Chapter - IV

High Seriousness
Whether or not influenced by Carlyle, Arnold tends, in the Second Series of *Essays in Criticism*, at any rate, to concentrate chiefly on literary figures rather than problems. Somehow, the image of his hero is never complete. He takes here the risk of entering "on times where the personal estimate of poets begins to be rife".¹ He writes on the four great romantic poets, Keats, Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley (in this order, without caring for chronology). His neglect of Coleridge, the critic-poet of England, and of the visionary Blake, is revealing, though he goes back to such contrasted figures as Milton and Gray. On the other hand, he includes Tolstoy and Amiel, figures nearer in time, if not in temper.

All the same, the opening essay 'The Study of Poetry' remains Arnold's last general pronouncement in poetics. The essay was the General Introduction to *The English Poets* edited by T.H. Ward in 1880. One may be tempted naturally to compare this last poetic theory with the first such official statement in 1853 Preface to *First Edition of Poems* by Arnold. The long gap of some twenty-seven years has its sobering effect on Arnold. Yet, in both, he clinches fast to his favourite recipe, his moral concern. On this issue Lionel Trilling observes "a religious theory of art" ² in the 1853 Preface and discovers in 'The Study

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². *Matthew Arnold*, p. 153
of Poetry' a theme that "poetry will, as things are going, eventually take the place of religion". This in spite of the fact that Arnold was not truly religious. Wimsatt and Brooks also point out:

... the lofty purpose, the grand unified exclusive norm for poetry, the monolithic seriousness, which Arnold proclaims in 1880, is a consistent enough development from the Preface of 1853.

But apart from this common theory of poetry which covers a considerable part of both essays, the motives behind them are clearly different. The 'Preface' dictates the duties of an artist while 'The Study' prescribes the principles to be followed by a critic. Nothing is easier than to explain the reason, Arnold is writing the 'Preface' when his own efforts are engaged in composing poems, but 'The Study' is the harvest of his incessant labour in the field of criticism.

There are many points of contact between the two essays, particularly in their enunciation of the theory of poetic art. In both, Arnold insists that poetry should give joy. He says in the Preface that poetical representation "shall inspirit

3. Matthew Arnold, p. 374


5. Leon Gottfried calls this period, 1877-81, "fertile four years" for Arnold, p. 71
and rejoice the reader that it shall convey a charm, and infuse delight." His quotation from Schiller in this context is significant: "All art is dedicated to joy." (Incidentally this is the basic Indian aesthetics and theory of creation.) "The most precious benefit" to be drawn from the best poetry, says Arnold in 'The Study', is a clearer, deeper sense of "the strength and joy". Poetry has "a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us". Curiously, a poet so plaintive as Arnold should talk consistently, as a critic, about poetic joy. Arnold is also attentive to the close relation between form and content in both essays. Speaking of the ancient Greek poets in the Preface, he says that they were rigidly exacting on one point, "the adaptability of the subject to the kind of poetry selected, and the careful construction of the poem". The selection and construction of the 'action' were all important to them. In 'The Study of Poetry' he gives critical opinion on the same issue. The substance and matter of poetry are inextricably connected with its style and manner. Referring to Goethe in the closing paragraph of the Preface, Arnold observes that it would be dilettantish to neglect the mechanical part and show spirituality and feeling or to seek to arrive at poetry only by mechanism ignoring the matter. This is a note of caution to the artist. The same caution against "literary dilettantism" is meant for

7. ibid., p. 610
8. Essays in Criticism, 2nd Series, p. 3
the critic in 'The Study of Poetry'. Perhaps the warning can be related to Arnold's over-bearing moral concern. While criticising the classic "with open eyes" the critic must have "a clearer sense and a deeper enjoyment of what is truly excellent". He should not be guided only by historic estimate. Arnold says in his assessment of Burns, "a poet's criticism of life may have such truth and power that it triumphs over his world and delights us". The Preface has an expression to this effect: "Poetical works belong to the domain of our permanent passions". It may be presumed that Arnold probably did not look back to the 1853 'Preface' while writing 'The Study of Poetry' in 1880; but for him, the basic element remains the same throughout in the composition as well as in the appreciation of poetry.

Arnold's dictation to the artist in the 'Preface' is, one may suspect, directed partly to his own poetic self. He asks and answers what the eternal objects of poetry are. "They are", he says, "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". Such actions must be excellent, that is, they must appeal most powerfully to the great primary human affections; "to those elementary feelings which subsist permanently in the race, and which are independent of time".

12. *ibid.*, p. 611
Arnold gives examples from ancient Greek and Roman authors who may serve as "excellent models" to the modern poet. But, for Arnold, Shakespeare, inspite of his greatness, is "a less safe model". For he has the soundness of the ancients, their action, and their manner but not their purity of method. The individual artist should be aware of "the all-importance of the choice of a subject; the necessity of accurate construction; and the subordinate character of expression". It may seem that Arnold illustrates the classical principles of composition, which might not have been true of Arnold's divided personality and his own creative work. It is of course easy to say why he himself followed the classical principles in Sohrab and Rustum (1853), Balder Dead (1855) and Merope (1858). He wrote considerably in his letters in defence of these works which were virtually failures. Yet 'Empedocles on Etna' has survived inspite of its lack of action while these poems written on classical models have passed into oblivion. For Arnold the only action that he knew was melancholy. But the failure of his own poetry does not affect the theory. The fact may be explained in the light of his statement that the unchanging human heart which is the material of poetry could be discovered in 'Empedocles'. For all its decadence and death-wish, the poem is again "designed with extraordinary care, a professional job of architectonics" as Keene points out. Arnold borrowed from Goethe this 'Architectonics' that tells

13. Romantic Image (Collins; Fontana Books; 1961), p. 25
the artist from the layman. This 'architectonics', 'power of execution' is not exercised in Arnold's classical works. The 'Preface' is the work of Arnold the critic who fails to do justice to Arnold the artist; with all its limitations, it has something to teach the artists.

Yet in the essay Arnold is not always a critic or an anxious theorist. The field of aesthetic speculation is not a happy hunting ground for such an essentially non-reflective critic as Matthew Arnold. He comes at times closer to art, if not to the making of a poet. The voice of the artistic self is often audible. The phrase, "the dialogue of the mind with itself" is so suggestive that it is more poetic than critical; and in fact Arnold has made poetry out of it in 'The Future':

As is the world on the banks,
So is the mind of the man. (ll. 17-18)

Gone is the calm of its earlier shore. (l. 52)

our minds
Are confused as the cries we hear,
Changing and shot as the sights which we see.
(11. 55-57)

These lines appear to be a poetic rendering, made much earlier, of the lines in the Preface: "the calm, the cheerfulness, the objectivity have disappeared; the dialogue of the mind with
tselr has commenced. Arnold may not be much philosophical but he could not have been quite innocent of these subjective stirrings. Perhaps his civilized persona made it impossible for him to be either wild or absurd.

The Preface, by the way, is written not in one style. One may note that in the theories of Wordsworth and Shelley too, though in different directions, protests, insights and social concern, so not always co–here. D.G. James finds "the eighteenth century echoes" 15 in the passage: "What are the eternal objects of poetry ...". But Arnold's characteristic style comes out in the passages that reveal the artist in him. Here is one such passage about the young writer of the present times:

What he wants is a hand to guide him through the confusion, a voice to prescribe to him the aim which he should keep in view, and to explain to him that the value of the literary works which offer themselves to his attention is relative to their power of helping him forward on his road towards this aim. 16

The passage is so vivid and dramatic that one cannot doubt its genuineness. The intention may be that of a critic, but the tone is that of an artist. Arnold crosses often the pale of critics.

in his armour of sympathetic expression. On these occasions he cannot execute his professed theory of disinterestedness. How artistic is the resolve in the conclusion of the Preface:

Let us not bewilder our successors; let us transmit to them the practice of poetry, with its boundaries and wholesome regulative laws. 17

A critic's advice to the artist should not be all critical; it should have a charm, "a power of delighting", so to say. And if the critic himself is an artist, he cannot but revert to art now and then. The result is that criticism becomes interspersed with artistic exposition. The 'Preface' reveals Arnold's critical 'tact' not unmixed with artistic undertones.

The critic and the artist in Arnold seem more intimate in 'The Study of Poetry'. Here criticism reaches a level where poetry alone can exist. Arnold really speaks of judging poetry by poetry. The method is not so much of analysis as of comparison, a comparison based more on intuitive preferences than on reasoned grounds, even when reasoned grounds are offered. In Arnold's own words, "The characters of a high quality of poetry"... "are far better recognised by being felt in the verse of the master, than by being perused in the prose of the critic". 18

18. Essays in Criticism. 2nd Series, p. 12
Thus the expression of great masters may be applied as a "touchstone" to other poetry. Arnold gives examples of touchstone passages from Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton. The passages are not of equally high poetic quality as he claims, and he avoids distinguishing their levels of excellence. But the selection reveals his fine critical tact and artistic taste.

