

# Morality in Victorian Period\*

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**Abstract**—Morality is a significant element in literary works throughout history. In Victorian England, it gained unprecedented concern because of the loss of religious belief and material progress. Matthew Arnold, the most influential critic of his time, attaches great significance to morality in literature. The major reason for Victorian's morality concern is presented and the religious background of that time is introduced. Matthew Arnold's belief in poetry's religious function is stated and analyzed.

**Index Terms**—Matthew Arnold, morality, poetry

The significance of morality in literary works has been in dispute for centuries. From Plato on, moral concern, through ups and downs, however, is more or less indispensable in literary production and criticism. Victorian England is much noted for its strong attachment to moral concern. Under the influence of the Victorian environment, many literary men, in their search for a solution to the inner conflict have constituted from the beginning a strong ethical and moral element in their literary works.

## I. NECESSITY OF MORALITY IN A TRANSITIONAL AGE

The concern of morality is an indispensable element in literature. The unity of the Greek ethos guarantees the unity of Greek drama, from which Aristotle extracts the assertion of "Catharsis." At that time, men were still comparatively simple in their thinking in their assumption that, for their experience, the most powerful of instruments was poetry. Morality, or more specifically, morality in religion, had provided a stay for human soul in the Middle Ages. Then moral prepossession which had dominated antique centuries passed on to the Renaissance. In that spirit and faith Sidney wrote about function of literature; and that spirit and faith is to be found in Spencer and Milton. And the tradition passes to the great romantics: Wordsworth, Coleridge, and many other obvious names we may leave aside. We even find Byron, a seeming dandy, who appears less a palpable member among other moralists, claims that the highest of all Poetry is the ethical and the highest of all objects should be moral truth; and Shelley, an atheist himself, shared with Byron the same judgment.

Writers on controversial topics are only too prone to see the years of their own as epoch-making, especially when religious issue, an essential one both in literature and reality, is in question, and Victorian literary men belong to this category in a particular way. Victorians and literary in Victorian period are much noted for the concern of morality. According to M. H. Abrams, the term "'Victorian,' and still more Victorianism, is frequently used in a derogatory way, to connote narrow-mindedness, sexual priggishness, the determination to maintain feminine 'innocence' (that is, sexual ignorance), narrow-mindedness, and an emphasis on social respectability" (1999, p.329). That is certainly a representative opinion prevailing in modern age. However, a moment's thought should propel us to realize how partial and unsatisfactory such generalizations are likely to be. Though it has been in constant debate whether or not literature and morality are two distinct spheres with no inherent connection, this "problem" is "less a philosophical problem than a problem arising from the ingrained attitudes in most of our minds" (Buckley, 1959, p.14).

To understand their moral concern, we have to have a close look at their religious condition. By the time of Protestant Movement, life was still conceived primarily in theological terms, and to its problems, religion alone held the answer or was to find the answer there. Fundamental unity of Christian thought remained unimpaired until late part of the eighteenth century, because as the products of the Middle Ages, Protestantism, were still at one with Catholicism, and shared most of the presuppositions with the opponents. Catholicism then was forced to find compromise unavoidable in the nineteenth century because rationalism of the eighteenth century already made divine revelation difficult. Together with many subdivisions within English Anglican, there are good grounds for accepting contemporary views on the decades in the early nineteenth century in England as a time of crisis in religion.

