

Literary Criticism
Dr. Merin Simi Raj
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Matthew Arnold's Study of Poetry

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The screenshot shows the Poetry Foundation website. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search by Poem or Poet" and a red search button. To the right of the search bar are links for "About Us", "Events", "Newsletters", and "Give SUBSCRIBE". Below the search bar is a navigation menu with links for "POEMS", "POETS", "PROSE", "COLLECTIONS", "LISTEN", "LEARN", "VISIT", and "POETRY MAGAZINE". The main content area features the title "The Study of Poetry" by Matthew Arnold. Below the title is an "Introduction" section with the following text: "Matthew Arnold was one of the foremost poets and critics of the 19th century. While often regarded as the father of modern literary criticism, he also wrote extensively on social and cultural issues, religion, and education. Arnold was born into an influential English family—his father was a famed headmaster at Rugby—and graduated from Balliol College, Oxford. He began his career as a school inspector, traveling throughout". A video inset in the bottom right corner shows a woman with glasses and a red vest speaking.

We are now looking at Victorian criticism. This is right after the Romantic period and during the Romantic period, we also realize, there are hardly any rules. So, it is entirely anti-Neoclassical during the Romantic period. They tried to move away, deliberately, from the classical rules as well as from all kinds of guidelines and all kinds of notions which were laid down for different kinds of genres and different art forms.

By the time that Arnold starts writing, there is hardly anything in terms of a critical principle. Almost everyone can write criticism they think and everything is accepted in the name of evaluating literature. Arnold, incidentally, since he comes at such a historical time too, he becomes the first one after Aristotle to lay down principles again.

So, if you look at the others who we have looked at, after Aristotle till Arnold, we realize that they are all trying to either reinforce certain notions or depart from certain prevalent notions and largely until about mid-half of what we have looked at, they are trying to defend the function of literature. They are trying to situate the larger function of literature within this human life itself.

We find that by the time Arnold starts writing, he begins to feel the need to lay down certain principles again. He also becomes the first one, the first English critic to actually lay down a set of rules and become very prescriptive. His work is very prescriptive. There are so many things that we can attribute to him. His criticism, his literature, was a very wide, all-encompassing kind of thing.

For the same reason he is also known as a cultural critic. He is seen as the father of modern criticism. After Dryden, he is the one who made literature and made criticism popular in such a way that now the notion of criticism as something which evaluates, as something which judges, we almost owe entirely to Matthew Arnold.

If you look at some of the titles of his work, one is *Culture and Anarchy*. He speaks extensively about how literature and poetry can be situated or needs to be situated within the larger circle of human life, human culture. He sees these things informing each other, the intertwined nature of literature, culture, religion, philosophy, all of these things come together to inform the kind of criticism that Arnold talks about.

If you look at his background, if you have read his poetry, if you know the kind of literary output that he had, he was also one of those poets who were very heavily influenced, affected rather by what was happening during the Victorian time, the crisis of faith affected him massively, that we can find in most of his poetry. And it is a later stage, during a later stage that he turns to prose and criticism entirely.

Some critics are also of the opinion that when the poet in him was entirely exhausted, he turned to criticism. And Arnold also thought that criticism was inferior to creative literature. He does not really write for the poet as such, he is known as a critic's critic, he writes for the critics. He thinks the critics also need a set of guidelines to function.

He is someone who gives a set of rules, a set of guidelines, a few prescriptive principles to the other critics who were writing during that time, mostly because he thought almost everyone could lay claim on both poetry as well as criticism. He thought that it is high time that certain principles were in place in order to realize what is fine poetry as well as what is fine criticism.

Even for evaluating good poetry you need to have certain kinds of standards as a critic, as someone who is laying down rules. Incidentally, Arnold was the first one to give an academic lecture in Oxford entirely in English and not in Latin, because during that time Latin was still

the language of scholarship. So, he is seen as very important academically for various reasons.

His output was not just in terms of his creative output, it was also in building the scholarship right during his time. It was not that after his lifetime we have realised it is important to include him in the Canon as he was very influential even during his lifetime in terms of his writing.

It is said that his theory of poetry, his understanding of poetry and his attitude to criticism changed considerably during the time of his writing as well. One of the earliest things that he wrote was a preface to poems published in 1853. There, the intention of the preface was also to talk about his own work. One of the poems that he had included in the first set, 'Empedocles on Etna'; in the second edition, he decided to exclude that poem because he thought the seriousness of the emotion was not really captured in that. For instance, you know, he was also one critic who thought that *Hamlet* was not entirely a complete play because the emotion did not really result in any kind of action.

The emotion, whatever the protagonist was embodying, did not really translate or the dramatist/author could not entirely translate that emotion into any kind of action which could be perceivable by the reader, this was seen as inferior. In the same way, he thought one of his poems which was considered very well-received by the readers, he thought the seriousness was not really captured by the poetry, the work that he had written.

He had similar kinds of reservations about Chaucer too. He thought that even Chaucer need not be considered such a great poet because his work lacked seriousness. He was someone who had these very radical views about poetry, but at the same time, maintained a conservative standard when it comes to poetry.

He could question the classics, he could completely disown Chaucer's writing by saying that just because he is important historically, we need not elevate him to that stage; but at the same time he admired Dante, Homer and said these should be the standards by which poetry should be evaluated.

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This is one of the earliest essays that he wrote, *The Function of Criticism*. There he talks about this important notion that needs to be kept in mind, disinterestedness. “It is of the last importance that English criticism should clearly discern what rule for its course in order to avail itself of the field now opening to it, and to produce fruit for the future it ought to take”.

In the first part of the essay, he says the entire Europe is looking up to English critics and the English literary field to get some kind of insight about the ways to do criticism in the contemporary. “The rule may be summed up in one word, disinterestedness, and how is criticism to show disinterestedness? By keeping aloof from what is called the practical view of things by resolutely following the law of its own nature which is to be a free play of the mind on all subjects which it touches. By steadily refusing to lend itself to any of those ulterior political, practical considerations about ideas, which plenty of people will be sure to attach to them, which perhaps ought often to be attached to them, which in this country, at any rate, are certain to be attached to them quite sufficiently, but which criticism has really nothing to do with”.

He advocates for this divorce from any kind of political reading (political in a very large sense). He is someone who really had played a very significant role in transforming criticism to the way in which we largely see it now by encouraging us to look at criticism as a disinterested thing.

It is a very academic thing that he does. He lays down rules and a certain principle. This is something which does not, which need not tie up with what he says is the practical view of things.

That is something that he continued to believe in and he also made sure that his readings of particular kinds of works are entirely removed from the practical view of things which includes the political, practical considerations about ideas. He says, we are living through a time when England particularly has a proclivity towards these kinds of readings, to situate everything within this larger structure.

