Chapter I

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Matthew Arnold’s advent as the ardent champion of literary criticism and as the trail blazer of modern criticism is a momentous event of the Victorian age. Out of the critical disarray and confusion of his time Arnold suddenly emerged as the most imposing figure. Upon the literary criticism and culture of the modern age Arnold exercises a deep, unrivalled and lasting influence. It is almost impossible to appreciate properly to what extent modern criticism, cultural study and contemporary modes of English studies in the universities world-wide are enduringly indebted to this Victorian poet-critic. But the envisaging of Arnold about the shape of the things to come is not anything unusual. Professor Mohit K. Ray in his well-researched critique, "Objectivity in Literary Criticism" avers this point decidedly. Talking about the ‘huge knowledge explosion’ and many facets of emerging as well as contemporary criticism Professor Ray says:
None of these theories, however is absolutely original. We had antecedents of them, though often in embryonic form in the writings of earlier times (Ray 1).

This well-defined view of Professor Ray seems to validate our proposition.

One can safely and securely single out Matthew Arnold as the only man who virtually alone prepared the grounds for modernism in literary criticism. And probably it would not be an overstatement to claim that contemporary cultural studies also learned its mores and argots from Arnold. All should generously accept the fact that with Matthew Arnold the main line of modern criticism started. But, again Arnold not only prefigured modern literary criticism he was also one of the first modernist poets too. If expressions of boredom, alienation, an angst-ridden psyche and feelings of anomie as well as dichotomy are the hallmarks of modernist poetry and literature, a la Baudelaire, Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Conrad, Eliot, Joyce, Sartre, Camus and Beckett et al,
then Arnold is certainly an initiator of modernism. Like those of the quintessential modernists Arnold's poetry is, as Patrick Parrinder says:

intensely melancholic. The theme of loss of self occurs in relation to the melancholia. Empedocles, who is true to his own nature, throws himself into the crater of Etna; Arnold, in suppressing morbid and suicidal impulses perhaps also suppressed himself (Parrinder 144).

The looming shadow of Arnold can be felt when we closely look at the substantial body of modern criticism. Literary and cultural studies of Irving Babbitt, P. E. More, T. S. Eliot, criticism of I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis, Lionel Trilling down to Raymond Williams and Northrop Frye owe a considerable lot to Arnold. There is a striking resemblance of some of the New Critics with Arnold's critical precepts. Moreover Arnold exerted a deep influence upon the voguish, post-modern cultural studies which now rule the roost of the avantgarde literary studies. The fact that comparative literary studies including Translation studies bear a direct influence of Arnold is now almost a common knowledge. In this point we
must take into account a remarkably important point regarding Arnold’s relation with Comparative Literary studies, this is worthy to be explored comprehensively. Apart from his coining the term ‘Comparative Literature’ in the sense we use it today in English, Arnold is almost the first man to treat comparative literature systematically as a distinct and major discipline. In the arena of English literary criticism John Dryden went before Arnold introducing concepts of comparative literary studies but his approach was not well organized and very tenuous. While pursuing this thesis we must keep in mind the point that Matthew Arnold’s basic approach towards criticism was an essentially comparative approach and the radical aspect underscoring his literary criticism and theory is a comparative poetics. So apart from dealing him in separate sections of Comparative Literature throughout the dissertation, whenever the occasion arises we shall strive to show Arnold in the perspective of his comparative approach to literary studies. However, before we proceed to study thoroughly how Arnold deeply influenced the main movement of the modern criticism, it will be profitable to make a brief survey of the
views of the modern critics and chroniclers of history of literary criticism regarding Arnold's modernity in criticism. For examination we are taking four important critics who wrote the history of literary criticism.

William K. Wimsatt, Jr. and Cleanth Brooks in their significant Literary Criticism A Short History wrote a chapter on Matthew Arnold—The Arnoldian Prophecy containing extensive studies and useful insights. Here they very dexterously charted the evolution of Arnold as a critic, his emergence as the, "most imposing figure in English mid-Victorian criticism." Wimsatt and Brooks here marked how Arnold appeared as the antagonist of the voguish lyric-spasmodic movement, they write:

... a brusque classical resistance to it. The Preface to his Poems of 1853, pitched in the high and confident tone of which he was to become increasingly master, announces the rationale of a valiant negative gesture, that of omitting from the volume of 1853 the long poem which gave the volume of 1852 its title, Enpiedocles on Aetna. Not because it is a poem on an ancient subject, says Arnold, though many may think this a sufficient
reason. But because the dark emotions of the protagonist lead to no outcome. “Suffering finds no vent in action”. The situation is monotonous and morbid (Wimsatt & Brooks 436-37).

