Chapter II

Arnold's Classical Criticism—

"Preface" to the *Poems* (1853),

On the Modern Element in Literature,

"Preface" to *Merope.*

1853 Preface

Matthew Arnold's 1853 "Preface" to the *Poems* is his first critical affirmation, his first official statement on poetic principles. His *Poems* (1853) excludes "Empedocles on Etna", the dramatic poem in which the Greek philosopher Empedocles, extremely frustrated with the ways of the world, disillusioned with the hope that peace and true joy can ever be found to placate man's inordinate longings, hurls himself into the crater of Etna. Here he begins by warily enunciating the reasons behind his withdrawal of the 'morbid' "Empedocles on Etna", condemns excessive romantic subjectivity and the contemporary demand that poets should choose for their subjects from the currents of modern life. Here he also implores fervently for greater action and magnificent characters. This poetics of Arnold is essentially Aristotelian in its spirit and quintessence. Here Arnold devises an aesthetics of detachment and objectivity. Like his

total oeuvre of literary criticism, his very first venture as a critic too amply augurs some of the basic tenets of modern critics like T. S. Eliot and of the New Criticism and of the psychoanalytical approach to literature.

T. S. Eliot's role and achievement as one of the most important literary critic of the twentieth century will be acknowledged forever in the history of modern literary criticism. There can be no denying of the fact that T. S. Eliot's advent in the realm of twentieth century literary criticism made a momentous impact and infused fresh blood into the life of a torpid, languid critical ambience. Regarding this F. O. Matthiessen extremely appositely says, since the publication of Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism, First Series* in 1865, there was a virtual drought of proper critical activities:

> In the years just before the First World War, the speculations of T. E. Hulme, and Ezra Pound brought a new quickening of life which prepared the way for Eliot's own development; but there was no detailed intensive re- examination of the quality and

function of poetry until the publication of *The Sacred Wood* in 1920 (Matthiessen 4).

T. S. Eliot's relationship with Matthew Arnold is a very curious one. Throughout his critical career Eliot spoke on Arnold considerably on many occasions. But Eliot's stance against Arnold is evidently an unhappy one and his approach against his predecessor was extremely deprecatory in certain instances. T. S. Eliot was one of the principal detractors of Arnold who relentlessly denounced and found fault with Arnold. Yet inspite of Eliot's obdurate antagonism to Arnold, after making a thorough reconnaissance of both Arnold and Eliot's critical writings one can never deny the fact that Eliot's critical perceptions was considerably influenced by this Victorian poet- critic. Besides his other critical writings, this very initial attempt of Arnold his, "Preface" to *Poems (1853)*, appears to cast a long shadow upon some of the seminal thoughts of Eliot.

One of the principal grounds, upon which Arnold discards his poem "Empedocles in Aetna", is that the poem lacks meaningful action. The protagonist of the poem suffers certainly, befitting of a tragic character,

but his suffering is the 'passive suffering'. Citing an Aristotelian bravura Arnold says that passive suffering is never a fit theme for poetry. According to Arnold:

> What then are the situations, from the representation of which, though accurate, no poetical enjoyment can be derived? They are those in which the suffering finds no vent in action; in which a continuous state of mental distress is prolonged, unrelieved by incident, hope or resistance; in which there is everything to be endured, nothing to be done. In such situation there is inevitably something morbid, in the description of them something monotonous (*CT* 2-3).

One can find a strange affinity between these particular theories of Matthew Arnold and T. S. Eliot's famous concept of *objective correlative* as propounded by him in his essay "Hamlet and His Problems". In this respect we can recall Eliot's outrageous complaint against Hamlet who was suffering from, "... the buffoonery of an emotion which can find no outlet in action; in the dramatist it is the buffoonery of an emotion which

he can not express in art" (*SW* 102). Supporting this claim of Eliot, eminent critic Murray Krieger says, " It seems clear enough that roots of Eliot's objective correlative can be traced to Arnold's *1853 Preface*" (Krieger 458).

Here Arnold not only foretells Eliot's theory of *objective correlative* but also makes us see that Eliot's very language here is also evocative of Arnold. Again, Arnold's mention of such terms as 'morbid', 'monotonous', 'painful', rather than 'tragic' representations is an objective structure of action which is the equivalent of Eliot's "chain of events". These mental states are the objective equivalent of otherwise pent-up subjective expression.