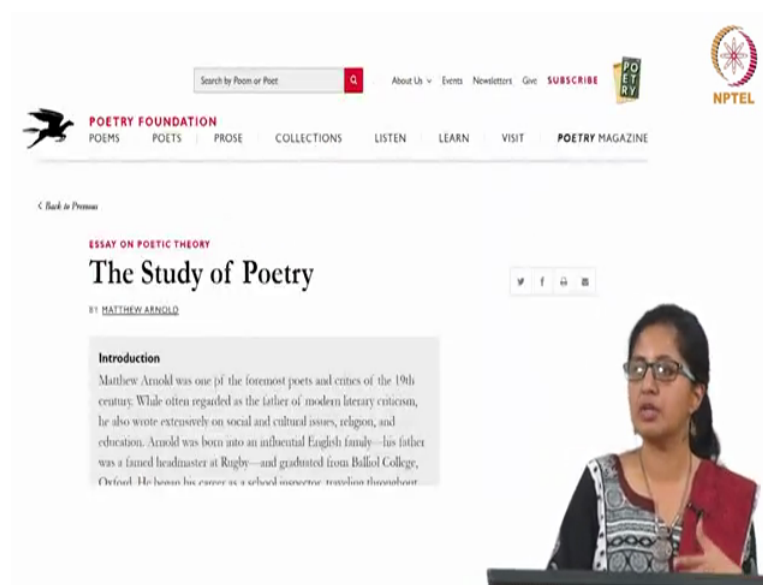
He does not want criticism to be situated. Of course, he looks at culture, he looks at religion, he looks at philosophy and many other things; but the methodology, the principles of criticism, need not be governed by such considerations. If I could give a quick example, that is how he talks about Chaucer.

Historically, he is very important, but that is not good enough reason to think that Chaucer is a good writer. You need to look at Chaucer in a very objective sense, taking him away from other kinds of practical considerations, including the way in which he is situated historically.

“Its business is to do this with inflexible honesty, with due ability; but its business is to do no more and leave all questions of practical consequences and applications, questions which will never fail to have due prominence given to them. Else criticism, besides being really false to its own nature, merely continuous in the old rut, which it has hitherto followed in this country, and will certainly miss the chance now given to it”.

He wants to move out of the rut into which he thinks criticism has now fallen, looking at the practical aspects and looking at the many practical considerations, practical view of things which has always already been attached to criticism.

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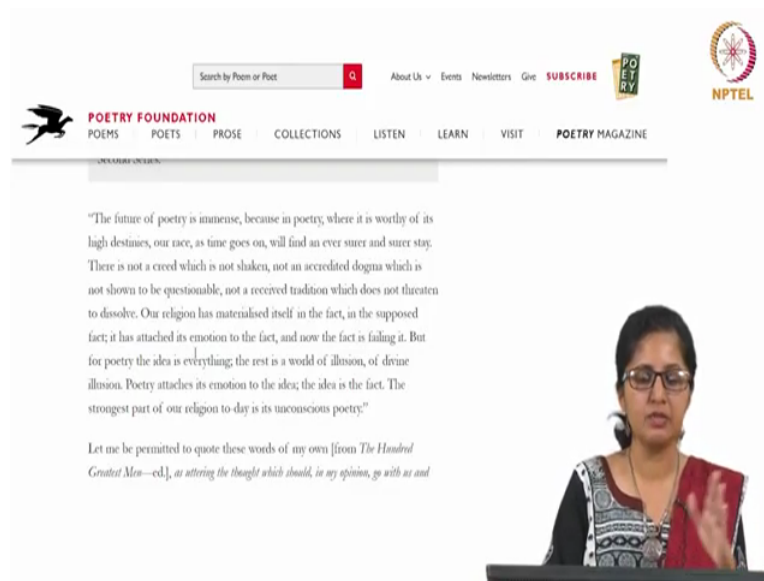
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Having said that, we will look at *The Study of Poetry* where he talks about his poetic theory in detail. As we go further, as he explicates some of the things that he believes in, some of the theories that he puts forward, we will also get a better sense of how he wanted to do criticism. And we also realize that inadvertently, that is the kind of critical principle that most of us also have.

The kind of objectivity that literature has always demanded, we think. Of course, as we have mentioned before, post-mid-20th century, particularly from the 60s, 70s, with this turn towards theory in a big way, with this turn towards poststructuralism, a lot of fundamentals have changed, a lot of attitudes have changed. But the conventional way of doing criticism, we find that in terms of the practical applications, in terms of the methods of doing criticism, we owe a lot to Matthew Arnold.

Whether we agree with his method or not, we find that that is how things have been done for the longest time as well.

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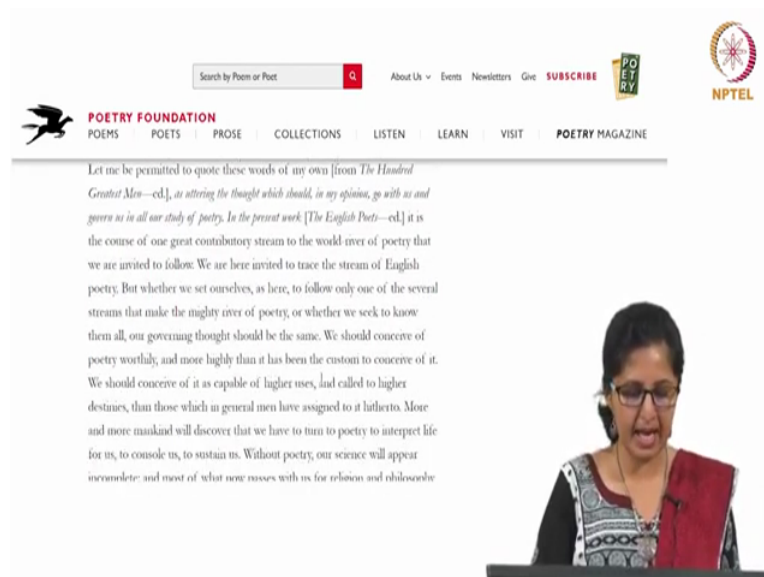
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“The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry, where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialised itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact, and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry the idea is everything; the rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea; the idea is the fact. The strongest part of our religion to-day is its unconscious poetry.”

