

# Dictionary of Literary Biography

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Volume 32:

Victorian Poets  
Before 1850

Dictionary of Literary Biography • Volume Thirty-two

# Victorian Poets Before 1850

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## Plan of the Series

. . . *Almost the most prodigious asset of a country, and perhaps its most precious possession, is its native literary product—when that product is fine and noble and enduring.*

Mark Twain\*

The advisory board, the editors, and the publisher of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* are joined in endorsing Mark Twain's declaration. The literature of a nation provides an inexhaustible resource of permanent worth. It is our expectation that this endeavor will make literature and its creators better understood and more accessible to students and the literate public, while satisfying the standards of teachers and scholars.

To meet these requirements, *literary biography* has been construed in terms of the author's achievement. The most important thing about a writer is his writing. Accordingly, the entries in *DLB* are career biographies, tracing the development of the author's canon and the evolution of his reputation.

The publication plan for *DLB* resulted from two years of preparation. The project was proposed to Bruccoli Clark by Frederick G. Ruffner, president of the Gale Research Company, in November 1975. After specimen entries were prepared and typeset, an advisory board was formed to refine the entry format and develop the series rationale. In meetings held during 1976, the publisher, series editors, and advisory board approved the scheme for a comprehensive biographical dictionary of persons who contributed to North American literature. Editorial work on the first volume began in January 1977, and it was published in 1978.

In order to make *DLB* more than a reference tool and to compile volumes that individually have claim to status as literary history, it was decided to organize volumes by topic or period or genre. Each of these freestanding volumes provides a biographical-bibliographical guide and overview for a particular area of literature. We are convinced that this organization—as opposed to a single alphabet method—constitutes a valuable innovation in the presentation of reference material. The volume plan necessarily requires many decisions for the

placement and treatment of authors who might properly be included in two or three volumes. In some instances a major figure will be included in separate volumes, but with different entries emphasizing the aspect of his career appropriate to each volume. Ernest Hemingway, for example, is represented in *American Writers in Paris, 1920-1939* by an entry focusing on his expatriate apprenticeship; he is also in *American Novelists, 1910-1945* with an entry surveying his entire career. Each volume includes a cumulative index of subject authors. The final *DLB* volume will be a comprehensive index to the entire series.

With volume ten in 1982 it was decided to enlarge the scope of *DLB* beyond the literature of the United States. By the end of 1983 twelve volumes treating British literature had been published, and volumes for Commonwealth and Modern European literature were in progress. The series has been further augmented by the *DLB Yearbooks* (since 1981) which update published entries and add new entries to keep the *DLB* current with contemporary activity. There have also been occasional *DLB Documentary Series* volumes which provide biographical and critical background source materials for figures whose work is judged to have particular interest for students. One of these companion volumes is entirely devoted to Tennessee Williams.

The purpose of *DLB* is not only to provide reliable information in a convenient format but also to place the figures in the larger perspective of literary history and to offer appraisals of their accomplishments by qualified scholars.

We define literature as the *intellectual commerce of a nation*: not merely as belles lettres, but as that ample and complex process by which ideas are generated, shaped, and transmitted. *DLB* entries are not limited to "creative writers" but extend to other figures who in this time and in this way influenced the mind of a people. Thus the series encompasses historians, journalists, publishers, and screenwriters. By this means readers of *DLB* may be aided to perceive literature not as cult scripture in the keeping of cultural high priests, but as at the center of a nation's life.

*DLB* includes the major writers appropriate to each volume and those standing in the ranks immediately behind them. Scholarly and critical counsel has been sought in deciding which minor figures to include and how full their entries should be.

\*From an unpublished section of Mark Twain's autobiography, copyright © by the Mark Twain Company.



Wherever possible, useful references will be made to figures who do not warrant separate entries.

Each *DLB* volume has a volume editor responsible for planning the volume, selecting the figures for inclusion, and assigning the entries. Volume editors are also responsible for preparing, where appropriate, appendices surveying the major periodicals and literary and intellectual movements for their volumes, as well as lists of further readings. Work on the series as a whole is coordinated at the Brucoli Clark editorial center in Columbia, South Carolina, where the editorial staff is responsible for the accuracy of the published volumes.

