

Matthew Arnold

Poems 1

“The Scholar Gypsy”

- Written in 1853.
- The poem is based on a story which was found in *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661), written by Joseph Glanvil.
- A pastoral poem written in elegy form (Arnold begins his poem by describing a rural setting just outside of Oxford. The speaker watches as a shepherd and reapers work in a field there)
- Written in 25 stanzas of 10 lines each.
- The poem tells the story of a poor and disillusioned Oxford student who leaves university to join a group of traveling “gypsies” (Romani people). The Scholar-Gypsy wants not only to withdraw from his studies but also to withdraw from the modern world.
- He is so welcomed and becomes such a part of the “gypsy” family that they reveal some of their secrets to him. When he is discovered by two of his former Oxford peers, he tells them of how the Romani have their own unique way of learning.
- He plans to stay with them to learn as much as he can from them. He will then share their wisdom with the world, although he does not wish to return to that world himself.
- The poem anticipates the crisis of the modernist period. The poem is testament to Arnold’s preoccupation as a poet and a cultural critic: “this strange disease of modern life.”
- Important quotes-
 - “This said, he left them, and return'd no more.—

But rumours hung about the country-side,

That the lost Scholar long was seen to stray,
Seen by rare glimpses, pensive and tongue-tied,
In hat of antique shape, and cloak of grey,
The same the gipsies wore.”

- “Free from the sick fatigue, the languid doubt, Which
much to have tried, in much been baffled, brings”
- “Wave us away, and keep thy solitude!”
- “Through the thick corn the scarlet poppies peep,
And round green roots and yellowing stalks I see
Pale pink convolvulus in tendrils creep;
And air-swept lindens yield Their scent,
and rustle down their perfumed showers
Of bloom on the bent grass where I am laid”
- “when wits were fresh and clear and life ran gaily as the
sparkling Thames.”
- “a truant boy Nursing thy project in unclouded joy
And every doubt long blown by time away.”
- “For what wears out the life of mortal men?
'Tis that from change to change their being rolls;
'Tis that repeated shocks, again, again,
Exhaust the energy of strongest souls
And numb the elastic powers.”

“Dover Beach”

- It was first published in 1867 in the collection *New Poems*

- Composed of 4 stanzas of variable lines. No consistent rhyme scheme. Irregular iambic Pentameter.
- A dramatic monologue where the poet expresses his frustrations and hopelessness of the modern day world of chaos. The poem also laments the loss of true Christian faith in the 19th century English society.
- Matthew discusses how faith used to encompass the whole world, holding the populous tight in its embrace. But, he believes, it is losing ground to the sciences, particularly those related to evolution (*The Origin of Species* by Charles Darwin was published in 1859).
- The poet's speaker, considered to be Matthew Arnold himself, begins by describing a calm and quiet sea out in the English Channel. He, along with his beloved, stand on the Dover coast and looks across to France, where a small light can be seen briefly and then vanishes. This light represents the diminishing faith of the English people and the world around them. The 2nd stanzas mentions Sophocles.
- Throughout this poem, the speaker/Arnold, crafts an image of the sea receding and returning to land with the world's faith as it changes throughout time. At this point in time, though, the sea is not returning. It is receding farther out into the strait.
- The poem concludes pessimistically as the speaker makes clear to the reader that all the beauty and happiness that one may believe they are experiencing is not, in fact, real. The world is actually without peace, joy, or help for those in need and the human race is too distracted by its own ignorance to see where true assistance is needed anymore.
- Important quotes-
 - "The sea is calm tonight

The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits;"

○ "The Sea of Faith

Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,"

○ "Alas, is even Love too weak to unlock the heart and let it
speak? Are even lovers powerless to reveal To one
another what indeed they feel?"

○ "Ah, love, let us be true

To one another! for the world, which seems

To lie before us like a land of dreams,

So various, so beautiful, so new,

Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,

Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;

And we are here as on a darkling plain

Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,

Where ignorant armies clash by night."

"Rugby Chapel"

- Written as an elegy for his father who died fifteen years ago
- Published in 1857
- In the poem he describes the virtues of his father.
- In the first stanza, the poet describes the surroundings in the season of Autumn- how yellow leaves are falling and although light seeps in through the window, it still feels dark because his father is not present there. Fifteen years have passed since his death and his loss is yet felt by his family. At the Rugby Chapel, where he is laid, the autumn has spread its charms.

- Then he goes on to meditate on the questions of life and death- how so many men have come and gone like waves of ocean and yet only a few are remembered. He notes had his father been there, he would have helped humanity overcome its pain and sufferings. He was one of the Sons of God who help humanity.
- The poem ends on a note of optimism on account of the hope that people like his father would keep on coming back to this world to make it a better place.
- Important quotes-
 - “What is the course of the life
Of mortal men on the earth?—“
 - “Foam’d for a moment, and gone.”

“Thyrsis”

- A Pastoral Elegy
- Written in December 1865 when Arthur Hugh Clough died in November 1961. First published in *Macmillan’s Magazine* in 1866. It was included in Arnold’s *New Poems* in 1867.
- Written in 24 stanzas of 10 lines each.
- Thyrsis, was a shepherd in Virgil's Seventh Eclogue, who lost a singing match against Corydon.
- The poem begins with Arnold’s description of the pictorial beauty of Oxford where he and his friend Clough spent their earlier days.
- While wandering he looks for the “elm tree” which he and his friend Clough used to connect during their youth. As Arnold failed to see the elm-tree in front of him he laments about the departure of him and Clough from Oxford leaving behind the beauty and rustic purity that it holds.

- Clough has been contrasted with Thyrsis who left the “shepherds and silly ships” and died due to his own mistake as he got driven by the modernity of the world and perished amidst the “storms that rage outside our happy grounds”.
- Like the cuckoo bird who flies away in despair as spring passes by, Thyrsis also flutters leaving Arnold alone, who is framed as Corydon.
- Nevertheless, Arnold decides not to lament over the death of Thyrsis and instead go ahead with the quest that once he and Thyrsis shared. Thus, the end of the poem depicts that Arnold must carry on with the quest that will bind their unity and the bond once shared with Clough despite the fragmented world, “harsh, heart-wearying roar”.
- Important quotes-
 - “The bloom is gone, and with the bloom go I.”
 - “Tonight from Oxford up your pathway strays! Here came I often, often, in old days; Thyrsis and I; we still had Thyrsis then.”
 - “Why faintest thou! I wander’d till I died.
Roam on! The light we sought is shining still.
Dost thou ask proof? Our tree yet crowns the hill,
Our Scholar travels yet the loved hillside.”