Then Wimsatt and Brooks have shown in a scrupulously elaborate manner the development of Arnold as a critic through his various writings, and attempt a judicious assessment in a thorough discursive mode of Arnold’s achievements and inadequacies. Albeit with H. W. Garrod, Wimsatt and Brooks concede that Arnold is one of the greatest critics of all time, they have certain reservations too, against one or two points of Arnold’s critical modes. For instance they unfavourably criticize Arnold’s controversial touchstone method:

This open appeal to the chunklet, the sample piece of precious stuff, is a rather startling shift toward the norm of style and away from the initial classic thesis of 1853 that the ‘action is all’ (Wimsatt & Brooks 445).

But it is striking that such erudite scholars and commanding critics
like Wimsatt and Brooks almost totally overlooked Matthew Arnold's modernity, his role as the precursor of modern criticism. Apart from the cursory and perfunctory mention of Arnold's influence upon the new humanists, P. E. More, Irving Babbitt et al/ Wimsatt and Brooks announce the end of the critical line that began with Matthew Arnold:

... the end of a didactic critical movement which, adequately defined in Arnold's terms of 1880, had in the humanism of his successors moved no nearer to a distinct concern for literature (Wimsatt & Brooks 451).

But actually the case was something different. W. K. Wimsatt himself when with M. C. Beardsley wrote about 'affective fallacy' and 'intentional fallacy' they were distinctly influenced by certain critical ideas of Matthew Arnold.

Rene Wellek's monumental work *A History of Modern Criticism* (1750-1950) replaced the pioneering work of George Saintsbury. Here his critical acumen commingled with deep insight produced criticism of a very finest kind. Wellek in the fourth volume of his *A History of Modern
Criticism discussed Matthew Arnold in detail. René Wellek in the opening paragraph of the chapter concerning Matthew Arnold, with extraordinary perspicacity comments about the resemblance between Arnold and the modern critics, "... the critics of the twentieth century Irving Babbitt, T. S. Eliot, F. R. Leavis, and Lionel Trilling show marked affinities with his outlook" (Wellek 155). But Wellek concedes this fact with certain reservations. He thinks that instead of pure literary criticism of Matthew Arnold, it is the influence of his Kulturphilosophie that is more potent and can be felt strongly. Then Wellek very deftly sums up Arnold's critical precepts and practices. Wellek, while discussing the critical tools of Arnold, gives just emphasis on his repeated pleas for 'disinterestedness'.

"Trying to define 'disinterestedness' Wellek says, " 'disinterestedness' surely means for him something quite specific: a denial of immediate political and sectarian ends, a wide horizon, an absence of prejudice, serenity beyond the passions of the moment (Wellek 156)."
Then Wellek speaks at length to elucidate Arnold’s ‘disinterestedness’. After paying a rich encomium to Arnold’s critical precepts Wellek says:

Arnold’s advocacy of the critical spirit, of an atmosphere conducive to the free exchange of ideas, his praise of objectivity, disinterestedness, and curiosity (properly understood) are valuable and sound even today (Wellek 157).

Notwithstanding Wellek’s appreciation of Arnold’s relevance and influence upon the modern criticism there is no probing at any deeper level regarding Arnold’s role as the anticipator and predecessor of the modern critics.