While he is talking of English poetry his choice of poets is restricted to Chaucer, Dryden and Pope, Gray and strangely Burns. Following the chronological order he begins with Chaucer and ends with Burns. Gray is given scant notice, merely a paragraph, perhaps because Gray himself was reticent by nature. Arnold's attraction for him may be precisely here for Gray's buried self. Much had been written about Chaucer before Arnold and no less since. Yet his Chaucer criticism is a master stroke, even if there is little in common between Arnold and Chaucer, either as poet or as person. Chaucer, Arnold says, "is a genuine source of joy and strength, which is flowing still for us and will always flow". Arnold is concrete in his observation:

The substance of Chaucer's poetry, his view of things and his criticism of life, has largeness, freedom, shrewdness benignity.

Yet Chaucer is not one of the great classics as he has not "the high and excellent seriousness". To Arnold this high seriousness is that virtue "which gives to our spirits what they can rest upon", as found in Dante's line

In la sua volontade è nostra pace ...
It is, of course, revealing that Arnold finds solace in Dante's high poetry without Dante's faith. Burns too, like Chaucer, has not the high seriousness of the great classics, though he has largeness and freedom. He touches it at moments, "in a profound and passionate melancholy", as Arnold says, in the four lines taken by Byron as motto for his poem 'The Bride of Abydos'. Arnold dismisses Dryden and Pope from the field of poetry as they are "classics of our prose". One wonders why this total, formidable, yet unforgettable rejection. Again what he means by this high seriousness is never made quite clear and has been the butt of much criticism. The 'touchstone' passages do not all indicate the nature and quality of seriousness that Arnold found in them. Though he is not explicit in his statements, it is on this point of seriousness that his study of poetry hinges. The word 'seriousness' may have Victorian echoes for the modern mind, but surely there is something like the permanent in the affairs of men and their total response to life. Both the artist and the critic in Arnold felt the need of this something "to rest upon", specially when the foundations of faith are gone. Arnold the artist finds it nowhere — the world has "neither joy, nor love, nor light/ Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain". But Arnold the critic finds it in poetry, in the best kind of poetry. The man who wrote about the dialogue of the mind with itself was a hidden dramatist of ideas. Not to see the tension of the opposition is to miss much. In fact, the specimen quotations have aesthetic values in so far as they bring in, in the words of Wordsworth, a "tranquil restoration" ( 'Tintern Abbey') to the
"dizzying eddy" ('Resignation') of human life. The religionists, Eliot for instance, may object to Arnold's appreciation of poetry of faith without faith. But another equally strong objection would be that the tranquillizing power is the gift and by-product of visionary experience, a possibility which Arnold did not recognize and no doubt lacked. Arnold relied rather heavily on stoicism, save that the stoic is partly a sentimentalist. So to him, if the function of criticism is to propagate the best that is thought and said, the function of poetry is to effect through that 'best' the return to one's self, to the buried life. And the value of poetry is in proportion to its power of offering this particular state in which man can enjoy the "self-poised" life.

But 'The Study of Poetry' is not about the function of criticism; it is about the nature of criticism. Critical estimate, Arnold says, may be historical, personal and real. When a poet's work is regarded as a stage in the development of a nation's language, thought and poetry, it is historical estimate; when personal likings and circumstances influence the judgment of a poet's work, it is personal estimate. In both one tends to over-rate the object of one's interest, and the judgment becomes fallacious. Arnold insists, therefore, on the real estimate which comes out of "disinterested endeavour". The touchstone passages are enough, he says, to conduct the critic to a real estimate. But when all is said and done in the essay, one suspects a fallacy in Arnold's thesis. For it is hard, rather impossible, to make a real estimate of any poetical work keeping away the historical and personal factors. One has to refer to Eliot's
remark in this regard in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent':

No poet, no artist of any sort, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead. I mean this as a principle of aesthetic, not merely historical, criticism.

Regarding the personal factor in criticism John Crowe Ransom has observed rightly: "We are not quite constructed with the capacity for a disinterested interest".20 An absolutely real estimate is then a misnomer. It has always behind it the phantoms of historical sense and personal affinity. But the crucial point in this essay is the demand made of a critic and not of a poet. Arnold speaks of "the reality of a poet's classic character", and of poetry belonging to "the class of the truly excellent". The critic has to detect "the presence or absence of high poetic quality" by applying touchstone passages to any poetic work. So Arnold says,

Yes; constantly in reading poetry, a sense for the best, the really excellent, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, should be present in our minds and should govern our estimate of what we read.

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But how many of the critics of poetry have this "sense for the best"? The critic should have the capacity to feel the high poetic quality before he proceeds to judge the work of a poet. He should be trained to acquire the taste of "the best". If the artist has to follow the ancient models, the critic must also have the touchstone passages from great authors. If the art of poetry is serious, the craft of criticism is serious too. For criticism leads the way to enjoyment of the best, the truly classic in poetry. Arnold believes that the truly classic poetry is a treasured possession of mankind for all times. The "common sort of literature" may hold its sway for the time being but "good literature" will always give the people strength and joy.

It is the function of criticism to underscore the excellence of a literary work. This essay formulates the ways to fulfil that function. The '1853 Preface' and 'The Study of Poetry' make up a complete whole; one lays the principles of art and the other those of criticism. If poetry demands a special critical response, criticism calls for a special creative impulse. In the Essays of the Second Series Arnold shows his awareness of this relation between art and criticism.
In his essays on Milton and Gray, Arnold is not so much a critic as an artist. At this mature stage of his career, he could be quite at ease with his criticism of literary authors. His manner, therefore, is somewhat careless and slovenly. This is more true of 'Milton' which was originally an address delivered on a special occasion. The essay has the vulnerable points common to almost all such addresses. Arnold has to refer to the occasion and connect it with the main body of his criticism of Milton. The occasion was the unveiling of a Memorial Window in a church presented by an American. But in this connection, he lifts his audience to a height which can only be attained in a work of art. He mentions the Greek poet and the Bible on the point of the standard of excellence. The Greek poet said that excellence dwells among rocks hardly accessible, and The Bible says, that to habituate ourselves to the things that are really excellent is of the highest importance. Arnold's description of Leopardi as a "gifted and stricken young Italian, who in his sense for poetic style is worthy to be named with Dante and Milton" is more than mere criticism. 21 The fine remark of Leopardi quoted by Arnold is after his heart. From Leopardi, Arnold goes to take up Milton

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21. Leopardi was a favourite subject of study for the sensitive Victorians. Oscar Wilde in his famous essay 'The Critic as Artist' observes: "The pain of Leopardi crying out against life becomes our pain". The "stricken young Italian" of Arnold has an affinity with Obermann and the Scholar Gipsy. Arnold speaks much of him in the Byron essay.
the poet as one of those great men "who are modest, because they continually compare themselves, not with other men, but with that idea of the perfect which they have before their mind". Arnold himself has been haunted by this idea of the perfect. But it remains for him an object of admiration rather than one of application to life. He speaks of Marcus Aurelius "who made perfection his aim" 22 and of Joubert who "cared far more about perfecting himself than about making himself a reputation". 23 Milton's familiarity with the great Hebrew poets and prophets, with the great poets of Greece and Rome, confirms how much he valued the idea of the perfect in poetry. Arnold says how greatly the English race owes to Milton for "the influences of refining and elevation". Milton is the great sentinel against the Anglo-Saxon contagion of commonness. This is also made clear by Arnold with reference to the tale told at the end of the Arnold. But in all this he cannot attain to the precise art of a critic in the Milton essay, rather he makes an art of what he says as a critic.