Professor Shiv K. Kumar in his introduction to a collection of T.S.Eliot's essays comments that T.S.Eliot's :

> ...basic critical premises have achieved their fullest formulation in three of his most important essays: 'Tradition and the Individual Talent'(1917), 'The Function of Criticism' (1923), and 'The Frontiers of Criticism' (1956). In fact, one may say that

what he expounded, however tentatively, in the first two essays has persisted as his most characteristic critical stance, subject only to minor modification or elaboration in his subsequent writings (Kumar 2-3).

Such is the significance of Eliot's first critical endeavour "Tradition and the Individual Talent", that it almost forms one of the bedrock of his critical edifice. Corroborating its importance professor Mohit K. Ray in his critique "The Legacy of Matthew Arnold" says: "modern criticism may be said to have started very well with Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (Ray 103).

Yet T.S.Eliot who reviled Arnold so trenchantly, seems, here, too, stupendously influenced by his Victorian predecessor. Arnold while positing his polemics in a systematic way in the "Preface" of the *Poems* (1853) launches a diatribe against the contemporary idea of an ideal topic of a poem. He says that he is absolutely against the then current, voguish impression that the ideal poet should never select his subject of his poetry from the themes or incidents of the remote past. Instead they

should make most of the matters of the present import. But Arnold scoffing off at this phony and specious idea says that eternal objects of poetry are not at all concerned with the straitjackets of time. If we go back to the context, we shall find that in the course of explaining why Arnold has excluded "Empedocles" from his 1853 volume of *Poems*, he says that he abhors the contemporary idea, " of the present day appear to entertain ... against the choice, in short, of any subjects but modern ones" (*CT* 3). Brushing aside this idea about the contemporaneity of a poem's subject, very firmly, almost with Eliotian imperiousness he says:

> Now this view I believe to be completely false. It is worth examining, in as much as it is a fair sample of a class of critical dicta everywhere current at the present day, having a philosophical form and air, but no real basis in fact; and which are calculated to vitiate the judgement of readers of poetry, while they exert, so far as they are adopted, a misleading influence on the practice of those who make it (*CT* 3).

In no uncertain terms Arnold makes it clear that a good poetic

action has nothing to do with its antiquity or modernness, it is only the 'inherent qualities' that counts. Arnold says, "A great human action of a thousand years ago is more interesting to it than a smaller human action of to-day" (*CT* 4). What Arnold stresses here is that it is the contemporary relevance of the past or the presentness of the past which is clearly suggestive of Eliot's concept of the tradition and the presentness of past as enunciated in his breakthrough essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

Similarly rejecting the prevalent misconception about the exigency of a poem's being exclusively modern, Eliot, much like Arnold emphasizes the need of being conscious about tradition. What Arnold says, Eliot retells the same in a different mould. According to Eliot 'tradition' is contingent on a special kind of, "historical sense... a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence..." (*SW* 49).

It is significant to note that at the concluding portion of his "Preface" (1853) Arnold while speaking about the "best models of

instruction for the individual writer", without naming the word 'tradition' expressly emphasizes about the need for being aware of the excelling works of antiquity. Here we find Eliot's idea being prophesied with exceptional élan and clarity:

> This last may certainly learn of the ancients, better than any where else, three things which it is vitally important for him to know: - the all- importance of the choice of a subject; the necessity of accurate construction; and the subordinate character of expression (*CT* 12).

In no indeterminate terms Arnold underlines the need of sustaining a tradition for the production of better work by the posterity:

> As he penetrates into the spirit of the great classical works, as he becomes gradually aware of their intense significance, their noble simplicity, and their calm pathos, he will be convinced that it is this effect, unity and profoundness of moral impression, at which the ancient poets aimed; that it is this

which constitutes the grandeur of their works, and which makes them immortal (*CT* 12).

In his seminal essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Eliot almost makes an echo of this idea of Arnold:

> Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense... the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity (*SW* 49).

So we can see that in his "Preface" to the *Poems* (1853) Arnold very conspicuously anticipates T.S.Eliot's concept of 'tradition' and the 'individual talent'. When we shall make a recce of the later writings of Arnold we shall see how recurrently he foresees, and has a close affinity with T.S.Eliot, who bears the 'critical legacy' of Matthew Arnold.