However it will be worth observing that, a contemporary of René Wellek, Murray Krieger sheds new and fascinating lights upon Arnold’s relationship vis-à-vis some of the leading modern critics like T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, and Northrop Frye. It will be highly profitable for us to note, how astutely Krieger establishes Arnold’s strong claim as the father figure of those critics. Mincing no words or not leaving the whole matter
in a vague profile of opacity, Krieger unequivocally and powerfully presents Matthew Arnold as the predominant predecessor of modern criticism. At the opening paragraph of his well-researched critique “The Critical Legacy of Matthew Arnold, or, The Strange Brotherhood of T. S. Eliot, I. A. Richards, and Northrop Frye” published in *The Southern Review*, Krieger asserts the claim of Arnold:

The historian of contemporary literary theory can clearly trace influential notions of Matthew Arnold in the critical writings of a variety of twentieth-century theorists who might seem, otherwise to have little in common. They can be seen as strongly at work in a T. S. Eliot, whose attitude to Arnold is consistently antagonistic, as in those like I. A. Richards or Northrop Frye, who themselves at times suggest their sympathetic allegiance to Arnold. Indeed the haunting suggestion of Arnoldian doctrine may be the more significant as it appears, unasked and unwanted, in the work of an alien
mind that cannot rid itself of the influence. And Eliot, surely, could not get the reviled Arnold off his back (Krieger 457–74).

However when the moment will come we shall do the proper recce of the profound writing of Murray Krieger and see the relation of Arnold with those modern critics in a newer acuity.

When it comes to the comparatively younger historians of criticism like Patrick Parrinder we see him no better in his opinion regarding Arnold’s modernity than his predecessors. In his otherwise admirably written definitive history of modern criticism *Authors and Authority* Parrinder deals with the central texts of Arnold’s criticism, painstakingly traces the connections between authorship and critical judgement, focuses on Arnold’s opinions regarding culture and society as well as tries to explicate the Arnoldian polemics. But in his discursive discussion of Arnold’s criticism the point of Arnold’s role as the initiator of modern criticism is conspicuously absent. At the concluding part of his discussion Parrinder only extremely faintly alludes to the modernity of Matthew Arnold:
But he was alone among the Victorian prophets in the forcefulness of his advocacy of the literature and the critical spirit. The choice made him a seminal figure, and provides the explanation of his 'modernity'; professional literary critics from Saintsbury to F. R. Leavis have striven to disentangle the element of 'true criticism' in his prolix and varied work. When we consider his prestige as a forerunner of modern English Studies, it might be supposed that his act of 'true criticism' was his discovery and propagation of the idea of the critical spirit as an institution of unrivalled virtue and power (Parrinder 176).

Again, it must be conceded that though an organized body of writing dealing with Matthew Arnold as the trend-setter of modern criticism lacks noticeably, it is acknowledged sporadically by the critics. As Murray Krieger has done it in his paper, Sister Thomas Marion Hoctor in the "Introduction" of her well-researched edition of Arnold’s Essays in Criticism, First Series, makes her point tacitly and tersely. Without openly
hailing Arnold as the singularly powerful influence upon modern literary
criticism, she says:

And when such eminent literary critics of the moment as C. S.
Lewis, Douglas Bush, and Northrop Frye find themselves
instinctively turning to Arnold for inspiration or authoritative
support, one cannot help feeling that he has somehow
remained a vital influence. In fact, with a few minor exceptions
it is the single figure of T. S. Eliot who stands between Arnold
and a quite passable reputation at the present time. R. P.
Blackmur in an essay aptly entitled "In the Hope of
Straightening Things Out" observes that for Eliot 'the fight with,
and use of, Matthew Arnold is life long' (Marion Hoctor xxxiii-
iv).

The views of Stephen Spender, Park Honan, William E. Buckler and Chris
Baldick seem to corroborate the idea that Arnold was a forerunner of
modern literary criticism. In his *The Struggle of the Modern Spender
hailed Arnold as the 'unacknowledged legislator of twentieth century
criticism'. Park Honan in his remarkable biography of Arnold also conceded that among the English critics Arnold is the single most important influence in the United States. William E. Buckler in his authoritative *Matthew Arnold’s Prose: Three Essays in Literary Enlargement* highly endorsed the critical importance of Matthew Arnold by asserting that Arnold was quite simply, the founder of the main line of modern criticism in English. Even Chris Baldick in his monumental tome *The Social Mission of English Criticism, 1848-1932* richly acclaimed Arnold as the 'bold' vigorous founder of modern English literary criticism.

In our proposed thesis *Matthew Arnold and Modern Criticism* it would be our objective to explore to what extent Arnold prefigures the fundamental tenets and precepts of modern literary criticism and how the obsessively intransigent critics like T. S. Eliot had unfairly maligned Matthew Arnold who virtually initiated the 'main movement' of twentieth century literary criticism.