There are, of course, bits of criticism quite in conformity with the general tenor of the address. Arnold makes his usual remark about the "mighty power of poetry", which is ever a passion with him. He finds its source "chiefly in the refining and elevation wrought in us by the high and rare excellence of the great

22. Essays in Criticism First Series, 1968/e, p. 214
23. ibid., p. 160
style". The effect of style, he says, is felt, though the cause cannot be explained. Arnold's preoccupation with style is as old as the 1853 Preface where he prescribed for the artists the study of the ancient Greek poets, "the unapproached masters of the grand style". In this connection he sounds a note of caution against taking Shakespeare as a model: "He is a less safe model." He reiterates this stand in the essay on Milton: "Shakespeare himself does not possess" the "sureness of perfect style", whereas "From style really high and pure Milton never departs". Thomson, Cowper, Wordsworth studied Milton, followed him, adopted his form but they fail in their diction and rhythm if judged by "that high standard of excellence maintained by Milton constantly". What is strange is that Milton, "this great master in the great style of the ancients", is not mentioned at all in Arnold's Preface. In his bias for the ancients he could not look nearer and see Milton who is "of all our gifted men the best lesson, the most salutary influence". Arnold is a true critic in finding out the points of Milton's distinction. It is to nature that he owes first and foremost: "Nature formed Milton to be a great poet". He had a sense of the grandeur of his vocation and a constant moral effort to keep himself worthy of it. He was again the man of "industrious and select reading". The Milton essay echoes the tone of the Preface, and Arnold could give one of his last advices, (perhaps the last), as critic

24. Essays in Criticism 2nd Series, 1958/e, p. 38
and artist, "with truth, force and insight":

In our race are thousands of readers, presently there will be millions, who know not a word of Greek and Latin, and will never learn those languages. If this host of readers are ever to gain any sense of the power and charm of the great poets of antiquity, their way to gain it is not through translations of the ancients, but through the original poetry of Milton, who has the like power and charm, because he has the like great style. 25

The criticism is not in the form of analysis and comparison, it is rather a professional opinion. The maturity of the opinion is evident when one thinks of the two essays on Milton of Eliot in the context. In his first essay Eliot admits Milton's greatness as an artist, but he says, "a man may be a great artist, and yet have a bad influence". 26 But in his second essay, written after some eleven years from the first, he rectifies his earlier observation that Milton is "an unwholesome influence". He considers Milton "a great poet and one whom poets to-day might study with profit". He says further, "the study of his verse might at last be of benefit to poets" 27 and advises them to "devote some study to Milton as, outside the theatre, the greatest master in

25. EC II, pp. 39-40
26. Selected Prose (ed. Hayward, John; Penguin Books; 1958), P. 123
27. Ibid., p. 147
our language of freedom within form". Milton is a vigl against Anglo-Saxon intrusion and at the same time "the most salutary influence".

The essay on Gray is another typical example of the methods employed earlier by Arnold in 'Joubert' and 'Marcus Aurelius'. The method comprises quotations from the persons whom he criticizes and also from others on them. He arranges the quoted passages to drive home his point. The main point in this essay is the scantiness of Gray's production. Arnold discusses at length the quality of Gray's mind and soul, and finds the reasons behind his scant production, and observes, "Seriousness, character, was the foundation of things with him", and "with all this strenuous seriousness, a pathetic sentiment, and an element, likewise, of sportive and charming humour". Yet with all his qualities, Gray produced so little that it seems to be a wonder to many. His young friend Bonstetten ascribes it to "an unsatisfied sensibility", Sainte-Beuve explains Gray's melancholy as the result of the sterility of his poetic talent. Arnold reveals that ill-health was no cause of his sterility. The critic in Arnold gives the simple explanation: "Gray, a born poet, fell upon an age of prose"; "Gray, with the qualities of mind and soul of a genuine poet, was isolated in his century". The age of prose told on the quality of his poetry as well. Arnold is perhaps right in his opinion. He refers to the Zeitgeist in his own case, and believes in the effect of the 'time spirit' on the work of an author. In a letter he writes to Clough" ... these are damned times ... " He wishes to overcome the difficulties, to transcend
the time, but he knows that time must leave its stamp on literary production. Gray could not escape the influence of the age, the age of prose. But Arnold is not clear in regard to the influence, that is, if Gray was conscious of it or not. It appears that he was not aware of what actually the trouble was with him. Arnold quotes from one of his letters to Horace Walpole: "If I do not write much, it is because I cannot". Gray knew his malady, he did not seek it out. But Arnold had "the sickening consciousness" of his difficulties, and he could write about his own feeling in poems. And this is part of Arnold's romantic inheritance. Gray had to transmit the element of romanticism through his temperament and not really through his poetic production. Arnold points out the melancholy, languor and depression of Gray's temperament.

But Arnold's essay is not all about "Gray's life and letters", "his mind and soul". There are some critical observations regarding poetry in general. The most famous of them is the passage in which he distinguishes genuine poetry from the poetry of Dryden and Pope. Arnold's criticism achieves artistic accent here:

The difference between genuine poetry and the poetry of Dryden, Pope, and all their school, is briefly this: their poetry is conceived and composed in their wits, genuine poetry is conceived and composed in the soul. The difference between the two kinds of poetry is immense. They differ profoundly in their modes of language, they differ profoundly in their modes of evolution.
The criticism continues and is carried to the climax when Arnold says that genuine poetic language and evolution are "infinitely harder of attainment"; these come only from those poets who, as Emerson says, "live from a great depth of being". The poetry of Dryden and Pope "does not take us much below the surface of things". The mature Arnold had sought to live from a depth of being and to take us much below the surface of things, to the buried life. But the young Arnold had a different view: "Not deep the poet sees but wide". Arnold's latter view is a development from the sensuous to the spiritual, and together, these present a complete view. Arnold has said in this essay that poetry should "give us the emotion of seeing things in their truth and beauty". The beauty of a thing thrills the heart and the truth stills it. Of course, "to see things in their beauty is to see things in their truth"; as Arnold says in Keats essay. If beauty is truth, and truth beauty, or if there is a vital connection between them, is a different question. But the concern for truth and beauty reveals respectively the critical attitude and artistic ardour. In his essay on Gray Arnold shows both: the critic and the artist are at work. The gleanings of beauties from Gray's writings, and from those of others on Gray reveal the critic-artist combination in Arnold.

The essays in the Second Series include chiefly Keats, Wordsworth, Byron and Shelley with a bare mention of Coleridge in the Byron essay. Of these four the essays on Keats and Shelley have little literary criticism. The one is a defense against the fantastic 'Johnny Keats' legend and the other is about the
beautiful fiction called Shelley. There is in these two essays a sort of carelessness, an attitude of indulgence characteristic of old age. But Arnold could show his powers in full in the essays on Wordsworth and Byron. Here Arnold reveals the critical attitude matured through long exercise. That he is old is obvious enough in these essays too, in the lengthy and leisurely digressions, but he could tag them tightly to the main argument like a master. It may seem strange that Arnold is reticent on the poetical qualities of Keats and Shelley, and is rather interested in their biographical details. But then he is doing here his duty as a critic; a critic of his stature should perform the task "to clear away the claptrap and clutter that obscures the clear view of the subject, and particularly that kind of claptrap which is the result of an inappropriate or indiscreet attachment to the wrong things in the subject". So he balances the 'Johnny Keats' legend with the manly Keats, all flint and iron, and "the unattractive Shelley" with the "ideal Shelley" in his generosity and gentleness, delicacy of mind and manner. Of course, it must be regretted that Arnold did little or no criticism of Keats and Shelley as poets. It may be understood that he had a personal distaste for Shelley who, as poet and prophet, could not satisfy the demands of character. But Arnold could have given an adequate literary appraisal of both Shelley and Keats.

Arnold finds character and self-control wanting in the Keats of the Letters to Fanny Brawne. He quotes one of these letters as an example: "You have absorb'd me ...", and on it he comments, "The sensuous man speaks in it, and the sensuous man of a badly bred and badly trained sort". Arnold's love-lyrics except the first one in the 'Switzerland' series are all about Parting, Farewell and Isolation. He expresses love's pathos and not love's passion. Yet the passage

I know that graceful figure fair,
The cheek of languid hue;
I know that soft, enkerchief'd hair,
And those sweet eyes of blue.

('Meeting' ll. 5-8)

is all passion, though he struggles immediately afterwards to collect himself:

I hear a God's tremendous voice
Be counsel'd and retire.

(ll. 11-12)

He refuses to be "passion's slave"; but like every young man, he is here as much a sensuous youth as Keats. Yet he could criticize Keats' sensuousness as expressed in the letter to Fanny Brawne since he is interested in the matters of morality in his advanced age now more than ever. But one may ask what would he have said of Werther's passion for Lotte, the youthful passion of "Europe's sagest head"?
How I feasted on her black eyes during this conversation
how the vivacious lips and the fresh, hearty cheeks drew
to them my whole soul. 28a

The passage may remind one of Keats' letter to his brother and
his sister-in-law in America about "a young lady from India whom
he has just met". 29

When she comes into a room she makes an impression the
same as the beauty of a Leopardess ... she kept me awake
one night as a tune of Mozart's might do. I speak of the
thing as a pastime and an amusement than which I can feel,
none deeper than a conversation with an imperial woman, the
very 'yes' and 'no' of whose lips is to me a banquet.