Let me be permitted to quote these words of my own [from *The Hundred Greatest Men*—ed.], as uttering the thought which should, in my opinion, go with us and govern us in all our study of poetry. In the present work [The *English Poets*—ed.] it is the course of one great contributory stream to the world river of poetry that we are invited to follow. We are here invited to trace the stream of English poetry. But whether we set ourselves, as here, to follow only one of the several streams that make the mighty river of poetry, or whether we seek to know them all, our governing thought should be the same. We should conceive of poetry worthy, and more highly than it has been the custom to conceive of it. We should conceive of it as capable of higher uses, and called to higher destinies, than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto. More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy



This screenshot is similar to the one above, showing the Poetry Foundation website. The main content area features a quote by T.S. Eliot from *The Study of Poetry*. To the right of the text is a video inset showing the same woman speaking.

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He begins this work, *The Study of Poetry* with a quote from one of his own works. We read this quote entirely. “The future of poetry is immense, because in poetry where it is worthy of its high destinies, our race, as time goes on, will find an ever surer and surer stay. There is not a creed which is not shaken, not an accredited dogma which is not shown to be questionable, not a received tradition which does not threaten to dissolve. Our religion has materialized itself in the fact, in the supposed fact; it has attached its emotion to the fact and now the fact is failing it. But for poetry, the idea is everything. The rest is a world of illusion, of divine illusion. Poetry attaches its emotion to the idea. The idea is the fact. The strongest part of our religion today, is its unconscious poetry”.

He sees poetry in everything. He thinks poetry is extremely important and this is one belief that he continues to hold. Even if you look at his poetry 'Dover Beach', towards the end, he says, amidst all this confusion, maybe the only solution that he sees is in love.

It is a very prophetic way of looking at things. In some ways it is also a very romantic way of looking at it. Romantic, not in the sense of the Romantic Movement; it is also a very romantic way of looking at love as the solution for everything, creativity as a solution for everything.

He is someone who sees poetry in everything as a universal thing. If you again think about 'Dover Beach' as a poem, he says, whatever crisis of faith that now I am hearing in the ebb and flow of the sea over here, it is the same thing that Sophocles heard too. So, there is a certain universality with these kinds of crisis and emotions that he sees which could date back to the classic times. It is the same set of things, not to say that in a very redundant fashion.

But to say that poetry was always already there, everywhere, capturing everything. And he goes to the extent of saying that it is the only religion that they have at that moment. This is also the time when England is going through, the entire Europe is going through, this massive crisis, a lot of major events have happened. More importantly, Darwin had happened, the economic theories and things that they believed in, everything had changed.

It is also the time (in the last session also, we spoke about it) when Freud, Marx and Darwin happened to the world and they realized that man is not really entirely in control. They realized that whatever Enlightenment had promised, maybe it was good for advancing the capitalist, imperialist ideas.

But beyond that, man as an individual, is not entirely in control. There are economic things which could take control of him. There are other subconscious things and Jung takes it to another level saying there are these archetypes. And Darwin says it is something that evolved, you have absolutely no control over it.

It is during this critical time when man realizes that he is not really at the centre of it, that his foundations are being thoroughly shaken, that is the time when Arnold is writing. He is investing all of his energy into poetry in various ways and we find that energetic investment in most of his works as well.

Having quoted from one of his own works, he says, "We did conceive of poetry worthily, and more highly than it has been the custom to conceive of it. We should conceive of it as capable

of higher issues and call to higher destinies than those which in general men have assigned to it hitherto. More and more mankind will discover that we have to turn to poetry to interpret life for us to console us, to sustain us". He sees poetry as a criticism of life. So, that is how he speaks about poetry. That is the only thing that we are left with, which is why he goes on to tell us that this deserves utmost serious attention.

Criticism is not a business that we can take lightly because poetry is the only thing that we are left with. That seems to be the only constant in this chaotic world and he compares this with science and religion. "Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete, and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science, I say, will appear incomplete without it. For finely and truly does Wordsworth call poetry "the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science"; and what is a countenance without its expression? Again, Wordsworth finely and truly calls poetry the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge. Our religion, parading evidences such as those on which the popular mind relies now, our philosophy, pluming itself on its reasoning about causation and finite and infinite being, what are they but the shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge?".


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The image shows a screenshot of the Poetry Foundation website. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search by Poem or Poet" and a magnifying glass icon. To the right of the search bar are navigation links: "About Us", "Events", "Newsletters", "Give", and "SUBSCRIBE". There is also a "POETRY" logo and an "NPTEL" logo. Below the navigation bar, the "POETRY FOUNDATION" logo is displayed, followed by a menu with links for "POEMS", "POETS", "PROSE", "COLLECTIONS", "LISTEN", "LEARN", "VISIT", and "POETRY MAGAZINE". The main content area features a quote from Wordsworth: "for us, to console us, to sustain us. Without poetry, our science will appear incomplete; and most of what now passes with us for religion and philosophy will be replaced by poetry. Science, I say, will appear incomplete without it. For finely and truly does Wordsworth call poetry 'the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science'; and what is a countenance without its expression? Again, Wordsworth finely and truly calls poetry 'the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge'; our religion, parading evidences such as those on which the popular mind relies now; our philosophy, pluming itself on its reasonings about causation and finite and infinite being; what are they but the shadows and dreams and false shows of knowledge? The day will come when we shall wonder at ourselves for having trusted to them, for having taken them seriously; and the more we perceive their hollowness, the more we shall prize 'the breath and finer spirit of knowledge' offered to us". Below the text is a video player showing a woman with glasses reading from a book.

Mind you, he is living during a time when there are a lot of scientific advancements happening. It is a very revolutionary time. It is also the time when industrialization has happened in a big way. In every way, just when human beings thought that things cannot get any better, it is happening in both ways.

On the one hand, life is getting easier, lot of things are happening, railways have happened, transportation, communication, everything is being challenged in a big way. Science is such a big thing, but at the same time, they realize that with this penetration of science into everyday life, the foundations which they thought were rock solid are also being shaken in a big way.

This is the time when, he says, there are also these false shows of knowledge. Certain things appear as being knowledge, this is also the time when these thinkers and critics begin to question the idea of knowledge itself; how useful this kind of knowledge is and how that is affecting humanity.

He is writing at such an interesting and turbulent time where he needs to situate criticism and literature in a different way altogether.

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The image shows a screenshot of the Poetry Foundation website. At the top, there is a search bar labeled "Search by Poem or Poet" and navigation links for "About Us", "Events", "Newsletters", "Give", and "SUBSCRIBE". The Poetry Foundation logo is on the left, and the NPTEL logo is on the right. Below the navigation, there are menu items: "POEMS", "POETS", "PROSE", "COLLECTIONS", "LISTEN", "LEARN", "VISIT", and "POETRY MAGAZINE". The main content area features a quote: "more we shall prize 'the breath and finer spirit of knowledge' offered to us by poetry." Below this is a paragraph of text starting with "But if we conceive thus highly of the destinies of poetry, we must also set our standard for poetry high, since poetry, to be capable of fulfilling such high destinies, must be poetry of a high order of excellence." A video overlay on the right side of the screenshot shows a woman with glasses speaking.