In his "Preface" to the *Poems* (1853) Arnold not only adumbrates T.S.Eliot's critical conceptions but also some other aspects of modern literary criticism. For instance, here Arnold intuitively envisages an extremely imperative mode of modern literary criticism---the psychoanalytical school of criticism. It is a common knowledge now that, psychoanalytical criticism deals with the psychology of the author or the characters of a text and treats a work of literature primarily as an expression of the state of mind as well as the personality traits of the individual authors. With the application of Freudian theories of psychoanalysis, his premises and procedures that engendered the dynamic form of psychology that is termed by Freud as psychoanalysis,

psychoanalytical criticism turned out to be a burgeoning field of research and study.

But Matthew Arnold writing as early as 1853, drops broad hints of what now we can call the initiation of psychoanalytical criticism or at least application of psychology in his criticism. Arguing about the feasibility of adapting antique themes for modern poetry Arnold says that, the modern poets need not fret about the spatio- temporal moorings of a topic, whether the exact ambience of the older themes can be reproduced in their poetry or not. Arnold remarks:

> The externals of a past action, indeed, he(the poet) can not know with the precision of a contemporary; but his business is with its essentials. The outward man of Oedipus or of Macbeth, the houses in which they lived, the ceremonies of their courts, he cannot accurately figure to himself; but neither do they essentially concern him. His business is with their inward man; with their feelings and behaviour in certain tragic situations, which engage their passions as men (*CT* 5).

Arnold's conception of 'inward man' instantly makes us remember the famous phrase coined by Virginia Woolf in her profound essay *Modern Fiction*, regarding the level of consciousness of James Joyce, whose writings "reveal the flickerings of that innermost flame which flashes its message through the brain..."(Lodge 89).

Besides to that affinity of thought of Virginia Woolf with Arnold we find this Arnoldian idea of dealing with the 'inward man' recur in the critiques of some other modern psychoanalytic critics. For instance, Freud himself chiefly deals with the concept of the 'inward man' so to speak. His theory of individual psychology apparently exploring the hidden recess of a man's mind, the uncharted complex welter named 'psyche', its division into three strata-'id', 'ego', and 'superego' extensively deals with the individual man. One of his most celebrated terms *Oedipus complex* is also derived from his analysis of the 'inward man' of Oedipus in Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. The Freudian analysis of dreams and neurotic symptoms, the forbidden and repressed desires of an individual was applied to the field of analyzing various characters of literature by

Freud himself and his followers. He himself analysed the inner psychology of the protagonists in the plays by Shakespeare-*Hamlet, Macbeth, A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *King Lear*. He also made an exceptionally brilliant psychoanalytical study of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*. His disciple, the eminent psychoanalyst Ernest Jones also made a powerful study in this line, *Hamlet and Oedipus* (1949), dealing with the inner man of those literary characters and their authors. So it seems that Matthew Arnold, by spelling out the concept of the 'inward man', presages a powerful school of criticism, immensely helpful for the better understanding of an important side of literature.

So from the above discussion it becomes evident how Arnold in his 1853 "Preface" to *Poems* anticipates to a large extent some of the basic configurations and aspects of modern literary criticism.

On The Modern Element in Literature

After Arnold's 1853 "Preface" to *Poems* came his inaugural lecture in the poetry chair at Oxford in 1857, "On The Modern Element in Literature". Like his earlier critical endeavour the 1853 "Preface", this lecture is chiefly polemic in its approach. Moreover, "On The Modern Element in Literature" seems to continue some of the deep-seated, radical ideas of Arnold, propounded in his 1853 "Preface". One can read the essay as an elaborate explication with copious illustrative references of the views expressed in the celebrated "Preface" (1853).

In the previous chapter we scrupulously tried to show how the modern criticism astutely grasped the dynamics of Matthew Arnold's critical polemics and reincarnated them to a large extent in their modern day exponents spearheaded by T.S.Eliot. It will be amazing to note that Arnold with rare insight and élan not only adumbrates critical ideas of T.S.Eliot, the New Critics or the psychoanalytical school of criticism but also made forays into comparative poetics; comparative literature and

translation studies, and even dimly foreshadowed the post modernist New Historicism.