Arnold was a Victorian gentleman, and knew that conduct is
three-fourths of life. So he cannot approve of the 'sensuous'
Keats or the 'inflammable' Shelley. But he could well appreciate
the romantic sensuous Keats passing on to a classic conception
in "I have loved the Principle of Beauty in all things". Arnold
admits that "the yearning passion for the Beautiful" is with
Keats the master-passion and it "is not a passion of the sensuous
or sentimental man. It is an intellectual and spiritual passion".
In his Keats criticism therefore, Arnold's irritation with the
sensuous man was a passing phase, and one finds in it a personal
estimate and not a real one. The real estimate is in establishing

28a. The Sufferings of Young Werther (Rupa ; 1961), p. 36
"the relations of beauty with truth, and of both with joy. This part of Arnold's criticism has a 'gusto' which lifts it to the level of art. The choice quotations from Keats, "Beauty is truth, truth beauty", "A thing of beauty is a joy forever", and "Nothing startles me beyond the moment", bring in a flavour far richer than their immediate context in the essay. 30

While giving a catalogue of Keats' "signs of character and virtue" Arnold has found little scope for dealing with his literary merit. Yet he has said, perhaps, the last word in this regard when he says that Keats ranks with Shakespeare. In his usual formulistic style, Arnold states how Keats is "of Shakespeare's tribe" in naturalistic interpretation, and how he "was not ripe" for the faculty of moral interpretation. He has not dwelt at length on this subject from a critical point of view. But Arnold himself is lost, partly at least, in "the fascinating felicity", and he could have nothing but admiration, brooding on his notion of "perfection of loveliness". Criticism fails at certain points, and he knows with Keats that "an indescribable gusto" in voice is to be enjoyed to the full: "To show such work is to praise it". Arnold ends his essay characteristically "by delighting ourselves" with a fragment of such a work, Keats' ode for May Day.

30. This part of Arnold's criticism is treated more precisely and elaborately by A.C. Bradley in his Oxford Lecture on 'The Letters of Keats' (pp. 226-230)
'Keats and Shakespeare' has been a delightful subject of study in recent times, though Arnold's ranking of Keats with Shakespeare is not accepted by all. Leon Gottfried observes, "... assuming the inherent superiority of the drama and long narrative as poetic forms, Arnold necessarily could not rank Keats with the greatest poets". 31 But though not by performance, by promise at least, Keats has rightly been seen as the nascent Shakespeare. "A mighty formative thought" as found by Arnold in Keats has been evidenced by Dr Bradley who quotes the long letter of Keats about 'The Vale of Soul-making' and comments: It would not be easy to find anything written at the same age by another poet of the time which shows more openness of mind, more knowledge of human nature, or more original power of thought. 32 He quotes again three passages from a letter which illustrate "Keats's insight into human nature", and speaks of Keats,"... so far as his gifts were concerned, his hope of ultimate success in 'dramatic poetry was well founded'. 33 But even if all this is mere speculation, Keats reminds one of Shakespeare more than

31. MA and the Romantics, p. 150
32. Oxford Lectures, p. 223
33. One of Keats' ultimate ambitions, as he told Bailey, was "to make as great a revolution in modern dramatic writing as Kean has done in acting", and a revolution was badly needed. Keats knew that his approach to the drama would have to be very gradual.

Bate, Jackson, John Keats (Oxford), p. 567
any other English poet, and Matthew Arnold shows the right
instinct as a critic in ranking him with Shakespeare. The ques-
tion is not whether Keats would have been another Shakespeare
had he lived longer; it is rather the quality of genius in which
he can claim kinship with Shakespeare. Keats' conception of a
poet's character is remarkable in this regard:

It has no self; it is everything and nothing .... It enjoys
light and shade; it lives in gusto, be it foul or fair, high
or low, rich or poor, mean or elevated. It has as much
delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen. What shocks
the virtuous philosopher delights the chameleon poet."33a

Keats himself has not this poetical character in its totality.
But it is a good description of the spirit of Shakespeare, and
Keats might have been on the way to acquire such a spirit. It is
not a matter of imitation or influence, but of inborn quality.
Arnold knows that Shakespeare is "a less safe model" for imita-
tion, and Eliot has observed the same in regard to Keats:
".... King Stephen was more blighted by Shakespeare than
Hyperion by Milton".34 But Matthew Arnold has his strong advocate
in Middleton Murry who says, "Keats as a poetic artist ( is )
second to none since Shakespeare".

10. The essay on Shelley is the review of Dowden's two-volume
Life of Shelley ( 1886 ), and the interest is chiefly biographi-
cal. It is note-worthy that Arnold leans towards the lives of

34. Selected Prose, p. 136
the poets in his later criticism. Except the essays on Wordsworth and Byron, all others in the Series contain the facts of life more than the features of literature. He mentions in the "Milton essay": how "the daily life of happiness in common things and domestic affections — a life of which, to Milton as to Dante, too small a share was given — he seems to have known most, if not only, in his one married year with the wife who is here buried". Arnold is delivering his address in St. Margaret's Church, Westminster. The essay on Gray describes particularly how he suffered from "languor and depression" preserving always the "seriousness" of his character. The Johnny Keats legend is a part of Keats' life. Whatever the reason, this wading through biography might have been a pleasure to Arnold in his old age. After a long career as poet and critic, he could indulge in this sort of critical biography, ever a passion with him. Perhaps no poet in English has spoken so much of personalities of such diverse nature as those of Heine and Tolstoy, Joubert and Amiel. The sordid revelations of Shelley's life shocked many of his admirers. But Arnold was not as shocked as Browning; he regretted that these had ever been made public. He could analyse the facts of Shelley's life and work and was able to strike a balance:

The man Shelley, in very truth, is not entirely sane, and Shelley's poetry is not entirely sane either. The

Shelley of actual life is a vision of beauty and radiance, indeed, but availing nothing, effecting nothing. And in poetry, no less than in life, he is "a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain". 36

The new details discovered, Arnold wishes to keep untarnished the poet of 'purity and beauty'. True that his approach is rhapsodic rather than critical, but it is no futile attempt to set the image in correct perspective. The dreamy, angelic quality in the poet Shelley persists inspite of the modern Shelley scholarship which denies the myth of the dreamy 'Ariel', and the 'ineffectual angel'. Eliot's first reaction to Shelley's poetry was rather a repetition of Arnold's attitude. 37 Arnold's famous summary will ever be regarded as a part of Shelley criticism since the critics today are divided in their opinion. F.R. Leavis has made an impression following Allen Tate and Cleanth Brooks that Shelley had a "weak grasp on the actual "and a lack of "critical intelligence". 38 Neville Rogers, on the other hand, observes in Shelley "the combined force of a man in whom poet, reformer, philosopher and scientific investigator were one". 39 It appears that Arnold is not inclined to accept either of the two views.

36. EC II, p. 147

37. The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism (Faber and Faber ; 1959 ), pp. 88-97

38. Revaluations( 1959 ),Chatto and Windus ; London, p. 206

About Dowden's Life, Arnold says, "It is a sore trial for our love of Shelley." For it reveals the secrets of Shelley's private life. So the exclamation, "what a set! what a world!", springs from a confused sense of his love and abhorrence. Herbert Read calls it a "sublime sneer". But Arnold attempts in the last few pages of his essay to rehabilitate his "ideal Shelley". And the attempt is not critical; it is an exuberant outburst of an artist who reasserts his love for someone inspite of his faults. Where Arnold cannot critically defend Shelley, he takes recourse to his artistic self. Leon Gottfried has rightly said of this part of the essay: "This description itself is indeed worthy of a novelist for vividness, but its critical value is nil". The comparison of the Shelley set with the old Oxford set of Copleston and the Kebles and Hawkins seems to Lionel Trilling "astonishing", and he comments, 'only amazement ( and French ) can do justice to the disgust : "What a set! what a world! "'. The testimonials collected and quoted by Arnold in favour of his argument are again less critical than artistic. In the same way the little interspersed anecdotes give a taste of art. The image at the close quoted from his essay on 'Byron'—"a beautiful and ineffectual angel beating in the void his luminous wings in


41. Matthew Arnold ( George Allen and Unwin Ltd. ), p. 372
vain" 42—is itself Shelleyan; Arnold's criticism here is "Pinnacled dim in the intense inane". He has, in fact, little concern with literary criticism. In this respect the essay stands out in the whole range of his critical writings. There is again not even a faint echo of that aphoristic critical coinage which is so common even in the essays of this Series. The short Milton essay has much of it; in the essay Arnold speaks of the "mighty power of poetry". In the essay on Gray the source of "genuine poetry" is traced. The distinction between "a work of art" and "a piece of life" is drawn in the Tolstoy essay, and the observation made that "the crown of literature is poetry". He observes in 'Amiel' how "creation" gives "pleasure" and "joy". The essays on Wordsworth and Byron abound in many such utterances. Therefore it seems somewhat strange that the long essay on Shelley has not a single coinage or passage on the value and function of literature; and it is stranger when one considers Arnold's reticence on Shelley's Defense of Poesy. But Arnold's ploughing through Dowden's Life is an artistic venture; his purpose is not critical. He is to re-assert his love for Shelley inspite of the distressing facts of his private life. Of course, Arnold is critical in regard to the Life itself. He says how Dowden has used the ample materials of Shelley's life with order and judgment. He has "little except praise for the manner in which Professor

42. Leon Gottfried has pointed out that this famous line is anticipated in Arnold's quotation from Thubert on Plato: "Plato loses himself in the void... but one sees the play of his wings, one hears their rustle... It is good to breathe his air, but not to live upon him." Matthew Arnold and the Romantics, p. 182
Dowden has performed his task". Arnold himself has performed his task well. It is too much to ask for literary criticism in a review of biography. The essay itself stands as a good work of art; and Arnold has indeed made it seem the part of a novel. One incident of Shelley's life cited by him may be sufficient as an example:

In January 1815 his grandfather, Sir Bysshe Shelley, died. Shelley went down into Sussex; his father would not suffer him to enter the house, but he sat outside the door and read Comus, while the reading of his grandfather's will went on inside.