Victorian England was co-perverted by both optimistic and pessimistic air resulting from material prosperity and spiritual decaying. In 1870, Disraeli noted the current "disturbance of mind" and "ascendant materialism," which were caused, "Firstly, by the powerful assault on the divinity of Semitic literature by the Germans; and secondly, by recent discoveries of science, which are hastily supposed to be inconsistent with our long-received convictions as to the relations between the Creator and the created" (Robbins, 1959, p.6). The desire to seize a new faith under emotional stress, or to cling to the old Christianity and accept it for all its superstition for the sake of social order and personal

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need, had found both in its tensions the readiness to abandon private judgment for embracing some external authority. But which authority to accept is the question. When whether to choose The Old or the New religion was still unsettled, minor branches of the new already in dispute. What is worse, in that high period, the commercial prosperity and general expansion around the mid age left the educated reader freer to observe and take sides in the religious ritual controversy as in Oxford Movement and the debate on the relations between the Church and State. Cheerful optimism or serene tolerance was hardly the only distinguishing sentiment over Biblical criticism, Ritual practices, and the claims of physical science. Even the Oxford Movement was, on the whole, doctrinal or ritual without much metaphysical appealing. For all its width and tense in the scope, the Oxford Movement left the controversy unsolved. The eventual result is, as Matthew Arnold wrote to his French correspondent, M. Fonan ès in 1881:

Religious disputes... still attract great attention, and create passions and parties; but certainly they have not the significance which they once had. The moral is that whoever treats religion, religious discussions, questions of churches and sects, as absorbing, is not in vital sympathy with the movement of men's minds at present... The great centre-current of our time is a *lay* current. (Russell, 1895, p.1:5)

For all its force, the effect did not last long in a time when an external authority still imperative.

Oxford Movement died out, but the religious crisis remained unsettled. When the faith wavered, when God seemed remote and the dignity of man merely hypothetical, the artist lost his capacity to feel at rest and his assurance that the higher self actually exists. Arnold laments that his "Scholar-Gipsy" at Oxford could to less extent "animate" or "ennoble" the despairing soul. Yet the melancholy of the poem remained comprehensible to many "light half-believers of their causal creeds," who were unable to make for righteousness consciously. As the Sea of Faith ebbed, the intellect lay naked to all the winds of doubt with nowhere to stand firm. In an age overpowered the will to believe; and the mind was left, without ethical sanction, to its own divided aims. Without a hard heart, man may easily go astray to inner bewilderment, just as Empedocles did. It was under such mind state that Arnold wrote his famous lines: "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born..." ("Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse" ll.85-86).

The dead world being the world of orthodox beliefs and certainties, the one not yet born may come from the world of scientific truths and demythologized religion. Arnold's reinterpretation of the Bible and Christianity in an effort to establish their unique claim to permanence as moral and spiritual guides is one of the endeavors to restore their sense of wholeness of his contemporaries. The disintegration of the unity of man, nature, and God which Empedocles experienced in his time, and which Arnold experiences in modern world, is not an isolated event. The moment of Empedocles' death is "a true turning point or pivot of history," because it is the instant, as J. Hillis Miller sees it, "when God withdraws from the world," and only at such a time does man experience himself as "complete emptiness" (1963, p.261). All Arnold's frustrated attempts to escape back to the epoch when man could participate in the divine life have led him inexorably to the discovery of the truth about man's present condition: "vacuity and distance" are what man, in these bad times, really is. And this "vacuity and distance", "the void which in our breasts we bear," can in no way be escaped (Ibid).

In 1861 Jowett prophesied that "in a few years there will be no religion among young men, *unless religions is shown to be consistent with criticism*" (qtd. in Robbins, 1959, p.8). The important implication is that intellectual men could not find satisfaction within the Church to meet both their emotional and spiritual needs and their critical intelligences. It was of prime urgency to reconstruct a spiritual holder, because when faith could no longer sustain its former spiritual condolence and sustain. It was an age as in which the opinion that religious belief was necessary for moral and social purposes was universal, and yet real belief was feeble and precarious.