One feature that distinguishes *DLB* is the illustration policy—its concern with the iconography of literature. Just as an author is influenced by his surroundings, so is the reader's understanding of the author enhanced by a knowledge of his environment. Therefore *DLB* volumes include not only drawings, paintings, and photographs of authors, often depicting them at various stages in their careers, but also illustrations of their families and places where they lived. Title pages are regularly reproduced in facsimile along with dust jackets for modern authors. The dust jackets are a special fea-

ture of *DLB* because they often document better than anything else the way in which an author's work was launched in its own time. Specimens of the writers' manuscripts are included when feasible.

A supplement to *DLB*—tentatively titled *A Guide, Chronology, and Glossary for American Literature*—will outline the history of literature in North America and trace the influences that shaped it. This volume will provide a framework for the study of American literature by means of chronological tables, literary affiliation charts, glossarial entries, and concise surveys of the major movements. It has been planned to stand on its own as a vade mecum, providing a ready-reference guide to the study of American literature as well as a companion to the *DLB* volumes for American literature.

Samuel Johnson rightly decreed that "The chief glory of every people arises from its authors." The purpose of the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* is to compile literary history in the surest way available to us—by accurate and comprehensive treatment of the lives and work of those who contributed to it.

The *DLB* Advisory Board

## Foreword

The two *Dictionary of Literary Biography* volumes on *Victorian Poets* (volumes 32 and 35) are intended as companions to *DLB 21, Victorian Novelists Before 1885* and *DLB 18, Victorian Novelists After 1885*; indeed, six of the fiction writers treated in those volumes also appear as poets—Emily Brontë, Robert Buchanan, George Meredith, Mortimer Collins, George Eliot, and William Morris. For many Victorian novelists, such as George Eliot and Emily Brontë, the writing of verse was more or less incidental to their primary talent; for others, such as Morris, fiction was a kind of polyphonic prose extension of their poetry; still others, such as Buchanan, engaged in both genres indiscriminately, with only moderate success in either. Only Meredith and Hardy among the great Victorian novelists had successful parallel careers as poets, and Hardy has been included in *DLB 19, British Poets, 1880-1941* because his creatively poetic period commenced only at the very end of the century with the publication of *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* in 1898.

Compartmentalizing the Victorian Age has always posed problems for the literary historian, not only because so many of the great Victorians were indefatigable writers who refuse to submit to taxonomical pigeonholing, but because any definition of the age must accommodate major and prodigious achievements in three distinct literary genres—poetry, the novel, and nonfictional prose. The scope of these genres is amply demonstrated by the three critical surveys devoted to them, edited by Frederic Faverty (poetry), George Ford (the novel), and David DeLaura (nonfictional prose).

While it is not really possible to identify the age as dominated by a single genre, there is no question that the novel attained its majority during the 1800s. Paradoxically—or perhaps predictably—the social advances of the century, which included the growth of the middle classes, the universalization of public education, and an increase in leisure time, resulted not in an elevation in aesthetic sensitivity but in a democratization of the arts; from this the novel, more than any other literary form, benefited. The nineteenth-century aesthetic equivalent of television, the novel, because of its wide appeal and readership, was subject to the same kind of “prime-time” restrictions that operate today in “family oriented” TV programming. While these strictures were often self-imposed, as in the case of

Trollope in England and W. D. Howells in the United States—both prided themselves on never having written anything that could not be read aloud in mixed company—the stranglehold that the great lending libraries exerted on popular taste and on both the economics and the format of the novel enabled them to enforce a de facto censorship. Realism is evident in the treatment and style of many Victorian novels, but nowhere in the fiction of the period is there so explicit a sexual passage as the consummation scene in the Ottima-Sebald section of Robert Browning's *Pippa Passes* (1841) or domestic dialogue comparable to that in George Meredith's *Modern Love* (1862).

The novel, however, was destined to thrive because its very nature made it more accessible to the average reader, and because the relaxed grip of the libraries in the late 1880s freed novelists and publishers to experiment more widely with both form and content. As it became more mature and sophisticated in terms of technique and style, arrogating to itself most of the self-reflexive qualities associated with poetry and becoming ever more prominently a nondiscursive form, the novel tended to usurp virtually all other literary genres. No modern writer—and probably not even Browning today—coming across the materials of *The Old Yellow Book* would cast them into a poem of over 21,000 lines; the material itself, with its inherent potential for an experimental and complicated handling of point of view, coupled with the impact on sales, would lead him instinctively to write *The Ring and the Book* (1868-1869) as a novel.