There are many layers of critical insight in the text of Arnold's "On The Modern Element in Literature". Firstly, there is an inherent note of historicism present in this writing. Corroborating this point eminent critic and authoritative historian of criticism René Wellek says:

> It would be a mistake to think that Arnold was not a historical critic. He had been imbued with the historical point of view.... Arnold's inaugural lecture at the Oxford, "On The Modern Element in Literature", presents a scheme of history that must be characterized as deterministic and schematic in an almost Hegelian way (Wellek 159).

With an acute historic consciousness Arnold makes a thorough survey of the sequence of ages and nations, and he redefines their qualities in terms of their political as well as intellectual greatness, vigour as well as life, "with a sequence of literatures that are rated according to the

adequacy with which they express their particular age and nation"(Wellek 159).

Arnold thinks that while doing the survey of the ancient classical literature he would also assess their history alongside, he would do this to bring the vigorous elements of intellectual deliverance in them. According to Arnold, he wants to:

> attempt such a general survey of ancient classical literature and history as may afford us the conviction -in presence of the doubts so often expressed of the profitableness, in the present day, of our study of this literature- that, even admitting to their fullest extent the legitimate demands of our age, the literature of the ancient Greece is, even for modern times, a mighty agent of intellectual deliverance (*CT* 19-20).

This very *modus operandi* of Arnold, the concept of placing the literature and the history of a particular period side by side foretells much ahead, the coming of what now passes as a voguish approach of post modern theory: New Historicism. In this lecture "On The Modern Element

in Literature" Matthew Arnold's likeness with the New Historicists is discernible. New Historicists while making a critique of literature never want to deal with a text in isolation from its historical context, they do focus chiefly upon the historical and cultural condition of the text's production, meanings etc. Arnold proposes to do almost the same in "On The Modern Element in Literature" and in this respect he, though faintly, heralds the idea of the New Historicists, because here Arnold not only alludes to the history or literature of the ancient Greece or Rome or Elizabethan England but also amply refers to the contemporary culture and vogues of the people.

Again another facet of Arnold's historicism is his acute awareness about the need of going back to the classical roots, which would help to maintain the legacy of the classical masters. When Arnold proposes to do a 'general survey of classical literature' it certainly shows his ardent desire to be aware of the tradition of old literatures. Emphasizing the need to appreciate the antique literatures, the classics, Arnold says, the indispensability of the past literatures lies in the fact that they "have most

successfully solved for their ages the problem which occupies ours: the literatures which in their day and for their own nation have adequately comprehended, have adequately represented, the spectacle before them''(*CT* 21). Arnold thinks that the modern age should perceive what they can from the literatures of the past, because, the literatures of the past "are founded upon a rich past and upon an instructive fullness of experience"(*CT* 22). We find a striking proximity of this particular tradition- awareness of Arnold with that of T.S.Eliot. According to critics like Stanley Edgar Hyman, T.S.Eliot's basic poetics is a 'poetics of tradition', Hyman in his famous critique on modern literary criticism *The Armed Vision* says, "the word 'tradition' is undoubtedly the key term in Eliot's critical writing " (Hyman 73). Eliot fervently and repeatedly asks the poets and the authors to sustain a 'historical sense' which:

> involves a perception, not only of the pastness of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of

> literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order (*SW* 49).

Commenting on Arnold -Eliot affinity about the conception of 'tradition', Patrick Parrinder says that:

> [I]n "Tradition and the Individual Talent", however, Eliot argues that the tradition the poet must labour to acquire is not that of the English language but a very different conception, the 'mind of Europe'. Thus we may say that his most famous essay on these themes turns back to Matthew Arnold in the hope of resolving the confusions in his own thinking"(Parrinder 219).

Another level of Arnold's historic approach can be read in the treatise "On Modern The Element in Literature", as his "classicizing tendency" (Collini 49). Arnold's classicizing tendency in general, which is sustained throughout his critical career has a discernible influence upon some of the modern critics, who are accountable for the determining of the modernist poetics. Notable among them are T. E. Hulme and T. S. Eliot. Throughout Arnold's critical opus as in his "On the Modern Element

in Literature" one can mark the representation of classicism as an emblem of salubrious life and literature. In "On the Modern Element in Literature" Arnold shows that his age should imbibe the classical spirit and learn the lesson of 'intellectual deliverance' from the classical age of Periclean Athens. Arnold showers rich plaudit upon the Periclean Athens as an epoch of culmination and brilliance, the untrammeled energy of human life got its freest expression in that age. Douglas Bush in his *Matthew Arnold: A Survey of his Poetry and Prose* says, that in his lecture "On the Modern Element in Literature":

> Arnold outlined another dynamic principle of his classicism.... The "Preface" had ended by exalting study of the ancient classics as an experience of unique value, and the text of lecture is that "the literature of ancient Greece is, even for modern times a mighty agent of intellectual deliverance" (Bush 86-87).