He says now that we all believe that poetry is the only thing that we are left with; he goes on to tell us, “If we conceive thus highly of the destinies of poetry, we must also set our standard for poetry high”. We cannot take this lightly at all, since poetry to be capable of fulfilling such high destinies must be poetry of a high order of excellence.

If poetry is the only thing that you are left with, if that needs to be seen as superior to other forms of knowledge, even superior to science, religion-- faith in all of those things is being shaken during those times; he says, then anything and everything cannot become poetry. You need to set very high standards to evaluate what poetry is exactly. We must accustom ourselves to a high standard and to a strict judgment.

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but if we conceive this tragedy of the destinies of poetry, we must also set our standard for poetry high, since poetry, to be capable of fulfilling such high destinies, must be poetry of a high order of excellence. We must accustom ourselves to a high standard and to a strict judgment. Sainte-Beuve relates that Napoleon one day said, when somebody was spoken of in his presence as a charlatan: "Charlatan as much as you please; but where is there not charlatanism?"—"Yes" answers Sainte-Beuve, "in politics, in the art of governing mankind, that is perhaps true. But in the order of thought, in art, the glory, the eternal honour is that charlatanism shall find no entrance; herein lies the inviolableness of that noble portion of man's being" [*Les Cahiers*—ed.]. It is admirably said, and let us hold fast to it. In poetry, which is thought and art in one, it is the glory, the eternal honour, that charlatanism shall find no entrance; that this noble sphere be kept inviolate and inviolable. Charlatanism is for confusing or obliterating the distinctions between excellent

Charlatanism is for confusing or obliterating the distinctions between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true. It is charlatanism, conscious or unconscious, whenever we confuse or obliterate these. And in poetry, more than anywhere else, it is impermissible to confuse or obliterate them. For in poetry the distinction between excellent and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance. It is of paramount importance because

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That is also a time, thanks to Romanticism, almost everyone is writing. And novel has emerged as a big form. Literature is no longer this coveted privileged property of only a certain class, lot of people are beginning to engage with these newer kinds of writings, there are writings not produced only from London.

It is becoming a mass thing in a big way. It is becoming a very popular thing where everyone has access to these forms of writings as well. He is someone who is also very concerned about the decay or the failing quality of these kind of things, and he uses a strong word over here, "Charlatan as much as you please; but where is there not charlatanism?"

Charlatanism is someone who is faking to be original when he really does not have that kind of capability; it could be spurious, it could be something very mediocre. He is talking about the mediocre kind of art or mediocre kind of writing which is also becoming very popular during that time.

He dismisses this entire set of poetry which cannot be considered as poetry, art which cannot be considered as poetry in this one word, charlatanism. He says that is something that poetry cannot afford. "In poetry which is thought and art in one", an interesting phrase. Poetry which is thought as well as art collapsed into one.

"It is the glory, the eternal honour that charlatanism shall find no entrance. It is that this noble sphere be kept inviolate and inviolable". He tells us charlatanism is there everywhere; in politics, in science, new kinds of knowledge that are emerging. It is everywhere, in religion. But poetry needs to be kept pure, you cannot afford poetry to be affected by any kind of charlatanism.

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and inferior, sound and unsound or only half-sound, true and untrue or only half-true, is of paramount importance. It is of paramount importance because of the high destinies of poetry. In poetry, as in criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such a criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty, the spirit of our race will find, we have said, as time goes on and as other helps fail, its consolation and stay. But the consolation and stay will be of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true.

The best poetry is what we want; the best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can. A clearer, deeper sense of the best in poetry, and of the strength and joy to be drawn

This is something which will confuse our judgment. He says, you would not know what the distinction is between excellent and inferior, what is true and not true. He, in this entire passage, is reiterating that in many ways, in poetry more than everywhere else, it is impermissible to confuse or obliterate them.

“And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true”. Here, a major distinction is being made between what is good poetry that could be judged and what the kind of poetry is that can be dismissed as part of charlatanism

If you think about it now, we do not really try to judge all kinds of artworks. There is a certain abstract way in which you pick whom to judge and how to judge. Like if you have two works to choose: one, a novel by Rushdie and another one which has been produced by any random writer, you would obviously go for Rushdie, to critique him; because you think that only certain kinds of works deserve criticism.

So Arnold is someone who makes this distinction possible. And from this time onwards, you can also find that no one really wastes time talking about certain sorts of works, they are not even worthy of criticism. The fine distinction even before the critical methods are being applied to particular works, the first decision is which work to critique and which one not to critique.

We have this in every kind of field. If you take the case of movies, only certain kinds of movies are sent for awards. You know that only certain kinds of movies can be evaluated critically, you know that only certain kinds of movies, certain kinds of texts could be brought to classroom. So, there are these guidelines which are in place.

Now, it seems more or less like common sense, but we need to know that there is a historical process even behind that, and Arnold is one of the critics who had played a very key role in making this possible for a good reason or for a really terrible reason, one would not know for sure.

But, it is very important for us to realize that he is the one who makes this distinction extremely important, and he also advocates this thing about all kinds of writings not deserving the title of poetry or title of whatever genre it is.

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of power in proportion to the power of the criticism of life. And the criticism of life will be of power in proportion as the poetry conveying it is excellent rather than inferior, sound rather than unsound or half-sound, true rather than untrue or half-true.

The best poetry is what we want; the best poetry will be found to have a power of forming, sustaining, and delighting us, as nothing else can. A clearer, deeper sense of the best in poetry, and of the strength and joy to be drawn from it, is the most precious benefit which we can gather from a poetical collection such as the present. And yet in the very nature and conduct of such a collection there is inevitably something which tends to obscure in us the consciousness of what our benefit should be, and to distract us from the pursuit of it. We should therefore steadily set it before our minds at the outset, and should compel ourselves to revert constantly to the thought of it as we

consciousness of what our benefit should be, and to distract us from the pursuit of it. We should therefore steadily set it before our minds at the outset, and should compel ourselves to revert constantly to the thought of it as we proceed.

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. But this real estimate, the only true one, is liable to be superseded, if we are not watchful, by two other kinds of estimate, the historic estimate and the personal estimate, both of which are fallacious. A poet or a poem may count to us historically, they may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves, and they may count to us really. They may count to us historically. The course of development of a nation's language, thought, and poetry, is profoundly interesting; and by regarding a

When he talks about the power of poetry, he clarifies that it is only the fine poetry, the best poetry which has the power to become all of these things, the power to become science, religion, philosophy. When all of those things have failed mankind during those times he is telling us how to make this decision.