The Victorians may have been the last poets who will ever successfully compete with novelists for a fair share of readers' attention, and while even they were no longer regarded, in Shelley's terms, as the “unacknowledged legislators of the world,” certainly they were the last whose message was taken seriously by their contemporaries, and the last to be overly concerned about the aesthetic and moral responsibility of the poet as a spokesman for and interpreter of his age. Of course, most Victorian poets posed no real threat in terms of sales to the leading Victorian novelists—Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Hardy, Meredith, and Trollope—but Tennyson raked off a fair share of the market: *Enoch Arden*, for example, sold over 17,000 copies on the first day of publication in August 1864; the entire first impression of 60,000

copies was exhausted by year's end, and the half-year profits on that book alone netted the laureate £6,664.4s.2d. It could be argued that *Enoch Arden*, as a verse narrative, capitalized on a certain spillover from the popularity of the novel, but many of Tennyson's other works could also be considered "best-sellers" in nineteenth-century terms; and the demand for even so eccentric a book as Philip James Bailey's *Festus* (1839) sent it through more than sixty editions in half a century. The point, however, is not so much that poetry in the Victorian period managed to survive against the competition of the novel, or that the major poets could make a living practicing their craft, but that there was still a sizable and literate audience concerned with the poet's perception of his world. The isolation that has characterized the poet since the 1880s—for which the poets themselves, by insisting on the privateness of their individual vision and language and disclaiming all responsibility save to art itself, must assume a large part of the blame—was not the condition of the Victorian poet. The tension between the private and public roles of the poet is readily evident in Tennyson, Browning, and Arnold, as E. D. H. Johnson pointed out several decades ago; but the major Victorians, at least, were unwilling to surrender one for the other and consciously sought and adopted strategies which would allow them to pursue private visions and values without alienating themselves from their readers.

The divisions between historical eras are always somewhat arbitrary, but it is more difficult to assign boundaries to the Victorian age than to do so for some other literary periods. The limits of the queen's reign, 1837 and 1901, while convenient, are inadequate. For 1837, there is no single event or work associated with the date, beyond her ascendancy, that signals a clear transition—as do, say, the death of Dryden and the publication of his *The Secular Masque* in 1700, which brings the curtain down with a nice finality on the Restoration; or the publication in 1798 of Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, whose preface and practice launch a dramatic shift in poetic theory that heralds the literature of Romanticism. Similarly, if the Victorians ever did refer to themselves by that epithet, by the year of the first Jubilee (1887), and certainly by 1901, most nineteenth-century intellectuals could have mustered half a dozen more appropriate labels for themselves. And, of course, neither date accounts for those last leaves upon the tree at either end of the Victorian spectrum. Even as a chronological denominator *Victorian* is ambiguous; but as a critical term, it is in a sense even more vague, since it can

hardly be said to describe a body of writing that has any distinguishing homogeneity (though there are certain identifiable traits and characteristics among the poets belonging to the Oxford Movement, the Spasmodics, or the Pre-Raphaelites, who shared, to a degree at least, common aims and practices). In conventional usage, the term *Victorian* is often used pejoratively to refer to a set of social, cultural, and moral attitudes that by the standards of the twentieth century are regarded as narrow-minded, hypocritical, and chauvinistic; but such distinctions, which dominated the period of reaction in the first two decades following the death of the queen, have been undercut by systematic research into all aspects of the period in recent years.

The inherent inadequacies of the above applications of the term have led a number of modern critics to attempt to make the Victorians respectable by demonstrating that they were either post-Romantics or premoderns. But as Michael Timko pointed out in his important essay on "The Victorianism of Victorian Literature" in *New Literary History* (1975), such attempts, while a tribute to the skill of the critics and to the versatility of the literature of the period, ignore palpable distinctions that are unique to the condition of the Victorians, stemming from the twin influences of Darwinism, on the one hand, and the substitution of epistemological for metaphysical concerns on the other, both of which altered significantly the ways in which the Victorians viewed civilized man's relationship to nature and God. And they also overlook the literary innovations, such as the development of new, or combinations of traditional, genres, devised by the Victorians to meet the challenge of their times. Victorian literature, and especially the poetry, is a literature of personal, social, and moral engagement, often cast in the imagery of struggle or battle, which is characterized by dialogue, duality, conflict, quest, and uncertainty—about the human situation, the social condition, and the responsibility of the artist in confronting these important issues. While all periods are to some degree transitional, it is not a particularly useful generalization to apply to the Victorians. As Timko says, "To talk of the period from 1825 to 1890 as post-Romantic or pre-modern . . . is to fail to recognize these unique characteristics that constitute the paradigmatic experience and contribute to the style or charter of the period."