In this Arnold wants to make, as we have pointed out earlier, " a general survey of ancient classical literature" (*CT* 19). Then he turns his face to

the dim recesses of past, Athens of the time of Pericles. He makes a rapid survey of the profound literary works of that time and finds them "adequate", "a mighty agent of intellectual deliverance", great literature of great epoch. The political works by Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles "who saw life steadily and saw it whole" and Aristophanes are "most perfectly commensurate" with that epoch. Arnold also casts a glance to the classical Roman literature, to Lucretius, Virgil, Horace et al. Arnold's this very predilection to going back to classical elements in literature finds a distinct echo in the classical thinking of the modern critics like T.E.Hume and T.S.Eliot. So again we find the presaging of the modern criticism by Arnold. T.E.Hume was the avantgarde member of the 'Imagist' movement who recommended for a 'dry hard' poetic style sans all superfluities. He, according to David Lodge, "acquired a legendary posthumous reputation as the key thinker behind the Pound -Eliot revolution in English poetry in the second decade of the century" (*TCL* 92). This poet-critic who died young and left very little for the posterity, had a strong preference for classical over romantic values. Though recent

critics like, Patrick Parrinder writes off Hulme "as a deeply muddled thinker" and asserts that Hulme's "major philosophy is no longer sustainable" (Parrinder 212). Hulme should be remembered for the virtue of his sheer impetuosity. His likeness with Arnold becomes palpable when he makes a fervent call for classicism in poetry in his *Romanticism and Classicism.* We can hear an unequivocal Arnoldian echo in Hulme when he writes, "...after a hundred years of romanticism, we are in for a classical revival" (*TCL* 93). Speaking about the "classical revival" Hulme says, almost in an Arnoldian overtone, that, classics should be regarded as "a real vital interest in literature...romanticism as an awful disease"(*TCL* 94). In a bid to defining classical in literature, Hulme says:

> What I mean by classical in verse, then, is this. That even in the most imaginative flights there is always a holding back, a reservation. The classical poet never forgets this finiteness, this limit of man. He remembers always that he is mixed up with earth. He may jump, but he always returns back; he never flies away into the circumambient gas" (*TCL* 96).

Hulme goes on disparaging the romantics' attitude to life, their exuberance of emotion and the intoxicating, heady effect which their kind of writing constantly engenders and in its turn makes a poetic attitude enervating and puerile, replete with too tangible maudlinness. Arnold also censured all these aspects of romanticism, so did T.S.Eliot. To both of them and to Hulme much romantic poetry was repulsive. Arnold in his critical oeuvre castigated these traits of Shelley, Keats and of the romantics.

T.S.Eliot is a self-proclaimed 'classicist' in literature and for this declaration he has to face barrage of assails in many forms. Though Wimsatt and Brooks observe that,"the line of descent from the classicism of Matthew Arnold to that of Eliot is certainly neither an evident nor an unbroken one"(Wimsatt & Brooks 658), Eliot seems to carry on the Arnoldian line of classicism when for instance, he declares in *The Sacred Wood* that, "the important critic is the person who is absorbed in the present problem of art, and who wishes to bring the forces of the past to bear upon the solution of these problems"(*SW*37), he actually utters the

Arnoldian dictum of a critic's classicism. This type of classicism, while it has a direct echo of Arnold, is an intrinsic portion of Eliot's critical creed. Commenting on this Patrick Parrinder says:

> Eliot's tendency to authoritarian classicism does not date, as has sometime been thought, from the time of his religious conversion in the late 1920s, since he was expressing these views in unpublished lectures as early as 1916 (Parrinder 218).

Eliot's recurring insistence upon the importance of the past, the classical roots are unequivocally expressed not only in his critical manifesto "Tradition and the Individual Talent" but also throughout his vast critical oeuvre where he invokes from time to time Dante and the Jacobean dramatists, the Greek poets and the metaphysical poets. When Eliot asks the poets to take into serious consideration "the mind of Europe" to absorb and assimilate it, as we have cited earlier, it is, infact, nothing but an Arnoldian plea for classicism which implores the poets to come, to be imbibed in the classical poetic tradition of yore.