He talks about two ways in which we can make this estimate, the real estimate, “The only true one is liable to be superseded if we are not watchful by two other kinds of estimate, the historic estimate and the personal estimate, both of which are fallacious”. He tells us about the two ways in which literature has been judged during that time.

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What is the first one? The personal estimate. “A poet or a poem may count to us historically, they may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves and they may count to us really”. This is what he thinks is the only thing that matters, the one that counts to us really.

“They may count to us historically. The course of development of a nation’s language, thought and poetry is profoundly interesting; and by regarding a poet's work as a stage in this course of development, we may easily bring ourselves to make it more of importance as poetry than in itself it really is. We may come to use a language of quite exaggerated praise in criticizing it, in short to overrate it”. This is something that we know is true in all kinds of literary histories. There would be these first works published.

You will say critically, it is deficient in many ways, but it is very important because it is the first. And also, if we talk about *Beowulf*, for instance, in the history of English Language and Literature, we talk about *Beowulf* not because it is the best thing that has ever happened to the English world but because it is the first thing, the first documented thing.

You need to talk about it because it is important for the nation. He is making a distinction over here between those sorts of works which are important historically. And if you think about any literary history that you are familiar with, there are always these important literary markers that you have to talk about for historical reasons.

And Arnold is the first one to tell us: do not rate them for other things, their importance is historical. That is a historical estimate, give it what it deserves. "So arises in our poetic judgments, the fallacy caused by the estimate, which we may call historic", and he is alerting us against considering that historical work, poetically superior because the estimate is entirely based on certain historic reasons.

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The screenshot shows a video lecture interface. On the right, a woman with glasses and a red and black patterned top is speaking. On the left, a text excerpt from the Poetry Foundation website is displayed. The website header includes a search bar, navigation links (About Us, Events, Newsletters, Give, SUBSCRIBE), and the Poetry Foundation logo. The text excerpt reads: "poet's work as a stage in this course of development we may easily bring ourselves to make it of more importance as poetry than in itself it really is, we may come to use a language of quite exaggerated praise in criticising it; in short, to overrate it. So arises in our poetic judgments the fallacy caused by the estimate which we may call historic. Then, again, a poet or poem may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affinities, likings and circumstances, have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet's work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses, because to us it is, or has been, of high importance. Here also we overrate the object of our interest, and apply to it a language of praise which is quite exaggerated. And thus we get the source of a second fallacy in our poetic judgments—the fallacy caused by an estimate which we may call personal."

This screenshot continues the video lecture. The woman is still speaking. The text excerpt on the left continues from the previous slide: "us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affinities, likings and circumstances, have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet's work, and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses, because to us it is, or has been, of high importance. Here also we overrate the object of our interest, and apply to it a language of praise which is quite exaggerated. And thus we get the source of a second fallacy in our poetic judgments—the fallacy caused by an estimate which we may call personal." Below this, a new paragraph begins: "Both fallacies are natural. It is evident how naturally the study of the history and development of poetry may incline a man to pause over reputations and works once conspicuous but now obscure, and to quarrel with a careless public for skipping, in obedience to mere tradition and habit, from one famous name or work in its national poetry to another, ignorant of what it"

“Then again, a poet or a poem may count to us on grounds personal to ourselves. Our personal affinities, likings and circumstances have great power to sway our estimate of this or that poet’s work and to make us attach more importance to it as poetry than in itself it really possesses because to us, it is or has been of high importance”.

And that is also something which critics had been doing. If you look at their language, if you look at the rhetoric used in many of those works, it is also based on their personal affinities. They sometimes do not like some of the personal choices that they made.

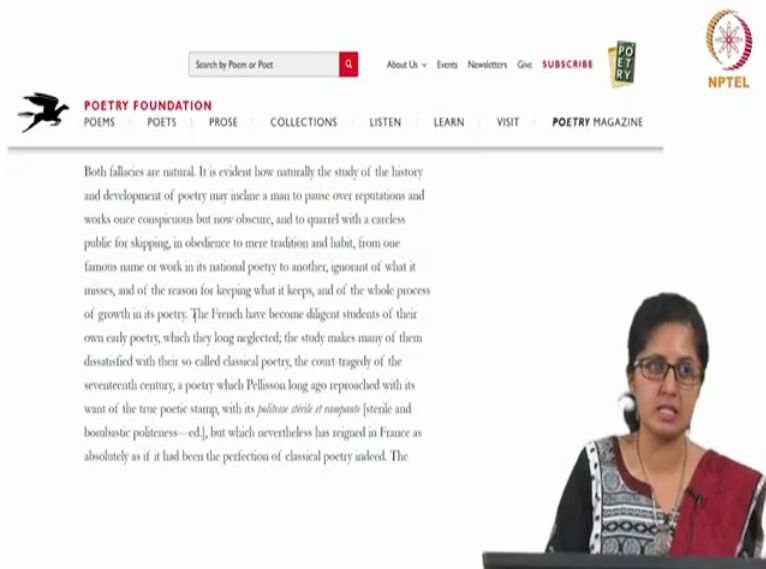
For instance, Dryden when he talks about Chaucer, has certain problems with some of the political choices, political affiliations, or the detachment that Chaucer had--that also has a bearing on the way in which Dryden judges Chaucer.

Or the bawdy language in the “Wife of Bath’s Tale” and “The Knight's Tale”, he thinks it cannot be included in the contemporary, during the Neoclassical time Dryden talks about it. So, those sorts of personal things can also become important when you are judging a work.

Arnold is seeing both these as flawed ways of looking at a literature, judging literature: the historical estimate as well as the personal estimate, because both are biased in many ways; which is why he talks about the need for this disinterestedness which will not have any practical considerations in mind, neither historic, not personal.

The term that he uses is fallacy. These two could lead us to praise a work which really does not deserve it, with undue exaggeration.

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The screenshot shows the Poetry Foundation website. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search by Poem or Poet" and a red search button. To the right of the search bar are links for "About Us", "Events", "Newsletters", and "Give" with a "SUBSCRIBE" button. Below the search bar is a navigation menu with the following items: "POETRY FOUNDATION", "POEMS", "POETS", "PROSE", "COLLECTIONS", "LISTEN", "LEARN", "VISIT", and "POETRY MAGAZINE". The main content area displays a paragraph of text from Matthew Arnold's "The Fallacy of Personalities". The text reads: "Both fallacies are natural. It is evident how naturally the study of the history and development of poetry may incline a man to pause over reputations and works once conspicuous but now obscure, and to quarrel with a careless public for skipping, in obedience to mere tradition and habit, from one famous name or work in its national poetry to another, ignorant of what it misses, and of the reason for keeping what it keeps, and of the whole process of growth in its poetry. The French have become diligent students of their own early poetry, which they long neglected; the study makes many of them dissatisfied with their so-called classical poetry, the court tragedy of the seventeenth century, a poetry which Pellissou long ago reproached with its want of the true poetic stamp, with its *politesse stérile et rampante* [sterile and bombastic politeness—ed.], but which nevertheless has reigned in France as absolutely as if it had been the perfection of classical poetry indeed. The

In the bottom right corner of the screenshot, there is a video inset showing a woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a red and black patterned top, speaking into a microphone.