This is Matthew Arnold's Shelley, the "ideal", the "angelic", and the "delightful" Shelley. There is nothing to be questioned about the essay except its placement in the Series of Essays in criticism.

Wordsworth and Byron struck Arnold as "a glorious pair" among the poets of the nineteenth century. In a brief estimate of the major Romantic poets, Keats, Coleridge, Shelley and Wordsworth in the 'Byron' essay he makes this closing observation. Possibly this was the judgment by which he gives much

43. It is hard to accept Herbert Bead's judgment that Arnold's "essay on Shelley, a review of Dowden's Life, is even from a literary point of view about as poor a piece of work as Arnold ever perpetrated".

The True Voice of Feeling (Faber and Faber; London; 1968), p. 214
more weight to the essays on Wordsworth and Byron than to the
other essays in the Second Series. In fact, Arnold is at his
best in these two essays, both as critic and as artist. But
many more and are puzzled how he could 'pair' Wordsworth and
Byron. Arnold's admiration of Byron is even questioned; though
some have tried to offer an explanation. Goethe and Wordsworth
are his avowed masters, but the clue to his Byron-worship is
to be sought for in some hidden ground. Saintsbury comments
that Arnold "saw Force in Byron", and his Byronism is "an
obvious admiration for Force" which seems to be a common reac-
tion exhibited in the men of study. Lionel Trilling finds the
explanation in Arnold's own psychological crisis, and says,
with the evidence of Goethe and Freud, "This desire for the
Byronic way of headlong, violent and even unintelligent and
immoral action for its own sake is but the other side of
depression and inaction". Trilling's voice itself sounds
Freudian. He relates thus Arnold's Byronism to his personal
struggle with apathy and despondency. But Leon Gottfried thinks
it wrong to see Arnold's admiration for power in purely psycho-
logical terms. He reminds one of "Arnold's sense of the high
communal vocation of poetry, not just to interpret the world
for us but to arouse, stimulate, animate us for a life of which
three-quarters is conduct". Byron's poetry performs an

44. Matthew Arnold, p. 139
45. Matthew Arnold, p. 130
46. Matthew Arnold and the Romantics, p. 105
important function in this respect and has a social value which itself is doubtful. These differences of opinion make one thing clear that Arnold's Byronism remains a riddle. J.B. Orrick has struck at the very root of the problem and said, "... fundamentally he neither sympathised very fully with Byron as a man nor admired him greatly as a poet". But this is perhaps not tenable when one comes to know Arnold's attitude expressed towards the end of the essay: "Byron has never yet, perhaps, had the serious admiration which he deserves". He asserts in the context that Byron has a "vital influence" which is not felt at all in the atmosphere built up by "the theatrical Byron".

It, however, appears that the cardinal points on this matter have eluded the critics of Arnold. His Byronism is not any isolated fad; it is a necessary stage in Arnold's development as artist and critic. Arnold betrays himself, no doubt, quite unawares, in the comparison of Leopardi, Wordsworth and Byron. The comparison is made to demonstrate the superiority of each to the other in one respect or another. But, in fact, the three poets stand for the varying tensions and stages in Arnold's own tangled growth. The stricken poet of Recanati with his "pessimism" is close to Arnold in his "pleasing melancholy" of 'The Scholar Gypsy', 'Dover Beach', 'Tristram and Isoul', etc. Byron, himself no classicist, with his "force", "energy"

47. VA and Goethe, pp. 22-23
48. Essays in Criticism II, p. 119
and "power" represents Arnold's mood at the time of his pre-
possession with classical notion for "action", when he was
writing Sohrab and Rustum, Balder Dead, etc. Wordsworth is
the ideal of a "self-poised life" for Arnold "the apostle of
quiet". The objection that 'the man who never tired of saying
that conduct was three-fourths of life, of coupling poetry with
"high seriousness", and the grand style had no legitimate
reason for such high praise of Byron' does not hold good. Arnold
was more complex than single track critics imagine.

Matthew Arnold was not a stereotyped product of the Rugby
school under his father. The inner drama had a wide range with
many passions and personae criss-crossing the subjective stage.
The praise for Byron proceeds from a love of action in him,
specially, for social reform and gusto. It is not the artist
in Arnold but the critic, the social critic, and even more,
something in his person, that admires Byron, the Byron who
fought against British Philistinism. The chief motive behind
Arnold's Byronism is this offensive on the social and cultural
menace even if in an un-Arnoldian manner. It is the same motive
which drew Arnold towards Heine inspite of his "want of moral
balance". For Heine "it was a life and death battle with
Philistinism", and Byron "shattered himself to pieces against
the huge, black, cloud-topped, interminable precipice of
British Philistinism"— in both Arnold felt a fellow traveller.
Both Heine and Byron were soldiers in "the Liberation War
of humanity". Though more academic, Arnold's lifelong quest
was "Estote ergo vos perfecti", 'the full perfection of our
humanity', which only 'Culture' as opposed to 'Anarchy' can bring about; and 'Culture' stands for almost all that he valued most deeply. But Byron and Heine would probably reveal themselves as anarchists — a possibility which did not worry Arnold. In his analysis of the structure of English Society he finds that none of the three main classes, Barbarians, Philistines and Populace, can serve as an organ of culture. Byron could not flatter the Philistines, the great middle class, nor the Barbarians, his own class the aristocrats. The habits and ideas of these classes roused him "to irreconcilable revolt and battle". It so happened with Heine. Byron and Heine seemed to serve the cause of Arnold's chief concern as a critic of man and society. Arnold admits in his essay on Heinrich Heine that with Byron another member of the aristocratic class, Shelley, had "a high courage and a turn for breaking bounds". He says, "in social status, in material environment, in historical destiny, nothing separated these two men". Again, not surprisingly, Shelley was one of the few of his contemporaries whom Byron could admire. Yet Shelley was no soldier, but a Utopian socialist, "a beautiful and ineffectual angel, beating in the void his luminous wings in vain". Of course, it may be cautiously said that Arnold is so much carried by his enthusiasm for praising Byron as one of Nietzsche's 'free spirits' "beyond good and evil" 49 that he did not care to see him steadily and whole.

49. Read, Herbert, The True Voice of Feeling, p. 300
In his criticism Arnold follows Goethe's line of approach as he himself states in the essay. The *zeitgeist* influenced Goethe to heighten his estimate of Byron, and Goethe was not a 'cool critic' in his judgment. He strikes a balance in his criticism between "the negative part" and "the positive part". Byron had "a splendid and puissant personality", but "The moment he reflects, he is a child". On the negative side Arnold echoes Goethe's line and says, "He taught us little" in 'Memorial Verses'. As a man, Byron was "all astray"; he has "no light" to lead one from the past to the future. Arnold admits with Lady Blessington that "His great defect is flippancy and a total want of self-possession". Then to speak of the positive part, he discovers the real Byron, the "inspired" Byron when "a higher power took possession of him and filled him". But this metaphor of inspiration derives ultimately from the Platonic theory of poetry. It is the daemonic energy with which he lived and wrote. Was it the want of this daemonic energy in Arnold that drew him to the melodramatic Colossus? Herbert Read is forceful on this point when he says of Byron:

... we must grant him the true romantic afflatus, the wildest poetic energy in the whole range of post-Shakespearian poetry. 50

But in Arnold both the negative part and the positive part of the true criticism of Byron are based chiefly on the observation