In selecting a dividing line for the poetry of the period, the editors have been guided by practical as well as theoretical considerations. While any date would inevitably be arbitrary, a genuine case

can be made for 1850 on several different grounds: the death of the Romantic poet laureate, Wordsworth, and the publication of his *Prelude*; the appointment of Tennyson as the Victorian poet laureate and the publication of his *In Memoriam*. The year 1850 has always been regarded as Tennyson's annus mirabilis, but because it forces immediate comparisons between the two poets and their two major works, it is perhaps of even greater importance to the history of Victorian poetry. The year, however, hardly marks the end or even the beginning of an era—Wordsworth had long been a living anachronism, a fact to which in some ways *The Prelude* is a literary testament; and Tennyson's personal triumphs in 1850 only climaxed the new career he had launched after the "Ten Years' Silence" with the publication of *Poems* in 1842.

The two laureates' works are striking examples of Romantic and Victorian poetic sensibilities. Notwithstanding the obvious similarities in *The Prelude* and *In Memoriam* as poetic autobiographies—Rossetti's term *autopsychologies* might be more apt—the works are inherently different. Not only do they proceed from different world views but their respective personae speak for two generations that have little in common, intellectually or spiritually. *The Prelude* is essentially a personal and highly subjective document, archetypically romantic in its treatment of the "growth of a poet's mind." In some ways equally subjective, anchored as it is in personal grief and loss, *In Memoriam* manages to transcend the personality of the narrator and to generalize the experience of the poet into a universal grief, tempered by hope. The narrational "I" in *The Prelude* is always Wordsworth; in *In Memoriam*,

Tennyson said, "I is not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking through him." In this elementary distinction lies one of the major contrasts between the poetry of the Romantics and the Victorians.

Thus, 1850 does provide a convenient transition between early and late Victorian poetry. The editors have imposed broad guidelines to assist in assigning individual poets to one volume or the other, and these have had the fortunate result of roughly equalizing the contents of the two volumes, both in terms of the number of poets and the major poets of the period, though the three giants—Browning, Tennyson, and Arnold—all appear in the first volume. Obviously, the poetic careers of many of the poets in this volume, including Browning, Tennyson, and Arnold, extend well beyond 1850; but the division into two volumes at 1850 does provide some insight into the scope and the chronological development of Victorian poetry.

Finally, we would like to thank our contributors, many of them recognized authorities on their respective figures and on Victorian poetry in general, who have generously given of their time and knowledge to compose entries of the highest caliber. Inevitably, differences of opinion arise in a project of this kind and magnitude over matters of emphasis, perspective, and length. Our editorial decision has been—except in matters of house style and format, which are determined by the *DLB* editorial offices—to allow the authors themselves to be the final arbiters of these questions.

—William E. Fredeman and Ira B. Nadel



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Dictionary of Literary Biography • Volume Thirty-two

# Victorian Poets Before 1850





# Dictionary of Literary Biography

## Matthew Arnold

William Robbins

*University of British Columbia*

**BIRTH:** Laleham-on-Thames, England, 24 December 1822, to Thomas and Mary Penrose Arnold.

**EDUCATION:** Second class degree, Oxford University, 1844.

**MARRIAGE:** 10 June 1851 to Frances Lucy Wightman; children: Thomas, William Trevenen, Richard Penrose, Lucy Charlotte, Eleanor Mary, Basil Francis.

**DEATH:** Liverpool, England, 15 April 1888.

**BOOKS:** *Alaric at Rome: A Prize Poem* (Rugby: Combe & Crossley, 1840);

*Cromwell: A Prize Poem* (Oxford: Vincent, 1843);

*The Strayed Reveller and Other Poems*, as A. (London: Fellowes, 1849);

*Empedocles on Etna and Other Poems*, as A. (London: Fellowes, 1852); republished as *Empedocles on Etna: A Dramatic Poem* (Portland, Maine: Mosher, 1900);

*Poems: A New Edition* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1853);

*Poems: Second Series* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1855);

*Merope: A Tragedy* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1858);

*England and the Italian Question* (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1859); edited by Merle M. Bevington (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1953);