“Both fallacies are natural. It is evident how naturally the study of history and development of poetry may incline a man to pause over reputations and works once conspicuous but now obscure and to quarrel with a careless public for skipping, in obedience to mere tradition and habit, from one famous name or work in its national poetry to another, ignorant of what it misses and of the reason for keeping what it keeps and of the whole process of growth in its poetry”.

Arnold is someone who had a very important role to play in the way in which we canonize things in today’s world. He had a very significant role to play. If you go by this statement that he makes, you cannot entirely justify Johnson's attempt to redeem Shakespeare and give him a literary reputation.

What was the only reason which prompted Johnson in the first place to dig Shakespeare's reputation up and talk about it in such ways that it would cement his literary reputation forever? The only reason was that he was extremely popular when he was living and when his plays were being performed, and he thinks he had outlived his century.

So, there are many other things which lie outside the text. It is not entirely about the literary merit. In fact, we cannot even talk about the literary merit because the work was not even published in the first place. It is only after his death that these folios came out which the co-actors and others had put together.

So, in that sense, it is largely based on a historical estimate along with a biased kind of a personal estimate-- that is how Johnson takes up that work. Shakespeare is not someone that Arnold praises in exaggerated terms. Chaucer, Shakespeare, he looks at all of them with a lot of scepticism; he thinks it is largely based on the historical mileage that they received that one continues talking about them.

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seated immovable amidst His perfect work, like Jupiter on Olympus; and hardly will it be possible for the young student to whom such work is exhibited at such a distance from him, to believe that it did not issue ready-made from that divine head."

All this is brilliantly and tellingly said, but we must plead for a distinction. **Everything depends on the reality of a poet's classic character.** If he is a dubious classic, let us sift him; if he is a false classic, let us explode him. But if he is a real classic, if his work belongs to the class of the very best (for this is the true and right meaning of the word classic, classical), then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can, and to appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character. This is what is salutary, this is what is formative; this is the great

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And this is the distinction that he pleads for. “We must plead for a distinction. Everything depends on the reality of a poet's classic character”. He is not really going back to the classical rules. This is not a recycled version of the neoclassical age. He is beginning to tell us about certain methods to be used and he is stressing the need to maintain a classic character.

Here we find that poetry also becomes a very elitist kind of thing. It is not something which anyone can write, it is not something that anyone can judge. It needs to have a classic character. “If he is a dubious classic, let us sift him, if he is a false classic, let us explode him”. Here, there are two things happening simultaneously.

One, the need to judge the poetry which is available in and around him during that time. Secondly, to understand the true nature of the works which have been handed down to us as classics, going back to those classics; that is where he says, "If he is a dubious classical, let us sift him, if he is a false classic, let us explode him". So, the assumption is that the works which are considered already classics, there are different kinds. Some of them have been considered classic-- they just earned it in an easy way because of the historical estimate or some critics thought that he is personally very influential.

So, it is important to look back at those works which are deemed as classics and to see whether they are actually classics or not. And based on that, you judge the works of the contemporary. "If he is a real classic, if his works belong to the class of the very best (for this is the true and right meaning of the word classic, classical) then the great thing for us is to feel and enjoy his work as deeply as ever we can, and to appreciate the wide difference between it and all work which has not the same high character".

Again, this is a useful move, but this also has its inherent fallacies because here, he is suggesting that we use something as a model. You go back to the classics. Not all classics can be used as a model. Fine, that is a very fine move. It is an iconic thing to say at this point of time in criticism, but again, to say that certain works which fit the category of this true classic, to say that use them as models to judge the works of today, to judge all other works-- that could be a very flawed way of looking at criticism.

But if you think about the larger scheme of things, in the 20th century, every critic had a model in mind. It was on the basis of that that works were being judged. For instance, if you look at the contemporary, the post 1980s, the way in which Indian fiction has formed in very direct as well as indirect terms, Rushdie becomes a model.

Anyone who does not write the nation, anyone who does not have that sort of a narrative, we do not find them really getting a place in the Canon either. If you look at a series of works: Rushdie, Ghosh and Vikram Seth and all the others who had been writing, there are these mega stories which would fit within the story of the nation or they try to tell the story of the nation in a different way altogether.

You think about all those who have been left out from the canonical understanding of what Indian fiction is, what Indian writing is, historically, we will find that it has always been like

that. If you look at the 1930s and 40s, there are a lot of works about Gandhi. It is a period of even this category which later came to be termed as Gandhi fiction.

So, whoever has not written about those things or the nationalist movement, for instance, GV Desani's *All about H Hatter* is a work which gets attention only after Rushdie publishes his work. This is a 1947 novel which is seen as, like *Tristram Shandy*, one of the works that predates postmodernism.

But it does not really catch the attention because during that time it was Gandhi, it was the nationalist movement, there were anti-colonial things to be spoken about and anything that does not fall into that, becomes not a work worthy enough to be judged. So, we do find that post-Arnold, (it is not to say that the moment he published *The Study of Poetry*, everything changed), there is a convenience which we can attribute to this model as well. You find certain things, if it is of this kind, you take this for serious study, for serious criticism; if it does not have these markers, then there is no need to study that as a serious work of literature at all. We do have these distinctions in our mind, as we know, for what is worthy of serious literary study and what is not.