50. *The True Voice of Feeling* (Faber and Faber; 1968), p. 310
of other critics and on the comparison of Byron with other poets. Byron is placed in the galaxy of such poets as Coleridge and Keats, Scott and Shelley, Milton and Shakespeare, Dante and Raphael, Leopardi and Wordsworth. This comparison constitutes the main body of the essay, and it reveals Arnold's critical tact. Along with it Arnold has made some intimate comments which seem to well up from a depth of thought and feeling. Putting forward the thesis that Byron had not enough of the artist in him, he observes: "his poetic work could not have first grown and matured in his own mind, and then come forth as an organic whole". On the other hand, "he has a wonderful power of vividly conceiving a single incident, a single situation". The insight goes as far back as the 1853 Preface. There Arnold told the little anecdote of Menander and a man who enquired as to the progress of his comedy. Menander told the man that he had finished it, not having yet written a single line, because he had constructed the action of it in his mind. This sense of contemplative or imaginative wholeness, the 'total impression' is beyond Byron's range. But Arnold finds in him one requisite quality the lack of which in Clough he had complained about in a letter.51 Byron had "a strong and deep sense for what is beautiful in nature, and for what is beautiful in human action and suffering". But even here Arnold missed something which would have been after his heart and which takes

Byron closer to the stricken Leopardi. "From various sources", Herbert Read observes, Byron "had contracted the current Weltschmerz". With all his power and passion Byron bore this element of sad yearning, and this made him beautiful but "blighted", "dauntless soldier" but "of a forlorn hope". The naive sense of glory inspired him, but "Byron's despair was very real thing, and in some sense the basis of his feverish activity". Yet for all its limits Arnold's essay remains a contribution to Byron criticism. But this piece of criticism has little of artistic accent, and the cause of it is quite clear. Arnold is all admiration for Byron ("our soul / Had felt him like the thunder's roll" ), and mere admiration can rarely quicken the artistic sense in Arnold. To be artistic, he needs something "to rest upon", to be engaged in spirit, and not enchanted. Byron enchants him, Wordsworth engages him.

In the Wordsworth essay Arnold is more in his element. Thus Herbert W. Paul : "The essay on Wordsworth is so good, that to praise it is better than to criticise it, and to read it is better than either". The essay is as much a piece of criticism as a work of art. Arnold is in a leisurely mood throughout the essay, and he digresses often from the main points of argument. The digressions acquire often a quality of art. The story of the clergymen pilgrim to Rydal Mount has

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52. The True Voice of Feeling, p. 302
53. Matthew Arnold, ( EML Series ), p. 167
comic humour in it, but does it not have a touch of tragedy too? Arnold writes, "Rydal Mount became an object of pilgrimage .... Not every pilgrim was a reader ... ". The distinction between Shakespeare and Wordsworth on the point of their producing inferior passages is made in a fanciful manner:

Shakespeare frequently has lines and passages in a strain quite false, and which are entirely unworthy of him. But one can imagine his smiling if one could meet him in the Elysian Fields and tell him so; smiling and replying that he knew it perfectly well, and what did it matter? But with Wordsworth the case is different. 54

This is more than criticism; here is created a joyful atmosphere of civilised empathy or it is that form of criticism which has in it the "proof of the presence of aesthetic values". Arnold's aesthetic attitude coalesces with the critical in his illustration of the moral idea, how to live, in Wordsworth's poetry. For Arnold, the question, how to live, is itself a moral idea, and Wordsworth was conscious of the moral element in poetry. Commenting violently on Goethe's work, Wordsworth told his nephew, the Bishop,

Man is essentially a moral agent, and there is that immortal and inextinguishable yearning for something pure and spiritual which will plead against these poetical sensualists as long as man remains what he is. 55

54. EC II, p. 80
55. The True Voice of Feeling, p. 196
Arnold says that Wordsworth deals powerfully with what really is life, and refers, in the context, to a happy figure used by Epictetus "for things like the play of senses ... in comparison with ... the concern, how to live". The things bear to life the relation which inns bear to home: "As if a man, journeying home, and finding a nice inn on the road, and liking it, were to stay for ever at the inn. Man, thou hast forgotten thine object; thy journey was not to this, but through this". Epictetus develops the figure that he does not deny the inn is taking; what he attacks is the resting in it, the not looking to the end which is beyond it. Arnold who quotes Epictetus with approval was probably more aware of the state of homelessness than of home, either in emotional, social or metaphysical sense. This metaphor serves the critical purpose to make clear how Wordsworth makes noble and profound application, to his subject, of ideas "on man, on nature, and on human life". But the metaphor is autonomous and can stand without the context as a parable of high artistic excellence. There is again a comic scene of an imaginary gathering of Social Science Congress in a great room in some provincial town of England to declaim a passage of Wordsworth containing "scientific system of thought". But Arnold could not continue long the comic strain, and passes on to his wonted melancholic mood: ".... and in the soul of any poor child of nature who may have wandered in thither, an unutterable sense of lamentation, and mourning, and woe." The essay is

56. Leon Gottfried refers to Arnold's letter (May 2, 1883) to his wife describing his experience of a meeting in the Wordsworth Society. Matthew Arnold and the Romantics; Note 106; p. 233
studded with such small fragments as convey artistic emotions with critical thoughts. To testify the truth, one may look to the passage in which Arnold speaks of Wordsworth's plain and austere style:

His expression may often be called bald, as, for instance, in Resolution and Independence; but it is bald as the bare mountain tops are bald, with baldness which is full of grandeur.

Arnold's own commentary is a piece of stylistic writing whose baldness and grandeur reveal an immost secret of Wordsworthian sublimity.

The point of the essay comes through two sources: the general criticism and the specific illustrations—representative of the critic-artist in Arnold. The judicious criticism helps the essay and demonstrates the ideal of disinterestedness. This may not be the whole truth. It has been alleged by E.K. Brown that Arnold was often and duly emotional in his criticism. Even if his weakness for Wordsworth be admitted—and that should be considered, as Trilling says, from a 'sense of human limits'—the general comments mark Arnold's dual ability as a critic of life and literature, and his over-all moral concern. The disquisition on 'glory' advocated by Renan contains a review of the brief history of Wordsworth's popularity. But the passage has such revealing aphoristic expressions as "The world is forwarded by having its attention fixed on the best things", or "A nation, again, is furthered by recognition of its real gifts and
successes". Arnold, always self-conscious, recalls next his own remark made in 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time'. About Roebuck's speech regarding "our unrivalled happiness" he comments: "...our upper class is materialised, our middle class vulgarised, and lower class brutalised". The great British empire is no matter of pride to Arnold. What he is proud of is the English poets and poetry, which shows his concern for fine creativity, even if Arnold never used that phrase. The critic of life and society easily turns a critic of literature; for him this is no shift from one sphere to another. For one's business in life is first to perfect oneself, and the means of perfection will include education, criticism and poetry (even only one could be sure of that!). Education will base itself on "the best that has been thought and written in the world". Criticism is a part of the same process, a creation of "the authority of the best self". Poetry is a distinct organ of the "best self" of man; and it sets a standard of "beauty, and of a human nature perfect on all sides". One senses in these statements a note of hope as well as forlorn-ness. At heart Arnold must have known that the perfection of self is never to be reached.

In the Wordsworth essay, Arnold defines poetry from two different points of view, style and subject. "Poetry", he says first, "is nothing less than the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth". It is doubtful if Arnold felt the full significance of what he

57. FC II, p. 76
said. The definition he gives in 'Heinrich Heine', only apparently alike, falls far short of this one. He says there, "... poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive and widely effective mode of saying things". The difference is obvious. Poetry, in the Wordsworth essay, is the 'perfect speech' in which 'truth' can be uttered, and not a beautiful 'mode of saying things'.

This reveals the dichotomy between aesthete and moralist, poet and critic in Arnold. He repeats also his earlier definition that "poetry is at bottom a criticism of life", and explains it too at some length in this essay, and again in the Byron essay. He says in the Byron essay,

Truth and seriousness of substance and matter, felicity and perfection of fiction and manner, ..., are what constitute a criticism of life made in conformity with the laws of poetic truth and beauty.

In the Wordsworth essay he goes on to say,

... the greatness of a poet lies in his powerful and beautiful application of ideas to life...."

