

:: STRUCTURE ::**17.0 Objectives****17.1 About Matthew Arnold****17.2 Background****17.3 Explanation of "The Study of Poetry"****17.4 Keywords****17.5 Let us sum up****17.6 Check your progress****17.7 Books suggested**

17.0 OBJECTIVES

- The present unit focuses on the essay "The Study of Poetry" written by Matthew Arnold.
- The unit will try to present the arguments laid out by Arnold in the essay lucidly and straightforwardly.
- The unit's objective is to help the students understand the major points discussed by Arnold in the essay.

17.1 ABOUT MATTHEW ARNOLD

Matthew Arnold was one of the greatest poets and commentators of the 19th century. He was widely considered the founder of contemporary literary criticism, but he also wrote extensively about religion, education, and social and cultural issues. Arnold was born into a well-known English family; his father was a well-known Rugby headmaster. He received his degree from Oxford's Balliol College. He started as a school inspector, travelling extensively across England on the recently constructed railway network. He was the first professor of poetry at Oxford to offer lectures in English rather than Latin after being elected to the position in 1857. Arnold is usually seen as one of the first poets to express a genuinely Modern perspective in his writing. His poetry has had a significant, if unacknowledged, impact on literature. *The English Poets*, an anthology by T. H. Ward, originally featured the essay "The Study of Poetry" as its introduction (1880). Later, it was included in the second series of *Essays in Criticism*.

17.2 BACKGROUND

An essential work of post-Victorian criticism is "The Study of Poetry." It emerged about 25 years after Arnold's renowned Preface to his poetry. The opening of his well-known article might be the most appropriate writing approach for this essay. Many critics have dubbed this article Arnold's manifesto for his poetry and everything else he accomplished as a writer and critic. The first section of the article discusses the value of poetry and the weight he wants his readers to give it. An essentially Arnoldian survey of British poetry from Chaucer to Burns is covered in the second section.

17.3 EXPLANATION OF "THE STUDY OF POETRY"

In this piece, Arnold critiques both the craft of criticism and poetry. Arnold thinks poetry has the potential to do great things. It is a form of art in which the concept itself is reality. He claims that as poetry is a mirror for life, we should appreciate its value. According to Arnold, poetry will eventually replace philosophy and religion, and science is complete with poetry. Plato's charge is disproved by Arnold, who describes poetry as a critique of life and asserts that people would continue to find refuge and comfort in poetry over time.

According to Arnold, when reading poetry, people prefer to judge whether it is in the best shape. The real estimate, the historical estimate, and the personal estimate are the three ways it occurs. The most accurate assessment of a poem's value is an objective viewpoint that considers both the historical setting and the poet's creative ability. The historical and personal estimate, however, frequently outperforms the real estimate. This is because the historical evaluation precedes the historical setting over the value of the artwork. On the other hand, a reader's subjective evaluation of poetry is influenced by his or her own preferences, likes, and dislikes. Both of these estimations, according to Arnold, frequently contain errors.

The real estimate frequently needs to be made aware of the historical and personal estimate. However, Arnold also asserts that it is normal. Because of the historical importance of studying poetry's growth and historical context, critics frequently need to pay more attention to poetry's flaws. Poetry is elevated in historical estimation, making it difficult to see its flaws. The historic estimation elevates the poet to a practically divine standard, resulting in the development of classics. According to Arnold, a poet's work will provide the reader with genuine enjoyment and allow him to compare and contrast it with other works of poetry of a different high calibre. Arnold claims that this is the actual value of poetry. Arnold

urges his readers to read classics critically and to be aware of their flaws. This will allow one to evaluate poetry according to its rightful worth. Arnold discusses the concept of imitation in this passage. According to him, whatever one reads or learns keeps returning to him. Therefore, a poet may subconsciously or consciously mimic the classics to live up to their high standards. This is also true for critics, who frequently choose an unbiased, real estimate over a historical and personal one. The study of ancient poets is impacted by historical estimation, but the study of modern or contemporary poets is impacted by personal estimation.