## II. THE FUNCTION OF LITERATURE IN A TRANSITIONAL EPOCH

Under the influence of the Victorian environment, and more particularly of his father Thomas Arnold, Matthew Arnold's search for a solution to his inner conflict had constituted from the beginning a strong ethical element. Beginning in the nineteenth century, literature itself began unmistakably to play the role, or at least was intended to play the role, that religion once had. Victorian men of letters resorted even more to morality than their predecessors, which manifests itself in their highlighting exploration of morality in the literary works. For one thing, a set of rigid religious ritual and "miracles," already under severe suspicion in itself, could not match the scientific exploration of a nation prospering at an unprecedented speed. Meanwhile, the prevailing anxiety that religion was fast losing its power would kindle man's aspire for a moral sustainment to defend from the fear of unbelief. Such anxious uncertainty was to be relieved by the accentuated moral attachment to literature, which was beginning to be endowed with religious bearing outdoing its task, as Sir Sidney preaches, to teach and to delight.

In the nineteenth century, there emerged "the belief that the aesthetic consciousness was capable of organizing and transfiguring the whole of human experience" (Madden, 1967, p.v). Despite a marked shift from idealist to empirical attitudes in philosophy generally, the tendency to endow poetry and art with an unprecedentedly grandeur power gained in clarity and precision as the nineteenth century progressed. "Though few could explain the exact process by which art was to accomplish its religious mission, none questioned its ultimate relevance to the ethical needs of an aspiring people" (J. H. Buckley, 1981, p.144). At the time of Hegel and Goethe, art has already begun to take on a function analogous to religion, and even to some extent replacing it (Honon, 1981, p.299). Schiller's belief in art, under whose spell Arnold was also influenced, helps to explain such phenomenon by describing the aesthetic impulse as going

beyond the individual and as capable of binding the whole of society together in a new and higher form of culture. In England, Thomas Carlyle claims, "Literature is but a branch of Religion, and always participates in its character: however, in our time, it is the only branch that still shows any greenness; and, as some think, must one day become the main stem" (Abram, *Norton Anthology*, 2006, p.926). In *Arnold and the Romantics* (1977), W. A. Jamison explored Victorian definition and their moral concern of poetry. He cites from Carlyle, Mill, Ruskin, Leigh Hunt to illustrate their preponderance on content to metrical composition, and poetic "healing" function felt by Mill, Newman, Keble, who regard poetry as "medicine," "solace for the mind" to free them from disappointments and sufferings of actual life. (p.11-13). So Matthew Arnold, when making his claims for the religious function of literature, was only stating a phenomenon that had become, in many instances, a *fait accompli*. As a practicing poet, Arnold, like Goethe and Schiller before him, found the idea of harmonizing and ennobling human experience through poetry had an enormous appeal. Religion for them is often a goal arrived at by the way of literature; and in the last two centuries, "in agnostic or convert alike, literature and religion unmistakably overlap" (Raleigh, 1957, p.263-64). It was in this way and for this purpose that such writers as Carlyle, Mill, Arnold and George Eliot became literary critics, and all the more, moralists.

In 1881 publication of Arnold's "The Study of Poetry" made a great stir which threw him into incessant depreciation:

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. (Super, 1973, p.9: 161)

It is from this declaration that T. S. Eliot fires the severe attack on of Arnold's attempt "to affirm that the emotions of Christianity can and must be preserved without the belief," and he strongly scolds that "Arnold dismisses altogether the intellectual element in religion, and leaves only art and morals; ... and truly moral art is all that Arnold leaves us in the place of religious faith" (1928, p.66). "From this proposition," Eliot continues to draw his conclusion, "two different types of man can extract two different types of conclusion: i) that Religion is Morals, ii) that Religion is Art" (1932, p.434).

There is a tradition of interpretation associated with T. S. Eliot, I.A. Richards, and Lionel Trilling on charging Arnold with religious aestheticism, with having reduced religion to poetry, to a moral subjectivism. It is presented in Trilling's biography of Arnold, for instance, the charge of religious dilettantism that Arnold is but "a connoisseur of Christianity" (1939, p.363). In the analysis of the origins of Arnold's religious belief, DeLaura suggests, "the conflation of all these disparate men, Edmund Copleston, John and Thomas Keble, Edward Hawkins, and Newman," as well as the grounds for his admiration, suggest "the complexity, and perhaps the confusion" of Matthew Arnold's religious position (1969, p.10). Such confusion can be explained in the context of larger social background. W. O. Raymond, in a survey of the Higher Criticism in England during the nineteenth century, concludes that the typical attitude of the English mind to questions of philosophy and religion, similar to the views of Nature, is marked by "individualism, subjectivity, lack of systematic development, absence of radicalism" (qtd. in Robbins, 1959, p.11). Under such circumstances, something universal, objective and systematic is imperative.