While the first definition that poetry is the most perfect speech brings the manner into special prominence, the second that it is a criticism of life lays stress on the matter. But the phrase 'criticism of life' has gained such a currency that the other definition is often ignored, even by the critics of Arnold. Yet, in reality, the neglected definition is a more precise and superior approach to poetry.
speech of man" and "that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth". Poetry is then the most perfect speech and the utterance of truth in it. But the two, the speech and the truth, are inseparable; it may be said that speech is truth and truth speech. The perfect speech is not possible precluding truth, and the truth can only be embodied in perfect speech. Arnold has not touched here the means which can create this kind of poetry. But later, in this essay, he has given a surprising hint. Speaking of the excellence of Wordsworth's shorter poems, specially 'Lucy Gray', Arnold writes, 'To give aright what he wishes to give, to interpret and render successfully, is not always within Wordsworth's own command. It is within no poet's command; here is the part of the Muse, the inspiration, the God, "the not ourselves"'. This is a view which the ancient Indian seers could have approved. The perfect speech in which the truth is uttered has behind it vision or inspiration; it is the spontaneous expression made in a moment of aspiration or opening. By the way, Arnold does more than anticipate, though from another end, Eliot's theory of Impersonality in "the not ourselves". In Eliot it is more a matter of

58. In the Vedic philosophy, the two are, in the highest sense, known as 'Brahmā' and Bāk. 'Brahmā' is the consciousness, the truth, and 'Bāk' is the speech, the outward expression of consciousness. The eternal idea or truth raises a vibration ('spandan') to come out and becomes speech. In the Vedas, this is called 'Mantra', the highest kind of poetry.


Of course, this higher vibration was foreign to Arnold.
sophistication; Arnold touches, almost without knowing it, the world of magic. He approaches unconsciously the Vedic enunciation of the creation of 'Mantras' as 'apouraseya', non-personal. The highest poetry is the embodiment of the primal pulsation of the Eternal idea, and the Vedic sages are not the creators of it but only seers and channels. In this sense, the highest poetry can only be called 'creation' while other arts are mere 'construction'. There have been many attempts to define poetry and to trace its origin; but not any of them is thoroughly satisfying. It is certainly beyond any critic's power, and the poet-critic like Arnold is in somewhat advantageous position. He raises so many issues that it may not be illegitimate to see him in the unfamiliar perspective which gives a new, comparative dimension to his thinking. This casual remark ('perfect speech' and 'truth') seems to be astonishingly true of archetypal poetry of which Arnold was not sufficiently aware. There are times when the critical self in Arnold reaches a profundity beyond Arnold the poet's range. The simple, unadorned lines that "poetry is nothing less than the most perfect speech of man, that in which he comes nearest to being able to utter the truth" are written with the "bare, sheer, penetrating power" of a critic who was at times more than a critic.

In the specific part of criticism Arnold shows as much the penetrating power of a critic as the keen appreciation of an artist. Here, at least, one cannot expect of him the critic's ideal of disinterestedness, and Arnold is not a dissembler. He admits frankly, "I am a Wordsworthian myself .... No Wordsworthian
has a tenderer affection for this pure and sage master than I, or is less really offended by his defects". But this love and 'veneration' has not blinded the critic. He has pointed out the defects of Wordsworth's poetry before giving him the praise that was due. Wordsworth has a mass of inferior work, quite uninspired, flat and dull, and he was evidently unconscious of its defects. His classification of his poems again may be 'ingenious' but 'unsatisfactory'. He has not the 'tact of the Greeks in matters of this kind'. Yet "in real poetical achievement" Wordsworth has a high place, and Arnold has taken much pains to assign him the place, not only among the English poets but also in the wider range of Continental poets. It is true that his due recognition had been delayed, and Arnold has mentioned the causes of this delay:

The poetry-reading public was very slow to recognise him, and was very easily drawn away from him. Scott effaced him with this public, Byron effaced him.

Again "Mr Tennyson drew to himself, and away from Wordsworth, the poetry-reading public, and the new generations". Wordsworth is almost unknown on the Continent. Yet, Arnold ascertains Wordsworth's place:

But taking the roll of our chief poetical names, besides Shakespeare and Milton, from the age of Elizabeth downwards, and going through it, - Spenser, Dryden, Pope, Gray, Goldsmith, Cowper, Burns, Coleridge, Scott, Campbell, Moore, Byron, Shelley, Keats (I mention those only who
I think it certain that Wordsworth's name deserves to stand, and will finally stand, above them all.

Arnold takes then the chief poetical names of the Continent since the death of Molière except Goethe, and finds Wordsworth's performance in poetry superior to theirs. The ancients have not been drawn into such comparison, and the poets of Christendom, Dante, Shakespeare, Molière, Milton and Goethe are given greater attention than Wordsworth. But among the moderns his superior cannot be found. Arnold thinks perhaps that this proposition is too plain to need argument and he does not offer any. But the absence of evidence is more than compensated by his attempts to show where lay Wordsworth's real greatness. Wordsworth "gives us so much to rest upon, so much which communicates his spirit and engages ours". The key phrase is 'to rest upon', that is, in Wordsworth's poetry, "the spirit of our race will find,... its consolation and stay". Wordsworth's is that kind of poetry to which "we have to turn .... to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us". Arnold has not developed the idea of 'resting upon' but what he means is clear. Ordinarily, and admittedly, man has religion to rest upon in his life of tension and struggle. But such religion should be realised faith, and not mere philosophical faith. Wordsworth's poetry has a quality which can serve the same purpose as revealed religion. It is the quality of the poetic spirit in which he is superior to many other poets. It is quite the same as the "unique freedom

59. 'The Study of Poetry' EC. II, p.2
of spirit" which reveals Wordsworth's true stature as held by Herbert Read. 60 Wordsworth is in some sense independent of the zeitgeist, and his appeal is to the universal mind.

Arnold uses three key phrases to establish the greatness of Wordsworth's poetry: "enduring freshness", "noble and profound application of ideas to life" and "the power of joy". There has been much of Wordsworth criticism since Arnold, and that is much more analytical and subtler than Arnold's. Yet in his own way Arnold is at his best in exploring Wordsworth's greatness. The critic's intellect is combined with the artist's intuition, and the truth is told once for all. The point of 'freshness' is not elaborated in the essay, and one has to turn to those lines of 'Memorial Verses' to understand the full significance of it:

He laid us as we lay at birth
On the cool flowery lap of earth,
Smiles broke from us and we had ease
...... ... for there was shed
On spirits that had long been dead
Spirits dried up and closely furled,
The freshness of the early world.

( 11. 48-57 )

60. The True Voice of Feeling, p. 195
Wordsworth knew long before Hopkins, "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things", and his life-long concern was to explore this freshness in the "mighty world of eye and ear". An accurate observation has been made by David B. Pirie:

Instead of concocting imaginary worlds for our diversion, he (Wordsworth) directs us back to the one world which is real even if its very familiarity can sometimes make it almost invisible. 61

Bradley expresses the same matter in simpler terms: "He saw new things, or he saw things in a new way", and again, "His peculiar function was 'to open out the soul of little and familiar things', alike in nature and in human life". 62 It is as if by a flash that the familiar things appear with all their early wonder and give a joy whose grounds are true as it comes out of a communion between the human heart and the object on the dissolution of the film of familiarity. The power of joy is then related to the freshness on the one hand and, on the other, to the application of ideas to life. Arnold is spacious in illustrating the point of moral idea. He gives examples from Shakespeare, Milton and Keats to show what moral idea is and how it is expressed. He takes the authority of Voltaire and Epictetus regarding the importance of moral idea in life and

61. 'Introduction', Wordsworth (Methuen, London; New York), p. 1
literature. Arnold says, "The question, how to live, is itself a moral idea" and makes a generalisation:

A poetry of revolt against moral ideas is a poetry of revolt against life; a poetry of indifference towards moral ideas is a poetry of indifference towards life.

