CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION
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Matthew Arnold, both as a 'transitional figure' and as a 'prophet of the modern age' enjoys and enjoys rightly a wider acclaim and appeal, even at the present time. In the words of Leon Gottfried "he fully deserves the thorough, searching study he has been receiving in recent years."

No literary critic, since Coleridge exercised a more lasting and extensive influence on the discipline of literary criticism, especially descriptive criticism than Matthew Arnold, although, it has been said that he has not contributed much to the theory of literary criticism and that he was more of a social critic than a literary critic.

A host of critics, such as, T.S. Eliot, Lionel Trilling, F.R. Leavis, Walter Jackson Bate, have showered due praise on him, highlighting his originality and the kind of influence he exercised on others, as a literary critic.

"For half a century," writes Scott-James, "Arnold's position in this country was comparable to that of the

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venerable Greek, Aristotle, in respect of the wide influence, he exercised, upon criticism\textsuperscript{2} and the absolute trust his votaries had in his literary judgments.

Lionel Trilling speaks of the significance and relevance of Arnold's writings to the present cultural and political situation of the world. He observes that "he should write of him with an even enhanced sense of his standing for the intellectual virtues that are required by a complex society, if it is to survive in real and not in merely simulated life; and also with an enhanced sense of two other things: of how difficult it is to make these virtues seem attractive and necessary, and of Arnold's personal fortitude in carrying out his chosen task of making them so."\textsuperscript{3}

His influence was commanding in his own time as the names of his principal heirs indicate. Eliot ascribed the wide influence exercised by Arnold to the academic world represented by A.C. Bradley, George Saintsbury, Charles Whibley, Irving Babbitt, W.F.Kear and H.W.Garrod.


\textsuperscript{3}Lionel Trilling, Matthew Arnold (New York, Col.up, 1949), Preface to the Second Edition, pp 5-6.
Walter Jackson Bate felt that his main significance as a critic lay "in his constant support of the dignity of critical thinking; his attempt to lift the view of the English speaking reader towards wider, more cosmopolitan range; his re-application of classical criteria; and above all, his courageous attempt, in an increasingly hostile environment, to reassert the traditional value of literature."^4

It is an indisputable fact that Arnold provided the right impetus, to reanimate and broaden English criticism and 'helped to lift it from the mediocrity into which it had fallen after Coleridge.' Criticism was brought to bear upon itself, 'a much weightier function than it had been accustomed to bear. Literature, and more so, literary criticism, were looked upon not only as educator and guardian of public opinion but as an intellectual and philosophical discoverer of ideas, a necessary precursor of valuable creative activity."^5


It is equally true that a critic of such great emi-
nence, has suffered from 'general unfairness', more than
any other great critic.

"And I do not like your calling Matthew Arnold
Mr. Kidglove Cocksure. I have more reason than you for dis-
agreeing with him and thinking him very wrong, but neverthe-
less, I am sure he is a rare genius and a great critic." 6

In the above lines, Hopkins is evidently blaming in the
passage quoted Robert Bridges's indiscriminate criticism
of Matthew Arnold. This also testifies to the fact that
Arnold's critical pronouncements provoked in some eminent
writers even a degree of antagonism and animosity.

His failings are far too many, to be glossed over.
His weaknesses have to be admitted. As a poet, he never,
possessed the poetic vigour and virtuosity of either Browning
or Tennyson. And it has been said that there is a total
absence of sound political philosophy and 'his religious
writings are marred by inconsistencies of reasoning and a
dearth of precision.' Even as a literary critic, he failed
to present a disinterested analysis of the literary object
before him.

6The Letters of Gerard Manley Hopkins to Robert
Bridges, XCVII.
Eliot described him as a propagandist for criticism rather than a critic, a populariser rather than a creator of ideas. Though Eliot spoke of Arnold's "The Study of poetry" in eulogistic terms, calling it a classic in English criticism, he also notes elsewhere, "an inner uncertainty and lack of confidence and conviction ... the conservatism which springs from a dislike of change" in his critical observations. If, inspite of such unfavourable criticism, Arnold still occupies a unique place in the history of literary criticism, it is because there yet remains (after all allowances have been made) much that accounts for Arnold's stature and centrality in the domain of literary criticism. However, ambiguous his position in the literary history may be, — both as a continuator and severe critic of the Romantic Tradition, he poses a challenge to all right thinking persons.

By and large, a systematic study of his works, would be found highly rewarding.

II

An attempt is made in the following pages to study

Matthew Arnold's criticism of the Romantic poets and examine its limits and limitations. As has been mentioned above, the term, criticism is used by Arnold in a broad and inclusive sense and even the enunciation of his theory is done in a language which is descriptive and not abstract. It is in the English tradition that it should be so. For example when he wants to define 'high seriousness' or best poetry he says "that the substance and matter of the best poetry acquire their special character from possessing, in an eminent degree, truth and seriousness. We may add yet further, what is in itself evident, that to the style and manner of the best poetry their special character, their accent, is given by their diction, and even yet more, by their movement. And though we distinguish between the two characters, the two accents of superiority, yet they are nevertheless vitally connected one with the other."9

Hence his well known 'touchstones'. His sensibility is sharp and none can give us better examples and yet it is appreciation of 'poetry' and not a poem. And even as

responses to poetry, it is a question whether Arnold tried to bring out fully the implications of the diction and metaphor of the passages. This seems to be particularly true of passages from romantic poetry.

Lines such as

"And never lifted up a single stone"
(Michael.)

"Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes, or new Love shine at them beyond tomorrow"
(Ode to the Nightingale)

The Form he saw and worshipped was his own

His likeness in the world's vast mirror shown

(The Revolt of Islam, Canto VIII)

are cited to show that Arnold's readings of the Romantic poetry, virtually miss this essential aspect of the Romantic poetry - the metaphorical significance.

It is also to be noted that Arnold has not taken up for the purpose of critical analysis, a single poem (not even a short lyric). Hence, his inadequate assessment of the great Romantics.