Arnold's distinction as a propagandist for ethical criticism, Leavis also claims, cannot be questioned, yet it must be also apparent, he continues to argue, the propaganda could hardly have had its virtue if the pamphleteer had not had notable qualifications in criticism. The value of this essay, Leavis defends that, does not "depend on our accepting without reservation the particular terms in which Arnold stresses the importance of poetry in these introductory sentences, and he is not disposed of as a literary critic by pointing out he was not theologian or philosopher; nor is it probed that he was incapable of consistency and vigour of thought." (1968, p.261) The value lies in instead, if we deplore Arnold's way with religion, Leavis continues, that "as the other traditions relax and social forms disintegrate, it becomes correspondingly more important to preserve the literary tradition" (ibid). As was the case with so many of his views, the seed of the idea was Victorian anxiety and had its nurture from the Victorian moral climate. When things are as already they were in Arnold's time, it is necessary, as what Arnold has undertaken for "Culture," to do the work by a theologian as such if he could do it better. One could not construct an Arnoldian "theology" on such judgment as Professor Lowry's reasonable but guarded statement that Arnold "probably knew more philosophy than he is generally given credit for" (Lowry ed., 1932, p.5). Perhaps there is no happier term to apply to him than ethical idealist. With a clearer view and a more balanced estimate than prevailed in the first half of this century, Arnold's view on religion, if not fully right, is stimulating. As Barzun's cool concession puts it, "compared with some of the religious enthusiasts of today... Matthew Arnold would be accounted a precisian" (qtd. in Robbins viii). It is more to the point to examine what he had to say, and why he felt he had to say it, in the light of his reading, his life and times, and his considerable influence. When this is done, the conviction emerges that in a broadly human context, morality is one of the eternal human problems, and his approach is again synthesis. Arnold was, in Mrs. Humphry Ward's words, "A Modernist before the time" (Machhann, 1988, p.31). He was ahead of his time in foreshadowing in philosophical and theological thinking what are characteristic of our own day. What he offers is a Christianity reduced to its essential values by the eliminating of an obsolete incredible supernaturalism. He appeals to basic fact of Christian experience, but his approach is that of literary critic.

The key to this liberal tradition is the experiential and the moral foundations of religious belief. Arnold explicitly asserts that “The paramount virtue of religion is that it has *lighted up* morality” (Super, 1962, 3:134). God must be envisioned as the ground of moral values and, therefore, conceived essentially as a moral influence, rather than in abstract metaphysical sense. God is known neither by intellectual demonstration nor by mystical vision but rather by the exercise of conscience and the moral will. Arnold’s religious position must not be viewed simply as that of a maverick or a dilettante but rather that it must be seen as standing squarely in a tradition of liberal-modernist theology, when to be interpreted in a more broad way. Arnold claims in some way a moral purpose for literature. Why he should have to say such things is a question rarely asked within a discipline so concerned to examine its own history. Eliot has always been at pains to reject the legacy of nineteenth-century critical thought, and at the same time to establish an adequate notion of the reality of poetry. The interest arises out of his sense of the interior order both of a poem and of the poet. In both, his thought centers on the idea of impersonality. For Arnold, however, it is an internal and external need combined. Whatever moral reality poetry possesses, then, is intimately connected with the question of order. Arnold did see poetry and the poet as interrelated, but poetry means far more than a mere utterance of the author’s mind, rather, he is against using poetry as an expression. For him, poetry is making something, i.e., the utility of poetry. There are traces of Utilitarianism’s influences, but Arnold is cautious of vulgarizing poetry in practical application.