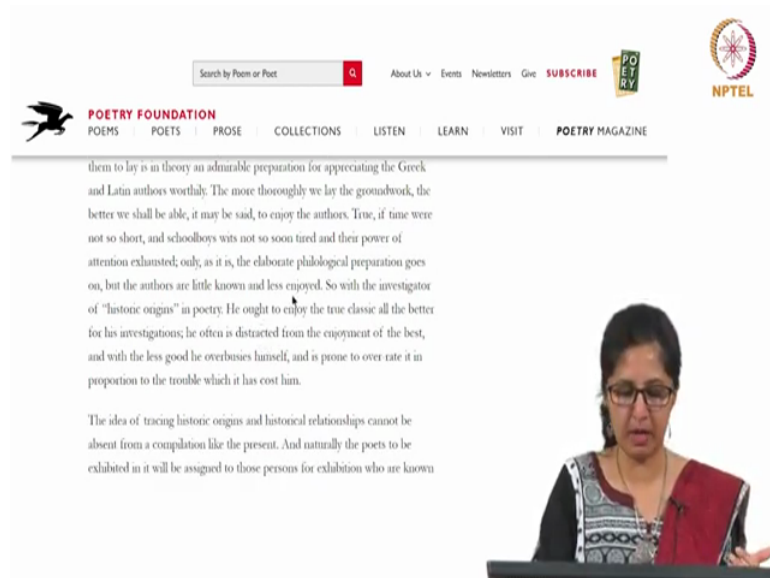
We also know that a personal preference cannot become a reason, a good enough reason for taking a work. If you are being asked to talk about a certain work and if you need to give a rationale for it, you can never say, I have read it and I loved it so I am going to work on it. That is not seen as a good enough reason, it is not seen as a reason which is objective enough.

But during Johnson's time-- this is where I want you to see the difference-- during Sidney's time, during Johnson's time, due to the kind of stature that they had; if they said, I approve of it, because it is one fine mind approving something-- that was good enough. And even Longinus very briefly spoke about it: If a set of people, who had similar kinds of learned faculties, all thought a certain work was elevating, it was good enough to think that that was a work of sublime quality, because fine minds can have the ability to produce good criticism. Arnold is debunking that but at the same time he is also introducing newer kinds of myths.

There are certain kinds of myths he is debunking, but he is also introducing new myths by saying-- look at classics and bring back the classics which are truly, really classics. We will find that, as we go on, that that is a bit problematic-- to find what is really a classic, which is the true classic and which is a dubious one and then to use that as a standard to evaluate everything.

So, there are certain very radical things that he proposes and also certain things which we will find are quite flawed as well.

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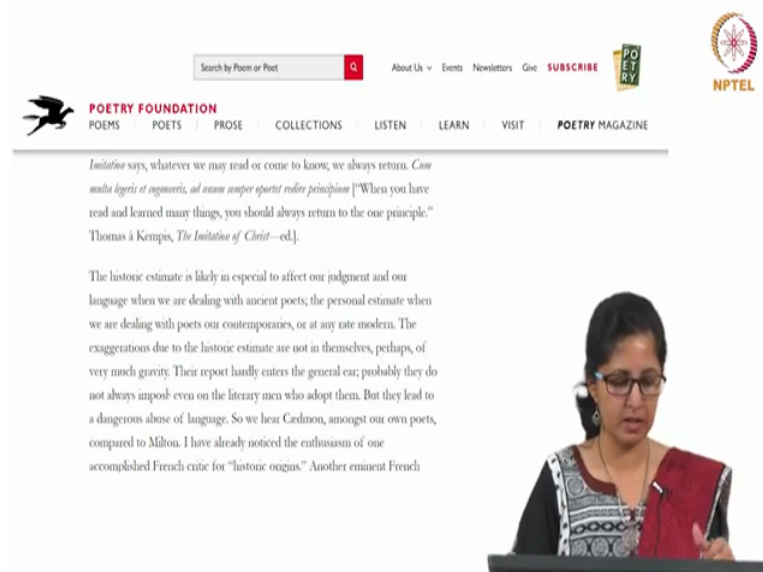


The screenshot shows a webpage from the Poetry Foundation. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search by Poem or Poet" and a red search button. To the right of the search bar are links for "About Us", "Events", "Newsletters", "Give", and "SUBSCRIBE". There is also a "POETRY" logo and an "NPTEL" logo. Below the search bar is a navigation menu with links for "POEMS", "POETS", "PROSE", "COLLECTIONS", "LISTEN", "LEARN", "VISIT", and "POETRY MAGAZINE". The main content area contains a paragraph of text: "them to lay is in theory an admirable preparation for appreciating the Greek and Latin authors worthily. The more thoroughly we lay the groundwork, the better we shall be able, it may be said, to enjoy the authors. True, if time were not so short, and schoolboys wits not so soon tired and their power of attention exhausted; only, as it is, the elaborate philological preparation goes on, but the authors are little known and less enjoyed. So with the investigator of "historic origins" in poetry. He ought to enjoy the true classic all the better for his investigations; he often is distracted from the enjoyment of the best, and with the less good he overbusies himself, and is prone to over rate it in proportion to the trouble which it has cost him." Below this paragraph is another line of text: "The idea of tracing historic origins and historical relationships cannot be absent from a compilation like the present. And naturally the poets to be exhibited in it will be assigned to those persons for exhibition who are known". On the right side of the slide, there is a video inset showing a woman with glasses and a red and black patterned top speaking.

So, in this entire passage, he is reiterating this thing about overrating a work. He is the first one who spoke about it. "He ought to enjoy the true classic, all the better for his investigations; he often is disregarded from the enjoyment of the best and with the less good he overbusies himself, and is prone to overrate it in proportion to the trouble which it has cost him". It also becomes like one is forced to admire a classic.

One is forced to like a classic, one is forced to say that a certain work is good because there is a lot of trouble which has gone into it in terms of labelling it as a classic and also in terms of the investment that you put in engaging with that work.

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The screenshot shows the Poetry Foundation website. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search by Poem or Poet" and a magnifying glass icon. To the right of the search bar are links for "About Us", "Events", "Newsletters", and "Give", followed by a "SUBSCRIBE" button. The Poetry Foundation logo, featuring a bird in flight, is on the left. Below the logo, the text "POETRY FOUNDATION" is displayed, followed by a navigation menu with links for "POEMS", "POETS", "PROSE", "COLLECTIONS", "LISTEN", "LEARN", "VISIT", and "POETRY MAGAZINE". The main content area features a quote from Thomas à Kempis: "Imitatio says, whatever we may read or come to know, we always return. *Cum multa legis et cognoveris, ad unum semper oportet redire principium* ["When you have read and learned many things, you should always return to the one principle." Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*—ed.]. Below the quote, there is a paragraph of text discussing the "historic estimate" and its effect on judgment and language. In the bottom right corner of the screenshot, there is a video inset showing a woman with glasses and a red and black patterned top speaking.