*The Popular Education of France, with Notices of That of Holland and Switzerland* (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1861);

*On Translating Homer: Three Lectures Given at Oxford* (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1861);

*On Translating Homer: Last Words: A Lecture Given at Oxford* (London: Longman, Green, Longman & Roberts, 1862);

*Heinrich Heine* (Philadelphia: Leypoldt/New York: Christern, 1863);

*A French Eton; or, Middle Class Education and the State* (London & Cambridge: Macmillan, 1864);

*Essays in Criticism* (London & Cambridge: Macmillan, 1865; Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1865);

*On the Study of Celtic Literature* (London: Smith, Elder, 1867); with *On Translating Homer* (New York: Macmillan, 1883);

*New Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1867; Boston: Ticknor & Fields, 1867);

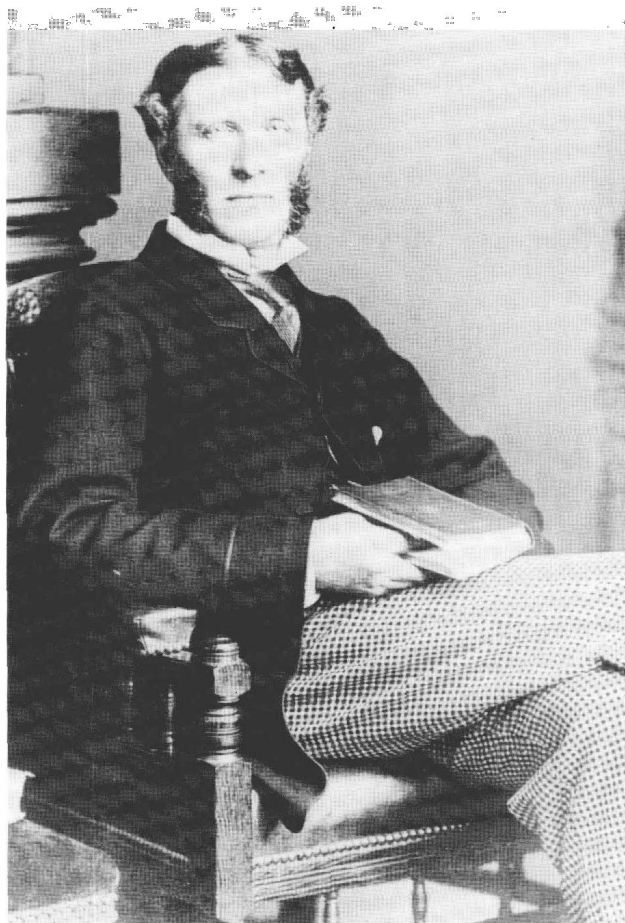
*Schools and Universities on the Continent* (London: Macmillan, 1868); republished in part as *Higher Schools and Universities in Germany* (London: Macmillan, 1874);

*Culture and Anarchy: An Essay in Political and Social Criticism* (London: Smith, Elder, 1869); with *Friendship's Garland* (New York: Macmillan, 1883);

*St. Paul and Protestantism; with an Introduction on Puritanism and the Church of England* (London: Smith, Elder, 1870; New York: Macmillan, 1883);

*Friendship's Garland: Being the Conversations, Letters and Opinions of the Late Arminius, Baron von Thunder-ten-Tronckh; Collected and Edited with a Dedicatory Letter to Adolescents Leo, Esq., of "The Daily Telegraph"* (London: Smith, Elder, 1871); with *Culture and Anarchy* (New York: Macmillan, 1883);