### III. ARNOLD’S MORAL CONCERN IN POETRY

All through his life, Arnold has been searching for the Idea behind the concrete form in poetry. What he concerns in religion is also the organizing Idea, which for him has been waning and becoming materialized. “But moral rules, apprehended as ideas first, and then rigorously followed as laws, are, and must be, for the sage only. The mass of mankind have neither force of intellect enough to apprehend them clearly as ideas, nor force of character enough to follow them strictly as laws” (Super, 1962, 3: 134). Arnold tries to redefine religion so to reestablish the connection between God and man by endow morality the religious function.

He does not want, however, a narrowly didactic poetry and considers preaching a debasement of the poet’s function, instead, he revolts against it. Arnold believes passionately in the beneficent influence of “culture,” urgently needful in an age whose civilization had become increasingly “mechanical and external” and whose religious tradition in decline. His writings in later years are mainly centering on religious concern, and some criticism advanced against him that Arnold had forsaken Hellenism for Hebraism, had reversed the stand taken in *Culture and Anarchy*. Such criticism missed the obvious fact that religion was an integral part of culture, as Arnold saw it. His definitions of culture, embracing reason and the will of God as the marks of that perfection which is man’s goal, reveal clearly that the Hellenistic emphasis aimed at the English Philistine was not intended to be made at the expense of religion. Arnold’s religious writings were a deepening and modifying of his plea for culture, not a retreat from Greece to Israel. The touchstone method used in his literary criticism comes into play, to distinguish between mere morality and that which is “morality touched with emotion,” or religion.

Hebraism and Christianity, then, have that heightened insight and feeling about morality which constitutes religion. The Hebraic virtue of self-conquest and the stoic virtue of resignation, coupled with the intellectual virtue of disinterestedness, prepared for that simple, intuitive, spontaneous apprehension of the whole of experience which characterized great poetry. Arnold developed his aesthetic position and solved the religious problem within an epistemological framework which placed the imaginative reason at the summit, connecting morality (religion’s ethical element) with the Hellenic ideal of total perfection, dogma (the intellectual element) with the free play of dialectical reason, and ritual or liturgy with that visitation of creative energy which organized man’s noblest moral and intellectual experiences so as to make them beautiful. Here again it is his reconciliation habit at work.

Life itself, as Coleridge taught, is a tension between opposite forces and the life of faith subsists in a tension between two poles of experience: between the head, which finds no sufficient evidence, and the heart, which bids us trust the larger hope. “The moral and intellectual are always dividing, yet they must be reunited, and in the highest conception of them are inseparable” (Super, 1977, n11: 179). Arnold’s fear is that once the intellect has gained control, it not only destroys the wholeness of the world but dissolved the union between man, Nature and God. Arnold noted “I cannot conceal from myself the objection which really wounds & perplexes me from the religious side is that the service of reason is freezing to feeling, chilling to the religious mood. & feeling & the religious mood are eternally the deepest being of man, the ground of all joy & greatness for him. (Ullmann, 1989, p.160)

For him the essentials are dignity of thought and sentiment and distinction of manner and utterance. In modern man, a martyr to thought, insight and mystery—necessities for a poet, which lies beyond reason, has been blotted out by the blighting light of intellect. Mind and spirit no longer form a unity—for this there must be faith in something beyond what can be known by the rational mind. The age was uncongenial, the state of knowledge uncertain, and the struggle too lonely, not because the poetic gift and the ambitions it inspired were unworthy, but the disillusionments and anxiety caused by the division between the mind and heart. For Arnold morality is feeling and emotion attachment as against the intellect and reason which will frozen emotion, for which he is torturing in their split.