In a way Arnold's complete critical opus is a cogent plea for the

practice of comparative literature. The chief doctrine of his poetics is actually, the doctrine of comparative criticism. Though it would be prudent to christen Arnold's criticism as 'pluralistic' in modern parlance, actually he is a comparatist par excellence; who achieved his critical ideal of 'real estimate' by employing comparative method successfully. Moreover the credit of circulating the term comparative literature goes to Arnold. Commenting on this distinguished authority on comparative literature Susan Bassnett says, " ... the earliest English usage is attributed to Matthew Arnold, who referred to 'comparative literatures' in the plural in a letter of 1848" (Bassnett 12).

In his lecture "On the Modern Element in Literature" Arnold is speaking about the burgeoning facts of the modern age, which are well nigh incomprehensible for man to grasp, for their immensity and multitudiousness. Then he goes on cataloguing what the facts are:

> The facts consists of the events, the institutions, the sciences, the arts, the literatures, in which human life has manifested

itself upto the present time: the spectacle is the collective life of humanity (*CT* 20).

Then Arnold almost at the same breath strikes the keynote of the basic concept of comparative literature, what Susan Bassnett says that some readers may simply find that view propounded by Arnold as the basic tenet of comparative literature. Arnold writes:

> [a]nd everywhere there is connexion, everywhere there is illustration: no single event, no single literature, is adequately comprehended except in its relation to other events, to other literatures (*CT* 20-21).

Matthew Arnold, a wonderful prose maker as he is at a single stroke makes us see the whole point, objective and ideology of studying comparative literature. And throughout his "On the Modern Element in Literature" he speaks with a rare visionary profundity about comparative literature, where we can find his deep affinity with the modern advocates of comparative literature.

Illustrating a very important point of the basic tenets of comparative

literature Arnold says that as long as the literatures of ancient Greece and of the Christian Middle Age are appreciated in an isolated manner their proper evaluation is exceedingly hard to achieve. But when they are compared with each other's perspectives, a proper evaluation can be achieved. To rightly comprehend their literary merits one has to compare and correlate the two literatures. The fact that Matthew Arnold foretells the basic concepts of modern comparative literature can be clearly evinced from the copious illustrative references of other literatures in "On the Modern Element in Literature". Here Arnold not only makes ample comparisons between various literatures, but also refers to a wide variety of literatures of different languages. According to Arnold for achieving 'intellectual deliverance' a synergy "of a great epoch and a great literature" is virtually a *sine-qua-non*. And in the course of his exploring the mélange between those two things Arnold almost rummages antique classics here, and shows how gradually the basic concepts of comparative literature gets constructed in his thought and writing. Then he drives home his thesis by providing illustrative references to the literatures of

different sorts. He goes back to the classical Greek literature, works of brilliance produced in the Periclean Athens. Arnold is ecstatic about the poetry of Sophocles, poet of "consummate, unrivalled adequacy", Aristophanes, Aeschylus. He also gives elaborate references to Roman litterateurs, Menander, Lucretius, Virgil, Horace and others. In making a thorough appraisal of Elizabethan age to show the inferiority of the age's literature and how that age lacks in the adequacy, to do all these, Arnold does the job of a perfect comparatist. In this respect also Arnold has a strong similarity with his successor T.S.Eliot. Eliot also makes copious references to various other literatures.

Preface to *Merope*

Matthew Arnold's "Preface" *to Merope* comes chronologically after his celebrated "Preface" to *Poems* (1853) and his inaugural lecture at Oxford "On the Modern Element in Literature". A common strand runs through all these three writings -that is an impassioned argument by the critic for going back to the classical roots in the choice of subjects in poetry. According to the critics like Stefan Collini, "... the "Preface" to his verse drama *Merope* ... represents the classicizing tendency in Arnold's aesthetic at its highest pitch"(Collini 49). The "Preface" to the *Poems* (1853), says, Douglus Bush "had ended by exalting study of the ancient classics, as an experience of unique value"(Bush 86-87). And Arnold's "On the Modern Element in Literature" is a plea that, 'the literature of Ancient Greece is, even for the modern times, a mighty agent of intellectual deliverance' (*CT* 20). In the "Preface" *to Merope* Arnold sustains his points in defense of classicism with a rare élan and tour-de - force. Arnold writes with profound reverence for classical literature:

> But, as often as it has happened to me, to be blamed or praised for my supposed addition to the classical school in poetry, I have with rare humiliation, how little any works of mine were entitled to rank upon the genuine works of that school, how little they were calculated to give, to readers unacquainted with the great creations of classical antiquity, any adequate impression of their form or of their spirit (*CT* 38).