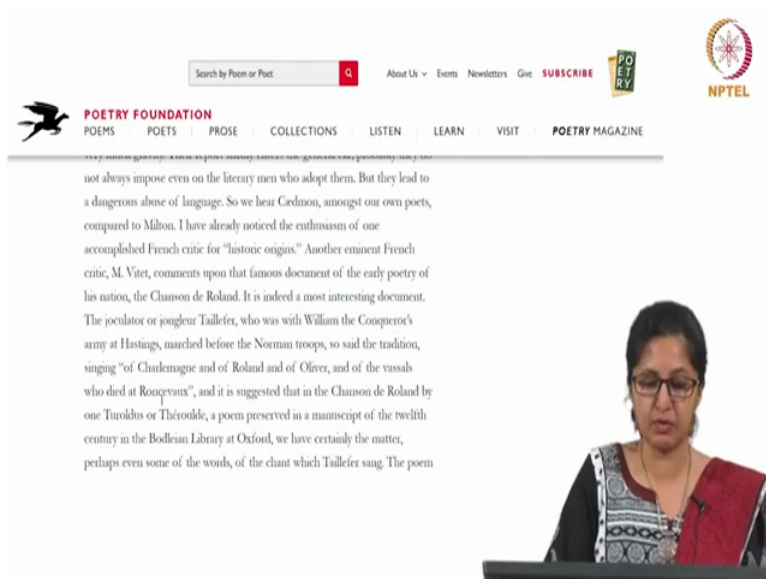
I will just wrap up with this bit where he is now moving on to tell us who the poets are that he thinks are important. So before that, “The historic estimate is likely in especial to affect our judgment and our language when we are dealing with ancient poets, the personal estimate when we are dealing with poets of our contemporaries, or at any rate modern”.

So, this we find is more or less true even today when we sometimes look at certain works. There is a historical estimate, everyone has liked it. So, you think that there are certain kinds of works even when you are growing up, you think that you have to read them.

If somebody asked you if you have read them, it is such a shame to say you have not. So, there are those kinds of works which everyone thinks everyone should read. And there are certain kinds of works, when you read it in the contemporary, it may have a personal appeal to you because of the circumstances or it could happen to any kind of artwork, it is a very temporal thing.

It will have a major effect on you during the time when you are reading it due to any kind of influence. It could be your age, it could be your gender, it could be the historical considerations of those times, Arnold is very suspicious about that as well. In both ways, he is very suspicious of this and he says, “The exaggerations due to historic estimate are not in themselves, perhaps, of very much gravity. Their report hardly enters the general ear, probably they do not always impose even on the literary men who adopt them. But they lead to a dangerous abuse of language.

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The image shows a screenshot of the Poetry Foundation website. At the top, there is a search bar with the text "Search by Poem or Poet" and a magnifying glass icon. To the right of the search bar are links for "About Us", "Events", "Newsletters", "Give", and a "SUBSCRIBE" button. Further right is the "POETRY" logo and the NPTEL logo. Below the search bar is a navigation menu with the following items: "POEMS", "POETS", "PROSE", "COLLECTIONS", "LISTEN", "LEARN", "VISIT", and "POETRY MAGAZINE". The main content area displays a paragraph of text, which is partially obscured by a video overlay of a woman speaking. The text on the page reads: "not always impose even on the literary men who adopt them. But they lead to a dangerous abuse of language. So we hear Caedmon, amongst our own poets, compared to Milton. I have already noticed the enthusiasm of one accomplished French critic for "historic origins." Another eminent French critic, M. Vitet, comments upon that famous document of the early poetry of his nation, the *Chanson de Roland*. It is indeed a most interesting document. The jocular or jongleur Taillefer, who was with William the Conqueror's army at Hastings, marched before the Norman troops, so said the tradition, singing "of Charlemagne and of Roland and of Oliver, and of the vassals who died at Rouvieux", and it is suggested that in the *Chanson de Roland* by one Turoldus or Thieroude, a poem preserved in a manuscript of the twelfth century in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, we have certainly the matter, perhaps even some of the words, of the chant which Taillefer sang. The poem

So we hear Caedmon, amongst our own poets, compared to Milton. I have already noticed the enthusiasm of one accomplished French critic for “historic origins”. Another eminent French critic M. Vitet comments upon that famous document of the early poetry of his nation, the *Chanson de Roland*”. These are the works which are important at that point of time in English history, in European history; everyone talks about these works.

So, Arnold becomes extremely important at this point of time because he thinks, in a very rational way, there is a method to question those works which have been handed down as canon, as important in a historical sense.

(Refer Slide Time: 40:28)

The top screenshot shows a slide from the Poetry Foundation website. The text on the slide reads: "has vigour and freshness; it is not without pathos. But M. Vitet is not satisfied with seeing in it a document of some poetic value, and of very high historic and linguistic value; he sees in it a grand and beautiful work, a monument of epic genius. In its general design he finds the grandiose conception, in its details he finds the constant union of simplicity with greatness, which are the marks, he truly says, of the genuine epic, and distinguish it from the artificial epic of literary ages. One thinks of Homer; this is the sort of praise which is given to Homer, and justly given! Higher praise there cannot well be, and it is the praise due to epic poetry of the highest order only, and to no other. Let us try, then, the Chanson de Roland at its best. Roland, mortally wounded, lay himself down under a pine-tree, with his face turned towards Spain and the enemy—"

The bottom screenshot shows the same slide with French text and an English translation. The French text reads: "De plusieurs choses à remembrance le poist, De tantès terres come li beys, cunquist, De dulce France, des lances de sun lign, De Carlemagne sun seignot ki l'aurist." The English translation reads: "[Then began he to call many things to remembrance,—all the lauds which his valour conquered, and pleasant France, and the men of his lineage, and Charlemagne, his bege lord who nourished him]—*Chanson de Roland* (iii, 939-42. Arzold's note.)"

He gives away some of his own assumptions also. “One thinks of Homer; this is the sort of praise which is given to Homer and justly given”. He has his own biases. It is difficult to find out the rationale of them, on what basis he thinks Chaucer does not have much seriousness, but Homer is really good.

He finds certain works are dubious classics, but he does not disown Homer at all throughout this. Hopefully you will take a look at the rest of this passage, he gives a lot of examples too, in between and we find that he is very well-versed in history, in contemporary criticism. His knowledge, his scholarship is very telling when you look at any of his critical works.

It also makes him a very important critic to reckon with, which is why, as I mentioned, he is considered as the first modern critic, as well as a critic’s critic. And when he starts writing

criticism, it is not that it was just a set of prefaces like most other writers did; we find that his entire critical energy, his entire creative energy gets channelized into writing criticism entirely.

He means really serious business when he undertakes these things. It is not just to justify his kind of works or to produce them as prefaces to a range of things that he had been writing.

As I had also mentioned, his poetic career in a certain way comes to an end when he starts writing criticism. In personal ways, as well as in very objective ways, he also thinks that criticism is a bit inferior to the creative faculty and one needs to be extra cautious while talking about superior works because criticism is inherently inferior and you are looking at something very superior, a creative work.

So you need to be more alert in using your judgments and applying your standards. So, we wrap up with this and we continue with this text tomorrow. Thank you.