Arnold suggests using the "touchstone" method to evaluate poetry to decide whether it is of a high calibre. He adopts this strategy from Longinus, who stated in his concept that a given example of sublimity can be classified as a true example of the sublime if it can please everybody, regardless of habits, tastes, or age can do so at all times. This approach was first proposed in England by Addison, who claimed he would have a man read both modern works highly regarded by his contemporaries and classical works that have withstood the test of time and location.

If he cannot enjoy them, he will conclude that the reader, not the author, needs more quality and can find them. Arnold uses the touchstone technique to evaluate whether examples of poetry meet the high standards of the classics by contrasting them with other types of poetry. He claims there is no requirement for the poetry to resemble or have any similarity to the touchstones. Once the touchstones have been ingrained in the critic's consciousness, he can use them to compare other poems to the touchstones to discern whether they possess high poetic quality.

Arnold uses the works of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, and Milton as examples of touchstone poetry. He claims that although the instances he used are very different from one another, they all share a robust poetic character. According to him, a critic need not expend unnecessary effort to justify poetry's brilliance. He only needs to show examples of the best poetry to do this. According to Arnold, the subject and style of poetry determine its excellence. Then, drawing on Aristotle's insight, he asserts that the best poetry has high subject matter veracity and seriousness, as well as outstanding diction that characterises its style. Arnold points out that this approach's real power is in how it is used. He, therefore, exhorts critics to evaluate and assess poetry using the touchstone approach.

Arnold continues by discussing French poetry, which significantly impacted English poetry. He distinguishes between the poetry of the north and the south of France. Italian literature was affected by the poetry of southern France. Nevertheless, northern French poetry predominated across Europe during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The Anglo-Normans brought this poetry to England, and it had a significant

influence on English poetry. French romance poetry was particularly well-liked at the time. However, Arnold claims that it lacked any unique qualities and lacked the great truth, seriousness, and diction of classic poetry, which are valuable mainly historically.

Arnold then discusses Chaucer, who was much influenced by Italian and French poetry. According to Arnold, Chaucer's real estimate, not the historical estimate, accounts for his poetry's significance. Chaucer's poetry is exceptional because of its subject matter and writing technique. As he sees it, he writes about nature and human life. Arnold praises Chaucer's use of language and refers to it as "liquid diction" to highlight the fluidity of Chaucer's writing style, which he views as an admirable quality. Chaucer, according to Arnold, is different from a classic. Chaucer's absence of the extraordinary seriousness of the classics, which deprives him of high honour, is compared to Dante by the author.

Arnold then discusses Dryden and Pope after mentioning Milton and Shakespeare and praising them as classics. According to historical estimates, Dryden and Pope are, without a doubt, two of the greatest poets of the eighteenth century. However, according to Arnold, Dryden and Pope were better prose writers than poets. Suitable prose with appropriate inventive quality was required throughout the restoration era, which Dryden and Pope delivered. Therefore, Arnold concludes that they are prose classics rather than poetry.

Following Dryden and Pope, Arnold discusses Gray. Gray did not write a lot, but what he did write was highly poetic. Gray is consequently a classic in Arnold's eyes. Arnold now discusses Robert Burns in the latter half of the eighteenth century, claiming that this is when the personal estimate starts to impact the real estimate. Arnold thinks that Burns is a better Scottish poet than an English poet. Arnold disagrees with Chaucer's view that Burns is a classic. He claims that Burns, too, lacks the admirable gravity that poetry lovers want. He contrasts Burns with Chaucer and concludes that Burns' style of presentation is more nuanced. Burns lacks the great seriousness of the classics, yet his poetry nevertheless has honest substance and style, according to the real estimate.

Arnold then continues by discussing Byron, Shelley, and Wordsworth without making any judgements on their poetry. Arnold thinks that because they are more contemporary than the classics and their writings are more intimate, his opinion of these poets will be impacted by his love. Arnold concludes by discussing the classics' capacity for self-preservation. The classics will always reign supreme since they have already withstood the test of time and will continue to be enjoyed for years to come. No amount of excellent literature can compare. According to Arnold, this results from people's tendency toward self-preservation.

Human nature will remain the same throughout the ages, and the portions of the classics that deal with the subject will always be relevant, preventing them from being lost to the passage of time.

