotten by instinct upon culture; one which all artists of equal rank possess in equal measure.

There are in the English language three elegiac poems so great that they eclipse and efface all the elegiac poetry we know; all of Italian, all of Greek. It is only because the latest born is yet new to us that it can seem strange or rash to say so. The "*Thyrsis*" of Mr. Arnold makes a third, with "*Lycidas*" and "*Adonais*." It is not so easy as those may think who think by rote and praise by prescription, to strike the balance between them. The first however remains first, and must remain; its five opening lines are to me the most musical in all known realms of verse; there is nothing like them; and it is more various, more simple, more large and sublime than the others; lovelier and fuller it cannot be.

The leader is fairest,
But all are divine.

The least pathetic of the three is "*Adonais*," which indeed is hardly pathetic at all; it is passionate, subtle, splendid; but "*Thyrsis*," like "*Lycidas*," has a quiet and tender undertone which gives it something of sacred. Shelley brings fire from heaven, but these bring also "the meed of some melodious tear." There is a grace ineffable, a sweet sound and sweet savour of things past, in the old beautiful use of the language of shepherds, of flocks and pipes; the spirit is none the less sad and sincere because the body of the poem has put on this dear familiar raiment of romance; because the crude and naked sorrow is veiled and chastened with soft shadows and sounds of a "land that is very far off;" because the verse remembers and retains a perfume and an echo of Grecian flutes and flowers,

Renews the golden world, and holds through all
The holy laws of homely pastoral,
Where flowers and founts, and nymphs and
semi-gods,
And all the Graces find their old abodes.

Here, as in the "*Scholar Gipsy*," the beauty, the delicacy and affluence of colour, the fragrance and the freedom as of wide wings of winds in summer over meadow and moor,

the freshness and expansion of the light and the lucid air, the spring and the stream as of flowing and welling water, enlarge and exalt the pleasure and power of the whole poem. Such English-coloured verse no poet has written since Shakespeare, who chooses his field-flowers and hedgerow blossoms with the same sure and loving hand, binds them in as simple and sweet an order. All others, from Milton downward to Shelley and onward from him, have gathered them singly or have mixed them with foreign buds and alien bloom. No poem in any language can be more perfect as a model of style, unsurpassable certainly, it may be unattainable. Any couplet, any line proves it. No countryman of ours since Keats died has made or has found words fall into such faultless folds and forms of harmonious line. He is the most efficient, the surest-footed poet of our time, the most to be relied on; what he does he is the safest to do well; more than any other he unites personality and perfection; others are personal and imperfect, perfect and impersonal; with them you must sometimes choose between inharmonious freedom and harmonious bondage. Above all, he knows what as a poet he should do, and simply does that; the manner of his good work is never more or less than right. His verse comes clean and full out of the mould, cast at a single jet; placed beside much other verse of the time, it shows like a sculptor's work by an enameller's. With all their wealth and warmth of flowers and lights, these two twin poems are solid and pure as granite or as gold. Their sweet sufficiency of music, so full and calm, buoys and bears up throughout the imperial vessel of thought. Their sadness is not chill or sterile, but as the sorrow of summer pausing with laden hands on the middle height of the year, the watershed that divides the feeding fountains of autumn and of spring; a grave and fruitful sadness, the triumphant melancholy of full-blown flowers and souls full-grown. The stanzas from the sixth to the fourteenth of "*Thyrsis*," and again from the sixteenth to the twentieth, are, if possible, the most lovely in either poem; the deepest in tone and amplest in colour; the choiceness and sweetness of single lines and phrases most exquisite and frequent.

O easy access to the hearer's grace,
When Dorian shepherds sang to Proserpine!
For she herself had trod Sicilian fields,
She knew the Dorian water's gush divine,
She knew each lily white which Enna yields,
Each rose with blushing face;
She loved the Dorian pipe, the Dorian strain.
But, ah! of our poor Thames she never heard!
Her foot the Cumner cowslips never stirred;
And we should tease her with our plaint in vain.

She has learnt to know them now, the river and the river-meadows, and access is as easy for an English as a Dorian prayer to the most gentle of all worshipped gods. It is a triumphal and memorial poem, a landmark in the high places of verse to which future travellers, studious of the fruits and features of the land, may turn and look up and see what English hands could rear.

This is probably the highest point of Mr. Arnold's poetry, though for myself I cannot wholly resign the old preference of things before familiar; of one poem in especial, good alike for children and men, the "*Forsaken Mer-*