These notes by Arnold, make us remember of Eliot, of whose classical penchant and concept of 'tradition' we have discussed earlier. Arnold's phrase "great creations of classical antiquity" is similar in its tone and tenor with Eliot's idea of a meritorious literary work of past, as a 'monument'.

Arnold's role as a comparatist critic finds its eloquent expression in the "Preface" to *Merope*. We can notice Arnold's comparative faculty at its best when he ponders upon his choice of a fit subject for his poetic drama. He rummages the repertoire of antique classics and endeavours to find an ideal subject, which he can treat independently. But the very

idea of shaping a subject from the formidable classics appalled him. He discarded the idea after much deliberation, on the ground that, " their treatment by the ancient masters is so overwhelmingly great and powerful that we can henceforth conceive them only as they are treated: an independent conception of them has become impossible for us" (*CT* 40). Then Arnold fixes his attention on the writings of Hyginius, a Latin mythographer, and who can provide "a rich mine of subjects" to the poets like Arnold who aspire to write something with a classical ring about them. Arnold's keen critical faculty, mingled with that of a knowledgeable comparatist, produces a powerful writing replete with seminal concepts of comparative literature which exerts a formative impact upon modern studies of comparative literature. Arnold's comparative faculty should be richly acclaimed for he speaks here from Aristotle, Plutarch, Euripedes, Ciecero, and Hyginus to Racine, Voltaire and Cardinal Richelieu at one breath. Arnold certainly delved deep and garnered much information about the classical Latin and Greek literature, French literature and made forays into the realms of various other literatures. At the concluding

portion Arnold presents an exceedingly well-balanced overview of the writings of Greeks, Shakespeare and Milton. Arnold quotes from Coleridge and makes an illuminating study of the magnificence of the Greek classics that even according to Arnold surpass Shakespeare. Arnold writes:

> Coleridge observes that Shakespeare, after one of his grandest scenes, often plunges, as if to relax and relieve himself, into a scene of buffoonery. After tragic situations of the greatest intensity, a desire for relief and relaxation is no doubt natural, both to the poet and to the spectator; but the finer feeling of the Greeks found this relief; not in buffoonery, but in lyrical song (*CT* 61).

Again making a comparative study of the chorus of Milton's *Samson Agonistes* and the choric effect of the Greeks, Arnold points out, despite Milton's brilliance, how superior was the treatment of the chorus of the Greeks. In the course of his comparative discussion apart from alluding

to Milton's *Samson* Arnold speaks about Shakespeare's *Richard the Third*, Italian dramaturge Alfieri, Pope and Dryden.

Arnold's remarkable affinity with Eliot, which seems endless, finds another noteworthy echo in this "Preface" to *Merope*. Here Arnold presents his views on 'tradition' in an unambiguous, clear way. Stressing the indispensability of and paramount importance of tradition in the making of a perfect poet, Arnold writes:

> the tradition is a great matter to a poet; it is an unspeakable support; it gives him the feeling that he is treading on solid ground. Aristotle tells the tragic poet that he must not destroy the received stories. A noble and accomplished living poet, M. Manzoni, has, in an admirable dissertation, developed this thesis of the importance to the poet of a basis of tradition" (*CT* 53).

What T. S. Eliot does in his epoch making essay of stupendous significance, "Tradition and the Individual Talent" is nothing but an explicit retelling of Arnold's thought. If we want Eliot to corroborate

Arnold's statement on 'tradition' culling sentences and phrases sporadically from his essay it will be futile and pointless. The whole of "Tradition and the Individual Talent" reverberates with an Arnoldian aura. The very last sentence from "Tradition and the Individual Talent" can neatly sum up the soul of the thought of both Arnold and Eliot. The splendid finale of Eliot's discourses on tradition comes with the idea that the poet, " is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living" (*SW* 59).