- Literature and Dogma: An Essay towards a Better Apprehension of the Bible* (London: Smith, Elder, 1873; New York: Macmillan, 1873);
- God and the Bible: A Review of Objections to "Literature and Dogma"* (London: Smith, Elder, 1875; Boston: Osgood, 1876);
- Last Essays on Church and Religion* (London: Smith, Elder, 1877; New York: Macmillan, 1877);
- Mixed Essays* (London: Smith, Elder, 1879; New York: Macmillan, 1879);
- Irish Essays, and Others* (London: Smith, Elder, 1882);
- Discourses in America* (New York & London: Macmillan, 1885);
- Education Department: Special Report on Certain Points Connected with Elementary Education in Germany, Switzerland, and France* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1886);
- General Grant: An Estimate* (Boston: Cupples, Upham, 1887); republished as *General Grant. With a Rejoinder by Mark Twain*, edited by J.Y. Simon (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966);
- Essays in Criticism: Second Series* (London & New York: Macmillan, 1888);
- Civilization in the United States: First and Last Impressions of America* (Boston: Cupples & Hurd, 1888);
- Reports on Elementary Schools 1852-1882*, edited by Sir Francis Sandford (London & New York: Macmillan, 1889);
- On Home Rule for Ireland: Two Letters to "The Times"* (London: Privately printed, 1891);
- Matthew Arnold's Notebooks* (London: Smith, Elder, 1902); republished as *The Note-Books of Matthew Arnold*, edited by Howard Foster Lowry, Karl Young, and Waldo Hilary Dunn (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1952);
- Arnold as Dramatic Critic*, edited by C. K. Shorter (London: Privately printed, 1903); republished as *Letters of an Old Playgoer*, edited by Brander Matthews (New York: Columbia University Press, 1919);
- Essays in Criticism: Third Series*, edited by Edward J. O'Brien (Boston: Ball, 1910);
- Thoughts on Education Chosen from the Writings of Matthew Arnold*, edited by L. Huxley (London: Smith, Elder, 1912; New York: Macmillan, 1912);
- Five Uncollected Essays of Matthew Arnold*, edited by Kenneth Allott (Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool, 1953);
- Essays, Letters, and Reviews by Matthew Arnold*, edited



Matthew Arnold at about the time of his first trip to America in 1883 (Elliott and Fry)

- by Fraser Nieman (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960).
- Collections:** *The Works of Matthew Arnold*, edited by G. W. E. Russell. 15 volumes (London: Macmillan, 1903-1904);
- The Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold*, edited by C. B. Tinker and H. F. Lowry (London & New York: Oxford University Press, 1950);
- Complete Prose Works*, edited by R. H. Super, 11 volumes (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1960-1977);
- The Poems of Matthew Arnold*, edited by Kenneth Allott (London: Longmans, 1965);
- Culture and the State*, edited by P. Nash (New York: Teachers College Press, 1965).
- OTHER:** *A Bible-Reading for Schools: The Great Prophecy of Israel's Restoration (Isaiah, Chapters 40-66) Arranged and Edited for Young Learners*,

- edited by Arnold (London: Macmillan, 1872);  
*Isaiah XL-LXVI, with the Shorter Prophecies Allied to It, Arranged and Edited with Notes*, edited by Arnold (London: Macmillan, 1875);  
*The Six Chief Lives from Johnson's "Lives of the Poets," with Macaulay's "Life of Johnson,"* edited by Arnold (London: Macmillan, 1878);  
*The Hundred Greatest Men: Portraits of the One Hundred Greatest Men of History*, introduction by Arnold (London: Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1879);  
*Poems of Wordsworth*, edited by Arnold (London: Macmillan, 1879);  
*Letters, Speeches and Tracts on Irish Affairs by Edmund Burke*, edited by Arnold (London: Macmillan, 1881);  
*Poetry of Byron*, edited by Arnold (London: Macmillan, 1881);  
*Isaiah of Jerusalem in the Authorised English Version, with an Introduction, Corrections and Notes*, edited by Arnold (London: Macmillan, 1883);  
 "Charles Augustin Sainte-Beuve," in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ninth edition (London: Black, 1886), IX: 162-165;  
 "Schools," in *The Reign of Queen Victoria*, edited by T. H. Ward (London: Smith, Elder, 1887), II: 238-279.

Among the major Victorian writers sharing in a revival of interest and respect in the second half of the twentieth century, Matthew Arnold is unique in that his reputation rests equally upon his poetry and his prose. Only a quarter of his productive life was given to writing poetry, but many of the same values, attitudes, and feelings that are expressed in his poems achieve a fuller or more balanced formulation in his prose. This unity was obscured for most earlier readers by the usual evaluations of his poetry as gnomic or thought-laden, or as melancholy or elegiac, and of his prose as urbane, didactic, and often satirically witty in its self-imposed task of enlightening the social consciousness of England.