Wordsworth's superiority is in the fact that he deals with life, as a whole, more powerfully than many other poets. Arnold is exhaustive in his treatment of the application of moral ideas to life in general but he does not care to clarify the point in regard to Wordsworth's poetry. Only he voices a caution that this application of moral ideas should not be confused with the "scientific system of thought", the so-called philosophy in his poetry. This is a piece of warning against the ardent Wordsworthians who find the greatness of his poetry in the philosophy. It is true that there was Hartley in the background of Wordsworth's thought. But H. Read has rightly remarked, "Wordsworth's imagination played upon the dry bones of Hartley's mechanistic psychology." 63 Perhaps A.C. Bradley has told the last word on this point in his Oxford lecture: "His poetry is immensely interesting as an imaginative expression of the same mind which, in his day, produced in Germany great philosophies". 64 All such observations conform to Arnold's statement about Wordsworth's moral ideas. But it is not easy, as some think, to answer how

63. The True Voice of Feeling, p. 203

64. Oxford Lectures on Poetry, p. 129
Wordsworth exhibited his moral perceptions in his poetry. It is not by "painting manners and passions" as spoken of by the poet himself in his Advertisement prefixed to the Lyrical Ballads, for that would be didactic poetry and didactic poetry cannot be great. In fact, Wordsworth's moral ideas are pervasive in the "still sad music of humanity" which has "ample power / To chasten and subdue". Arnold speaks of the success of 'Lucy Gray' but he does not point at the power of the poem. Bradley has attempted an explanation that the poem, if read aright, makes one feel so lonely; and "To call a thing lonely or solitary is, with him (Wordsworth), to say that it opens a bright or solemn vista into infinity". 65 The 'Immortality Ode' is not so great a success, in this sense, as 'The Daffodils'. "The perception of the daffodils as dancing in glee, and in sympathy with other gleeful beings, shows us a living, joyous, loving world, and so a 'spiritual' world, not a merely 'sensible' one" whereas the 'Ode' has a palpable design on the readers. The point of freshness and that of moral ideas have been rendered critically by David B. Pirie:

Wordsworth aims to expand our admiration for the grandeur of an impersonal universe, until we learn to define ourselves as inseparable from all the myriad forms of life without which we literally would not exist. Yet he also means to concentrate our minds upon a tenderness which

65. Oxford Lectures on Poetry, p. 142
only human beings seem to feel ..... 66

The grandeur (cf. Hopkins' 'God's Grandeur') is the ever-existing freshness in the objects of nature which Wordsworth unfolds in his poetry. But Arnold fails here as a critic to point out the means by which this is done. He has not considered Wordsworth's mystic, visionary power. Nowhere in the essay has he referred to this mystic strain which enables Wordsworth to "see into the life of things". The tenderness comes out of "clear moral perceptions" which again lead one to "acts/ Of kindness and of love".

The freshness and the tenderness are the sources of "deep power of joy", and Arnold is emphatic on this point in tracing the greatness of Wordsworth's poetry. Wordsworth feels the joy with an extra-ordinary power, and with the same power he shows his readers this joy and makes them share it. The concept of joy is not easy to expound philosophically, and Arnold has not attempted along that direction at all. But he has focussed the point of central importance in Wordsworth. In this connection, it may be noted that Wordsworth's joy is not, as one critic has it, of an opposite kind of dejection, or "depression and low spirits" as Arnold would have said. Nor again is "the joy/ Of elevated thoughts" with which Wordsworth is disturbed the same as "the deep power of joy" by which his eye is made quiet. In a passage

66. William Wordsworth, p. 1
in Literature and Dogma Arnold speaks of Jesus Christ that "he saw through suffering at its surface to the joy at its centre", and this seems to be the real joy to which he refers in the essay. It is alleged that Arnold could not see beyond the power of joy to the power of vision in Wordsworth, but this inability does not matter as Arnold could see the ultimate reached through joy and vision, and that is the peace which Wordsworth achieves and offers for human souls "to rest upon". Where else but in peace, in "sweet calm" may one find repose and rest?

The last two essays in the Second Series are about Continental authors, Tolstoy and Amiel. No one questions Arnold's choice of Tolstoy who is one of the great novelists of Russia, "a great soul and a great writer". But of Amiel it is said, "... what had Matthew Arnold to do with Amiel?" If the two essays are closely examined, 'Amiel' seems to be more in the spirit of Matthew Arnold than 'Count Leo Tolstoi': 'Tolstoi' has in it an appreciative analysis of the great novel, Anna Karenine; and, in this connection, Tolstoy's ideas about religion, Christianity in particular, are elaborated. The novel provides Arnold with the basis to reconstruct his ideas about morality and religion. Of course, he exposes these ideas as Tolstoy's theology. The chief idea is that "Moral life is the gift of God, is God, and this true life, this union with God to which we aspire, we reach through Jesus". This is living by the rule of God, of the truth.

67. Paul, Herbert, Matthew Arnold ( EML ; 1925 ), p. 169
68. EC II, p. 166
This essential doctrine, says Arnold, is extracted by Tolstoi from the Sermon on the Mount. And here Arnold opposes, "Christianity cannot be packed into any set of Commandments". What matters is "the things which have most soul in them" and not "a table of stiff and stark, external commands". Arnold stresses Jesus's "temper of sweetness and reasonableness". But he is not concerned with theology here as a system of philosophy; rather he gives his readers a new sense of freedom. He approves of "the doctrine of access to the spirit of life through Jesus" but he is equally conscious of the practical life of the people in society. He could be true to the kindred points of heaven and home. Perhaps, this is why he recommends that Tolstoi should leave religion and stick to literature; and he himself could not take up theology "abandoning the work of the poet and the artist".

The essay has very little 'criticism'; and that, in the comparative study of Flaubert's Madame Bovary and Tolstoy's Anna Karenine. The study is not comprehensive; it is based on two points only. The French novel has spirit of observation and touch of hardness while the Russian novel shows sensitiveness and subtlety. The effect in each case is different. Madame Bovary is a work of petrified feeling but Anna Karenine has springs of freshness. Such criticism is not well founded; yet it has its value in Arnold's aesthetics. The work of art must ennoble and animate and should not depress the human heart. But Arnold takes Anna Karenine as a piece of life and not as a work of art. The distinction is not made clear at any point in the essay except that Tolstoy "has not invented and combined it, he has
seen it" all happening before his inward eye. In fact, Arnold means to stress the absolute reality of the characters and their doings. Arnold is not, in the essay, much of an artist or a critic.

In 'Amiel' the critic and the artist in Arnold are in a happy alliance. The critic points out the lapses and virtues of Amiel, and the artist enjoys in full the beauties in him. But they move so close: it is hard to tell one from the other. The critic quotes copiously the best that is thought and said by Amiel and the artist enjoys them all. One example, one of the best, quoted by Arnold is enough to establish the point. Amiel speaks of the high society (le grand monde) of man:

... society is a form of poetry; the cultivated classes deliberately recompose the idyll of the past, and the buried world of Astraea. Paradox or not, I believe that these fugitive attempts to reconstruct a dream, whose only end is beauty, represent confused reminiscences of an age of gold haunting the human heart; or rather, aspirations towards a harmony of things which everyday reality denies to us, and of which art alone gives us a glimpse. 69

This is Amiel's criticism raised to the level of art of which Arnold has spoken. But Arnold who quotes this approvingly is no less a critic here. Besides, only the critic-artist complex can approve of the "reminiscences of an age of gold haunting
the human heart". One may not be sure if there is anywhere in
the whole range of literature a better expression of the roman-
tic nostalgia. The relevance of the passage is more in the fact
that this sort of nostalgia is, at moments, very personal to
Matthew Arnold. The age of gold remained ever in the dream of
man, and the longing for it increases with life getting harder
day by day. So from a "darkling plain" Arnold himself could feel
how "The sea of Faith/Lay like the folds of a bright girdle
furl'd", or that "we were/Parts of a single continent". The
reminiscences may be rare for the ordinary man, though the
world of wonder waits at hand for those who could feel. And the
critic who says, "Art alone gives us a glimpse" of the age of
gold is an artist at heart. The three passages of Amiel's li-
terary criticism on Sainte-Beuve, Victor Hugo and La Fontaine as
chosen by Arnold are valuable as pieces of criticism and enjoya-
ble as works of art. Arnold comments on these notes in that
vein: "... all composition is a kind of creation. Creation
gives ... pleasure, and when successful and sustained, more
than pleasure, joy". Amiel's criticisms on society, politics,
national character and religion are equally appealing, and these
bear a close affinity to Arnold's views on the same subjects.
Amiel's criticism of democracy, "Each function to the most
worthy" corresponds well with Arnold's theory of the remnant
derived from the Hebrew prophet Isaiah and enunciated in the
essay 'Numbers' in Discourses in America. The social and poli-
tical situation has changed much since Arnold's time, but the
truth about the theory of the remnant remains unchanged. Amiel
wished the politicians to learn that "the ultimate ground upon
which every civilisation rests is the average morality of the masses and a sufficient amount of practical righteousness". Arnold elaborates the same idea in 'Numbers':

Socrates maintained that in his time he and a few philosophers, who alone kept insisting on the good of righteousness and the unprofitableness of iniquity, were the only real politicians then living. 70

Amiel and Arnold have spacious areas of agreement on matters political, social and religious, and this shows how much Amiel meant to Arnold. However, between the two there is one point of difference; and Arnold dwells on it exclusively at the start of the essay, and that is Amiel's speculative intuition giving rise to the thoughts and fancies included in his Journal Intime. Arnold could not tolerate this "bedazzlement with the infinite", this "all-embracing Nothingness". He was not inclined to metaphysical thinking, which explains partly his aversion for Coleridge and Shelley. For him such philosophical speculations have no value whatsoever as ideas to be lived with. Bare ideas are nothing, these must be touched with emotion. The point of difference then explains Arnold's artistic temperament.

70. Matthew Arnold (ed. J.Bryson), p.632