In the early fifties he turned to morality and “character” in order to escape the dialogue of the mind, with its disillusionments and ennui. Yet, as “Empedocles on Etna” makes clear, the moral life, so far as it was characterized by mere endurance and stoic resistance, was to Arnold a second best. For Empedocles “the wisdom of his race” has

ceased to have any cogency. Consequently, he rests on the light of the independent intelligence. He counsels Pausanias against a superstitious credulity in the gods and urges on him the practical necessity of intellectual faculty. "Mind is the spell which governs earth and heaven" (1.27). Yet he knows—and this is the essential source of his grief—that the mind can attain to no complete and certain knowledge:

Hither and thither spins  
 The wind-borne, mirroring soul,  
 A thousand glimpses wins,  
 And never sees a whole;  
 Looks once, and drives elsewhere, and leaves its last employ.  
 The Gods laugh in their sleeve  
 To watch man doubt and fear,  
 Who knows not what to believe  
 Since he sees nothing clear,  
 And dares stamp nothing false where he finds nothing sure. (ll. 82-91)

The primary thing, to Arnold, is the feeling of peace and spiritual well-being at the triumph of the higher rational self over the lower self, not the literal interpretation emerging in a stock theological image like that of the clay and the potter. It is, in this sense, life is the visible victory of the higher self. Despair meant the refusal to realize the true self by devotion to the Eternal. And "the most dangerous form of despair," said Kierkegaard, was "man's unawareness of his spiritual essence, his blind absorption in material values. The troubled soul beset with a liberating 'despair', a genuine weariness of the ego, and a passionate desire to find some new center of life which might renovate the springs and purify the aims of the social and exhausted nature"; And "the dark night of the soul," or the "spiritual dryness of medieval mysticism," could be experienced only by one who "recognized the loss which his inability to 'die' unto the old self, by one who could cry aloud for succor "in a dry and thirsty land where no water is" (qtd. in J. H. Buckley, 1981, p.92).

Our "materializing" theology must realize that on intellectual grounds it cannot cope with modern science. The one thing needful is to "restore the intuition." Starting with Arnold's assumption that a broad culture and literary insight—what remained powerful part in religion at the time was poetry—are indispensable for restoring the intuition, for basing the permanent truth of the Bible on psychological experience rather than on dogmatic authority or systematic theorizing, we may notice here the critical "tact" at work. "Moral culture [is] so intimately allied to, nay incorporated with aesthetic culture,... that to their mutual perfection the one cannot be conceived without the other" (qtd. in Robbins, 1959, p.55).

Arnold suggests that society is "controlled by the actual instincts and forces," so that "it must seek to penetrate and then check with other "instincts and forces. It is on this basis he calls for a transformation of the "dominant idea of religion through the re-energizing stimuli of culture and poetry (Madden, 1967, p.169). Religion, however, is not abandoned. The whole book of *Culture and Anarchy* indeed is a collection of articles nearly indecipherable without understanding of the religious expressions at the time. Arnold desires to shift the trend of doing into inner self thinking as his terminology of the categories of "Hebraism" and "Hellenism". "The Hebraic virtue of self-conquest and the stoic virtue of resignation, coupled with the intellectual virtue of disinterestedness, prepared for that simple, intuitive, spontaneous apprehension of the whole of experience which characterized great poetry" (Madden, 1967, p.169). Here again his sense of unity is at work, endeavoring to embrace two spheres of human mind activities in a harmonious entity of the self and the state.

Arnold's poetical work may be seen to have as one of its significant nexus the apprehensions that are achieved by his persistent attempts to discover what poetry in his age could be. His method is indirect. Two dominant topics of Arnold's investigation are the question of the artist's attitude toward external experience, a problem that is usually approached through the opposition of those antitheses. Underlying these speculations—and inseparable from them—is an attempt to define the attitudes the wise poet should take toward his own age and toward the past and the future alike. For Arnold aesthetic and ethical ideals are ultimately the same, so that the way of the wise poet, which involves a paradoxical detachment with participation, the achieving of a passionate sincerity, is also the way by which the thoughtful man may be reconciled to life. "In best art," Arnold thus explicitly claims, "poetry and morality are one" (Super, 1964, 4: 161, 1965, 5:100).