Assessing his achievement as a whole, G. K. Chesterton said that under his surface raillery Arnold was, "even in the age of Carlyle and Ruskin, perhaps the most serious man alive." A later summary by H. J. Muller declares that "if in an age of violence the attitudes he engenders cannot alone save civilization, it is worth saving chiefly because of such attitudes"—a view of Arnold's continuing relevance which emphasizes his appeals to his contemporaries in the name of "culture" throughout his prose writings. It is even more striking, and would

have pleased Arnold greatly, to find an intelligent and critical journalist telling newspaper readers in 1980 that if selecting three books for castaways, he would make his first choice *The Poetical Works of Matthew Arnold* (1950), because "Arnold's longer poems may be an acquired taste, but once the nut has been cracked their power is extraordinary." Arnold put his own poems in perspective in a letter to his mother on 5 June 1869: "It might be fairly urged that I have less poetical sentiment than Tennyson, and less intellectual vigour and abundance than Browning; yet, because I have perhaps more of a fusion of the two than either of them, and have more regularly applied that fusion to the main line of modern development, I am likely enough to have my turn, as they have had theirs."

The term *modern* as used by Arnold about his own writing needs examining, especially since many readers have come to see him as the most modern of the Victorians. It is defined by Arnold in "On the Modern Element in Literature," his first lecture as professor of poetry at Oxford in 1857. This lecture, the first to be delivered from that chair in English, marked Arnold's transition from poet to social as well as literary critic. Stating that the great need of a modern age is an "intellectual deliverance," Arnold found the characteristic features of such a deliverance to be a preoccupation with the arts of peace, the growth of a tolerant spirit, the capacity for refined pursuits, the formation of taste, and above all, the intellectual maturity to "observe facts with a critical spirit" and "to judge by the rule of reason." This prescription, which he found supremely fulfilled in Athens of the fifth century B.C., is of course an idealized one when applied to any age, as is obvious when Arnold writes that Athens was "a nation the meanest citizen of which could follow with comprehension the profoundly thoughtful speeches of Pericles."

Such an ideal Arnold saw as peculiarly needful if his own age was to become truly modern, truly humanized and civilized. The views he developed in his prose works on social, educational, and religious issues have been absorbed into the general consciousness, even if what his contemporary W. R. Greg called "realisable ideals" are as far as ever from being realized. The prospect of glacially slow growth never discouraged Arnold. He could harshly satirize the religious cant which would have the "festering mass" of "half-sized, half-fed, half-clothed" children in London's miserable East End "succour one another if only with a cup of cold water"; he could more gently satirize the suicide of a



*Arnold's parents, Dr. Thomas Arnold and Mary Penrose Arnold (picture of Dr. Thomas Arnold from the painting in Oriel College, photo by H. W. Taunt)*

Puritan businessman obsessed with the two fears of falling into poverty and of being eternally lost. But he believed above all in the need for a vision of perfection if faith in the possibility of a better society for all were to be maintained. The vision, as an eloquent conclusion to a call for practical reforms in education, suffuses the final paragraph of heightened prose in *A French Eton* (1864). The belief that sustained him and motivated his crusade on behalf of "culture" is soberly expressed in the late essay "A French Critic on Milton": "Human progress consists in a continual increase in the number of those, who, ceasing to live by the animal life alone and to feel the pleasures of sense only, come to participate in the intellectual life also, and to find enjoyment in the things of the mind."

When Arnold's poetry is considered, a different meaning must be applied to the term *modern* than that applied to the ideas of the critic, reformer, and prophet who dedicated most of his life to broadening the intellectual horizons of his countrymen—of, indeed, the whole English-speaking world. In many of his poems can be seen the psychological and emotional conflicts, the uncertainty of purpose, above all the feeling of disunity within oneself or of the individual's estrangement

from society which is today called alienation and is thought of as a modern phenomenon. As Kenneth Allott said in 1954: "If a poet can ever teach us to understand what we feel, and how to live with our feelings, then Arnold is a contemporary."

The recurring themes of man's lonely state and of a search for an inner self; the rejection in "The Scholar-Gipsy" of "this strange disease of modern life, / With its sick hurry, its divided aims"; the awareness, at the end of the early poem "Resignation," "In action's dizzying eddy whirled" of "something that infects the world" make an impact a century and more later. Readers of the jet age may find wryly amusing these lines from "Stanzas in Memory of the Author of 'Obermann'" (1849):

Like children bathing on the shore  
Buried a wave beneath,  
The second wave succeeds before  
We have had time to breathe.

But the speed of the destabilizing process of change is, after all, relative. On the other hand, no reader can fail to respond to Arnold's well-known lines in "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" describing himself as "Wandering between two worlds, one