17.4 KEYWORDS

Calibre	the quality of someone's character or the level of their ability
Contrast	the state of being strikingly different from something else in juxtaposition or close association
Dubbed	give an unofficial name or nickname to
Elevates	raise or lift (something) to a higher position
Expend	spend or use up (a resource such as money or energy)
Flaws	a mark, blemish, or other imperfection which mars a substance or object
Manifesto	a public declaration of policy and aims, especially one issued before an election by a political party or candidate
Mimic	imitate (someone or their actions or words), especially in order to entertain or ridicule
Refuge	the state of being safe or sheltered from pursuit, danger, or difficulty
Sublime	of very outstanding excellence or beauty
Veracity	conformity to facts; accuracy
Withstood	remain undamaged or unaffected by; resist

17.5 LET US SUM UP

Arnold claims that poetry has a bright future and will soon take the place of religion and philosophy as a refuge for humankind's spirit. Religion is founded on alleged facts that lack an inquiry-based spirit. On the other side, philosophy is overly abstract. In contrast, poetry deals with concepts that are more enticing to humanity since they are strongly tied to human nature. Therefore, poetry is essential to all disciplines, including science.

Poetry is the essential substance of knowledge, whereas philosophy and religion are only shadows of knowledge. It is a critique of life, and how well it can sustain people will depend on how well it can critique life. According to Arnold, great poetry must have both truth and a high degree of seriousness, both in subject and presentation. The greatness of matter and the greatness of style are inseparable. The great style will naturally follow a grand subject. Arnold then examines English poetry, starting with Chaucer and ending in the early nineteenth century.

One should be careful to avoid historical and personal assessments and cultivate just the "real" estimate while determining the true standard of poetry. The term "personal evaluation" refers to placing value on a poet

based on one's preferences and affinities. According to Arnold, relying on one's estimate will result in bad decisions. On the other hand, the historical estimate evaluates a poet based on his significance throughout literary history. Arnold claims that this is not a fair evaluation of the poet either.

Because of its historical significance, we might give the work a higher rating than it merits. Instead, the reader should make an effort to construct an accurate assessment of a work. A true classic should be distinguished from a questionable or fake classic. A questionable classic needs to be sorted; a fake classic needs to be debunked, but a true classic must be profoundly cherished. According to Arnold, a classic is a work that is among the best.

In the essay's conclusion, Arnold points out that reading poetry by poets close to you puts you in danger because your own estimation of them will likely cloud your judgement. However, by utilising the touchstone approach, this risk can be avoided. Furthermore, the reader would gain from the true estimate by being able to understand clearly and profoundly appreciate the best and the classic in poetry.

17.6 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Choose the correct option:

1) According to Arnold, poetry interprets life in ____ ways.

- a) one b) two c) three d) four

2) Poetry, according to Arnold, attaches its emotion to the

- a) theme b) style c) idea d) diction

3) According to Arnold, the scantiest and frailest of classics in English poetry is

- a) Gray b) Pope c) Burns d) Milton

4) Whom did Arnold regard as the high priest of prose and reason

- a) Milton b) Gray c) Dryden d) Pope

5) In the study of poetry, Arnold writes that we have to turn to poetry to

- a) understand life and sustain us
b) interpret life and control us
c) interpret life and console and sustain us
d) understand life and strengthen us

Answer in Brief:

1) What is the central theme of "The Study of Poetry"?

2) Arnold opposes two methods of reading poetry. On what grounds does he oppose a historical reading? What are forms of understanding ignored by his historical approach?

3) For what reasons does Arnold oppose what he considers a personal reading of poetry? What does he seem to mean by this? Can you think of reasons why such an approach is valuable or inevitable?

Write a detailed answer to the following questions:

1) What is Arnold's touchstone theory?

2) Does Arnold's method aid in framing specific critical interpretations? How are judgments arrived at?

Answers:

1) – b 2) – d 3) – a 4) – d 5) – c

17.7 BOOKS SUGGESTED

- Arnold, Matthew, et al. *Selected Letters of Matthew Arnold*. The University of Michigan Press, 1993.
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