Arnold's claims for poetry, as defined by Leavis, are "religious claims; and they are intimately connected with his expectations of poetry as a moral force" (1968, p.263). "The best of Arnold's criticism is an illustration of his ethical views, and contributes to his discrimination of the values and relations of the components of the good life" (ibid). His moral obsession with poetry is in accordance with his interpretation of poetry as criticism of life, composed with ideas. "The noble and profound application of ideas to life is the most essential part of poetic greatness" (Super, 1973, 9: 337). The evaluation of poetry as "criticism of life" is inseparable from its evaluation as poetry; that the moral judgment that concerns us as critics must be at the same time a delicately relevant response of sensibility.

Whenever there is some question, he tends to resort to the effects of poetry and combining the religious and aesthetic power into one. This is consistent, in a way, since he is almost a sort of "pragmatist." One may measure the seriousness with which Arnold embraces his classical standards by noting that in judging his own poetry he elevates 'Sohrab and Rustum' above 'The Scholar-Gipsy.' This ranking, with which very few readers would agree, gives evidence of how far

spiritual anxiety could impel Arnold into aesthetic moralist. He would “judge the truth of poetry, just as he would judge the truth of Christianity, by its inward effects, its power to stabilize man and fit him for his moral action” (Vincent Buckley, 1959, p.53). Such a view is obviously unsatisfactory beyond a certain point, and it is too subjective. But he is an odd critic: “a great critic whose chief terms run over into one another, and persuade by their confusion” (ibid). We cannot agree with him in his solution, but we cannot help feeling the same with him in questioning.

In all its operations this principle of redress and restraint, of balance and flexibility, is “in a tradition of humanistic writing which looks back to Erasmus and forward to Edmund Wilson” (Robbins, 1959, p.163). His own critical principles reflect “a philosophy that reveals, not logic and system, but rather a set of attitudes that are eclectic in allegiance and tolerant in application” (ibid 162). It is the reciprocal relation of the intellect and emotion that has made up what there is of our civilization, the two polarities of “the imaginative reason,” which Arnold strives as the climax of his endeavour, the completion of his critical doctrine. The synthesis has been achieved, the dialectic successfully resolved. The phrase is persuasive and challenging. Yet it is a phrase, as many of his other catchwords, which defies precise definition. So Arnold became the most influential critic of the Victorian era because he assimilated the views of his age, corrected their eccentricities and excesses, and states them in a more coherent and consistent form. Arnold agreed that poetry should teach moral truth; but he recognized the complexity of the assignment more clearly than most of his contemporaries, and insisted that in fulfilling it poetry must retain its peculiar identity.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Arnold’s theory of poetry, at first designed to combat romantic melancholy, has its intrinsic limitations which can be accounts for by the situation it was devised to correct; while its strength lies in its reassertion of the humanistic value of poetry in an age of aesthetic confusion- diversity in interest can be seen, in a sense, as a state of confusion. Arnold’s effort, however, was bound to fail; for he tried to “impose upon the post from outside a form of discipline and an attitude of mind without sufficient consideration for the idiosyncrasy of the individual poetic temperament and for the necessary genuineness of the poetic impulse” (Jamison, 1977, p.23). He intended to construct a set of principles from by building a best self from inside, but the order, once established, has to be qualified by an outside measurement. His effort turns to fail in the end. But Arnold tried to invert the generally accepted relationship between poetry and the morality by asking the poet to supply the deficiencies of his age. His theory is important however not only as a corrective to the spiritual dilemma of his age, but as a reminder that we have not yet solved the problem with which he had struggled. The absence of an abiding faith as a center for moral action has continued to haunt thinking men in modern society. He faced the central issues of his day and of ours.

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